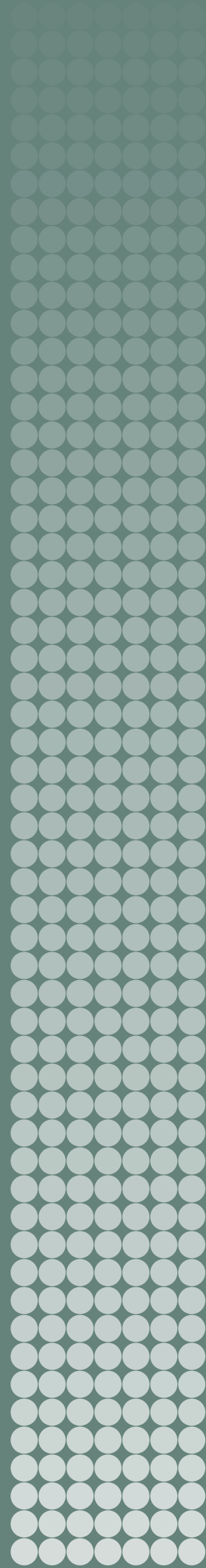


IMPROVING THE PROSPECTS FOR PEACE IN SOUTH SUDAN

Spotlight on Stabilization

CAROLINE DELGADO



**STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL
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World Food Programme

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The SIPRI–WFP Knowledge Partnership and Disclaimer

WFP and SIPRI established a knowledge partnership in 2018 to help strengthen WFP's contribution to improving the prospects for peace in the countries where it works. The research for phase I of this partnership visited four case study states—El Salvador, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan and Mali—and produced initial findings in June 2019. The evidence from these case studies indicated that some WFP programming positively contributes to improving the prospects for peace, but also identified various issues that needed to be addressed. The preliminary report made a number of general and country-specific recommendations on how WFP's contribution to improving the prospects for peace could be improved. However, further research was required to test the robustness and general applicability of the initial findings and recommendations, and to refine and add to them with more case studies. Accordingly, phase II of the inquiry was broadened by adding new states and deepened through a focus on five thematic areas. Eight states were identified for research in phase II: Colombia, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Honduras, Lebanon, Nigeria, South Sudan and Sri Lanka. The five thematic areas are climate change, stabilization, gender, cash-based interventions and measurement. The research has inquired into and reported on these areas in all eight states, and there was also a deep dive in each country into one or two of the thematic areas.

The South Sudan case study research focuses on two thematic areas: stabilization and measurement. The case study is divided into two reports that reflect the two thematic areas which, although related, explore distinct processes and have different units of analysis. This first report (part I) presents the findings from the stabilization deep dive, which explores the potential for WFP crisis response to contribute to a reduction in direct violence, enhance basic physical security and increase stability.

Part II of the series presents the findings of the measurement deep dive, which explores how current monitoring systems, internal processes and data can be adapted to capture WFP's contribution to improving the prospects for peace.

The findings and recommendations are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the positions of SIPRI or WFP, or the management, executive directors or boards of these institutions. The authors alone are responsible for any errors or omissions.

Executive summary

South Sudan is home to one of the world's worst hunger crises. Approximately 8.3 million people, or over 70 per cent of the population, face severe food insecurity. This food insecurity is an outcome of multiple compounding factors but violent conflict is a primary driver. Violent conflict has ravaged South Sudan since its independence from Sudan in 2011. A civil war was fought in 2013–2018, mainly along ethnic lines but driven by a desire to control the country's oil wealth. The war and the continuing levels of violence are spurred by a political marketplace characterized by a rentier economy controlled by politico-military elites that use the oil wealth to buy loyalty and allegiance.

Much of the contemporary violence is driven by sub-national and community actors, albeit with clear links through political marketplace dynamics to the national political and military elites that fought the civil war. In Jonglei and Unity states, community violence partly manifests itself through violent cattle raiding. Conflict and violence since 2011 have displaced nearly 5 million people within the country.

The World Food Programme (WFP) operates in the middle of this intersection between conflict, hunger and displacement. In 2022, it provided food assistance to nearly 6 million people. Over 60 per cent of all the recipients who are intended to benefit from WFP programming, or 'intended beneficiaries', receive unconditional food assistance. This food assistance has an impact on conflict and peacebuilding dynamics. This report analyses that impact and draws out the contribution of WFP's programming to enhancing stability through a reduction in violence and improved basic physical security. Together with a separate deep dive on measurement, this report makes up a country case study on WFP's contribution to improving the prospects for peace in South Sudan.

The findings are presented through two theories of change (TOCs). The research is based on the assumption that there is a link between food security and violence, while recognizing that this link is highly complex, deeply contextual and can change over time and place. Recognizing the importance of context, the report captures WFP's contribution at a specific location and point in time. Nonetheless, broader insights can be gained from this research to inform programming elsewhere in South Sudan.

Because WFP South Sudan is already intentionally leveraging its programming to contribute to peace, the proposed TOCs serve two purposes: first, to articulate the pathways through which WFP programming already contributes to enhanced stability through reduced violence and improved basic physical security; and, second, by identifying how this contribution can be enhanced.

Theory of change 1

*If General Food Distribution plus (GFD+) contained a more intentionally and locally anchored peace component and were scaled-up, **then** WFP's crisis response could contribute to violence reduction by enhancing IDP/host community relations and mitigating destabilizing dynamics linked to negative coping strategies and resource competition.*

This TOC explores the potential for GFD+ as an innovative aid modality to contribute to enhanced stability and violence reduction by focusing on two specific settings for internally displaced persons (IDPs). South Sudan is experiencing one of the world's largest displacement crises. Protracted displacement crises, whether internal displacement or refugee crises, have been linked to economic, social, environmental

and political instability. While the government encourages the return of people displaced by the conflict, most of the residents of IDP camps in Bor and Bentiu interviewed for this research indicated that they preferred to remain where they were. WFP has provided emergency assistance to the IDP population and surrounding host communities in Bor and Bentiu since 2013. WFP began piloting GFD+ in 2021. It seeks to integrate an unconditional resilience component into its emergency programming. Against continuing high levels of violent conflict and uncertainties around the prospects for return, WFP's GFD+ activities could enhance stability and help to build a degree of normality for displaced people and host communities while laying the ground for sustainable and voluntary return.

While this is the underlying purpose of GFD+, it was clear from the research that this component could be made more intentionally designed and scaled-up. The research identifies three main pathways through which GFD+ could be leveraged to intentionally contribute to enhancing stability, and thereby to increasing the prospects for peace. The first two are linked to strengthening the processes around designing and delivering GFD+ projects: by extending the criteria for selecting collaborating partners and enhancing the capacity of existing partners; and through adapting its community-based participatory planning (CBPP) approach to ensure that activities reflect local understandings of conflict and peace. The third is connected to the content of the 'plus' component, by designing GFD+ activities based on clearly articulated pathways through which this contribution occurs.

Theory of change 2

*If WFP's emergency response programming is leveraged to support and strengthen the restoration of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and existing infrastructures for peace, **then** local violence could be reduced and stability enhanced amid escalating conflict dynamics.*

This TOC takes a broader look at how WFP, through a combination of its specific programming (including GFD+) and long-standing presence, the level of trust it enjoys and its collaborations, can impact deeper structural drivers of violence. This can be achieved through a particular focus on restoring traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and the promotion of violence restraint.

Community violence in Jonglei and Unity states largely manifests itself through violent raiding and revenge attacks, predominantly perpetrated by heavily armed community defence groups or militias embedded in the cattle culture. Violent conflict between and among communities is increasing and is directly linked to the rising levels of food insecurity in South Sudan. At the same time, WFP's resources are being reduced. As people face the prospect of losing food assistance, tensions and social unrest have flared. Making matters worse, the structures of customary authority that have traditionally regulated community violence are being eroded or co-opted by regional and national elites.

Despite the worsening outlook for conflict, stability and food security—or, perhaps, because of it—there is an appetite and willingness to break the conflict and food insecurity trap. For this reason, leveraging WFP's emergency response programming to support much-needed efforts to restore traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and the ability of customary authorities to promote normative restraint could contribute significantly to local violence reduction and increased stability amid escalating conflict dynamics.

However, while traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and structures of customary authority can resolve conflict issues if empowered to do so, they also risk perpetuating structural violence. These mechanisms can help to preserve the patriarchal structures that drive gender-based violence, whereas differences in traditions and customs between community groupings can be accentuated to incite division and conflict. Any efforts to restore traditional conflict resolution mechanisms must therefore be accompanied by efforts to address exclusionary practices.

In the light of the above complexities, efforts to restore traditional conflict resolution mechanisms must accurately identify hierarchies and where power over violence lies, as well as the restraints on spiritual and political leadership and authority. WFP can and does make an important contribution to these ends. The TOC proposes that WFP's programming, as well as its deep contextual awareness and understanding of power dynamics—combined with its access to the most conflict-affected areas and regular dialogue with actors with the power to instigate violence or promote restraint—can be leveraged to build trust. This could strengthen existing peacebuilding infrastructures, address the exclusionary structures inherent in traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and provide peace dividends through GFD+, thereby increasing the cost of mobilization.

Abbreviations

CBPP	Community-based participatory planning
CBT	Cash-based transfers
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CSP	Country Strategic Plan
CSRF	Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization (of the UN)
FFA	Food for Assets
FLA	Field-level Agreement
GFD	General Food Distribution
GPAA	Great Pibor Administrative Area
IDP	Internally displaced person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PMC	Project Management Committee
R-ARCSS	Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan
RSRTF	Reconciliation, Stabilization, and Resilience Trust Fund
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SGBV	Sexual gender-based violence
SPLM/A	Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army
SPLMA-IG	Sudan People's Liberation Movement in-government
SPLMA-IO	Sudan People's Liberation Movement in-opposition
TOC	Theory of change
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
WFP	World Food Programme

1. Introduction

South Sudan is home to one of the world's worst hunger crises. Approximately 8.3 million people, or over 70 per cent of the population, face severe food insecurity.¹ This food insecurity is an outcome of multiple compounding factors but violent conflict is a primary driver.²

Humanitarian aid to conflict-affected populations enhances their prospects for survival. However, WFP's emergency response programming targeted at such populations could also have a violence-reduction impact, contributing to improved local stability. To identify this contribution, this report explores how WFP's emergency programming interacts with the conflict context in which it is provided, including its impact on the drivers of violence. It also assesses how WFP's work fits with the efforts of other actors and explores how it might better support collaboration with local, national and international partners. The research is grounded in the WFP South Sudan Country Office's own Contribution to Peace Strategy.³ It complements ongoing studies by the South Sudan Country Office on the potential for WFP resilience programming to address the root causes of the armed conflict. Together, these two areas of research—one on emergency programming and the other on resilience programming—seek to provide evidence of WFP's broader contribution to increasing the prospects for peace in South Sudan. While the distinction between emergency and resilience programming has a methodological significance, efforts to contribute to improving the prospects for peace must cut across programming in a holistic way. They cannot be compartmentalized into one type of programming.

The research is based on the assumption that there is a link between food security and violence, while recognizing that this link is highly complex, deeply contextual and can change over time and place. In recognizing the importance of context, the report captures WFP's contribution at a specific location and point in time. Nonetheless, broader insights can be gained from this research to inform programming elsewhere in South Sudan.

Because WFP South Sudan is already intentionally leveraging its programming to contribute to the prospects for peace, the proposed Theories of Change (TOCs) serve two purposes: they articulate the pathways by which WFP programming already contributes to enhanced stability through reduced violence and improved basic physical security and identify how this contribution could be enhanced.

Two specific TOCs are proposed. The first explores the potential for General Food Distribution plus (GFD+) as an innovative aid modality to contribute to enhanced stability and violence reduction, focused on two specific settings for internally displaced persons (IDPs). The second takes a broader look at how WFP, through a combination of its specific programming (including GFD+), long-standing presence, reputation and collaborations, is able to impact deeper structural drivers, through a particular focus on restoring traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and the promotion of restraint.

