



Meta-study on the Effects of Social Cohesion in Humanitarian and Development Programs

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Table of Contents

Overview	3
Methodology	4
Meta-Study Limitations	5
Findings from external literature	6
Findings from Internal Reports	7
SC&J Outcome Analysis	7
Justice Lenses in the Meta-Study	8
Analysis of Other Sector Effects	9
Cross-Sectoral Effects	9
Sector-Specific Analysis.....	9
Unresolved Questions in the Meta-Study	12
Additional findings	14
Recommendations	15
Bibliography	16
External literature review - studies of note.....	16
CRS projects included in analysis	17
CRS studies of note	18

Overview

This meta-study was conducted between 2022 and 2024 by [Catholic Relief Services \(CRS\)](#) and it sought to evaluate the impact and integration of Social Cohesion and Justice (SC&J) component in humanitarian and development sectors through two main and three supporting research questions.

Through [the first main research question \(1\)](#), the meta-study explored how SC&J can enhance the ability of humanitarian and development sectors to scale their impact and how SC&J contributes to the effectiveness of these sectors. It also delved into: (1a) how SC&J approaches, when integrated into programs, enable a more conducive environment for achieving broader sectoral goals; and (1b) what benefits sectors can gain from investing in SC&J and the long-term improvements this can foster.



Further, through [the second research question \(2\)](#), it sought to understand how SC&J can be strategically designed into sectoral frameworks to overcome persistent challenges. It examined how SC&J can help sectors more effectively address the root causes of these challenges by looking into (2a) the incremental effects of specific SC&J approaches (such as CRS' 3B/4D methodology¹ that combines Binding, Bonding and Bridging with the 4Ds of Appreciative Inquiry: Discover, Dream, Design and Deliver) when integrated into CRS programs.

Integrating Social Cohesion and Justice across diverse sectors delivers a range of significant benefits. It not only strengthens social bonds within and across communities but also creates a supportive environment that facilitates the implementation of project activities, reducing risks such as delays and stakeholder resistance. This environment enhances sector-specific outcomes, leading to improved performance and impact. Thus, intentional and systemic integration of SC&J into projects not only fosters community cohesion but also boosts overall project effectiveness and results.

However, the study highlights gaps in understanding nuances of SC&J integration across various sectors and contexts. Furthermore, it does not uncover the specific benefits, incentives, or motivations that encourage different sectors to invest in SC&J initiatives.

1 CRS' signature approach to building social cohesion, the 3Bs, progresses iteratively through stages of binding (personal healing and self-transformation), bonding (intragroup strengthening and consensus building), and bridging (inter-group engagement and collaboration), to shape people's lives at all levels, while also cultivating healthy relationships within and across families, communities, and societies. For more info please visit: <https://ics.crs.org/resource/ties-bind-building-social-cohesion-divided-communities>.



Methodology

The study utilized a systematic review approach with a meta-perspective, qualitatively analyzing external and internal documents regarding SC&J integration, selected using purposeful sampling to represent various viewpoints from the literature and CRS project documentation.

For the [external literature](#), the review included web-searched project reports, evaluations, research from academic sources, and gray literature. [Internal literature](#) was sourced from CRS's electronic project database. It included project proposals, quarterly, semi-annual, annual and final project reports, project evaluation reports and project studies of note. The external documents were published between 2019 and 2024, while the internal documents were produced and published from 2020 to 2023, from 29² countries.

Although the study primarily employed a qualitative approach, some of the data reviewed were quantitative, as they were part of projects' Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) system. These quantitative data, drawn from project and evaluation reports, complemented the qualitative insights where possible.

The meta-study research protocol was organized in four stages. The first stage was [document identification and validation](#). Documents were identified based on predetermined content labeling criteria³ and reviewed for relevance.


The relevance criteria ensured that only projects integrating social cohesion and justice with other sectoral components were included in the meta-study review. In evaluating external literature, relevance was assessed in conjunction with the labeling criteria, resulting in inclusion of 111 relevant documents in the analysis. Out of the 111 reviews conducted, 15 publications were identified as standout contributions for research purposes.

