



CRS Emergency Response Team crossing Jonglei Canal delivering medicine to communities affected by the floods in Ayod County. Photo Credit: Achuoth Deng/CRS consultant/2021.

Pathways to Resilience: Enhancing Social Cohesion in South Sudan

South Sudan has a long and tumultuous history of violence, food insecurity, and recurrent floods and droughts, resulting in profound challenges for individuals, groups, and communities. These hardships are further compounded by isolation, impassable roads, and security concerns in regions such as Eastern Equatoria and Jonglei States. Local and intercommunal violence, including conflicts among youth age-sets and cattle raiding, continue to disrupt lives and hinder productive activities.

In response to these complex challenges, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has implemented the Pathways to Resilience (P2R)¹ program in Eastern Equatoria and Jonglei States since 2021. The program aims to enhance the resilience of food-insecure individuals through a comprehensive approach covering multiple components, including Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) and nutrition, Community-Managed Disaster Risk Reduction (CMDRR), livestock, savings and lending, agriculture, adult literacy, and social cohesion.

To evaluate the impact of social cohesion and trauma awareness interventions on community resilience, CRS

conducted a comprehensive learning review between March and April 2023 in Akobo, Budi, Duk and Kapoeta North.

Methodology

The methodology involved selecting P2R project sites and conducting focused group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) with various community groups. Open-ended questions were used to explore the impacts of social cohesion and trauma awareness interventions, while imaginative questions were posed to elicit unique perspectives. Additionally, a mini-Social Cohesion Barometer² was administered to P2R staff to gauge their perceptions. The review aimed to build upon previous assessments and contribute to the existing knowledge on enhancing community resilience. The learning review approached the central research questions through two lenses: conflict transformation and CRS's 3Bs framework (Binding, Bonding, and Bridging)³.

¹ Pathways to Resilience (P2R) is an emergency food security activity funded by USAID/Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) in South Sudan and implemented by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in partnership with Vétérinaires sans Frontières Germany (VSFG).

² CRS' mini-Social Cohesion Barometer (the Barometer) is an innovative tool that gauges opinions on the level of social cohesion in a defined area using 18 indicators that fall under socio-cultural, economic, and political spheres.

³ Please see: <https://ics.crs.org/resource/ties-bind-building-social-cohesion-divided-communities>.

Conflict transformation aims to address the root causes of conflict and allowed the study to identify changes brought about by social cohesion and trauma awareness interventions. The 3Bs framework focused on the processes and changes at the individual, group, and intergroup levels. Social cohesion was defined as the quality and diversity of social ties that promote respect, trust, and unity for the common good.

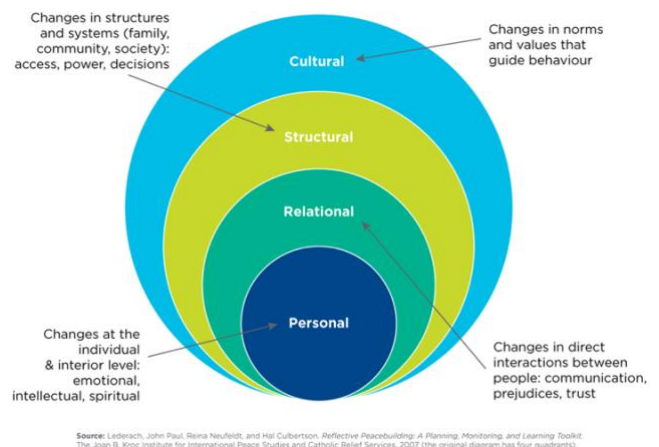
The review assessed change across four dimensions of transformation: Personal, Relational, Structural, and Cultural. The data aimed to evaluate individual growth, assess the strength of group relations, document changes in social structures and systems, and examine shifts in community beliefs and norms.

Findings

The Personal Dimension of Change highlights the impact of conflict on individuals' physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. The trauma healing training provided by P2R helped individuals develop coping mechanisms, change attitudes, and improve behavior. Participants reported a greater understanding of trauma and stress management, leading to improved mental well-being. This correlates with 81% of post training test average score obtained by participants during the third quarter of the FY2023. Personal agency and peacebuilding initiatives emerged, with individuals taking action to bring peace to their homes and communities. The concept of forgiveness was embraced, and hope played a significant role in resilience.

The Relational Dimension of Change focuses on direct interactions between individuals and groups. The social cohesion and trauma awareness training fostered better communication, understanding, and appreciation for others. Contact, cooperation, and collaboration increased, with individuals from diverse backgrounds working together and sharing resources. Connector projects, which aimed to build infrastructure and foster intergroup relationships, were praised by participants for their role in promoting community bonding. Peaceful conflict resolution became a preferred approach, resulting in fewer disputes and enhanced harmony within families and communities.

The Structural Dimension of Change reflects how systems and structures impact human relations. Access to public goods and services, such as schools, healthcare facilities, water sources, markets, roads, and telecommunications, played a significant role. Even small changes in group behavior indicated progress in social cohesion and structural change. For example, chronic water shortages in Eastern Equatoria created structural violence as access to clean water was limited. Unannounced visits from



cattle keepers in search of water led to tension and violence between neighboring communities. However, a connector project involving the digging of a communal water pond improved water access, reduced tensions, and enhanced food security by allowing livestock to remain closer to villages. Additionally, promoting transparent and inclusive internal governance systems within producer groups helped prevent and manage disputes, fostering community capacity and bonding. Informal courts and dialogue replaced revenge and violence in settling disputes, leading to more peaceful resolutions.

The Cultural Dimension of Change encompasses the slowest and most deeply ingrained aspects of community life. Women and girls experienced improvements in their status, speaking up confidently and taking on leadership roles. There was a growing recognition of the value of education, leading to increased school enrollment. Alcohol consumption decreased, and youth developed a stronger sense of discerning right from wrong, fostering more love and respect among them. These cultural shifts indicated progress towards a more inclusive and harmonious society. Further efforts were needed to continue promoting gender equality, education, and positive social values.

Integrating social cohesion and trauma awareness with mainstream resilience activities is essential for effective outcomes. By integrating these interventions with resilience activities, empowering women and community representatives, and addressing intergroup dynamics, sustainable peace and development can be promoted. The findings emphasize the importance of refining training, promoting inclusivity, and fostering gender equality to support long-term resilience and peacebuilding efforts. The recommendations provided aim to further enhance the effectiveness and impact of social cohesion and trauma awareness interventions, thereby contributing to building more resilient and cohesive communities in South Sudan.