



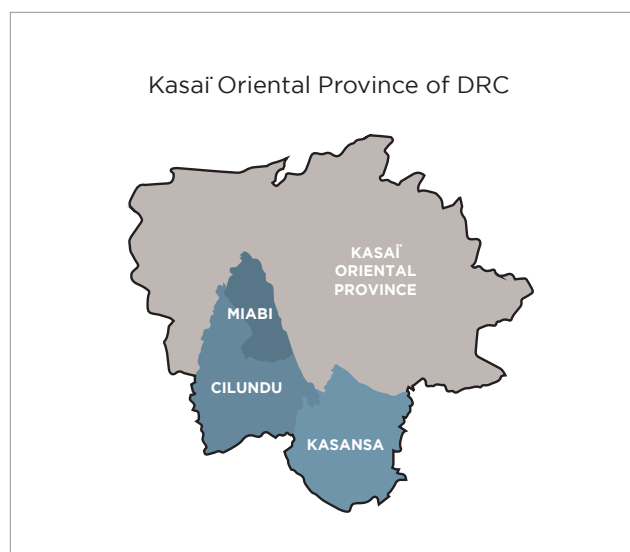
Learning from the Budikadidi Project in the DRC:

THE BENEFITS OF SOCIAL COHESION INTEGRATION
FOR MULTISECTORAL PROGRAMMING

Introduction

Since 2017, a Catholic Relief Services (CRS)-led consortium has implemented the USAID-funded Resilience Food Security Activity (RFSA) in three health zones of the Kasai Oriental Province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The Budikadidi project delivers multisectoral technical assistance to sustainably improve households' nutrition, food security, and economic well-being. With the foundational purpose of empowering communities to improve and sustain food security and nutrition for all community members, strengthening governance was an integral component of the original Budikadidi design. Following conflict in 2017, the need for strong governance within local structures was underscored as community members lacked trust amongst each other (horizontal social cohesion) and in their leaders (vertical social cohesion). In response, CRS invested private resources to integrate a social cohesion intervention targeting staff and community leaders.

In 2022, the Budikadidi team launched a privately funded robust learning agenda, including a study on social cohesion. The study was designed to document the unique Budikadidi approach to



Budikadidi takes place in the Kasai Oriental Province of the DRC, targeting communities in the Cilundu, Kasansa, and Miabi health zones.

social cohesion and governance integration, explore its influence on project outcomes, and offer recommendations for achieving greater development-peacebuilding coherence in future projects.

Methodology

The study began with a desk review of existing documents, including social cohesion workshop reports, project progress reports, and success stories developed by the Budikadidi governance team. Key informant interviews (KII) were conducted with the Chief of Party, the country program-wide social cohesion focal point, and two members of the CRS Africa Justice and Peacebuilding Working Group (AJPWG) who supported workshop design and facilitation. One focus group discussion (FGD)

convened the project's purpose leads and other senior project leaders while a second gathered eight field agents. Four FGDs and four KIIs were conducted with Community Action Committee (CAC) leaders, collectively reaching 26 men and 10 women from targeted communities. Lastly, KIIs were conducted with the Archbishop of the Kasai Oriental Province and seven members of the provincial Parliament to gather details on the spillover effects of the social cohesion intervention.

Context

In 2017, prior to Budikadidi's start-up, violence broke out in the previously stable province of Kasai Central. Conflict between the Kamwina Nsapu militia and the state led to mass violence and displacement, and Budikadidi geographic targeting was restricted to the Kasai Oriental Province as a result. While not the epicenter of the violence, communities across Kasai Oriental were nonetheless impacted. During the Budikadidi Refinement Period, the team noted an increase in overall insecurity and general distrust as affiliations were heightened. While the conflict presented

unique challenges, it also aggravated existing community-level tensions. Land and water scarcity, coupled with the significant presence of the mining industry, frequently spark resource competition throughout Kasai Oriental. Additionally, local power struggles between chiefs are chronic across and within villages. "It was very political in nature at the time we started implementing activities in 2018," the governance purpose lead described, but "as time moved on, [conflict] has become less political and more transactional and customary."