For the internal document review, a total of 999 projects were identified from the CRS database in accordance with the established labeling criteria. In the validation process, it was observed that projects usually contextualize their interventions in relevant social issues (i.e., problems that need to be addressed or mitigated to enable positive change) within proposals. However, SC&J activities were insufficiently reported in subsequent project documentation, when the focus was primarily on sector-specific activities and indicators. For example, community conflicts are often linked to inadequate agricultural management practices and low levels of beneficiary participation, conflict related to land use and others. Nevertheless, reporting remained predominantly sector-specific, with projects reporting primarily on agricultural indicators – crop yield, soil fertility, market access, etc. Some projects were excluded due to the absence of valid data (reports, evaluation) or their exclusive focus on social cohesion and peacebuilding.

Therefore, the analytical sample was narrowed down to 27 projects with 21

2 Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central Africa Republic, Chad, DRC, Egypt, El Salvador, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Philippines, South Sudan, Sudan, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

3 *Internal* content labels included the following English-language terms: Social Cohesion, Peacebuilding, 3B, 4D, Connector project, vertical social cohesion, engaging government, social accountability mechanisms, social inclusion approaches, conflict sensitivity. *External* content labels included the following English-language terms: social cohesion (SC), social inclusion, integration, social trust, mutual trust, justice and equity, bonding, community cohesion, Triple Nexus, social coherence, social justice, justice, and equity.



additional special studies. The study included a variety of multisectoral projects across different areas, such as [Resilience and Disaster Preparedness](#), [Microfinance](#), [Agriculture](#), [Economic Development](#), [Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene](#) and [Nutrition](#). It also covered initiatives in [Natural Resource Management](#), [Infrastructure Development](#), [Education](#) and [Disability Inclusion](#). These projects addressed various aspects of community development and were implemented across different time frames, multiple sectors and countries.

The second step involved [coding](#), which was developed to address the main and supporting research questions. Given the variety of external reports and publications, these were reviewed separately, without coding or categorization, to provide a general view of the existing evidence on social cohesion and justice integration processes. Internally, a dual-coding strategy was employed, combining both deductive and inductive methods. Deductive coding aligned the data with CRS's social cohesion and justice frameworks and the relevant research concepts, while inductive coding allowed new themes and patterns to emerge directly from the data, capturing unexpected insights.

In the third stage project documentation was [categorized](#). The first category included multisectoral projects characterized by standard report practices. The second category encompassed projects that deliberately focused on integrating SC&J, measuring and documenting its effects. Additionally, projects were categorized by scale and duration, distinguishing between 'multi-year projects with considerable investments' and smaller-scale projects typically implemented over a year with limited funds. This framework allowed

for a comparative analysis of how social cohesion initiatives differed across diverse project types and scales.

The [data analysis](#), carried out in the fourth stage, utilized the qualitative software Atlas.ti. This phase focused on identifying and evaluating key themes based on their frequency and importance. The study examined recurring patterns related to the integration of social cohesion and justice.

The overall assessment is that evidence reviewed in this study falls into the moderate category. The evidence is a mix of quality-assured monitoring data and observations including assertions based on the monitoring data as well as those that are unverified. To strengthen the trustworthiness of the evidence three of Lincoln and Guba's evaluative criteria for trustworthiness of qualitative research were employed. Data triangulation was utilized to establish confirmability. Preliminary results were validated by multisectoral teams that could speak to the evidence to establish credibility and thick description of the findings was used to establish transferability.⁴

Meta-Study Limitations

While this meta-study provides insights into the impact of SC&J activities, it has its limitations. For external data, the research relied on documents accessible through an online search engine, where search algorithm may have influenced the scope of information. Also, the study faced variability in its internal data regarding the reporting practices across different projects, mostly driven by donor requirements. For example, some projects had a variety of indicators and extensive internal and external evaluations, while others had only several indicators and

4 <http://www.qualres.org/HomeLinc-3684.html#:~:text=Lincoln%20and%20Guba%20posit%20that%20trustworthiness%20of%20a,that%20the%20findings%20have%20applicability%20in%20other%20contexts>

small-scale qualitative assessments. As a result, the depth and scope of internal documentation differed, possibly affecting the overall consistency of the data used in the analysis. Further, projects with more frequent reports tended to offer richer data, while those with fewer reports provided limited information.

Finally, both internal and external documents could be subject of selection and context bias. Also, the study findings are based on data available up to a specific point in time, potentially excluding developments that occurred afterward.

Findings from external literature

The [external literature review](#) (Please see the [bibliography](#)) in this study shows that research to date has primarily focused on the relationship between social cohesion other dimensions of peace and conflict such as: peacebuilding, prevention of violent extremism (PVE), conflict reduction, trauma healing and governance. Other sectors in which effects of social cohesion (SC) have been explored include resilience building, refugee response, or forced displacement. The majority of the publications did not explicitly address a justice component, and although some elements of justice could be identified, they were not the primary focus of these studies.