Section 2 provides a brief contextual analysis, focused on the trajectory and drivers of violence in South Sudan. Section 3 introduces the South Sudan case study approach, setting out the objectives, methodology and limitations, and providing an overview of WFP programming in South Sudan. Section 4 presents the TOCs, providing contextual background and a rationale for each. Research findings in support of the TOC are discussed with reference to the broader literature. Each TOC also raises potential

¹ World Food Programme (WFP) South Sudan, Country Brief, Nov. 2022.

² World Food Programme (WFP), 'South Sudan: Plan to reach 2.5 million people at risk of famine', [n.d.].

³ World Food Programme (WFP) South Sudan, 'The World Food Programme and contributions to peace in South Sudan: A strategic framework and way forward', unpublished.

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conflict sensitivity concerns. Eleven specific recommendations are provided around how WFP can enhance its contribution to achieving stability and violence reduction in line with the proposed TOCs.

2. Context analysis

Socio-economic and demographic characteristics

Violent conflict, severe weather events and disasters, poor governance and weak institutional capacity combine to make South Sudan among the least developed countries in the world. In 2021, it was ranked bottom of the human development index of 191 countries.⁴ It was also classified as Africa's third least economically resilient country in 2022.⁵ South Sudan is among the top ten countries in the world most vulnerable to the impact of climate change.⁶ The country is also experiencing one of the world's worst food security crises.⁷

Poverty rates are high. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that 92 per cent of the population is multidimensionally poor.⁸ Multidimensional poverty is greater than monetary poverty, which means that individuals living above the monetary poverty line can still suffer deprivations in, for example, health and education.⁹ One indicator of multidimensional poverty is that less than 6 per cent of the rural population, which constitutes 79 per cent of the population,¹⁰ has access to electricity.¹¹

The economy is heavily dependent on oil; petroleum exports constitute 90 per cent of tax revenue and almost all exports.¹² The sharp declines in international oil prices in 2020 and 2021 adversely affected economic growth and development while exacerbating existing vulnerabilities among the population.¹³ The country's oil wealth has provided a slush fund for patronage-based politics and personal enrichment, further fuelling conflict and instability, and remains the most critical sector of the economy.¹⁴ The World Bank estimates that the country's unexploited oil reserves could make South Sudan among the largest oil producers in sub-Saharan Africa, which suggests that a focus on the sector is warranted in the early stages of recovery.

Agriculture, raising livestock, forestry and fisheries constitute the primary source of livelihood for up to 95 per cent of the population and account for around 36 per cent of non-oil gross domestic product.¹⁵ However, only between one and two per cent of land is cultivated in any one year. Rural livelihoods are severely challenged by armed conflict, organized violence and climate-driven shocks.

The South Sudanese population is both ethnically diverse and young. An estimated 64 different ethnic groups are present in the country, although precise definitions of

⁴ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Human Development Reports, South Sudan, Updated 8 Sep. 2022.

⁵ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), *South Sudan: Humanitarian Needs Overview*, humanitarian programme cycle 2023 (UNOCHA: New York, 25 Nov. 2022).

⁶ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (note 5).

⁷ Global Network Against Food Crises and Food Security Information Network (FSIN), *Global Report on Food Crisis: Joint Analysis for Better Decisions* (FSIN: Rome and Washington, DC: 2022).

⁸ United Nations Development Programme (note 5).

⁹ United Nations Development Programme (note 5).

¹⁰ World Bank, Rural population (% of total population), South Sudan.

¹¹ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (note 5).

¹² World Bank, *Directions for Reform: A Country Economic Memorandum for Recovery and Resilience in South Sudan* (World Bank: Washington, DC, 2022).

¹³ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (note 5); and International Crisis Group, 'Oil or nothing: Dealing with South Sudan's bleeding finances', 6 Oct. 2021.

¹⁴ International Crisis Group (note 13).

¹⁵ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, *South Sudan Emergency Livelihood Response Programme, 2021–2023* (FAO: Juba, 2021).

ethnicity and belonging can prove challenging.¹⁶ Livelihoods, territory, language, migration patterns and social systems are the major factors that help to delineate and define ethnic groups. Significantly, 72 per cent of the South Sudanese population of 11.6 million people is younger than 30,¹⁷ while 41 per cent are below the age of 15.¹⁸ This demographic make-up, coupled with the high levels of multidimensional poverty, has been exploited by political elites to drive violence in the country.

Civil war in the world's newest state

Civil war broke out in South Sudan in December 2013, two years after it gained independence from Sudan. The root causes of the war are numerous and stretch back to the civil wars in Sudan since 1950. There were also deep-seated differences among the leaders of the separatist movements in southern Sudan, including the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). The country's oil wealth has played an important role too.

During the second Sudanese civil war (1983–2005), the armed faction of the SPLM, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), forcefully suppressed internal dissent.¹⁹ However, multiple local grievances created numerous motives for armed confrontation and shifting alliances within the wider conflict. By 1991, the civil war, predominantly fought between the central Sudanese government and the southern rebel movement, had transformed into a network of internal wars.²⁰ Rebel leader Riek Machar, of the Nuer ethnic group, created a splinter rebel movement, which plunged the SPLM into years of bitter infighting played out largely along ethnic lines.²¹

The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the SPLM/A and the Government of Sudan laid the ground for South Sudan's independence. The CPA provided for an interim period during which the southern Sudan government was granted regional autonomy and a share of national wealth and power. The south experienced dramatic growth during this period.²² Rather than embarking on a process of reconciliation, however, the SPLM, led by Salva Kiir of the Dinka ethnic group, used part of this wealth to buy peace from opposing armed groups in the south. These groups were offered an amnesty and incorporated into the SPLA, which quickly fractured into separate command and control structures.²³ By the time civil war broke out in 2013, the army was in effect a collection of ethnically based militia, each of which was organized on the basis of personal loyalty to its commander.²⁴

The civil war began in Juba when fighting broke out between the presidential guard along ethnic lines, but quickly spread to Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile states. The intensity of the violence peaked in 2016–17 after a failed peace initiative in 2015.²⁵ The war spread to areas that until then had been largely unaffected by war, including the southern Equatoria region which is known as the breadbasket of South Sudan.²⁶

¹⁶ Kon, M., 'Institutional development, governance, and ethnic politics in South Sudan', *Journal of Global Economics*, vol. 3, no. 2, (2015).

¹⁷ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (note 5).

¹⁸ United Nations Population Fund, World Population Dashboard: South Sudan.

¹⁹ Johnson, D. H., 'The SPLA split surviving factionalism', ed. D. H. Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars: Old Wars and New Wars*, 3rd edn (Boydell & Brewer: Rochester, NY, 2016).

²⁰ Johnson (note 19).

²¹ International Crisis Group, 'South Sudan: From independence to civil war', 9 July 2021.

²² Deng, D., 'Compound fractures-political formations: Armed groups and regional mediation in South Sudan', *ISS East Africa Report*, no. 21 (2018), pp.1–24.

²³ Deng (note 21).

²⁴ Council on Foreign Relations, 'Understanding the roots of conflict in South Sudan', 14 Sep. 2016.

²⁵ Martell, P., *First Raise a Flag: How South Sudan Won the Longest War but Lost the Peace* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2019).

²⁶ International Crisis Group (note 21).

Box 2.1. South Sudan's violent political marketplace

The civil war was largely fought along ethnic lines but driven by a desire to control the country's oil wealth. Oil funds were transferred first to the government of semi-autonomous southern Sudan under the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement and then, following independence, to the new Government of South Sudan. A militarized political marketplace was formed characterized by a rentier economy controlled by national politico-military elites that used the oil wealth to buy loyalty and allegiance from the various provincial elites and the plethora of armed groups.^a As oil revenues declined, the rentier economy transitioned, among other things, into a licence for loyal armed units to steal material goods and assets, and to appropriate people through rape, abduction, forced labour and illegal conscription.^b Provincial elites, unit commanders and individual soldiers came to interpret this licence as an unlimited entitlement rather than an exchange for political loyalty and service. As a result, the national elites began to lose control and many armed groups now operate unrestricted by any form of political or military authority.

^a Boswell, A. et al., *The Security Arena in South Sudan: A Political Marketplace Study* (London School of Economics and Fletcher School, Tufts University: London, 2019).

^b De Waal, A., 'A political marketplace analysis of South Sudan's peace', *Justice and Security Research Foundation Brief*, no. 2 (2016), pp. 1–7.

The Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) was signed in September 2018 between the government under President Kiir, the SPLA-in Opposition (IO) under Machar and ten other armed and political groups.²⁷ However, rebel leader General Thomas Cirillo in Equatoria refused to sign the agreement, partly out of frustration with Juba's monopoly over the country's oil wealth.²⁸ After delays and renewed negotiations to save the R-ARCSS, Kiir and Machar formed a unity government and declared an end to the civil war in 2020. However, slow implementation of key provisions of the R-ARCSS, notably unification of the armed forces absorbing fighters loyal to Kiir and Machar, threatens the peace process. Meanwhile, security continues to deteriorate across the country, particularly in the Greater Upper Nile region which includes Jonglei and Unity states.

Community violence in Jonglei and Unity states

Jonglei and Unity are among the most conflict-affected states in South Sudan. Jonglei state experienced exceptionally high levels of armed violence in 2020, involving community-based militias from the dominant Dinka, Nuer and Murle ethnic communities.²⁹ Conflict-related violence included abductions, sexual violence, looting of food supplies, the destruction of property and cattle raiding. Armed actors used scorched-earth tactics to prevent local populations from accessing resources and the means for survival.³⁰ While conflict intensity reduced at the end of 2020, there have been spikes in violence since, often in the form of violent cattle raids, targeted killings and abductions. The violence in Jonglei has been exacerbated by three consecutive years of unprecedented floods.

Violence in Unity state is primarily driven by competition for influence and control and tensions between the SPLM-in Government (SPLM-IG), the SPLM-IO and Nuer sub-groups. In addition to conflict intertwined with cattle-raising, the oil fields in Unity state further fuel violence, power struggles and fractionalization among the Nuer sub-

²⁷ ACCORD, 'Reviving peace in South Sudan through the Revitalised Peace Agreement', 11 Feb. 2019.

²⁸ International Crisis Group (note 21); and International Crisis Group (note 13).

²⁹ UN Mission in South Sudan and UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Armed violence involving community-based militias in Greater Jonglei, January–August 2020', 15 Mar. 2021.

³⁰ UN Human Rights Council, 43rd session, Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, 24 Feb.–20 Mar. 2020.

groups in the state.³¹ Control over the state capital, Bentiu, has shifted between the SPLA-IG and its allied Dinka and Bul Nuer militias, and the SPLA-IO backed by several Nuer sub-groups from central-southern Unity state. Civilians have experienced severe abuse, from starvation and killings, to sexual violence, forced disappearances and the intentional destruction of homes and assets to ensure that communities do not return.³² Like Jonglei, Unity state has suffered from severe flooding in recent years.

The high level of violence experienced in Jonglei and Unity states is an amalgamation of national, sub-national and community conflicts that manifest as increasingly violent cycles of cattle raids, counter raids and revenge attacks. Cattle raiding is a longstanding cultural practice among pastoralists in South Sudan. However, while it has always been violent, it was seldom lethal. Since the second Sudanese civil war, political and military elites have sought to mobilize and arm the raiders to further their own ambitions, transforming what was once a standard feature of life into a struggle for political power.³³ They were able to achieve this by undermining the cultural institutions that governed raiding and revenge, capitalizing on intercommunity grievances and promising material rewards, mainly in the form of cattle or arms. Consequently, cattle guards are now heavily armed and capable of launching devastating military-scale attacks on civilian communities.