Once Budikadidi activities were launched, this context of underlying tension threatened project roll-out. In zones particularly impacted by the neighboring conflict, the team noted greater community reluctance to form savings and internal lending community (SILC) groups due to mistrust and fear of theft. Early successes in agricultural programming were tenuous as some landowners sought to revoke communal access to their plots after witnessing increased production. Several governance structures were successfully established, including CACs, Producer Organizations (PO), and Water Management Committees (WMC). In many cases, however, these structures were initially perceived as threats to existing power instead of sources of development.

Early on, it became clear to Budikadidi leaders that a lack of social cohesion was impacting programming, and furthermore, programming had the potential to aggravate tensions.

In addition to conflict within targeted communities, Budikadidi leadership noted disunity within the project team during start-up. The common challenge of encouraging collaboration across consortium members was further deepened by divisions based on place of origin and perceptions of privilege. This tension resulted in siloed communications and planning and threatened efforts to improve multisectoral integration and project quality.

Approach



The original Budikadidi proposal presented a conflict-sensitive approach for integration across the project design with a strong focus on intentionally selecting agricultural interventions to mitigate land disputes. Concretely, the proposed approach centered on introducing the 3Bs/4Ds methodology (see box below) into high-risk communities to develop social cohesion action plans and engage youth as future leaders. Detailed programming and targeting were designed, however, to be refined following a thorough conflict analysis in year one.

The August 2017 conflict analysis revealed eight sources of conflict in the project zone. Importantly, the report noted that these conflicts were recurrent, underscoring a chronic experience of tension independent of the 2017 conflict in Kasai Central. Recommendations included engaging targeted communities and field staff in conflict analysis practices and supporting individuals and

households to develop relationships of trust and collaboration with their neighbors.

The first action taken to address social cohesion prioritized the Budikadidi team. A three-day workshop convened 80 staff in late 2017. The workshop doubled as a technical introduction to CRS' signature social cohesion approaches and a critical team-building experience. Participants reflected on team dynamics instead of communities, engaging in a personal experience of the social cohesion approach. In March 2018, the initial staff workshop was replicated in field offices, engaging 50 staff in Kasansa and 45 staff in Miabi. In March 2019, 32 field agents attended a formal training-of-trainers (ToT) workshop, shifting the focus from personal application of the content toward a skillset to plan and execute delivery of components of the 3Bs/4Ds curriculum. A basic introduction to adult learning principles was included to enhance quality delivery.

The 3Bs/4Ds

CRS' social cohesion approach, [the 3Bs/4Ds](#), is a flexible, multi-purpose methodology at the core of Budikadidi social cohesion programming. The 3Bs guide a continual process of transformation, beginning with *binding* (personal healing, resilience, and agency), advancing to *bonding* (intra-group strengthening and preparation), and resulting in *bridging* (inter-group engagement and collaboration). The 4Ds—*discover, dream, design and deliver*—place an appreciative perspective at the heart of social cohesion programming, focusing on achieving common visions rather than dwelling on sources of division.

Since the first workshop in 2017, Budikadidi staff have been encouraged to leverage their social cohesion training to address conflicts impacting programming. With the aim of introducing the 3Bs/4Ds approach for community-led application, field agents first led one-day replication workshops with 93 additional field staff responsible for nutrition/health, agriculture, SILC, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programming. These sector-specific facilitators then accompanied field agents in hosting replication sessions in the communities they serve, primarily targeting Budikadidi community volunteers (including CAC leaders) and local leaders. In total, 4,947 community members attended the initial wave of social cohesion sessions in May 2022, lasting 2.5 hours, on average. Sessions continue to take place on an ad hoc basis as field staff engage relevant community members to address conflicts when they arise.

The 3Bs/4Ds approach is often introduced directly *within* divided communities as stand-alone

programming. The Budikadidi team modified this approach, training project staff and select community leaders in the 3Bs/4Ds methodology to bolster conflict sensitivity and develop a social cohesion skillset amongst those who deliver programming. In lieu of a formal training cascade model down to the community level, the Budikadidi approach centered on the integration of social cohesion principles to influence the delivery of other sectoral activities within and across numerous community structures. From the 3Bs/4Ds content, the team prioritized activities and sessions with the most meaningful and relevant metaphors in the Budikadidi context that field staff and community leaders could replicate without additional resources (see box below).