In the peacebuilding sector, the review showed that social cohesion (SC) efforts contribute to developing more positive community relationships, but do not adequately address how these relationships are linked to structural issues and broader conflict dynamics, leaving this area insufficiently explored (Mercy Corps, 2022). Similarly in the PVE space, while data is showing stronger social trust as a result of SC interventions, it is less known how and to what extent SC interventions can reduce vulnerability to recruitment or whether they are enough to resist ideologies and structures that sustain

violent extremism (Mercy Corps, 2022). The literature also highlights SC's important role in addressing immediate trauma, but a lack of resources and sustainable support structures often constrains their long-term effectiveness. The review also showed that there is a positive connection between resilience and social cohesion; however, there is a trend in which resilience projects prioritize economic stability over social aims. Finally, SC programs play a crucial role in refugee response and addressing the challenges of forced displacement. Reports on refugee reintegration further suggest that SCJ initiatives can improve community relations but often fail to address long-term socio-political dynamics (World Bank, 2022).

While the above mentioned areas have been explored, evidence of SC&J integration in other sector areas is limited. Studies often focus on exploring different social cohesion theoretical frameworks, rather than whether social cohesion plays a causative role in relation to outcomes in other sectors.

The level of detail on social cohesion interventions in publications varies with their length, with shorter pieces offering only brief references while longer reports may describe specific activities. Outcomes are often presented in general terms, rather than through rigorous analysis, although some organizations provide multiple formats to cater to different levels of detail, including overviews, full reports, and methodological appendices.





Findings from Internal Reports

SC&J Outcome Analysis

As described above, the main goal of the meta-study was to examine whether SC&J interventions had an impact on other sector project outcomes. To investigate this, the study first looked into SC outcomes.

The analysis provided compelling evidence that applying CRS' 3B/4D approach⁵ enhances community social cohesion. The positive impact of these widely used methodologies are visible through narrative reports on levels of the Socio-Ecological Model⁶ and Social Cohesion Barometer⁷ results for CRS's Social Cohesion Conceptual Framework⁸.

At the personal level, sensitization, conflict resolution actions, and positive messaging empowered individuals by fostering a sense of self-worth and inclusion, encouraging them to become more involved in community matters and proactive in resolving conflicts. At the relational level, the review shows that SC&J activities helped reduce prejudice and stereotypes, which further helped build trust among different groups and created an environment for cooperation. On the household level, SC&J interventions, such as conflict resolution and communication workshops, improve family dynamics, contributing to stronger and more cohesive family units that underpin broader community stability. At the community level, the analysis reveals that SC&J interventions, such as engagement with citizens, improvements in governance systems and conflict resolution initiatives, foster collective identity and trust among


community members both horizontally and vertically. Increased trust allowed for more effective collaboration, as people worked together to address conflicts and challenges. At the structural level, SC&J led to policy shifts, enhanced institutional accountability, and more inclusive governance.

Field surveys conducted across the entire project area showed that 94.7% of beneficiaries reported improved communication between the community and local authorities, a significant increase from the 58% observed at baseline (Atlas.ti Quote 26:26).

The overall analysis of SC&J outcomes highlights that integrating SC&J interventions with other project activities improves a community's conflict resolution capabilities and thus reduces conflict, improves gender relationships and fosters sensitivity towards marginalized and underrepresented groups. For example, including women in conflict management structures has been shown not only to enhance the effectiveness of these structures but even improve the satisfaction of women who utilize them (Atlas.ti Quote: 210:23). Likewise, interpersonal skills programs have a significant impact on fostering collaboration among community members and their leaders (Atlas.ti Quote: 212:55).

