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# Inclusion of youth in conflict analysis for improved programming and policy responses to displacement in South Sudan

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## Overview

People in South Sudan have experienced decades of forced displacement and cross-border mobility, resulting in families split across the country and neighbouring Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda. As of 2021, more than 4 million South Sudanese citizens were displaced, either internally or abroad. Over the past four years, over 500,000 refugees and over 1.1 million internally displaced people (IDPs) have returned to their habitual residence.

The prominent role played by humanitarian and development actors in response to the crisis in South Sudan calls for the adoption of a conflict-sensitive approach to programming. This entails in-depth analysis, design and monitoring of the positive and negative impacts that humanitarian and development interventions might have on existing tensions in the country.

This policy brief discusses the fundamental principles of conflict analysis and how they can translate into practice. It highlights the need for a participatory, youth-sensitive conflict analysis. It also underlines primary areas of intervention for humanitarian and development actors to acknowledge when designing and implementing programmes targeted at South Sudanese refugees, IDPs, returnees and host communities.

## Report & Partner Reference

This policy brief builds on the key findings of *South Sudan's decades of displacement: Understanding return and questioning reintegration*, a study developed in a partnership between the Research and Evidence Facility (REF) – funded by the European Union Trust Fund (EUTF) – and Samuel Hall, a social enterprise dedicated to migration and displacement research. Over 1,000 respondents were interviewed for this study between December 2021 and February 2022. Research locations included Juba, Kajo Keji, Wau and Malakal in South Sudan; refugee hosting areas in Gambella and Benishangul Gumuz in Ethiopia; Kakuma and Kalobeyei in Kenya; and Bidi refugee settlement and Kampala in Uganda

## Conflict-sensitive analysis to improve humanitarianism and development programming

Conflict sensitivity is the ability of organisations or institutions to understand the conflict context in which they operate, as well as the potential interactions between their interventions and this context. This sensitivity is needed to design and implement programmes that better respond to the needs of those experiencing or at risk of experiencing conflict. Conducting a conflict sensitivity analysis consists in comparing context and conflict analysis information (such as conflict drivers and actors involved) with key (project) parameters and making adaptations to ensure negative impact is minimised and positive impact maximised (Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, 2012).

In fragile settings, conflict sensitivity is a prerequisite to providing the most appropriate assistance to the affected populations, including refugees, IDPs and migrants. It can also mitigate potential risks caused by the infusion of resources in conflict and post-conflict settings without considering the context and potential implications. Young people, who make up a large portion of the displaced population, are key to an inclusive conflict

sensitivity analysis, but they are often left out because they are assumed to lack agency and power.

Regional institutions and the international community have sought to prioritise the design of policies and programmes to find durable solutions to the protracted displacement and potential return of South Sudanese IDPs and refugees, but sometimes without an in-depth understanding of the conflict context and young people's roles within it. This leads to a lack of appreciation of the root causes of displacement and of the factors contributing to refugees' decisions to move or return, particularly regarding young people. This, in turn, can hamper efforts to assess the feasibility and requirements for safe and sustainable returns.

## Conflict-sensitive analysis as an opportunity for building partnerships

The accuracy of conflict-sensitive analysis is tied to the variety and diversity of voices it is built upon, including those of people inside and outside South Sudan. Programming efforts need to reflect these experiences and take greater account of these voices.

Principles of inclusion and participation play a key role in conflict analysis exercises. When conducted in a participatory way, conflict analysis has the potential to 'serve as a means of dialogue and mediation' and to pave the way for reconciliation (UN and Folke Bernadotte Academy, 2021).

A critical step in conducting conflict analysis is mapping the actors involved in a given conflict context, in order to understand their role and how they could affect, and be affected by, the planned intervention. Conducting participatory conflict analysis entails engaging in dialogue with local and civil society actors involved in the mapping, including local faith actors and local government representatives.

In the process, humanitarian and development actors should identify grassroots efforts and opportunities to strengthen social cohesion in rural and urban areas. Inclusive conflict

analysis exercises offer the opportunity to identify and build on local initiatives that have proved to be effective.

The meaningful inclusion of these groups offers the opportunity to identify and build on local initiatives to promote sustainable support for people in contexts of displacement and return. It will both enhance the legitimacy of the analysis and serve as an entry point for the establishment of partnerships and collaborations, as well as finding entry points for programming.