Social cohesion programming was designed to be cross-cutting, positively influencing group functionality and trust in leaders across the multisectoral project. As a result, the pathway for contributing to the project objectives that was

3Bs/4Ds Key Metaphors:



FIRE: The stages of a fire are used to discuss the development of conflict, including the intentional and unintentional contributions we add as members of identity groups.



THE COMPETING GOATS: Two goats tied together by a cord are pulling against one another toward two different piles of food. The cord is pulled progressively tighter, causing immense tension until both parties are so tired that they stop pulling altogether. Only then do they look back at one another and realize they are seeking the same goal (food) and can only reach it through compromise. The goats walk together to one pile of food, eat, then walk to the other and eat again.



THE POOR MAN AND THE GOLD: A poor man wanted wealth so badly that he left his home and traveled the world in search of gold. He spent his entire life searching for this gold and died poor. His friends brought his body home to bury it on his land. Upon digging his grave, they found that his house was built over a gold mine. The moral is that often the riches we seek are within us.



Budikadidi staff in the Kasansa Health Zone experience the metaphor of fire during a social cohesion training. [Photo by Sylvestre Kimbese for CRS]

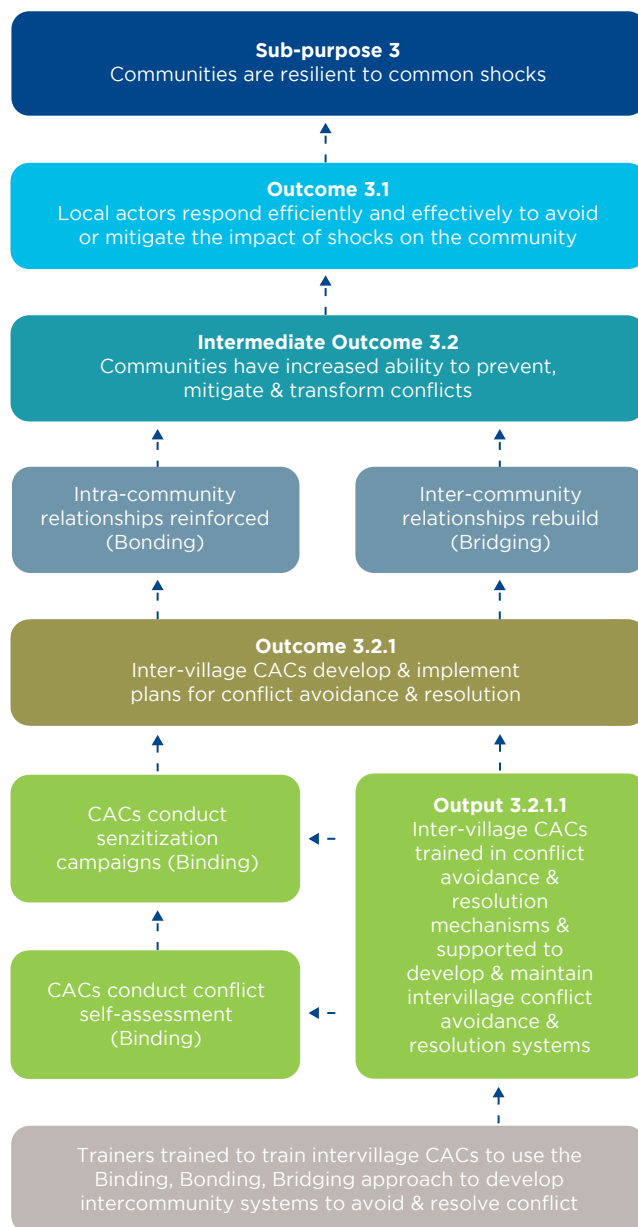
integrated into the project foundational purpose (FP) (see Theory of Change [ToC] image to the right) focused on governance. While the social cohesion intervention was largely owned by the FP team, no dedicated social cohesion position was established within the staffing structure. All trainings were facilitated by non-project CRS staff (the country program social cohesion focal point with support from technical advisors). While the team's appreciation for social cohesion programming grew throughout the project lifetime, the intervention remained restricted by a limited budget. CRS invested private resources to bolster Budikadidi's social cohesion programming, but ultimately, the effort was light compared to typical social cohesion interventions which entail an extensive series of refresher trainings and multiple layers of cascaded workshops. While the initial wave of social cohesion sessions reached 4,947 community members, this represents only 1% of Budikadidi participants.