The meta-study did not systematically examine the nuances of SC&J integration across socio-cultural, economic and political dimensions, nor did it address the horizontal and vertical aspects of cohesion due to the inconsistent use of measurement tools across projects. Still, narrative and monitoring and evaluation reports

5 https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/tools-research/crs_ties_rev-08-03-2017_web.pdf
6 https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/tools-research/crs_sbc_guide_lowres_final.pdf
7 https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/tools-research/the_scb_guide_for_meal.pdf
8 https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/tools-research/crs_social_cohesion_indicators_bank-jl-websingle_1.pdf



from projects that used quantitative SC measurement reveal an outcome pattern. The most straightforward effects were evident in the socio-cultural sphere; this is unsurprising as most SC&J activities were implemented at the **horizontal level**, focusing on strengthening ties within and across communities. Progress within the economic and political spheres was present but less notable. One can argue that economic sphere results are influenced by external factors such as market conditions, making it challenging to draw a clear connection between SC&J activities and economic prosperity. On the other hand, the meta-study found that when investment was made in strengthening **vertical linkages** with local authorities it was most commonly in sectors such as **disability inclusion, shelter, infrastructure and disaster risk reduction (DRR)**. This finding could point toward a tendency for projects to focus on building vertical ties in areas where progress is difficult or impossible without collaboration with local or state authorities. However, it remains unclear from the data whether the relationships established between citizens and authorities are sustainable once the project concludes.

More tailored research across projects is needed to better understand the influence of external variables and the interconnectivity between SC&J effects on local governance and economic issues.

Justice Lenses in the Meta-Study

The meta-analysis also indicates that integrating justice lenses along with social cohesion interventions into project activities could alter social, economic and political structures perpetuating injustice. All projects included in this analysis were mindful of inclusion, especially those related to the inclusion of marginalized youth and women, ensuring that these groups participate more fairly and fully

in the projects. Still, more than half of the projects included in the analysis went beyond mere participation of marginalized groups to also tackle root causes of exclusion and inequality through justice-oriented approaches and reporting to achieve better economic, political, structural and social cohesion outcomes.

Projects employing justice lenses report shifts in power dynamics and structural norms. For instance, a project in Senegal addressed gender disparities in governance participation by combining social cohesion training with economic activities, reporting that involving women in governance through having a voice in selecting the most vulnerable households for community lead projects, and through Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) groups assume active roles in community governance, shape community priorities, resolve conflicts, and improve women's economic situation. Project results show positive effects as CRS Social Cohesion Barometer measured a 7% increase in positive perceptions of social cohesion. Women contributed their knowledge and opinions to important community matters, had a voice in selecting the most vulnerable households for community-led projects and used SILCs as a space to resolve community conflict, therefore, empowering women to assume active roles in community governance.

Similarly, in Ethiopia, bringing justice lenses to youth engagement by training young people as peace ambassadors reduced conflict and addressed structural injustices. This contributed to reducing youth marginalization. In Burkina Faso, a project showcased the role of justice lenses in challenging political exclusion. By involving community members and local authorities in infrastructure planning, the project enhanced political inclusion and increased trust between citizens and the government, empowering communities to push for greater accountability.

Furthermore, the elements of justice and social cohesion can be mutually reinforcing. A qualitative assessment of how the 3B/4D approach affects disability-related social exclusion found that the approach helped foster compassion, empathy, acceptance, and self-care among caregivers and community members. It also promoted a sense of support, belonging, and collective self-efficacy, while influencing local norms regarding community responsibilities for people with disabilities and driving modifications to infrastructure. Additionally, economic opportunities for families of children with disabilities were strengthened by linking them to the social cash transfer program.⁹

While justice-oriented projects showed more sustainable changes, challenges persist. The meta-analysis suggest that inclusion and justice lenses are relevant to boost social cohesion and other sector outcomes. However, proving their casualty, impact and sustainability still needs to be explored.



Analysis of Other Sector Effects

Cross-Sectoral Effects


Regardless of the project's scope, geographic location, specific context or sector, when SC&J activities are integrated, project reports show increased participant engagement, more effective project implementation and stronger community resilience.

Projects report that integrating SC&J broadens the range of participants, particularly as it supports effective engagement of marginalized and underrepresented groups such as women, youth and people with disabilities. In conflict-affected contexts, integration ensures that community members have fairer access to projects activities. As a result of increased community trust, integration support the creation of an enabling environment for projects to implement their full scope. Finally, SC&J integration supports community resilience. By strengthening both horizontal and vertical social bonds, communities are better equipped to manage internal conflicts, minimize the risk of conflict escalation, and focus more on contributing and working on issues for the common good. Conflict reduction, as result of SC&J interventions, contributes to a fairer distribution of resources by creating support networks and fostering a collective capacity to respond to social and economic challenges.