Military and political elites play on the grievances generated by the endemic raiding and are able to mobilize armed cattle guards and community defence groups along ethnic lines. That said, the motives for pastoralist violence also revolve around the ambitions of young men frustrated by their inability to influence political structures that exclude them.³⁴ Material reward and the prospects of increasing personal livestock herds influence decisions around the use of violence. Increasing herd size ensures that young men can marry, transition into adulthood and manhood, and be seen as full members of society.³⁵

Finally, mainly due to decades of violent conflict and the predatory nature of governance in South Sudan, Jonglei and Unity states are among the country's most isolated and underdeveloped regions. Isolation and inequity further drive violence as uneven physical, social, economic and political access to natural resources, markets, governing institutions and other forms of capital and opportunity breeds grievances and reduces the likelihood of durable, non-violent resolutions to disputes.³⁶

Humanitarian outcomes

The civil war is estimated to have caused 400 000 deaths.³⁷ In addition, the UN Human Rights Council (Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, OHCHR) notes that a characteristic of the civil war has been the increasing securitization of the state, as the intelligence arm of the security sector plays a pivotal role in the repression of civilians, who are deprived of their fundamental freedoms.³⁸ The OHCHR lists

³¹ Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRFF), South Sudan, Conflict Sensitivity Analysis: United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Protection of Civilian (POC) Sites Transition, Bentiu, Unity State, and Malakal, Upper Nile State, Mar. 2021.

³² Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (note 31); and UN Human Rights Council (note 30).

³³ Wild, H., Jok, J. M. and Patel, R., 'The militarization of cattle raiding in South Sudan: How a traditional practice became a tool for political violence', *International Journal of Humanitarian Action*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2018).

³⁴ International Organization for Migration (IOM), 'A Boy Should Be a Fighter': Addressing Harmful Masculinities Driving Cattle-related Violence (IOM: Geneva, 2021).

³⁵ Idris, I., 'Livestock and conflict in South Sudan', *K4D Helpdesk Report* no. 484 (2018), Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, UK.

³⁶ World Food Programme South Sudan (note 3).

³⁷ Checchi, F. et al., *Estimates of Crisis-attributable Mortality in South Sudan, December 2013–April 2018: A Statistical Analysis* (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine: London, 2018).

³⁸ UN Human Rights Council, 40th session, 'Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan', 25 Feb.–22 Mar. 2019, A/HRC/40/69.

intentional starvation, arbitrary arrest, torture, sexual gender-based violence (SGBV) and child recruitment among the main human rights violations committed by SPLA-IG and SPLA-IO forces alike.³⁹

The conflict and violence since 2011 have created nearly 5 million IDPs, while disasters such as floods have led to almost 2 million more.⁴⁰ Half the latter were caused by the severe floods in 2020 and 2021. As a result of conflict and intensifying extreme weather events, nearly 9 million people needed humanitarian assistance in 2022. The figure for 2023 is estimated to be 9.4 million—a staggering 76 per cent of South Sudan’s population.⁴¹ Food insecurity has reached unprecedented levels. The October 2022 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) estimates that 7.76 million people will face severe acute food insecurity at the Crisis level (IPC Phase 3) or above in the April–July 2023 lean season, the highest level yet observed and surpassing the levels seen during the civil war between 2013 and 2016. Of these 7.76 million, 2.9 million people will face Emergency (IPC 4) acute food insecurity and 43 000 people will be in Catastrophic (IPC 5) acute food insecurity in parts of Jonglei and Unity states.⁴²

³⁹ UN Human Rights Council (note 30).

⁴⁰ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Country profile: South Sudan, Updated 18 May 2022.

⁴¹ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (note 5).

⁴² IPC Analysis Portal, ‘South Sudan: Acute food insecurity situation October–November 2022 and projections for December 2022–March 2023 and April–July 2023’.

3. The South Sudan case study approach

Objectives and background

This report assesses WFP's contribution to increasing the prospects for peace in South Sudan by focusing on stabilization, exploring whether and, if so, how WFP's emergency response programming helps to reduce violence and improve basic physical security.

The research on the WFP's effect on the prospects for peace as part of the SIPRI-WFP Knowledge Partnership is based on an understanding that violent conflict and peace are not two opposites in a linear equation, but instead complex phenomena that occur in complex social systems. Impacts on the prospects for peace are therefore not always immediately apparent or predictable, and occur in a highly dynamic, non-linear and emergent system.⁴³ Multiple factors, drivers and channels combine to shape the prospects for peace. Untangling this intricate web of dynamics to draw conclusions about any one driver is analytically difficult. Working towards more inclusive political, economic and social systems will not necessarily show signs of steady progress or achieve the predicted peacebuilding outcome.⁴⁴ For these reasons, peacebuilding is fundamentally an experiment.⁴⁵

Methodology

The research is structured around the development of Theories of Change. The development of TOCs articulates WFP's contribution to affecting the prospects for peace and clarifies the underlying assumptions that can position WFP as an important actor in the transition to peace in South Sudan. For this reason, it is essential that the TOCs are not unrealistic and do not make massive leaps in logic. Moreover, the characteristics of complex systems mean that the TOCs should be dynamic, since it is impossible to identify with any certainty how conflict and peacebuilding environments will behave in future. This requires a process that uses continuous participatory and locally anchored experimentation and feedback to generate knowledge about the conflict and peacebuilding environment. If the expected results are achieved, a TOC offers a causal pathway that can be explored, assessed for its validity and adapted to other contexts.⁴⁶

The research involved a review of WFP programme documents and data sets, and of the literature on South Sudan, as well as 16 remote interviews with WFP country office staff conducted prior to the in-country research. The in-country research was conducted in February 2022. The research team visited project sites in Bor, Jonglei state, Bentiu, Unity state and Juba. The team used in-depth interviews to gather data from WFP intended beneficiaries and non-beneficiary members of the community, as well as representatives of local government and customary authority, community-based organizations, international non-governmental organizations, NGOs and other UN agencies. Six focus group discussions and 26 key informant interviews and were held.

⁴³ De Coning, C., 'Adaptive peacebuilding', *International Affairs*, vol. 94, no. 2 (2018), pp. 301–17.

⁴⁴ De Coning, C., 'Complexity thinking and adaptive peacebuilding', *Accord*, no 28 (Mar. 2019).

⁴⁵ Campbell, S. P., *Global Governance and Local Peace: Accountability and Performance in International Peacebuilding* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2018).

⁴⁶ De Coning (note 43).

Limitations

The complexities of the armed conflicts in South Sudan coupled with the scope of the research resulted in several limitations. The research team could not meet with cattle keepers or visit the cattle camps, a key community grouping that would play a critical role in any improvement in the prospects for peace and WFP programming in South Sudan. Moreover, the dynamics captured in the two research sites, Bor and Bentiu, do not always represent broader dynamics in Jonglei and Unity states. For example, community violence in Jonglei at the time of the research primarily involved Dinka, Nuer and Murle ethnic (and sub-ethnic) groups, but most of the interviewees belonged to the Dinka ethnic group and no member of the Murle communities could be interviewed. There may therefore be significant factors in the prospects for peace pertaining to the two TOCs that this report has not captured.

WFP in South Sudan

WFP has been present in South Sudan since before independence in 2011. In 2021, WFP provided food and nutrition assistance to nearly 6 million people.⁴⁷ Over 60 per cent received unconditional support through WFP's emergency response programme, which assists crisis-affected and food insecure populations and refugees in South Sudan. The target beneficiaries are people experiencing severe food insecurity and famine-like conditions, IDPs, food-insecure communities in hard-to-reach areas, urban centres, agro-pastoralists requiring support during the lean season and flood-affected people. In rapid-onset emergencies and hard-to-reach areas, WFP uses its Integrated Rapid Response Mechanism (IRRM) mobile teams to ensure that food assistance can be delivered. Assistance is provided through general food distribution (GFD) in three transfer modalities: in-kind food assistance, cash-based transfers (CBTs) and a hybrid food basket of in-kind rations and a CBT. The choice of aid modality is determined by local context and market analysis.

WFP also reaches people through nutrition programmes, school-based programmes, asset creation and livelihood support. Asset creation and livelihood support are critical resilience-building activities for improving resilience to natural and human-induced shocks, and supporting community recovery of its asset base, which has been eroded by protracted conflict, as well as preventing the use of negative coping strategies, improving household food security and enhancing market access for smallholder farmers. WFP South Sudan expanded its resilience programming to conflict and violence hotspot areas in 2021, including in locations in Greater Jonglei and Unity state, in support of a humanitarian development and peace (HDP) nexus approach and to address the root causes of violence.⁴⁸

In 2020, WFP South Sudan developed its own Contributions to Peace Strategy, which provides a framework for examining the relationship between hunger and violent conflict. It outlines how WFP can leverage its comparative advantage in hotspots for hunger and organized violence, and at scale across the country. As a result, WFP's geographical targeting is now informed by analysis of how organized violence occurs and why.

⁴⁷ World Food Programme (WFP) South Sudan, '2021 Annual Country Report: Overview', 2022.

⁴⁸ World Food Programme (WFP), WFP South Sudan External, Situation Report no. 305, 30 Sep. 2022.

4. Theories of change

Theory of change 1

If GFD+ had a more intentionally designed and locally anchored peace component and were scaled-up, **then** WFP's crisis response could contribute to violence reduction by enhancing IDP-host community relations and mitigating destabilizing dynamics linked to negative coping strategies and resource competition.

Contextual background

South Sudan faces one of the world's largest displacement crises. At the time of the research, approximately 2 million South Sudanese were living as refugees and 1.4–2 million more had been internally displaced by conflict.⁴⁹ In addition to conflict-related displacement, disasters—particularly floods—had displaced over 500 000 people by the end of 2021. The research linked to this TOC concerns two specific settings: the IDP camps and surrounding host communities in Bor, Jonglei state, and Bentiu, Unity state.

Displacement, return and instability

Protracted displacement crises, whether of IDPs or refugees, are often linked to economic, social, environmental and, to a lesser extent, political instability.⁵⁰ When large numbers of displaced people settle in an area, they put strains on the available resources. Most displaced people in South Sudan have settled in areas that already suffer from a lack of resources, such as basic services, opportunities for income generation and land.⁵¹ Many communities where IDPs settle face severe intersectoral vulnerabilities and needs, notably widespread food insecurity, lack of basic services and limited livelihood opportunities. IDPs therefore compete with host communities for scarce resources, such as food, housing, agricultural and grazing land, firewood and income-generating activities. As the few existing services quickly become overwhelmed, and as conditions for host communities deteriorate—or are perceived to have deteriorated—there is a risk that relations between IDPs and host communities will be negatively affected, leading to increased tensions and the risk of violence.⁵² Research from a wide range of IDP and refugee settings shows that negative perceptions of refugees/IDPs can result in harsh constraints on such populations.⁵³ Mistreatment of refugees/IDPs can become a grievance against which refugee/IDP communities unite and can create the background for future clashes or conflicts.

While those fleeing conflict might find respite from conflict-related violence in the areas where they settle, conditions can expose them to different kinds of violence. For

⁴⁹ UNHCR Global Trends 2022; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) South Sudan, DTM IOM. The IDMC estimates that over 500 000 additional people were living as displaced persons due to disasters, principally flooding, at the end of 2020.

⁵⁰ Puma, M. J. et al., 'A developing food crisis and potential refugee movements', *Nature Sustainability*, vol. 1, no. 8 (2018), pp. 380–82; Ek., R. and Karadawi, A., 'Implications of refugee flows on political stability in the Sudan', *Ambio*, vol. 20, no. 5 (Aug. 1991), pp. 196–203; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Thematic Series, *The Ripple Effect: Economic Impacts of Internal Displacement* (IDMC: Geneva, Oct. 2018); and Fajth, V. et al., 'How do refugees affect social life in host communities? The case of Congolese refugees in Rwanda', *Comparative Migration Studies*, vol. 7 no. 1 (2019), pp. 1–21.

⁵¹ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (note 5).

⁵² Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (note 31).