Following ToT workshops, participants identified the lack of on-going formal accompaniment, resources to reinforce and replicate training content, and formal monitoring as key challenges to advance the 3Bs/4Ds methodology. Indeed, only one indicator specific to social cohesion was included in the project's performance tracking system: "Outcome F.3.1.2 Inter-village CACs develop and implement plans for conflict avoidance and resolution - USAID Indicator: # of new groups or initiatives created through U.S. government funding dedicated to resolving the conflict or drivers of the conflict." The aim of supporting CACs to develop specific conflict avoidance plans was ultimately abandoned; instead, CACs are supported to formally implement and monitor holistic Village Development Plans (VDP) and informally practice 3Bs/4Ds techniques to resolve conflicts in their communities. As a result, reporting on the above indicator merely highlights the number of functional CACs. The social cohesion intervention is otherwise absent from the project

Results

Budikadidi Team

Budikadidi managers attest to the foundational impact of social cohesion training for strengthening consortium management. Social cohesion workshops created a safe space for staff to acknowledge hurt feelings and express forgiveness, resulting in a more open, positive, and collaborative working environment. Team members celebrate a "One Budikadidi" mentality emerging from these efforts, largely replacing the divisive lines previously



monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) system, underscoring the importance of this study to document the project's social cohesion intervention and capture results and learning.



Budikadidi staff in the Miabi Health Zone participate in a team building exercise during a social cohesion training. [Photo by Sylvestre Kimbese for CRS]

travel is now coordinated by the project instead of individual partners, improving stewardship of resources and less siloed field work. Additionally, having experienced the benefits of social cohesion programming directly, staff across the consortium carry a personal appreciation for the integration of social cohesion activities and its potential to improve other outcomes.

While the team has largely sustained the positive results of early staff workshops, they acknowledge a missed opportunity for greater impact. “The training was good but not sufficient. There should

be follow-up from leadership to maintain these concepts,” staff admit. Without greater budget and time allotted to staff social cohesion training, some admitted that the *One Budikadidi* approach feels more theoretical than practical, acknowledging that the complexity of shifting social norms requires sustained practice beyond one-off workshops. Additionally, standard staff turnover across the project’s five-year lifetime yields a significant number of staff who did not experience the early training, and no written materials were provided to introduce social cohesion to staff outside the workshop space.

Community Dynamics

Staff note that conflicts are less frequent and violent since 2017 and state that Budikadidi's social cohesion work has contributed to mitigating tensions. In zones where conflict was most disruptive, staff have observed demographic shifts as people experiencing restored trust continue to return home and invest in their community.

A unique dimension of Budikadidi's social cohesion approach entailed bridging structures. While the 3Bs/4Ds typically engages individuals from different identity groups (ethnic, religious, etc.), Budikadidi staff and volunteers regularly applied the approach to resolve tense power dynamics between governance structures, including existing leaders (chiefs and local government structures) and groups established by the project (such as CACs and WMCs). Actively bridging these groups (commonly in informal discussion forums convened by field agents and community volunteers presenting 3Bs/4Ds metaphors) helped define their common vision, developing horizontal social cohesion amongst leaders. These efforts also strengthened

accountability amongst leaders, ultimately contributing to better governance.