Sector-Specific Analysis

When examining the effects of SC&J interventions on outcomes across various sectors, evidence suggests that SC&J interventions contribute to improved [Natural Resource Management \(NMR\)](#), [Agriculture](#), [Microfinance](#), [Shelter/Homes](#)

9 Internal CRS Assessment: Qualitative Assessment of how the 3B/4D Social Cohesion (2024) Approach Affects Disability Related Social Exclusion



and Communities, and Infrastructure, with weak evidence for Education and Disaster Risk Reduction. Reports tend to present positive effects of SC&J on other sectors, mainly through beneficiary testimonies, focus group and key informant interview qualitative data, but also through Social Cohesion Barometer quantitative results. Negative effects are undocumented. This may be due teams' limited capacity to emphasize where SC&J activities fell short and how these shortcomings relate to other sector outcomes.

"... strengthening social cohesion and justice among diverse groups contributes to the improved collective management of scarce natural resources. Furthermore, evidence supports coupling social cohesion and justice activities around NRM to strengthen social ties in divided communities" (Atlas.ti Quote: 183:6)


In Natural Resource Management (NRM), SC&J interventions have effectively created more inclusive structures that equitably manage land and water resources. Evidence demonstrates that when communities participate in SC&J activities, resource-related conflicts decrease, and inclusive decision-making processes that ensure fair access and use of resources improve. This inclusive approach to NRM promotes sustainability and fosters cooperation among different community groups, which is crucial for long-term resource management.

For example, a project in Bangladesh focused on engaging diverse community groups, such as traditional and religious leaders and youth, expanding participation and leveraging influential

social structures for community mitigation efforts. This approach enhanced resilience and readiness to manage environmental shocks and stressors in the area. Reports from Sudan emphasize the importance of strengthening social ties to secure buy-in from all stakeholders and avoid conflicts. This enabled the project to align resource management plans with communities' urgent challenges such as climate-induced stresses, and to promote sustainable practices in managing shared resources. In Kenya, project documentation suggests that social cohesion activities, including cross-community NRM exchange visits, build stronger social ties and enhance community adaptation to climate change. Additionally, activities such as community-hosted events and roundtable discussions addressed participation resistance from local communities and helped improve relationships with government leaders as well as promote more inclusive decision-making.¹⁰

In Livelihoods, SC&J interventions help to foster greater economic inclusion and improve access to resources. They increase the participation of producer groups in joint economic activities and enable diverse groups to participate in local economies more effectively. By promoting inclusive market practices and supporting income-generating activities, these interventions could help stabilize livelihoods, particularly for marginalized populations, enhance overall community resilience and positively impact nutrition quality. A multiyear, cross-border project implemented in Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria and Niger reported that the project has positively impacted 78% of livelihood beneficiaries by increasing their average monthly income. Furthermore, in

¹⁰ Examples for NRM were drawn from following project and related special studies: Sustainable Agriculture and Production Linked to Improved Nutrition Status, Resilience, and Gender Equity (SAPLING) project (Bangladesh), DCPSF 2021 Peacebuilding and Stability in Darfur & Taadoud II: Transition to Development Resilience Building in Darfur (Sudan), Resilient Arid Lands Partnership for Integrated Development plus (Kenya RAPID+) Resilience building program (Kenya); Fostering Sustainability and Resilience: A Kenya Case Study of Social Cohesion and Natural Resource Management.



Madagascar SC&J integration empowered youth as change agents, engaging them in livelihoods diversification and land restoration activities as part of disaster risk reduction efforts.

Applying improved business management associated with social cohesion skills was a good opportunity for new discoveries. My life changed dramatically ... [and] the prejudices that I had towards the Congolese and Burundians ended. From the first SILC loan of RWF 20,000 [approximately \$20] I got in 2016, I'm now eligible to get RWF 1,000,000 [approximately \$1,000] and can pay it back on time, which increased my household social-economic status. (Atlas.ti, Quote: 179:8)


For **Microfinance**, SC&J interventions have demonstrated efficacy in increasing income generation and fostering economic collaboration within and across groups. The meta-study research highlights that integrating SC&J within microfinance activities, such as Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC), leads to stronger economic networks, improved economic levels, and financial resilience. Findings across regions, countries and projects consistently reveal such positive effects both qualitatively and quantitatively. However, the meta-study also showed that SILC activities contribute to stronger social cohesion within the community, showing the mutually

beneficial effect of both interventions.¹¹

In terms of **Infrastructure**, SC&J interventions have been linked to the creation of more collaborative environments for infrastructure development. Evidence suggests that when SC&J principles are integrated into infrastructure projects, there is greater community involvement, leading to more effective planning, implementation and maintenance. This participatory approach ensures that infrastructure development meets the needs of all community members, enhancing utility and sustainability. In Ethiopia, joint community “connector projects” offered conflicting groups the chance to rebuild trust and reduce suspicion by working together to restore shared infrastructure. Community members identified and carried out mutually beneficial initiatives, such as renovating schools, water points, roads, and bridges damaged during conflict.