⁵³ Haider, H., 'Refugee, IDP and host community radicalisation', *GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report* no. 1162 (2014), University of Birmingham, UK.

example, there is ample evidence that displacement increases the risk of SGBV,⁵⁴ in part because displacement exacerbates trauma and stress due to fractured community bonds and loss of livelihoods.⁵⁵ While SGBV, including intimate partner violence, against women and girls is widespread and systematic throughout South Sudan, it is a particularly pressing concern in IDP camps. Displaced boys and men, on the other hand, are found to run an increased risk of recruitment to armed groups.⁵⁶ Both women and men are often obliged to undertake dangerous income-generating activities in order to survive.

Large displacement-related influxes can alter the ethnic or sectarian composition of host communities, fuelling hostilities along such divides.⁵⁷ Sometimes, shifting the demographic composition of an area through forced displacement can function as or even intentionally form part of a war strategy.⁵⁸ Such population manoeuvres have been a deliberate strategy in South Sudan. Much of the displacement has been driven by ethnically motivated human rights violations and efforts by national elites and local authorities to gerrymander ethnically identified constituencies and administrative areas.⁵⁹ Civilians from ethnic groups perceived to support the opposition have had their land occupied, forcing them to leave.⁶⁰ Deliberate starvation along ethnic and political lines, involving the looting of food supplies, destruction of the means to produce food and denial of access to food, has been used to target and punish communities perceived to support an opponent.⁶¹ Weakening the population in opposition-controlled areas and pushing them away from their home areas also reduces the opposition's capacity to recruit and erodes civilian trust in the opposition's capacity to provide security and sustenance to the population under its control.⁶²

In addition, when IDP or refugee camps are organized along ethnic or sectarian lines, they become vulnerable to attack by armed militias or other sectarian or ethnic groups.⁶³ This is the case with the Protection of Civilian (POC) sites in South Sudan (see box 4.1), many of which have been attacked by armed groups of a different ethnicity to the majority of the residents.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the SPLM-IG has persistently argued that the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) shelters rebel forces in the POC sites and infringes the government's sovereignty. Since the R-ARCSS was signed, the SPLM-IG has been pushing for the closure of the sites.

It is well known that humanitarian aid in these contexts can inadvertently exacerbate conflict and instability. In addition to the use of starvation as a method of warfare and the blocking of humanitarian assistance mentioned above, all parties to the conflict have at times intentionally 'sought to use humanitarian assistance as leverage over

⁵⁴ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (note 50).

⁵⁵ UN Human Rights Council, 49th session, A/HRC/49/CRP.4, 21 Mar. 2022; and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (note 5).

⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview South Sudan: humanitarian programme cycle 2022, Nov. 2021; and Human Rights Council, 'Assessment mission by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to improve human rights, accountability, reconciliation and capacity in South Sudan: detailed findings', A/HRC/31/CRP.6, 10 Mar. 2016.

⁵⁷ Haider (note 53).

⁵⁸ Lischer, S. K., 'Security and displacement in Iraq: Responding to the forced migration crisis', *International Security*, vol. 33, no. 2 (2008), pp. 95–119.

⁵⁹ Sullivan, D., 'Displaced nation: The dangerous implications of rushed returns in South Sudan', Field report, Refugees International, 29 Nov. 2018.

⁶⁰ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 'Recommendations for addressing internal displacement and returns in South Sudan', Briefing paper, IDMC, Geneva [n. d.].

⁶¹ UN Human Rights Council (note 30).

⁶² Craze, J., *Displaced and Immiserated: The Shilluk of Upper Nile in South Sudan's Civil War, 2014–19* (Small Arms Survey, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies: Geneva, 2019).

⁶³ Haider (note 53).

⁶⁴ Briggs, C. and Monaghan, L., *Protection of Civilians Sites: Lessons from South Sudan for Future Operations* (Norwegian Refugee Council: Oslo, 2017); and Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (note 31).

Box 4.1. Protection of Civilian sites

The POC sites were established at United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) bases after civil war broke out in 2013. Five sites were established: at Bor, Bentiu, Malakal, Juba and Wau. The population of the POC sites has fluctuated in response to food insecurity and the outbreak or cessation of national conflict or sub-national violence, but reached over 200 000 in 2015. The Bentiu POC site was the largest of the five POC sites at the height of the civil war in 2015, housing around 120 000 IDPs.

In 2020, UNMISS began transitioning the sites to become ordinary IDP camps under the jurisdiction of the South Sudan government, with the justification that there had been a sustained reduction in the immediate threats that led residents to seek shelter in the POC sites. It was also argued that the POC sites absorbed significant uniformed capacity, limiting the ability of UNMISS to protect civilians in other conflict hotspots.

Source: Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF), Conflict Sensitivity Analysis: United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Protection of Civilian (POC) Sites Transition: Bentiu, Unity State, and Malakal, Upper Nile State, March 2021.

civilian populations by pressuring aid agencies to provide food for civilians in areas they control'.⁶⁵ This has included exerting pressure on humanitarian organizations to assist staged population movements and to provide new arrivals with food.⁶⁶ Competition for humanitarian assistance among armed groups is among the factors that drive them to control where humanitarian access is provided. Warring parties compete to have more people under their control, partly because this brings more humanitarian supplies.⁶⁷

The government's and opposition's displacement strategies and population engineering present further challenges to returning people displaced by the armed conflict, as provided for in the R-ARCSS. The R-ARCSS tasks the parties to the agreement with allowing refugees and IDPs to return in safety and dignity to their places of origin or to live in areas of their choice. However, there is a risk that return migration and reconstruction will be yet another tool for population engineering by powerful actors.⁶⁸ Other challenges linked to the return of displaced populations include high levels of insecurity, acute levels of food insecurity and lack of access to basic services in the areas to which people might return.⁶⁹ Moreover, many returnees find that their housing, land or property has been occupied, destroyed or stolen. Without transparent and equitable land management and dispute resolution mechanisms, land-related disputes risk escalating into violent conflicts.

Displacement in Bor and Bentiu

Jonglei and Unity states are among the most conflict-affected states in South Sudan. Conflict and flooding in Jonglei have led to the displacement of several hundreds of thousand people. IDPs live either in camp settings, including 92 500 in Bor South, or in host communities across the state.⁷⁰ Food insecurity is persistently high. Most of the counties/payams in Jonglei state have been classified as IPC 4 (emergency) or above for the past six years. Pockets of famine have been reported since 2017 in Akobo, Ayod, Duk,

⁶⁵ International Crisis Group, 'ICG instruments of pain (II): Conflict and famine in South Sudan', Briefing no. 124, 26 Apr. 2017.

⁶⁶ UN Human Rights Council (note 30).

⁶⁷ D'Agoot, M. et al., *The Politics of Humanitarianism: Perspectives from South Sudan* (Conflict Research Programme, London School of Economics and Political Science: London, 2018).

⁶⁸ Kindersley, N. and the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF), South Sudan, 'Returns and Peace in South Sudan: Challenges, opportunities and the way forward', Dec. 2019.

⁶⁹ UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), UNHCR Position on returns to South Sudan, Update III, Oct. 2021.

⁷⁰ UNHCR, South Sudan IDP population, Mar. 2022.

Box 4.2. IDP camps visited

Bor former POC site: the Bor POC site transitioned to a regular IDP camp in 2020. At the time of the research, close to 4000 IDPs resided in the former POC site, of whom 1500 had arrived in the past three months (since December 2021) due to conflict and flooding. All the IDPs belonged to the Nuer ethnic group.

Malek IDP camp: close to 1300 IDPs reside in the camp; all belong to the Dinka ethnic group displaced by conflict in Central Equatoria, where they lived alongside the Mundari ethnic communities. The Dinka in Central Equatoria are originally from Jonglei.

Bentiu former POC site: the Bentiu POC site transitioned to a regular IDP camp in 2021. At the time of the research, close to 150 000 IDPs resided in the former POC, of who 30 000 arrived following the floods in 2021. The initial residents of the POC were mainly Dinka and Darfuri traders.^a Attacks by the SPLA-IG in early 2014 resulted in Nuer from Bentiu town and southern Unity state seeking protection at the POC site. This shifted the ethnic composition of the POC camp and most Dinka residents had left by the end of 2014.^b

Bentiu IDP camps A to E: established between August and October 2021 in response to flood-related displacement. At the time of the research, approximately 19 000 people were residing in the camps. By July 2022, the sites had a combined population of nearly 60 000.^c Site B recorded the greatest number of IDPs, followed by Site A and Site C. Sites A, B and C mainly comprise the Leek Nuer Section in Rubkona County, whereas most Sites D and E residents are Jikany Nuer from Guit County.^d Political drivers lie behind this composition. Since the start of the civil war in 2013, SPLA-IG and SPLA-IO have used displacement in Rubkona and Bentiu as a critical strategy to control civilian movements and aid for their strategic benefit. As a result, political divisions closely tied to ethnic and sub-ethnic divisions are reflected in the composition of the IDP camps.^e

^a Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRFF), South Sudan, Conflict Sensitivity Analysis: United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Protection of Civilian (POC) Sites Transition, Bentiu, Unity State, and Malakal, Upper Nile State, Mar. 2021.

^b CSRFF (note a).

^c International Organization for Migration (IOM), IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, 'Population count: Bentiu Town sites', July 2022.

^d International Organization for Migration and World Food Programme, 'Conflict Sensitivity Assessment: Bentiu and Rubkona Flood Response', Nov. 2021, unpublished.

^e IOM and WFP (note d).

Nyirrol, Uror, Fangak, Canal Pigi and Pibor. In 2020, the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA) was classified as 'famine likely'.

In Unity state, conflict and flooding have also led to large-scale displacement. Like Jonglei, Unity has suffered severe floods in recent years. Following severe flooding in 2021, five new IDP sites were established near Bentiu. There are over 193 000 IDPs in the state, over 100 000 of whom reside in the former POC site. Since 2016, the majority of counties in Unity state have been classified as IPC level 4 or above.

While the government encourages the return of people displaced by the conflict, most of the residents in IDP camps in Bor and Bentiu interviewed for this research (see box 4.2) indicated that they preferred to remain where they were. Many feared returning to their place of origin due to the persistently high levels of violence and, in some cases, because the armed actors that had displaced them are still there. These fears were more prominent among interviewees in the former POC camps than in the regular IDP camps. In addition to insecurity, many home villages had been flooded, further obstructing return.

Residents in the regular IDP camps also highlighted the important pull factors of the camps, which influenced their unwillingness to return home. These include having access to essential services, such as health clinics and schools for their children, that do not exist in their place of origin. Residents also listed the security offered by the camp

as an important reason for wanting to remain. Nonetheless, while security was a pull factor in the camps, as discussed below, insecurity was also a critical concern both inside and outside the camps.

WFP programming in Bor and Bentiu and the contribution to stability

WFP has provided emergency assistance to the IDP population and surrounding host communities in Bor and Bentiu since 2013, and also provided support when it was part of Sudan. At the time of the research, it was reaching over 130 000 intended beneficiaries (of which over 118 000 received GFD) in Bor and close to 297 000 intended beneficiaries (of which over 208 000 received GFD) in Bentiu. WFP emergency food assistance is provided through its GFD programme, using in-kind assistance and cash-based transfers. WFP has been piloting GFD+ since 2021. It seeks to integrate an unconditional resilience component into its emergency programming against a background of continuing high levels of violent conflict following the signing of the R-ARCSS and related uncertainties around prospects for return, exacerbated by natural disasters. WFP's GFD+ activities could enhance stability and help to build a degree of normality for displaced people and host communities alike, while laying the ground for sustainable and voluntary return.

Community relations, security and stability in Bor

Unwillingness or inability to return underscores the need for efforts that support peaceful coexistence within the camps and between camp residents and the surrounding host communities. The findings on IDP-host community relations in Bor and Bentiu were mixed but overall relations seemed better in Bor. While many factors shape community relations, the difference observed could be partly explained by the degree of ethnic homogeneity. The IDPs in the Malek camp, who noted positive relations, belonged to the same Dinka sub-ethnic community as the host population in Bor town. While they had arrived from Central Equatoria, they considered Jonglei to be their ancestral home state, from which they had been displaced during the Sudanese civil wars.⁷¹ As an indication of positive relations, residents spoke of how the host communities protected them, including host-community youth patrolling the plots of land used by the IDPs for cultivation. Joint cultural activities also took place with the host communities, such as wrestling competitions, often supported by WFP's cooperation partners.

