

# How layering NRM and social cohesion improves resilience outcomes



**Crop destruction has always been a problem by animals eating farming crops. Now the parties come together, discuss and agree on a compensation. The most important thing to preserve peace is [bringing] together farmers and pastoralists to work together and solve problems.”**

Ahmed Mohamed Ali (left), chairman of a community action group in Sudan

## A "TRIPLE NEXUS" APPROACH

Communities around the world increasingly face recurrent, overlapping crises due to chronic poverty, climate change and conflict. Preparing people to face these challenges requires building their individual capacities, assets, social capital and agency. To do so, CRS uses a holistic approach that empowers people to make decisions about how and what assets or capacities to use, and how to engage with systems and structures on their pathway to resiliency. In conflict-prone regions, CRS implements a “triple nexus” of programming—a combination of humanitarian, development/recovery and peacebuilding interventions that can easily pivot as conditions shift from conflict toward peace and as communities focus more on resilience than survival. Our programming is effective because it understands root causes, boosts social cohesion, enhances local capacity and supports the systems and structures that provide natural resource management (NRM). We strengthen resiliency in three ways:



**RISK  
REDUCTION  
AND COPING**



**ADAPTATION  
TO RECURRENT  
SHOCKS & STRESSES**



**INTEGRATED  
SYSTEMS  
CHANGE**

Systems change can be fostered separately or in a sequenced, layered and integrated approach, with interventions taking place in a non-linear manner to maximize effectiveness. Layering allows CRS to first stabilize household conditions and then support communities to acquire assets and build capacity.

In regions experiencing pressures on shared natural resources, CRS found that integrating NRM, social cohesion/peacebuilding approaches and governance strengthening to be a particularly effective and scalable combination. We organize people around a single shared resource—like a watershed—rather than by community boundaries because some resources are shared across communities and not all users might be physically present in the community targeted for programming. Organizing stakeholders around a single shared resource enables a common focus but also a platform to address conflict that can arise from competition over natural resources, a common source of tension in many places where we work. This is particularly important when considering groups who may otherwise be left out of community-level NRM decisions. For example, defining a catchment area and its users as a community can allow for participation from nomadic peoples who would otherwise be excluded due to their near constant movement, and/or women, who also might be excluded due to traditional gender norms but who gather water for domestic uses. The water catchment approach highlights the need for all resource users to work together, not just those living in and around the resource.

Improving the natural asset base is a key resilience-building strategy because it mitigates the impact of future environmental crises such as hurricanes or flooding and also helps people to cope with the impacts of ongoing climate stressors like inconsistent rains or prolonged droughts. NRM interventions begin with the selection of community members to participate in committees where disaster risk reduction or soil and water management decisions and action steps can be agreed upon. The most effective and sustainable committees have participation that is inclusive of the diversity present within the user base.

The improvement of natural resource governance and productivity is used as a mechanism to bring together competing groups through community-led governance platforms. The committees present a rich opportunity for integrating deliberate social cohesion interventions that can directly address conflict around resources and promote mutual understanding, trust and empathy between competing resource users. In particular, NRM committees serve as a gateway for layering interventions such as inclusive leadership training, conflict mitigation training and CRS' flagship 3B-4D approach because they weave social cohesion into a structured system and facilitate improved self-esteem and relationships within members.

CRS' 3B-4D approach begins with personal introspection (binding) that lays the groundwork for intra-group strengthening and preparation (bonding)

and inter-group engagement and collaboration (bridging).

The 3B-4D approach strengthens social cohesion and brings people together in workshops to talk about what divides them, uphold what unites them and act together for stronger, healthier and more just societies. The workshops include trust games, safe space conversation starters and mediation tools all aimed at empowering participants to transcend previous disputes within and across community lines and begin the process of building trust. By embedding the 3B-4D approach along with other social cohesion interventions within NRM committees, CRS helps build trust between individuals and diverse groups, enabling not just local leaders to mobilize and participate in decision-making groups, but also women, youth, disabled and nomadic people.

## THE POSITIVE IMPACTS OF LAYERING NRM AND SOCIAL COHESION: Taadoud in Sudan

Conditions in Sudan, especially Darfur, have been characterized in recent history by conflict, displacement and grinding poverty that causes widespread food insecurity, malnutrition and a virtual breakdown in governance and cooperation. As displaced people returned or internally displaced people (IDPs) settled in camps in and around population centers, shared resources were put under immense pressure. These factors exposed already diminishing natural resources, stressed by previous overuse, and shocked by extreme weather events and climate change. They also drove the need for new strategies and ways of using resources across the region. In particular, the dynamics between farmers and herders, who historically have shared a mutually beneficial relationship around water and land use, have dramatically shifted and often spiral into violence. As recently as the 1980's, herders were able to time their migration to avoid conflict with farmers' access to water, as such herds ate crop residues left by farmers and left behind manure that provided soils with fertility. As population pressures and recurrent droughts created water scarcity, this once balanced dynamic became one of competition.

In order to cope with the scarcity, farmers have intensified production by replacing shifting cultivation with continuous cropping and expanded their farm borders to areas where, historically, herders brought their livestock to access water sources. Farmers who expanded their land subsequently narrowed migration corridors for herders, who coped by becoming more sedentary. Herders have taken up mixed cropping and small ruminant farming to support their families. The farmer-herder relationship balance is further tested as IDPs may return to farmland that has been occupied without consent, finding themselves competing for land and water access with other farmers as well as herders. Addressing these complex issues, **Taadoud I & II** were designed to build resilience of returnee, IDP and host

communities through equitable governance and sustainable access to natural resources, strengthen household livelihoods and improve household nutrition. Community Action Groups (CAGs) were formed to manage natural resources, where leaders and members underwent negotiation, mediation, and conflict resolution training. Notably, by forming these CAGs around a shared water source instead of by community boundaries alone, nomadic herders were directly represented alongside farmers who also relied on that water source. The groups were able to implement landscape restoration and NRM plans to improve soil fertility, availability of water and pasture quality, while simultaneously improving social cohesion. For example, members agreed to build water catchment infrastructure improvements, such as sand dams, that increased the water availability for farmers, livestock and pastoralists.

These infrastructure interventions also had a sustainable and transformative impact on decreasing conflict and enhancing both production areas and crop productivity. Community members also benefited from more contact supply of water through recharged aquifer systems in the wadis leading to better pasture for livestock and timely water supply for agricultural production over the course of the cultivation seasons. Ultimately, implementing the 3B-4D approach, along with enhancing the availability of resources resulting from NRM interventions, reduced tensions and empowered community members with the skills to mediate potential conflict when it arises. CRS staff helped to effectively breakdown the farmer-herder designations, and with the inclusive nature of the CAGs, people were mobilized to work together to develop NRM infrastructure that protected water sources, increased water availability and built the overall resilience of project communities.