The sequencing and layering of SC&J activities and infrastructure development are significant predictors of positive outcomes. Depending on the context, SC&J activities can “open the door” for infrastructure projects to proceed, or infrastructure development can serve as an entry point for fragile communities to become more receptive to participating in social cohesion activities (Validation Workshop, 2024). As noted, social cohesion strengthening interventions were crucial

¹¹ Examples for Agriculture and Microfinance were drawn from following project and related special studies: Nigeria Water for Agriculture Program - Nigeria; Resilience and Food Security Program (RFSP) - South Sudan; Stabilization and Reconciliation in the Lake Chad Region - Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria, Niger; Supporting Livelihoods for Agropastoralists in Lakes State - South Sudan; Securing and Protecting Investments & Capacities for Environmental Sustainability (SPICES) - Madagascar; Community Conflict Management - Niger; Burkina Livelihood Project for IDPs and Host Communities - Burkina Faso; DRC Development Food Assistance Project (DFAP) - Budikadidi - Democratic Republic of the Congo; Enabling Durable Solutions for a Cohesive and Diverse Ninewa Plains - Iraq; A Case Study: Integrating Social Cohesion into Agriculture Programming in Liberia; Fostering Social Cohesion for Nutrition Impact: Lessons from a Zambia Case Study; Fostering Sustainability and Resilience: A Kenya Case Study of Social Cohesion and Natural Resource Management; Social Cohesion and Competencies Building as Key Factors for Agricultural and Microfinance Success: A Case Study from Nicaragua and Honduras; Integrating Social Cohesion Sudan: Case Study 4 - The Powerful Impact of Strengthening Social Cohesion to Improve Livelihood and Resilience Outcomes around Natural Resource Management in Darfur, Sudan; The Multiplier Effects of Integration: Outcomes Harvesting from Integrating Social Cohesion in Homes and Communities Multisectoral Programming in Uganda+



at the beginning of projects, enabling host and displaced populations to accept living together and subsequently receive economic and infrastructure assistance, further reinforcing social cohesion (Atlas.ti Quote: 117:2).¹²

Regarding **Shelter, Homes, and Communities**, SC&J interventions have led to increased economic opportunities for refugees and host communities. Further, the results indicate a more inclusive local market system, increased refugee access to natural resources, and widespread adoption of land agreements at the individual level. In Uganda, refugee and host community members frequently noted that including some host community Persons with Specific Needs (PSN) in shelter construction projects and forming mixed construction crews helped strengthen relationships between the groups. Additionally, there is strengthened local infrastructure for peace and improved coordination among implementing partners. In the Philippines, capacity building for local government partners on social cohesion led to the joint development and adoption of a Social Mobilization Manual, incorporating a social cohesion perspective into Bangsamoro region community settlements work.¹³

For **Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)**, communities engaged in SC&J demonstrate improved coordination during emergencies. They create and follow disaster reduction action plans and are more inclusive, allowing quicker and

more efficient responses to small-scale shocks. However, no evidence extends beyond DRR action planning enabling quick response to minor or moderate community shocks. Further research needs to assess whether SC&J interventions will effectively support emergency response in the event of larger-scale needs.¹⁴

In **Education**, research suggests that further exploration is needed to better understand the effects of SC&J activities on student attendance and academic success when these activities are integrated. The documentation included in this meta-study pertains to only one project, and while some positive effects were noted, it is not sufficient to draw conclusions.¹⁵

The meta-study provides insights into the positive effects of SC&J interventions on social cohesion and justice across various sectors; however, some areas still require further research to fully understand the mechanisms driving these outcomes.