CACs (the primary structure mandated to coordinate village development activities across all sectors and with relevant government entities) serve as the engine and likely source of sustainability for Budikadidi programming; thus, the project's ability to shift initial power threats into collaborative relationships was critical to success. The conflict sensitivity promoted in community social cohesion sessions has strengthened the capacity of CACs themselves to navigate and coordinate the many structures, groups, and leaders important to effectively implementing their VDPs. For example, Budikadidi expanded the existing CAC structure from health-focused to multi-sectoral, which initially angered Head Nurses. While multiple levels of Budikadidi leadership were engaged in resolving this issue, staff specifically recall CAC members employing their social cohesion training to work through these challenges and drive collaboration with government health actors.

Examples of the foundational impact of social cohesion on improved governance include:

The Bena Muamba CAC in Miabi serves five small communities, each with their own chief. During a quarterly meeting, the CAC reflected on the meager progress of their **Village Development Plan** and concluded that various parties were demotivated based on alignment with chiefs who were against one another. A community volunteer adapted the 3Bs/4Ds approach by engaging the chiefs in an exercise to imagine their community's future in a positive and negative light and to consider the importance of their peaceful collaboration to achieve the positive future. The chiefs agreed to break down the barriers that distanced them from one another and instead mobilize their communities behind the VDP.

The Tshipanga village was challenged by a power struggle between two village chiefs who incited their members to oppose the efforts of the other, including the peaceful election of CAC members, which were stalled due to violence. Different community volunteers requested that these two chiefs convene the community for a village assembly during which the volunteers introduced the competing goats metaphor. The chiefs acknowledged that their spirit of competition, instead of collaboration, was hurting the community's ability to develop. Following this dialogue, CAC leaders were **democratically elected** and now actively coordinate development efforts.

After a CAC was newly formed in Bena Masengu, the village chief felt threatened by the CAC's direct work with community volunteers without engagement of his leadership. Suspecting the CAC of hiding information from him, the chief rejected the structure and called for replacements. CAC members concluded that the chief was ignorant and greedy, and both parties stalled any development efforts led by the other. A Budikadidi field agent introduced the metaphor of fire to these parties, helping both sides to see that they were adding fuel to a tension that could erupt in violence. To resolve their conflict, the two parties agreed to host **monthly information sharing meetings and jointly plan village assemblies**.

Community sessions reinforced the idea that conflict is natural: violence in response to conflict should be avoided, but taking advantage of peacefully working through conflict can contribute to stronger communities. This mentality, coupled with the capacity of field staff and volunteers to replicate social cohesion activities on an as-needed basis, helped sustain and improve the functionality of many Budikadidi groups.

Staff and volunteers shared numerous instances of community leaders coupling their governance

training in monitoring groups' internal regulations with their social cohesion skillset to actively mitigate conflict. For example, CACs support WMCs to reinforce water-user rules during the dry season in particular when scarcity is known to spark fighting at water points. Capable of sustainably overcoming natural tensions and challenges, community groups established by Budikadidi have offered repeated opportunities for bonding, reinforcing social cohesion within communities.

Examples of social cohesion programming contributing to more inclusive, equitable and accountable groups include:

In the Bena Mbiya village, Budikadidi supported the establishment of a **WMC** to manage the community borehole. The WMC was coerced by family members of the chief to provide them with the water-user fees, causing distrust and tension throughout the community. The CAC and WMC convened their members and the chief and his family and introduced the fire metaphor. Understanding that one's actions can intentionally or unintentionally add fuel to the fire of conflict, the group discussed how continued tensions over water management could gravely impact lives. Following this dialogue, tension was quelled, and all parties have since upheld the WMC rules of procedure.

A **youth club** in the Lubuwa village struggled to achieve momentum after the president called the club mentors "unprofessional." This comment led to misunderstandings, tension, and eventually, drop-outs and divisions within the club. The Budikadidi field agent introduced appreciative inquiry to all youth club members and mentors, inviting them to view their organization as positive, healthy, and creative, rather than as a source of exclusion and conflict. The different parties agreed to view one another as collaborators with a joint vision instead of protagonists. The club rules of procedure were refined to better clarify the roles and responsibilities of all parties. Today, the club is thriving and has submitted a joint proposal for a livelihood competition.