Residents of the former POC site in Bor, who were all Nuer, also stated that relationships with the surrounding community were good. In addition to holding joint cultural activities, interviewees related how host community members would urge camp residents to come to stay with them in Bor town. Such cordial relations were a relatively recent occurrence, however, as residents had previously been unable to leave the camp site during the civil war and for the first couple of years following the signing of the R-ARCSS due to the threat of attack by members of the host community.⁷² Relations only began to improve around 2020, following the establishment of the National Unity Government and the cantonment of soldiers.⁷³ The transitioning of the POC camp to a regular IDP camp, and with it the reduced protection provided by UNMISS, has generated fear and concern among the camp's residents.

⁷¹ Wani Gore, P., 'The overlooked role of elites in African grassroots conflicts: A case study of the Dinka-Mudari-Nari conflict in South Sudan', University of Khartoum, Sudan, SWP 014:3.

⁷² Interview, ACTED representative, Bor, South Sudan, 17 Feb. 2022.

⁷³ Interview, ACTED representative, Bor, South Sudan, 17 Feb. 2022.

In addition, IDPs voiced concerns about the high levels of crime in Bor town and the threat of conflict-related violence. The high incidence of criminality around Bor town led to a strong preference among residents for food aid to be distributed through in-kind deliveries in the camps rather than CBT or vouchers. Interviewees argued that they felt unsafe moving between the camp and Bor town carrying merchandise or cash. Venturing outside Bor town was seen as high risk due to the presence of armed actors. Women are particularly exposed to such risk as they are charged with collecting firewood, which has become an extremely high-risk activity. Furthermore, many interviewees perceived Bor town to be under imminent threat of attack, which prevented parents from sending their children to school there.

Community relations, security and stability in Bentiu

IDP and host community relations appeared to be considerably more fractious in Bentiu. Camp residents spoke of an increase in revenge killings, which prevented many residents from venturing outside the camps. Men in particular would avoid leaving the camp, while women would only go outside when seeking to engage in economic activity. Many possible livelihood activities in the area have been curtailed by flooding, which generates additional insecurities. Whereas women would previously engage in vegetable cultivation and crop production to generate income, the only remaining form of economic activity appeared to be collecting and selling wood. However, wood has become increasingly scarce due to the flooding and unsustainable felling. One camp resident noted increased scarcity, stating that ‘over a month of collecting wood . . . would only be enough to buy one gallon of cereal’.⁷⁴

Wood scarcity, in combination with increasing needs and fewer income-generating opportunities, is causing resource competition with host communities, which sometimes prevent IDPs from collecting trunks, logs and branches in nearby areas. As a result, IDPs, specifically women, are forced further into conflict-affected areas where they are exposed to attacks and sexual violence. While it appeared that IDPs can still collect wood and reeds from the water, this is both physically demanding and dangerous, and escaping an attacker in the water is more complicated.

The dire situation has made women, particularly young girls, more vulnerable to early marriage—a practice that has increased in South Sudan since the civil war and its violent aftermath.⁷⁵ While various factors strongly linked to tradition and culture influence the practice of early marriage, research has found a broad acceptance of marrying off young girls as an economic coping strategy.⁷⁶ Girls are at increased risk of early and forced marriage due to food insecurity. Organizations providing services in the former Bentiu POC camp noted increased child marriage and other forms of SGBV.⁷⁷ Many interviewees also perceived that marrying off their daughters would lessen the strain of feeding remaining family members. Some spoke of marriage eliminating the risk of their unmarried daughters getting pregnant and the care of the baby falling on the family. In extreme cases, it was argued that girls are given away.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Focus Group Discussion, residents of Bentiu POC camp, 23 Feb. 2022

⁷⁵ UN Human Rights Council (note 30).

⁷⁶ International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Gender-based Violence: Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Survey in South Sudan* (IOM: Geneva, 2019); OXFAM, ‘South Sudan gender analysis: A snapshot situation analysis of the differential impact of the humanitarian crisis on women, girls, men and boys in South Sudan’, Mar.–July 2016, 2017; Madut, K., ‘Determinants of early marriage and construction of gender roles in South Sudan’, SAGE Open, 15 May 2020; and Plan International, *Adolescent Girls in Crisis: Voices from South Sudan* (Plan International: Woking, UK, 2018).

⁷⁷ Interview, Welthungerhilfe, Bentiu, South Sudan, 21 Feb. 2022.

⁷⁸ Interview, Welthungerhilfe, Bentiu, South Sudan, 21 Feb. 2022.

Another continuing tension between IDPs and host communities in Bentiu is the continuing movement of populations. Many of the displaced people in Bentiu keep cattle, and the increasing number of cattle in Bentiu is causing tensions with the host communities.⁷⁹ IDPs who had previously left the camp to migrate north with their cattle are now returning. Previous assessments by WFP note that an influx of cattle into Bentiu and neighbouring Rubkona town, due to limited foraging availability in the north, has generated community disputes as the cattle cause widespread destruction of crops. It is feared that a return of livestock to these towns will lead to further disputes with potential for violent escalation.⁸⁰

At the same time, there are concerns that if IDPs, who are predominantly from different Nuer sub-ethnic groups, move their cattle further north, this will encroach on Dinka-controlled land and constitute another potential source of tension and violence. As floods threaten to submerge the IDP camps, the likelihood of camp residents migrating north towards Panakuach increases. Tensions over land around Panakuach are further complicated because both the Dinka and the Leek Nuer claim this territory, as a consequence of deliberate population engineering by powerful political elites. Finally, Panakuach has important oil reserves, which are largely controlled by one of South Sudan's four vice presidents, Taban Deng Gai, of the Jikany Nuer ethnic group.⁸¹

Within the camps, relations between residents and camp management structures were also more fractious in Bentiu than Bor. In particular, when the Bentiu POC camp transitioned to become a government-run IDP camp, and the provision of camp security and protection transferred from UNMISS to the joint SPLA-IG and SPLA-IO police force, this effectively meant that the same people who caused the displacement of the residents were now guarding them.⁸² Some noted that the joint police force is escalating tensions within the camp, for example, by severely beating children they consider to be misbehaving or forcibly dispersing women who meet up in the evenings.

The potential contribution of GFD+ to enhanced stability in conflict hotspots

There are few signs that the security situation in Bor or Bentiu is improving. Leveraging emergency aid not only to offer immediate, unconditional relief, but also to enhance resilience and self-reliance could help to reduce localized violence and improve stability. While this is the underlying purpose of GFD+, it was clear from the research that this component could be made more intentionally designed and scaled-up. The plus components (see box 4.3) did not appear to be intentionally leveraged towards contributing to peace. Instead, they tended to focus on vegetable growing to complement food rations and the fencing of these sites to keep cattle out. While these are undoubtedly valuable activities, there is space for making GFD+ more tailored to reducing contextual conflict dynamics and thus enhancing the prospects for peace. In addition, GFD+ amounts to just 1 per cent of the total Field-Level Agreement (FLA) budget, which significantly limits the potential contribution of this modality.

The research identifies three main pathways through which GFD+ can be leveraged to intentionally contribute to enhancing stability and thereby help to improve the prospects for peace. The first two concern strengthening the processes around designing and delivering GFD+ projects. The third is the content of the plus component.

⁷⁹ Interview, International Organization for Migration representative, Bentiu, South Sudan, 21 Feb. 2022.

⁸⁰ International Organization for Migration and World Food Programme, 'Conflict Sensitivity Assessment: Bentiu and Rubkona Flood Response', Nov. 2021, unpublished.

⁸¹ International Organization for Migration and WFP (note 80); and Craze, J. and Tubiana, J., 'Legitimacy, exclusion, and power: Taban Deng Gai and the South Sudan peace process', *HSBA Issue Brief*, Dec. 2016.

⁸² Interviews: representative of WFP Bentiu Field Office, 21 Feb. 2022; Focus group discussion, Residents at former Bentiu POC camp, 23 Feb. 2022, Bentiu, South Sudan.

Box 4.3. General Food Distribution plus

GFD+ can be leveraged for three main purposes:

1. As an enhancement of standard GFD by which GFD intended beneficiaries participate in an activity that adds value for themselves, their households and their communities. GFD+ can support livelihoods and increase participation in income-generating activities, restore communal assets and build social cohesion and resilience.
2. As a transitional intervention that prepares households and communities for the shift from blanket unconditional assistance to targeted, conditional assistance, such as food for assets (FFA).
3. As a safety net for FFA participants when the severity of conflict conditions, natural shocks or increased levels of food insecurity require a temporary cessation of FFA activities.

The resilience, or plus, component can include peacebuilding activities, community dialogue, creating or rehabilitating communal assets, awareness raising and training, preparedness activities, risk mitigation activities and emergency livelihood-building activities, among other things.

First, to maximize the potential for GFD+ to contribute to increasing the prospects for peace, WFP should extend the criteria for the selection of cooperation partners and enhance the capacity of existing partners. Cooperation partners are selected using set criteria on the basis, among other things, of a history of successful implementation of projects with UN agencies or International NGOs, a presence in the location of the project, and having the required number of staff and adequate financial systems in place. This means that current partners do not necessarily have a mandate or the ability to work with a long-term vision and in a peace-integrated way. Organizations experienced in working towards peace objectives, in contrast, do not always fit WFP partner selection criteria. While this research could not assess the extent of the capacity of current cooperation partners to deliver peace-integrated GFD+ activities, many local civil society organizations have solid experience of responding to the interconnected needs of communities by taking an informal nexus approach.⁸³ There is an evident capacity disparity between local and international organizations. As WFP itself recognizes, local organizations have a stronger understanding of context, more culturally appropriate programme designs, and more solid and expansive community engagement than international organizations. International organizations, however, have a better capacity for risk management, financial reporting and logistics. Developing partnerships based on such identified capacities and capacity disparities would enable more equitable partnerships based on a recognition that all roles are equal and necessary. Such partnerships would not only enhance the impact of GFD+, but also contribute to localization efforts and strengthen existing peacebuilding infrastructures (see TOC 2). Moreover, leveraging the local knowledge and networks of organizations to improve programme design would help to develop conflict-sensitive responses, enhance accountability to affected populations and improve programme sustainability.

Second, WFP could adapt its community-based participatory planning (CBPP) approach to ensure that activities reflect local understandings of conflict and peace. Through this process, GFD+ could promote locally anchored understandings, and

⁸³ Quack, M. and Südhoff, R., *The Triple Nexus in South Sudan: Learning from Local Opportunities* (Centre for Humanitarian Action: Berlin, 2020); Wilkinson, O., de Wolf, F. and Alier, M., *The Triple Nexus and Local Faith Actors in South Sudan: Findings from Primary Research* (Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities and DanChurchAid: Washington, DC, and Copenhagen, 2019); Robinson, A., 'Localisation and conflict sensitivity: Lessons on good practice from South Sudan', *Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRFF) Better Aid Forum Briefing Paper*, Dec. 2021; and Remote interview, Donor government representative, 30 Mar. 2022.

peace messaging and solutions, such as on self-protection to counter, mitigate, deter or avoid threats. The interviews conducted as part of the research for this report revealed that local communities had a clear understanding of what is needed to mitigate some of the everyday manifestations of violent conflict. For communities interviewed in Bor, reconstructing a dyke damaged by the floods was considered an essential requirement, not least because it would allow a return to cultivation to ensure their food security, which they argued was a critical precondition for living in peace.⁸⁴

Among the other suggestions from the community members and collaborating partners interviewed were, in the context of flooding, to set up a canoe transport business, floating farms and rice cultivation pilots. These activities, and related resources, would also be less vulnerable to flooding than the kitchen gardens, which are destroyed when the land is flooded. While such activities have the potential to reduce the reliance of individuals on coping strategies that further expose them to conflict violence (see below), the limited resources available for the ‘plus’ components could generate important conflict sensitivity concerns should WFP be unable to support a large enough cross section of a community through such activities, thereby exacerbating grievances.