Unresolved Questions in the Meta-Study


The meta-study was unable to explore the second research question to understand how SC&J can be strategically designed into sectoral frameworks to amplify other project outcomes. This was because the documentation lacked sufficient details on SC&J interventions, making it difficult to assess the nuances of their effectiveness. Similar to the gaps observed in external literature, internal documents included in

12 Conclusions for Infrastructure were drawn from following project and related special studies: Shaping Our World Project- DCPSF 2018 – Sudan; Stabilization and Reconciliation in Lake Chad Region Phase II (STaR Phase II) – Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria; PATRIP Burkina Côte d'Ivoire – Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire; PATRIP Mali-Niger II – Mali and Niger; Social Cohesion Integration Ethiopia: Case Study 1: Post-Conflict relief and Recovery in Ethiopia: Working with youth for Sustainable Peace

13 Conclusions for Shelter, Homes and Communities were drawn from: SHAKE II - BHA – Philippines; The Multiplier Effects of Integration: Outcomes Harvesting from Integrating Social Cohesion in Homes and Communities Multisectoral Programming in Uganda; A Philippines Case Study: Uniting Social Cohesion in Homes and Communities

14 Conclusions for DRR were drawn from: Learning Brief: Integrating Social Cohesion and Justice into Disaster Risk Reduction in the Philippines; Stabilization and Reconciliation in Lake Chad Region Phase II (STaR Phase II) – Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria; DFAP Bangladesh – Bangladesh.

15 Conclusions for education were drawn from Building Bridges: Promoting Social Cohesion in Education – A Case Study from Ain Shams, Egypt



the study, such as reports and evaluations, do not explain in detail the type or scope of the SC&J interventions. Even when referring to the 3B/4D methodology, there was a lack of clarity regarding how the methodology was adapted to local contexts and what specific modifications were implemented to address particular social cohesion concerns.

SC&J interventions can vary widely, including activities such as conflict resolution training, sensitization meetings, community dialogue sessions, the inclusion of marginalized groups in decision-making processes, connector initiatives or other activities. However, the lack of detailed documentation on what exactly these interventions entail and how they are adapted to local contexts creates significant barriers to understanding their full impact. In the absence of specific data on the methods used and how these interventions are tailored to the unique social, political, and economic environments in which they are implemented, it is difficult to assess what the interventions are addressing and how this affects other sector outcomes.

This gap is particularly problematic for evaluating the effectiveness of SC&J interventions in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus. Without proper documentation and evaluation of SC&J activities, it becomes impossible to determine how well these interventions contribute to HDP Nexus outcomes.

The absence of detailed documentation also hinders the broader SC&J sector from developing a clear set of best practices. Without systematic data on what works and what does not, it is difficult to refine SC&J approaches and optimize their implementation in different settings and to replicate successful models in new regions or sectors. Moreover, the lack of transparency in how SC&J interventions are adapted to local contexts raises concerns about scalability and sustainability.

To address these gaps, a shift in how SC&J interventions are implemented and measured is necessary. The meta-study shows that it is necessary to improve documentation within SC&J integrated projects. This would include detailing the types of interventions being carried out, the methods used and how these interventions are adapted to fit specific social and cultural contexts. Additionally, there is a need for [standardized evaluation frameworks](#) that can be used across projects to measure the effectiveness of SC&J interventions consistently. Such frameworks would help assess not only the immediate outcomes of SC&J activities but also their long-term.

Moreover, implementing [standardized means for measuring SC&J in other sectors](#) could enable more accurate cross-project comparisons, providing valuable insights into which interventions are most effective in different contexts. This would not only allow for a clearer understanding of best practices but also offer guidance on how to adapt these practices to the specific needs of communities experiencing conflict, marginalization or instability.

Enhanced documentation and rigorous evaluation would not only make it easier to replicate successful interventions, but also to better understand how effective SC&J interventions improve the long-term sustainability of humanitarian and development projects, ultimately helping to foster social cohesion, reduce conflict and support community-driven development.

Additional findings

The meta-study also identified recurring patterns and practices related to SC&J integration strategies. While the study's primary goal was not to evaluate performance or pinpoint specific areas for improvement, identifying these patterns provides additional learning.

The findings confirm that teams implementing projects view [SC&J integration as crucial for success](#). This significance is reflected in project proposals and reports, often addressing how community dynamics influence project outcomes. For example, reports discuss how community conflicts can disrupt implementation or emphasize the necessity of fostering stronger relationships among community members and stakeholders to achieve desired project results. From the implementing teams' perspectives, these efforts are considered foundational, not just beneficial, to effective project execution and community resilience.