A **PO** in Chinemba signed a contract with a Kasansa PO to provide soybeans for transformation. A leader within the Chinemba PO was selling soybeans from their stock without the knowledge of the PO, negatively impacting stock levels and their contract. The Budikadidi field agent employed his social cohesion training to convene the PO members in dialogue. While the other members were angry and ready to replace the leader, this discussion revealed that the PO's internal regulations were being disrespected by many members. The field agent helped the PO re-establish checks and balances and the PO determined to provide the leader with a second chance to contribute to their shared vision.

Prior to Budikadidi, village chiefs or police alone were responsible for resolving conflict; today, numerous leaders can identify and mitigate tensions to remove these deterrents to development. One CAC member explains, “Conflicts linked to development activities are resolved by the CAC ... who emphasize listening, dialogue, fairness, and reconciliation... while other conflicts are managed by the village chief.” Staff also shared impressions that wider management of conflict within communities has freed more time amongst leaders to invest in development efforts,

allowing them to focus on long-term goals instead of short-term challenges.

Staff also laud the social cohesion intervention’s contribution to community openness to and appreciation for different perspectives. Complemented by the Faithful House approach, which aims to strengthen joint household decision-making, and literacy programming improving women’s capacity to manage resources, staff note stronger and more frequent participation of women in community spaces.

The benefits of Budikadidi’s social cohesion investments have enhanced the project’s development outcomes (across WASH, livelihood, agriculture, and health programming), as demonstrated by these anecdotes:

In consultation with a village chief, Budikadidi determined the geographic targeting for **water point drilling**. However, the team realized from other community leaders that this chief had usurped the leadership of a different chief of higher ranking, sparking a downward spiral that resulted in the cancellation of drilling activities. Budikadidi staff convened these parties, introduced the metaphor of the fire, and led a process of appreciative inquiry for them to recognize their shared interest in successful drilling, which began again after this social cohesion intervention.

When a SILC member in Kasansa did not repay his loan, animosity grew within the group, threatening its functionality. The CAC intervened, applied their social cohesion training, and reached an agreement with the SILC group to grant the individual an extension. The other SILC members agreed to practice tolerance, and the group has regained its momentum, now focusing on **savings and income generation**. Other SILC groups in the same zone have learned from this experience and apply certain timeframes for loan provision to actively mitigate conflict amongst their members.

A PO in the Nsulu wa Lomba village shares a border with an individual farmer’s plot. After the farmer diverted the stream providing water to the PO’s plot (negatively impacting their **market garden produce**), PO members looted the farmer’s crops to compensate for their losses. The farmer then readied his family to defend their farm with machetes against the PO members. Budikadidi field staff and the village chief used the metaphor of the fire to discuss the potential consequences of this rising tension with both parties. The farmer and the PO agreed to restore the natural path of the stream so both can access water, an agreement the CAC continues to monitor.

Jealousy related to volunteer opportunities sparked contempt amongst women targeted for nutrition programming. A Care Group Promoter supporting 14 Lead Mothers recalled home visits when she and the Lead Mother were mocked, “*You come to teach me **nutritious cooking**. That’s good, but did you bring me the food or t-shirt [that you received]?*” The Care Group Promoter and Lead Mother maintained their optimism (practicing appreciative inquiry) and continued the home visits. In time, the community observed and appreciated their impact, and households, which formally rejected them, invited them in. “*With patience and humility, I manage interpersonal conflicts.*”

A group of men are gathered outdoors under the shade of a large tree with thick, gnarled branches. They are seated on wooden chairs and benches. In the foreground, a man in a grey shirt and light-colored trousers sits with his back to the camera, looking towards the group. To his left, several other men are seated, some looking towards the camera and others looking away. A small wooden table in front of them holds a green plastic bowl and some papers. The background is filled with lush green foliage and the warm light of late afternoon or early morning. A text box in the upper right corner provides context for the scene.