Third, to enhance the intentionality of GFD+, community-identified activities must be accompanied by clear articulation of the pathways through which the contribution to stability and peace occurs. The contribution must then be monitored and measured. For example, the GFD+ activities centred on food production, such as the vegetable gardens visited by the research team, could reduce the reliance on harmful coping strategies that further expose individuals to violence. The precise coping mechanisms that people resort to and how these interact with conflict dynamics will differ across settings and over time. Among the mechanisms identified by this research were women resorting to gathering waterlilies for consumption during extreme food insecurity and collecting firewood to generate income. Both leave women vulnerable to attack. Child marriage was also noted as a form of coping mechanism. While these are partly rooted in traditional practices and culture, including gender norms (see TOC 2), enhancing household food production could reduce reliance on them during crises and thereby reduce exposure to exploitation and violence.

Moreover, if food production is accompanied by locally tailored marketing strategies, training and support, surplus produce can be sold in safe spaces to generate income. The income generated should further reduce reliance on collecting firewood in highly insecure areas for cooking fuel. Several collaborating partners are working to enhance business skills and could thus be called on to support the design of GFD+ activities.

As discussed further in TOC 2, engaging youth in livelihood and asset-generating activities has, in some circumstances, influenced their decisions on engaging in armed raiding. Finally, like standard WFP resilience activities, GFD+ activities can bring communities together, which has the potential to build, restore and strengthen community relations and related dynamics that shape peace. Activities can be designed to mitigate resource competition, enhance social capital and contribute to perceptions that displaced populations can contribute positively to everyday community life.

Conflict sensitivity concerns

Enhancing the design and delivery of GFD+ projects through the considered selection of collaboration partners should help to identify and address conflict sensitivity concerns. Adapting the CBPP process to ensure that activities and messaging reflect

⁸⁴ Interviews, Customary authorities, Bor town, South Sudan, 16 Feb. 2022.

locally anchored understandings of peace and solutions to community instability can further enhance the effectiveness of these efforts. For example, the research noted that there is a risk that some collaboration partners are using funds intended for GFD+ activities to build assets that would benefit the partner rather than communities.⁸⁵ This has the potential to generate tensions and discontent. Interviews with partners, on the other hand, revealed that they are not always clear about which activities are part of GFD+.⁸⁶

Other more critical conflict sensitivity concerns relate to the volatile political marketplace, which drives sub-national and community violence.⁸⁷ In the context of protracted conflict and the complex interlinkages between national, sub-national and community conflicts, politico-military elites are known to use, instrumentalize and manipulate local organizations to further their goals, which are often related to marginalizing or controlling populations regarded as dissident. This could be one reason why assets created through resilience projects have been the target of deliberate attack. There are also rumours of the politicization and manipulation of aid: that intended beneficiaries working on resilience projects ‘construct during the day and someone is paid to destroy it during the night, so that food assistance will continue’.⁸⁸ Transparency and communication are essential to address such conflict sensitivity concerns.

Recommendations

1. Ensure that the plus component in GFD+ activities is intentionally designed to contribute to improving the prospects for peace.
2. Increase the funds dedicated to plus activities. This could be done by increasing the proportion of the FLA budget dedicated to this end, or by engaging with donors that have already shown an interest in supporting activities that build resilience amid violent conflict.
3. Expand the selection criteria for collaborating partners in a way that allows WFP to partner with local organizations with solid experience of working on peace-related issues and build their capacities to attract direct funding from donors in broader localization efforts.
4. Ensure meaningful participation in decision making for local actors when tapping into their extensive experience to enhance the potential for GFD+ to positively contribute to the prospects for peace.
5. Adapt the extensive CBPP to ensure that plus activities reflect local understandings of conflict and peace.
6. Seek out complementary partnerships with humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors to enhance the GFD+ activities
7. Clearly articulate the pathways through which intentionally designed GFD+ can help to generate conditions conducive to peace, to enable monitoring, evaluation and assessment of these contributions.

⁸⁵ Interview, WFP South Sudan Country Office representative, Juba, 14 Feb 2022.

⁸⁶ Interviews, various WFP collaboration partners, Bor, 15–17 Feb. 2022.

⁸⁷ World Food Programme (WFP) and Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRf), ‘Adjusting terminology for organised violence in South Sudan’, Sep. 2020. [moved here from executive summary, or could just delete it?]

⁸⁸ Interview, WFP South Sudan Bor Field Office representative, South Sudan, 15 Feb. 2022.

Theory of change 2

*If WFP's emergency response programming is leveraged to support and strengthen the restoration of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and existing infrastructures for peace, **then** local violence can be reduced and stability enhanced amid escalating conflict dynamics.*

Contextual background and rationale

Community violence in Jonglei and Unity states largely manifests itself through violent raiding and revenge attacks, predominantly perpetrated by heavily armed community defence groups or militias embedded in the cattle culture. Community conflict is increasing and is directly linked to the increasing levels of food insecurity in South Sudan, whereby increasing food insecurity triggers further instability and violence. At the same time, WFP's resources are being reduced and tensions and social unrest have flared as people face the prospect of losing food assistance.⁸⁹ To make matters worse, the structures of customary authority that have traditionally regulated community violence have been eroded or co-opted by regional and national elites (see box 2.1).

Despite the worsening outlook on conflict, stability and food security—or perhaps because of it—there is a willingness in many communities to break the conflict and food insecurity trap. From its close work with communities, WFP has noted emerging fatigue among rural communities regarding spiralling cycles of revenge and increasingly violent cattle raiding.⁹⁰ This was also noted during the fieldwork and is reflected in broader research on South Sudan.⁹¹ However, given the protractedness of community violence, there is a feeling of hopelessness about *how* to end this cycle. As one representative of customary authority expressed it during a focus group discussion on attempts at dialogue, ‘we had more meetings, inviting leaders from different communities. But after the meetings, you get the same thing [more violent attacks]. We’ve tried enough and have no more capacity’.⁹²

Leveraging WFP's emergency response programming to support much-needed efforts to restore traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and the ability of customary authorities to promote normative restraints on violence could make a significant contribution to local violence reduction and increased stability amid escalating conflict dynamics. However, while traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and customary authority structures can resolve conflict issues if empowered to do so, they also risk perpetuating structural violence. These mechanisms can help to preserve the patriarchal structures that drive gender-based violence, while differences in traditions and customs between community groupings can be accentuated to incite division and conflict.⁹³ Therefore, any efforts to restore traditional conflict resolution mechanisms must be accompanied by efforts to address exclusionary practices.

⁸⁹ Remote interviews, WFP South Sudan Bentiu Field Office representative; and WFP South Sudan Bor Field Office representative.

⁹⁰ Remote interview, WFP South Sudan Country Office representatives, 23 June 2021.

⁹¹ Interviews, Customary authorities, Bor town, South Sudan, 16 Feb. 2022; and Pendle, N. R., “‘The dead are just to drink from’: Recycling ideas of revenge among the western Dinka, South Sudan”, *Africa*, vol. 88, no. 1 (2018), pp. 99–121.

⁹² Interviews, Customary authorities, Bor town, South Sudan, 16 Feb. 2022.

⁹³ Leonardi, C., *Making Order out of Disorder: Customary Authority in South Sudan* (Rift Valley Institute: London, 2019).

Actors with the agency to incite violence or promote restraint

A number of factors and processes combine to influence an actor's decision to pursue violence or exercise restraint. These factors and processes will vary over space and time and among different actors. Understanding group structures and how these are embedded in the surrounding society, as well as the role of violence among different groups, is essential in order to identify what or who influences violence and restraint. Equally, such an understanding is vital to ensuring conflict sensitivity.

Customary authorities and power

South Sudan's hybrid system of governance combines formal laws with customary laws and roles, but customary authorities dominate community governance. Customary authorities are regarded to represent the interests and concerns of the majority of South Sudan's rural population. Importantly, they have the power to decide on the rights and wrongs of community behaviour.⁹⁴ Customary authorities have also played an important role in conflict management, mitigation and prevention, and their use of traditional conflict resolution methods, reconciliation processes and ritual has been critical to maintaining peaceful coexistence within and between communities.⁹⁵ Many of these structures and mechanisms have broken down as a consequence of the protracted armed conflict, however, which has led, among other things, to traditional practices such as cattle rustling becoming much more violent, as well as more politicized and militarized.⁹⁶

The various forms of customary authority partly map on to the ethnic divisions of South Sudan as ideas of custom and tradition are often harnessed to promote ethnic identities.⁹⁷ However, degrees of power and influence differ between the various forms. The pre-colonial positions of spiritual leaders, such as the Murle Red Chiefs, the Nuer Prophets and the Dinka Spearmasters, are considered to derive their power from divine rights.⁹⁸ They tend to be perceived as more valuable and legitimate than the so-called government chiefs, who are known as paramount chiefs, executive chiefs, sub-chiefs or headmen, and are essentially a colonial legacy of indirect rule and may be elected, appointed or hereditary.⁹⁹ At the same time, however, the most successful leaders combine spiritual power with other sources of authority, such as government backing.¹⁰⁰

Many chiefs and, albeit to a much lesser extent spiritual leaders, belong to or have the support of local judicial, governmental, police or powerful family elites that enjoy considerable power and status. While customary authorities can extend their power and influence by being close to military and power elites, these same elites have been able to co-opt customary authorities. An outcome of the protracted wars is that chiefs and spiritual leaders alike have become susceptible to bias and corruption, and

⁹⁴ Rift Valley Institute, South Sudan Customary Authorities Project, 2020; and Hellmüller, S. and Santschi, M. (eds), *Is Local Beautiful? Peacebuilding between International Interventions and Locally Led Initiatives*, Springer Briefs in Environment, Security, Development and Peace, Peace and Security Studies no. 11, 2013.

⁹⁵ Idris (note 35); Tittmamer, N., 'Transitional justice for stabilizing South Sudan: Lessons from global and local contexts', *Sudd Institute*, Policy brief, 21 July 2016; Mosel, I. and Murray, R., 'Symptoms and causes: Insecurity and underdevelopment in Eastern Equatoria', *Human Baseline Security Assessment (HSBA) Issue brief* no. 16 (Apr. 2010); and Wild, H., Madut, J. and Patel, P. 'The militarization of cattle raiding in South Sudan: How a traditional practice became a tool for political violence', *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2018).

⁹⁶ Wild, Madut and Patel (note 95).

⁹⁷ Leonardi (note 93).

⁹⁸ Felix da Costa, D., *Changing Power Among the Murle Chiefs: Negotiating Political, Military and Spiritual Authority in Boma State, South Sudan* (Rift Valley Institute: Nairobi, 2018).

⁹⁹ Felix da Costa (note 98); and Ryle, J. and Amuom, M., *Peace is the Name of Our Cattle-camp: Local Responses to Conflict in Eastern Lakes States, South Sudan* (Rift Valley Institute: Nairobi, 2018).

¹⁰⁰ Felix da Costa (note 98).

the instrumentalization of conflict for personal interests.¹⁰¹ Customary authorities are therefore embedded in South Sudan's political marketplace and the systems of the militarized economy and government, and chiefs form a significant part of the country's local elites.