The study also highlights [the importance of resources and support for successful SC&J integration](#). As mentioned in the methodology section, the study compared two project categories: projects with standard implementation practices and projects that deliberately focused on integrating SC&J. Analysis showed that projects with standard practices are implementing SC&J activities in parallel to other sector activities rather than fully integrating them into broader project frameworks. These projects often explain the rationale behind introducing SC&J components, but the reporting focuses mainly on processes rather than results or effects. These standard projects usually lack SC&J analysis, except for some larger HDP Nexus projects that have more comprehensive documentation of SC&J processes. Conversely, projects that deliberately integrated SC&J exhibit more

adaptive practices. These projects invest in building staff and partners' capacity and actively seek innovative ways to integrate SC&J into projects. For example, deliberate SC&J integration projects work closely with staff from various sectors to help them understand and apply integration practices from their specific perspectives. This approach deepens understanding and promotes a more comprehensive application of SC&J principles. They typically offer more detailed reporting on SC&J processes and focus more on integration and other sector outcomes, a practice less common in projects holding to standard implementation practices.

The analysis also reveals [differences in integration practices](#) between larger projects touching on multiple components of the HDP Nexus and smaller-scale projects. Larger projects often provide more detailed reporting on SC&J components, possibly due to available resources and the capacity to document. Still, even when it comes to HDP Nexus projects, there is a tendency to elaborate more on the H&D component than the "P" and more quantitative data is presented in their reports and evaluations. Smaller projects, meanwhile, tend to emphasize their primary sector indicators, focusing less on SC&J integration.



Recommendations

The meta-study recommendations focus on improving **systems and practices** within humanitarian and development interventions to ensure the effectiveness of projects and programs.

The recommendations are grouped into four key areas: **enhancing MEAL systems and practices**, **improving reporting practices**, investing in **capacity building**, and promoting **adaptive strategies and innovations**.

As mentioned above, the meta-study findings indicate the need for **SC&J measurements related to humanitarian and development sector** to more accurately assess not only SC&J outcomes themselves, but also their linkages and relationships with other sectoral outcomes. Consequently, it highlights the importance of creating or upgrading **SC&J indicators in other sector programs** and clear instructions for exploring the linkages with other sector indicators. Moreover, conducting learning events is suggested to foster continuous improvement and knowledge-sharing within MEAL processes.

Reporting practices should be enhanced by adopting a more systematic approach to understand and interpret monitoring and evaluation results. The meta-study underscores the need for after-action review reports, workshop reports, special study reports and other such reports to be a regular project reporting practice. This would support more transparent and data-driven evaluations, allowing for continuous refinement of SC&J activities.

Documenting **adaptive strategies**¹⁶ and using adaptability assessments for SC&J could be a key to fostering innovation in the field. These strategies could enable

project activities to be more responsive to changing needs and conditions, ensuring that SC&J efforts remain relevant and impactful more broadly.

Continuous support and training in understanding SC&J processes and measurements is necessary not just for SC&J staff, but also other sector and MEAL leads and partners. Staff sensitization and capacity building is crucial for successful integration, as securing internal buy-in within the organization is predictor of better project success.

Based on these additional meta-study findings, if integration efforts are supported and standardized processes are established and encouraged by donors and policymakers, gathering more data and measurements about SC&J effects on other sector outcomes would be more feasible and effective.



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19. Promotion of Social Cohesion through the Savings and Internal Credit Communities in the Diocese of Doba and Lai - Chad
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21. Resilience and Food Security Program (RFSP) - South Sudan
22. Securing and Protecting Investments & Capacities for Environmental Sustainability (SPICES) - Madagascar
23. SHAKE II - BHA - Philippines
24. Shaping Our World Project- DCPSF 2018 - Sudan
25. Stabilization and Reconciliation in Lake Chad Region Phase II (STaR Phase II) - Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria
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2. Building a Culture of Social Cohesion and Peace - South Sudan
3. Burkina Livelihood Project for IDPs and Host Communities - Burkina Faso
4. Côte Ivoire Cross-border Conflict Resolution and Social Cohesion - Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire
5. Communities Leading Development (CLD) - Guatemala
6. Community-based Watershed Development in Support to Integrated Catchment Management - Lesotho
7. Community Conflict Management - Niger
8. DCPSF 2021 Peacebuilding and Stability in Darfur - Sudan
9. DFAP Bangladesh - Bangladesh
10. DRC Development Food Assistance Project (DFAP) - Budikadidi - Democratic Republic of the Congo

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