A weekly meeting of the Twibakay SILC group in Bakua Mwagi village in the Cilundu Health Zone in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Kasai Oriental province. [Photo by ©Michael Castofas for CRS]

Spillover Effect

During the first staff social cohesion training, CRS facilitators met with staff from Caritas and her sister organization, the Justice and Peace Commission, to discuss the possibility of piloting *vertical* social cohesion efforts in the DRC with government bodies in the Kasai Oriental Province. As Budikadidi unfolded, the province braced for the May 2022 gubernatorial elections as political identities progressively hardened. Conflict between opposing political parties rose to the point of suspending Parliament meetings, rendering the institution ineffective. After witnessing the positive results of integrating social cohesion efforts into Budikadidi programming at the community level and fearing electoral violence, the Bishop of Mbuji-Mayi requested CRS' assistance to deliver similar social cohesion education to support government officials. In November 2021, CRS facilitated a 3Bs/4Ds workshop with 24 members of the Provincial Parliament to address political tension. The workshop was a rare bridging opportunity

for these groups, and daily outputs broadcasted by local media presented a high-level model of social cohesion across the province. Following the workshop, the joint work of Parliament resumed, and the governor and vice-governor were elected in peace. Workshop participants established a Committee of the Wise (with members of both political parties and the Bishop as a neutral leader) to address internal tensions within Parliament; the committee has been convened once thus far. While Budikadidi-targeted communities feel distant from the impact of Parliamentary decisions, staff acknowledge the complementary power of improved governance at the highest levels. The Bishop hopes to scale such efforts across the province so government officials closer to communities can benefit from and leverage social cohesion approaches. [Click here](#) to learn more about this vertical social cohesion success story in Kasai Oriental.

Discussion

Budikadidi's MEAL system was not developed to monitor progress in the field, but qualitative findings overwhelmingly point to a positive impact on project objectives. Imagining the counterfactual (how Budikadidi would have evolved had social cohesion programming not been introduced), this study suggests that unaddressed tensions would have deterred the speed and effectiveness of key groups and leaders responsible for advancing development. Social cohesion programming appears to have been critical to the success of the project's governance strategy, which was foundational to all other sectoral aims. As the Kasais are not prioritized for peacebuilding efforts within the DRC, this intervention filled a significant gap in the project health zones, directly addressing a critical need while also serving as a force multiplier to accelerate and amplify project impact. Furthermore, a commitment to social cohesion integration contributed to the project's do no harm approach. To successfully implement a complex multi-sectoral project,

Budikadidi built upon and created several new community-based structures, contributing to already tense dynamics. The capacity of field staff to roll out programming with the skills to identify and mitigate conflict proved not only helpful but necessary.

Building upon the learning from Budikadidi's social cohesion intervention, future project design may consider the following recommendations:

Complex development projects will benefit from light, but highly intentional, social cohesion interventions.

Instead of investing in extensive trainings directly reaching "high risk" communities alone, the Budikadidi model empowered field agents and community volunteers to extend social cohesion results across the project's vast geographic zone. Beyond targeting considerations, this light approach is also ideal for multi-sectoral projects as various teams inevitably compete for field staff and community time. In practice, the length and frequency of Budikadidi social cohesion sessions within communities are largely unmonitored and presumably inconsistent. Teams must counterbalance a light cascade model with a commitment to consistency, shifting social cohesion from an elusive skillset for ad hoc application toward a known practice in all zones and monitored for additional coaching as necessary. This approach would benefit from complementary training in adult learning and content delivery (not specific to social cohesion) in order to build field staff and

“There is an interfertility between social cohesion initiatives and the components of a sustainable development project. The former serves as a breath of fresh air for the latter, and the latter serves as a support space for the former. The intersection of the two enables the theory of change to materialize.”

—CRS DRC SOCIAL COHESION FOCAL POINT

volunteer capacity and confidence to effectively lead replication efforts across sectors.

Budikadidi's original design envisioned the development of stand-alone conflict-avoidance plans, but this activity was eventually phased out. Staff assert that this effort would have become onerous for CACs to execute and monitor in parallel with other plans. Instead, they note the potential benefit of including social cohesion within existing VDPs to formalize this specific CAC member responsibility. Budikadidi has demonstrated that promoting social cohesion is a critical skillset of local leaders to enhance governance and lead development, a role which will benefit from greater accountability at the community and project level.