Elites and fluctuating alliances

As the lines between customary authorities and state authorities become increasingly blurred, national politico-military elites can also incite violence or promote restraint. Political and military leaders have often been interested in inciting conflict to secure access to resources or display their military strength. To do so, they manipulate local grievances while supplying their supporters with military-grade weapons.¹⁰²

A vicious circle emerges where, against these increasing levels of violence, customary authorities are increasingly required to seek powerful political and military connections to secure protection, resources and rights. These alliances, however, compromise the community's perception of their loyalty and independence, and therefore their legitimacy.¹⁰³ Furthermore, engrained mistrust between many citizens, specifically in the rural areas, and state officials tied to the historic marginalization of South Sudan's peripheries, has led to fragmentation, shifting alliances and related power- and identity-based conflicts. Major political actors and customary authorities are no longer able to consistently secure the loyalties of community-based militias or control their behaviour. Many now operate unrestricted by any form of cultural, political or military restraint or authority. This, in turn, exacerbates violence and reduces overall community confidence in peace and security.

The influence and power of women

While customary authorities play a leading role in defining custom, custom and tradition can be invoked by the speeches, songs, writing and actions of a wide range of actors. In this way, women can be central to inciting violence or promoting restraint. For example, set against the increasing fatigue regarding perpetual cycles of violence, Murle women have prevented the mobilization of armed youth through dance. The Murle people are organized in age-sets that both fight each other for dominance of their communities and raid. Before age-set groups can mobilize to raid, however, they must dance. Taking advantage of strict age hierarchies, women of a more senior age set planned a dance that prevented the younger men from dancing, leaving them unable to mobilize. The influence of women can also work in the opposite direction; they can incite violence through song, dance and acts that encourage negative, violent masculinity. Women can also influence the willingness of youth to mobilize and shame those who participate in failed raids. Women will in some cases pressure their husbands or male relatives to revenge loss and defend honour.¹⁰⁴

Exclusionary aspects of norms and customary law

While norms and customs have governed communities for centuries and are an essential part of regulating social behaviour, they can also be exclusionary and contribute to driving conflict. Customary authorities can therefore represent persistent structures of inequality and perpetuate systems of domination. Gender norms are a case in point.

¹⁰¹ United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Reconciliation, Stabilization, Resilience in South Sudan, 'Annual Report 2021', unpublished.

¹⁰² Interview, WFP South Sudan Bor Field Office representative, 15 Feb. 2022.

¹⁰³ Felix da Costa (note 98).

¹⁰⁴ Remote interview, WFP South Sudan Country Office representatives, 23 June 2021; and interview, WFP South Sudan Country Office representative, Bor, South Sudan, 15 Feb. 2022.

While gender norms and roles are expressed differently across South Sudan, in many pastoralist communities boys are socialized to defend communal assets from an early age. Men are valued within their communities for the protection they provide, which often includes launching pre-emptive attacks on other communities.¹⁰⁵ Meeting such expectations is essential if men and boys are to be considered important in their communities.¹⁰⁶

A further reason why young men will join violent cattle raids is to contribute to the bride price that will be demanded when they marry. Beyond leading to community violence, this practice commodifies and further marginalizes women and girls, reinforcing their secondary status in society, as they are valued primarily in terms of the bride wealth they can command.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, prevailing social norms essentially limit women to domestic affairs and leave them out of communal deliberations and decision making.¹⁰⁸ The bride price system coupled with women's economic dependence constitutes a means of control by husbands and greatly limits the ability of women to leave abusive relationships.¹⁰⁹ This further normalizes gender-based violence, which when perpetrated against women is partly sanctioned by customary law.

These gender- and age-related norms and customs are reflected in authority structures and in much of the local peacebuilding infrastructure. With few exceptions, most customary authorities are older male members of the community, and it is primarily these authorities and other male elders who engage in peace processes.¹¹⁰ Even though they comprise a considerable part of the cattle-related community-embedded armed groups that drive the violence, young men are also largely excluded. Women are excluded almost entirely, although older women are consulted in some cases.¹¹¹

WFP's contribution to restoring traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and promoting restraint

Set against the above complexities, efforts to restore traditional conflict resolution mechanisms must accurately identify the hierarchies of powers over violence and restraint among spiritual and political leaders and authorities. WFP can and does make an important contribution to this end.

Through its conflict analysis process, negotiations and dialogue, as part of its access efforts, WFP has built up in-depth and contextually fine-tuned knowledge of power dynamics, and social norms of behaviour, culture and tradition. The elaborate process of ensuring access to conflict-affected areas entails detailed negotiations with the actors with influence over the armed groups perpetrating violence in an area. These include customary authorities, state-level area commanders and national leaders.¹¹² Through this process, WFP is able to reach some of the most inaccessible and conflict-affected regions.

Linked to its presence, WFP has gained a degree of trust among communities, customary authorities and the community defence groups entrusted with protecting

¹⁰⁵ International Organization for Migration (note 34).

¹⁰⁶ International Organization for Migration (note 34).

¹⁰⁷ International Organization for Migration (note 34).

¹⁰⁸ International Organization for Migration (note 34); and Kuyang Logo, H., Shah, O. and Watson, C., 'Gender norms, conflict sensitivity and transition in South Sudan', *Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility*, Briefing Paper, 18 July 2022.

¹⁰⁹ International Organization for Migration (note 34).

¹¹⁰ Leonardi (note 93).

¹¹¹ International Organization for Migration (note 34).

¹¹² Remote interview, WFP South Sudan Country Office representative, 6 June 2022; and interview, WFP South Sudan Country Office representative, Bor, 15 Feb. 2022.

cattle. This is critical; trust is one of the most important factors in inter-group relations, and conflict management and resolution.¹¹³ Trust is essential social capital for effective partnerships. Its sustained presence, including the ability to quickly access conflict-affected areas as soon as the immediate armed confrontations have reduced, generates confidence among communities.¹¹⁴ Indicators of the trust earned by WFP include communities informing WFP of imminent attacks, its ability to broker humanitarian pauses where conflicting parties agree to cease hostilities to allow WFP to distribute food aid, and requests from other humanitarian agencies for WFP to negotiate access on their behalf.

This kind of contextual awareness and understanding of power dynamics, combined with access to the most conflict-affected areas, regular dialogue with actors with the power to instigate violence and promote restraint, and historical trust, can be leveraged to strengthen existing peacebuilding infrastructures, address exclusionary structures inherent in traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and provide peace dividends through GFD+, which increase the cost of mobilization.

1. Strengthening existing peacebuilding infrastructures

There is an established peacebuilding infrastructure in communities in South Sudan, which comprises peace committees, technical committees, Inter-Church Committees and Councils, and peace conferences. To a varying degree, these structures and actors build on traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and play an essential role in sub-national and local peacebuilding. However, they often lack the necessary resources to work with the required efficiency or to implement agreements.¹¹⁵ Coordinating with these actors, complementing and strengthening their structures, and providing material benefits to disincentivize violent livelihood strategies, where appropriate, are important ways to contribute to shorter-term violence reduction and longer-term peace.

WFP's participation in, and leadership of the UN-led Reconciliation, Stabilization and Resilience Trust Fund (RSRTF) in Jonglei and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area is a clear example of the above. Working with partners, WFP has supported peace dialogue workshops, strengthening the capacity of county commissioners, chiefs, women and youth leaders to implement the Pieri Action for Peace.¹¹⁶ It has also supported the inter-communal youth mission to disseminate peace messaging on dissuading violent raids and returning abducted women and children.¹¹⁷

WFP also makes an important contribution to the existing peacebuilding infrastructure through the trauma-healing components part of the RSRTF peace programming that are implemented in rural areas. Trauma healing components primarily consist of dialogue and rituals, and the latter are often performed by the intended beneficiaries in conjunction with the dialogues. This non-clinical approach to trauma healing plays a vital role in the isolated South Sudanese context of protracted conflict and deeply entrenched disputes. If left unaddressed, deep-seated trauma can perpetuate othering, i.e. the reductive action of labelling and defining individuals or

¹¹³ Alon, I. and Bar-Tal, D. (eds), *The Role of Trust in Conflict Resolution: The Israeli–Palestinian Case and Beyond* (Springer International Publishing, 2016).

¹¹⁴ Remote interview, WFP South Sudan Country Office: representatives, 24 June 2021.

¹¹⁵ Trias Consult, 'Sustaining peace in South Sudan: Peace and conflict analysis and opportunities for the UN Peacebuilding Fund', Jan. 2021, unpublished; and Remote interview, WFP South Sudan Country Office representative, 16 Jan. 2023.

¹¹⁶ The Pieri Action for Peace is a local agreement to resolve the violent conflict between the Lou Nuer, Dinka Bor and Murle groups in Jonglei.

¹¹⁷ United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Reconciliation, Stabilization, Resilience in South Sudan (note 101).

groups, and hatred. The research noted a clear tendency for othering among most interviewees, ranging from customary authorities to community defence groups, members of displaced communities and even some service providers.¹¹⁸ In some cases, there was a belief that ‘the other’ had acted out of hatred. At the same time, these interviewees did not acknowledge their role in the cycles of raids, counterraid and revenge. A narrative forms where one ethnic community is seen as the principal antagonist and perpetrator of violence, while their own ethnic community is seen as the predominant victim of this violence. This is concerning given that victimhood is profoundly political, and that ethnicity is used as a powerful tool for normative claim-making and to provide a sharp set of boundaries that delimit and manipulate ethnic communities and sub-communities.¹¹⁹ The creation of victimhood along lines of ethnic identity can lead to a process of securitization, in which powerful actors generate acceptance for their activities under a claim that they can provide security even if it means using violence. This was evidenced during the research, which took place in parallel with ongoing mobilization efforts among armed cattle guards and community defence groups to avenge earlier attacks in the area.

WFP is also in a strong position to facilitate access for other organizations working on community-based peacebuilding. As noted above, it can reach some of the most isolated conflict-affected communities that many other organizations and agencies, including those with a clear peacebuilding mandate, cannot reach.¹²⁰ Other humanitarian agencies look to WFP to negotiate access to conflict hotspots on their behalf. It was noted that organizations travelling with WFP feel protected, and that its flag is perceived as a ‘peace flag’.¹²¹ In addition to geographical access, WFP can facilitate access to critical actors that can influence violence and restraint and make pronouncements about peace.

Through its food distribution, WFP is uniquely positioned to enable peacebuilding activities that span ethnic and intra-communal divisions. Up to 10 000 people, often from different ethnic groups, can gather at a single distribution point. Food distribution therefore presents a valuable opportunity to engage with other peacebuilding actors. Examples of activities that could be carried out together with partners in these settings include soccer games and wrestling competitions. Both sports are used to bridge ethnic divides in South Sudan and serve as an avenue for releasing frustration. At the same time, the presence of customary authorities during distribution helps prevent these events from turning violent.¹²²

2. Addressing exclusionary structures inherent in traditional conflict resolution mechanisms

Through efforts to strengthen existing peacebuilding infrastructures, WFP is also well positioned to contribute to addressing the exclusionary practices that are part of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. The evolution of customary law is shaped from the bottom up by the opinions and wishes of the people and from the top down through statutory law courts and the opinions and rulings of judges.¹²³ Efforts

¹¹⁸ Interviews, Customary authorities, Bor Town, 15 Feb. 2022; and interviews, members of community defence groups, members of affected populations and service providers, Bor, South Sudan, 15–18 Feb. 2022.

¹¹⁹ Jeffery, L. and Candea, M., ‘The Politics of Victimhood’, *History and Anthropology*, vol. 17 no. 4 (2006), pp. 287–96.

¹²⁰ Interviews, Peacebuilding Opportunities Fund representative, Juba, 14 Feb. 2022; and WFP South Sudan Bor Field Office representative, 15 Feb. 2022.

¹²¹ Interview, WFP South Sudan Bor Field Office representative, 15 Feb. 2022.

¹²² Focus group discussion, Residents of an IDP camp outside Bor town, 18 Feb. 2022; and Norwegian Refugee Council representative, Mayom, 23 Feb. 2022.