This study found specifically that physical safety is, in part, the result of social cohesion at the community level. In South Sudan, tensions between hosting communities and IDPs are less visible, largely thanks to the blurred lines between these different categories. However, qualitative data suggest that social cohesion is lower in areas where unaddressed grievances and disputes continue to trigger armed violence, such as Malakal and, to a lesser extent, Wau. Moreover, the study's quantitative analysis shows a link between safety and social integration, with one indicator standing out: feeling respected by one's neighbours has a significant impact on contributing to feelings of safety.

As a result, those with weaker connections to return environments – such as the young people who have grown up living away – are often at risk of not feeling included in their return environments.

### **Youth-sensitive, conflict-sensitive analysis**

Conflict and displacement place additional burdens on youths, which need to be accounted for in conflict analysis. For example, they are often separated from their families, their education may have been disrupted, and they may have been compelled to take part in fighting. Understanding the challenges that young people face, and their potentially different priorities for life in a post-conflict, post-displacement context, can lead to a better understanding of how they can contribute to recovery efforts in the country.

Furthermore, a youth-sensitive conflict analysis enables practitioners and policymakers to understand how age interlinks with the drivers of conflict and mobility patterns, including return and reintegration. This becomes even more relevant in the context of South Sudan, as the country has one of the world's youngest populations. Most of its youth were born in displacement and have no direct experience of their families' areas of origin. In some cases, they have never been to South Sudan, as with the following research participant, whose children grew up as refugees:

*I do have four children and all of them were born here. If I tell them about South Sudan, they consider it as a foreign country and they reply to me that this is our land and home.*

For many young people, South Sudan is not home. Return may be a strategy to mitigate the uncertainty of living in exile, but it may also create a new form of uncertainty, as they will be returning to an unknown context, where their chances of succeeding are low (Grabska & Fanjoy, 2015).

One of the key findings of this study is that returning is not an aspiration for many young refugees. This poses serious limits to the development of the country. The main reasons identified by the research as to why young people choose not to return include: fear of returning to an unknown context; the lack of employment and education opportunities; and the families' expectations that young men will carry out tasks and fulfil roles that do not accord with their ambitions or with their experiences of the urban or camp environment in which many of them were raised. For instance, one young man explained the frustrations of returning to a rural environment after having grown up in the urban setting of the refugee camp:

*Some returnees sent youth [to rural areas] to take care of the cattle. This has been the case since the start of the conflict.*

Understanding these core issues, as well as the heterogeneous nature of the youth demographic in and outside South Sudan and

their different experiences of migration, displacement and return, is key to developing youth-specific interventions.

Ultimately, adopting a youth-sensitive approach to conflict analysis not only enables a more thorough understanding of young people's situations in South Sudan and host countries. It also helps to shed light on a number of perspectives that are relevant to the broader context and dynamics of a conflict, and to improve understanding of how age might

interlink with the root causes and drivers of conflict and opportunities for peace and durable solutions.

The research has identified some important steps that can be taken to integrate young people more systematically into conflict analysis to ensure that programming takes better account of their priorities, capabilities and their key role in breaking the cycles of conflict in South Sudan.

## Key policy recommendations

### The Government of South Sudan should:

- Use youth-sensitive conflict analysis as a tool to open up dialogue and create partnerships with local actors.
  - Adopt area-based and community-led approaches to durable solutions that target the whole population, including youth, regardless of their categorisation based on migratory status. Ensure that the entire community – including local service providers, local authorities and other relevant stakeholders – engages in dialogue.
- Align education and training opportunities offered with the demands of the local labour market, to enhance positive social interactions and the local inclusion of youth.

### Humanitarian and development actors should:

- Support young people born in displacement with information, counselling and assistance to plan ahead for their return and to join youth-led groups and civil society organisations that bring young people closer together, reinforcing the role of youth-led leadership structures.
  - Provide information to young South Sudanese pre-departure on the educational and vocational opportunities available in the country after their return.
- Ensure the inclusion of refugee, IDP, returnee and host community youth in conflict analysis exercises aimed at informing humanitarian and development programming.
  - Create platforms to encourage dialogue and exchange between displacement and conflict-affected populations, governmental authorities and humanitarian actors.
  - Involve youth in recovery and reconciliation processes aimed at achieving durable solutions, including in rural areas.

### Donors should:

- Fund conflict analysis exercises that include engagement with young people and their perspectives, aimed at informing humanitarian and development programming.
- Fund community-based conflict transformation and social cohesion mechanisms and institutions that are based on the above types of youth-inclusive conflict analysis.

## References

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