Integrating social cohesion monitoring into MEAL systems will help formalize follow-up and enable adaptations as necessary.

In addition to measuring progress over time, incorporating social cohesion within the project's indicator performance tracking table (IPTT) will raise the likelihood that the subject is visited more frequently during existing reflections, including quarterly meetings and report-writing processes. For example, the FP team may collect the number of conflicts resolved by CAC members on a quarterly basis. Annual data collection of prioritized [Social Cohesion Barometer](#) indicators would help the team triangulate field observations of evolving conflict factors and contribute to adaptive management decisions based on shifts in the operating environment. As social cohesion is complex and long-term in nature, the collection of qualitative anecdotes is highly useful and can be consistently collected over time during existing field visits or incorporated into the efforts of the project's feedback, complaints, and response mechanisms (FCRM).

Social cohesion benefits can be optimized through early sequencing.

While Budikadidi staff have leveraged a social cohesion skillset to deliver programming since 2017, application by community leaders started only recently. Numerous priorities compete within the sequencing of multi-sectoral projects, but ideally, social cohesion would occur earlier in the project lifetime. For RFSAs, teams can leverage assessments conducted during the Refinement Period to nuance conflict analysis and refine the social cohesion intervention for early application across heterogeneous zones. This is important both as it is foundational to the success of other objectives and because it warrants long-term accompaniment to shift deeply-rooted social norms. A longer timeline would also support an earlier shift in responsibility to replicate social cohesion activities from field staff to local leaders.

“ *It is not something that we can say that we will do in the beginning, middle, or end. It is continuous and should be executed at all moments. Conflicts never end, and the community needs to be ready at any point to address the conflict.”*

—BUDIKADIDI STAFF

Local leaders are most likely to initially apply their social cohesion training in response to heated tensions amongst leaders and project-supported groups (as seen in Budikadidi). With greater project accompaniment, however, leaders could leverage this skillset to address more latent tensions with the aim of better engaging marginalized individuals in the project. Lastly, customary power struggles constitute a significant amount of the local conflicts impacting Budikadidi programming. To retain the project's political neutrality, these challenges are best addressed by community leaders instead of field staff, underscoring the importance of developing this skillset early. If social cohesion is prioritized early in the project lifetime, teams will need to carefully consider accompaniment over time to sustain interest and quality delivery.

Personal experience with the methodology can drive consortium-wide buy-in and cross-cutting promotion of social cohesion.

The Budikadidi experience demonstrates that initiating the social cohesion intervention at the staff level was advantageous on multiple levels, as opposed to immediately taking the approach to the field. Firstly, it contributed to greater team unity, which eased consortium management. Secondly, it engaged staff from all sectors in personally understanding the merits of investing time in social cohesion, creating champions for the cross-cutting priority. Following an initial staff workshop early in the project lifetime, an introduction to social cohesion could be incorporated into all new staff orientations to mitigate turnover challenges. To reinforce team social cohesion, management could leverage existing events, such as quarterly meetings

“ *In terms of Budikadidi staff, team building should be constant. We need to take temperatures and look at the climate every six months or every year to see how things are working together. We need to have something that is more structured and strategic and intentional.”*

—BUDIKADIDI STAFF

and retreats, to incorporate refresher sessions that provide repeated opportunities for team bridging without increasing budget allocation to team training.

Lastly, investing in social cohesion as a long-term intervention instead of a one-time activity can contribute to programmatic sustainability.

Countless anecdotes show that Budikadidi social cohesion programming not only equipped local actors to resolve specific conflicts, but also strengthened governance structures and groups responsible for locally-led development. Budikadidi,

which translates to “self-reliance,” focuses on local actors’ ability to sustainably lead development efforts. Local leaders’ capacity to anticipate and address conflict is foundational to sustaining governance structures following project closure as the operating environment inevitably shifts. Highlighting the importance of social cohesion to sustaining local structures and groups in project exit strategies (ideally drafted at project launch to guide an intentional pathway until project closure) can reinforce the implementation of a consistent and well-monitored social cohesion intervention.



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