¹²³ Jok, A., Leitch, R. and Vandewint, C., *A Study of Customary Law in Contemporary Southern Sudan* (World Vision International and the South Sudan Secretariat of Legal and Constitutional Affairs: Juba, 2004).

are under way to support the evolution of customary law in a way that addresses exclusion and enhances a broader understanding between actors in the formal and informal justice systems. These include those implemented under the Rule of Law and Stabilization Pillar of the RSRTF.¹²⁴ Nonetheless, the research found concerns that some of these efforts are predominantly top-down, partly because of the inability of some international actors to access some of the most conflict-affected areas to ensure that their peacebuilding efforts are locally anchored.¹²⁵

One way WFP could help to address exclusionary aspects is by leveraging the potential of its project management committees (PMCs), collaborating partners and other, more spontaneous, self-organization efforts by communities (see box 4.4). WFP could leverage these structures to reach communities with peace messaging and sensitization efforts, including efforts to counter othering, but also on critical topics that might fall far outside WFP's mandate, such as the potential tension between customary law and international human rights law (see the conflict sensitivity concerns below). Peace messaging and sensitization efforts should be designed to help trigger reflection on exclusionary practices and seek to ignite processes that change perceptions in the longer term. Working through the PMCs and collaboration partners, if selected for their peacebuilding capacities (see TOC 1), would help to ensure that peace messaging is grounded in the everyday experiences of the most conflict-affected regions and sensitive to local understandings of values such as inclusivity. Moreover, it would help to ensure that change happens at a pace that does not threaten to further destabilize society.

The PMCs should have equal representation of women and men, which would therefore provide opportunities for more structured engagement with women to build their capacity. However, PMCs almost always operate in parallel with more powerful community authority structures, including structures in the IDP camps. Moreover, separate camp authority structures often build on those community authority structures, which limits the potential impact of the PMCs on addressing exclusionary structures around gender. However, WFP is working with partners to create separate forums for women to build confidence and formulate strategic approaches to influencing male-dominated spaces.¹²⁶ Connecting such women-centred forums to male-dominated spaces is an important avenue for addressing the exclusionary structures inherent in traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, even while the visible structures remain ostensibly male-dominated.

3. Peace dividends through GFD+ raising the cost of mobilization

While WFP has a role in shaping structures and processes that facilitate inclusionary dialogue and interaction, its food security interventions also contribute to tangible peace dividends. Linking dialogues and exchanges to tangible peace dividends is essential as any peacebuilding initiative that fails to acknowledge the fundamental constraints on community members' daily struggles to secure the necessities of life risks failure.¹²⁷

As this TOC has argued, the reasons why an individual resorts to violence are highly complex. However, the research found evidence that among those reasons are

¹²⁴ United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Reconciliation, Stabilization, Resilience in South Sudan (note 101).

¹²⁵ Interviews, Peacebuilding Opportunities Fund representative, Juba, 14 Feb. 2022; and WFP South Sudan Country Office representative, 15 Feb. 2022.

¹²⁶ Remote interview, WFP South Sudan Country Office representative, 16 Jan. 2023.

¹²⁷ Felix da Costa, D., 'We are one, but we are different': Murle identity and local peacebuilding in Jonglei, South Sudan', *NOREF Policy Brief*, June 2013; and Donais, T. and Knorr, A. C., 'Peacebuilding from below vs. the liberal peace: The case of Haiti', *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, vol. 34, no 1 (2013), pp. 54–69.

Box 4.4. Project Management Committees

Project Management Committees (PMCs) are structures set up by WFP and its collaborating partners, in close collaboration with local community authorities in the communities or camps where they operate, principally to manage and monitor food distribution. They are made up of community members and designed to be broadly inclusive of the communities where they are located, representing livelihoods and authority structures and, importantly, ensuring an equal gender balance. The PMCs serve as the link between intended beneficiaries and WFP/collaborating partners. For example, the PMC will inform the communities about upcoming food distributions and entitlements, gather any concerns related to WFP activities and communicate these to the collaborating partner. They act as community mobilizers, playing a critical role in ensuring community involvement and participation in project activities, and acting as a mechanism for disseminating essential information. Committee members will also communicate with customary authorities to maintain their support.

despair, a sense of having nothing to lose and idleness.¹²⁸ These are all factors on which powerful actors can capitalize. At the same time, the research found evidence that engagement in livelihood projects can motivate youth to refrain from mobilizing or engaging in violence. Although those who abstained from mobilizing amounted to only a small number of households compared to the number that did not, this demonstrates a desire to engage in alternative activities and that engaging in livelihoods can have a dampening effect on mobilization.¹²⁹ Similar findings surfaced in an independent evaluation of the RSRTF in 2022.¹³⁰ That evaluation found that such efforts, together with peace campaigns and social cohesion programming, helped to ensure that political and military leaders were unable to secure community support when trying to incite violence. The efforts of women and youth were specifically noted. While identifying causal connections between programme activities and any reduction in violence is a methodologically challenging endeavour, it pointed out that there had been no large-scale mobilization of Dinka and Nuer against the Murle between the attacks of early and mid-2020 and the evaluation. The evaluation concluded that this could provide evidence that the RSRTF intervention is helping to contain the worst of the violence, despite deteriorating security levels over the life of the programme.

Livelihood activities as part of GFD+ could therefore make an essential contribution to broader efforts to restore traditional conflict mechanisms and the ability of customary authorities to promote restraint. If GFD+ can enhance community assets and livelihoods, people will have more to lose. In this way, it is possible to start changing people's everyday reality in the context of spiralling violence, as 'people go from having nothing to lose to having something to lose' through violence and more that is worth protection by working hard to achieve peaceful relations.¹³¹ Increasing the opportunity cost of violence while enhancing incentives for peace goes to the heart of WFP South Sudan's strategy for contributing to peace.

Conflict sensitivity concerns

This TOC argues that WFP's contribution to restoring traditional conflict resolution mechanisms partly lies in the trust it has built up among some of the most conflict-

¹²⁸ Interviews, WFP South Sudan Field Office: representatives, 15 Feb. 2022; Focus group discussion, Youth engaged in WFP Food for Assets activities, Bor town, 16 Feb. 2022; and Interviews, UNMISS representatives, Bor town, 17 Feb. 2022.

¹²⁹ Remote interview. Representatives WFP South Sudan Country Office, 23 June 2021.

¹³⁰ DETCRO, 'Evaluation Report: RSRTF Area-Based Program in Jonglei and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA), Nov. 2022, unpublished.

¹³¹ Interview, WFP South Sudan Country Office representative, Juba, 14 Feb. 2022.

affected communities, which is linked to its sustained presence. Its access to these communities, however, will often depend on a range of actors that are engaged in, or have the ability to control, violence. In the context of the highly fluctuating and volatile political marketplace, there is a very real risk that negotiations fail, or that WFP could be seen as facilitating the actions of certain armed groups or taking sides.¹³² This, in turn, risks eroding trust.

Addressing the exclusionary aspects of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms by emphasizing individual human rights, particularly those of women, comes into direct conflict with most systems of customary law and affects the very foundations of the majority of southern Sudanese tribal societies.¹³³ In deeply traditional settings, promoting what might be perceived as ‘Western’ or secular values can cause tensions and hostility towards WFP and its collaborating partners. This has been noted, for example, in Nigeria.¹³⁴

As discussed in TOC 1, GFD+ activities and skills and asset creation can be deliberate targets for attack. This TOC highlights the potential for such activities to increase the cost of mobilization. At the same time, however, such activities could inadvertently propel cycles of attack and counterattack. A notable example is the reconstruction of dykes. In conversations with youth working on a WFP-supported project to reconstruct dykes between Bor and Baidit, it was clear that the communities highly valued and prioritized this work, not least because this would allow communities displaced by the floods to return to their land and begin to cultivate it again—thereby contributing to improved food security. Nonetheless, this area was still heavily affected by violence and the interviewees expressed a continued reliance on community defence groups, which are deeply entrenched in the violence, ready to counter any future attacks should the displaced community return.¹³⁵

Finally, on the potential to capitalize on WFP’s mass-distribution points, there is a well-known risk that gathering a large number of people during food distribution can facilitate community defence groups to mobilize and loot food supplies before raiding.

Recommendations

8. Enhance and institutionalize partnerships for peace. While these partnerships can include existing cooperation partners, they need to integrate contextually anchored peace messaging that addresses ‘othering’ and trauma by locating and understanding security as people’s lived experiences. Partnerships should support locally specific and emergent response models.
9. Leverage the potential for food distribution points to bring in other peacebuilding actors to facilitate the reach and inclusion of other peacebuilding initiatives.
10. Identify and address exclusionary structures pertaining to traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. This could include: (a) building on the inclusionary and representative structures and processes that underline PMCs; (b) leveraging PMCs to support peace partners to reach communities with peace and sensitization messages that trigger reflective

¹³² Remote interviews, WFP South Sudan Country Office representatives, 24 June 2021.

¹³³ Jok, Leitch and Vandewint (note 123).

¹³⁴ Delgado, C., *Improving the Prospects for Peace in Nigeria: Spotlight on Stabilization* (SIPRI: Stockholm, 2022).

¹³⁵ Jok, Leitch and Vandewint (note 123).

processes around exclusionary values and norms and othering, as well as around harmonizing customary and international human rights law and facilitating the smooth and sustainable reintegration of returnees; and (c) connecting women-led forums and initiatives to male-dominated spaces.

11. In line with the recommendations set out in TOC 1, ensure that GFD+ activities are designed with a clear intention to increase the costs of mobilization and incentivize peace.

Conclusions

This report has investigated the potential for WFP South Sudan's emergency programming to contribute to enhanced stability through a reduction in violence and improved basic physical security. The evidence presented indicates that WFP programming makes an important contribution, but there is room for improvement by further strengthening, systematizing and scaling-up its existing engagement. This report makes 10 recommendations to this end, which are set out below.

It is worthy of note that the South Sudan country case study stands out among the 12 case studies as part of the SIPRI-WFP Knowledge Partnership in that WFP South Sudan has a well-defined strategy on its contribution to peace. While it is too soon to assess whether the strategy has had any substantial impact, some important initial results have been identified. Some of these are discussed in this report and in the related report on measurement. The next challenge for WFP, therefore, is to make a long-term, sustainable impact in an increasingly difficult operating environment and at a time of reduced resources. Specifically, the strategy must be fully institutionalized so that contributing to peace becomes an inherent part of WFP's operations in South Sudan.

Recommendations

1. Ensure that the 'plus' component of GFD+ activities is intentionally designed to contribute to increasing the prospects for peace.
2. Increase the proportion of funds dedicated to the plus activities. This could be done by increasing the proportion of the FLA budget dedicated to this end or by engaging with donors that have already shown an interest in supporting such activities to build resilience amid violent conflict.
3. Expand the selection criteria for collaborating partners in a way that allows WFP to partner with local organizations that have solid experience of working on peace-related issues, and build their capacities to attract direct funding from donors in wider localization efforts.
4. In partnerships with local actors to tap into their extensive experience and enhance the potential for GFD+ to contribute to the prospects for peace, WFP should ensure their meaningful participation in decision making.
5. Adapt the extensive CBPP to ensure that the plus activities reflect local understandings of conflict and peace.
6. Clearly articulate the pathways through which more intentionally designed GFD+ can help to generate conditions conducive to peace, to enable the monitoring, evaluation and assessment of this contribution.
7. Seek out complementary partnerships with humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors to enhance the GFD+ activities
8. Enhance and institutionalize partnerships for peace and support locally specific and emergent response models.
9. Leverage the potential for food distribution points to bring in other peacebuilding actors to facilitate the reach and inclusion of other peacebuilding initiatives.

10. Identify and address exclusionary structures pertaining to traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. This could include: (a) building on the inclusionary and representative structures and processes that underline PMCs; (b) leveraging PMCs to support peace partners to reach communities with peace and sensitization messages that trigger reflective processes around exclusionary values and norms and othering; and (c) connecting women-led forums and initiatives to male-dominated spaces.
11. In line with the recommendations set out in TOC 1, ensure that GFD+ activities are designed with a clear intention to increase the cost of mobilization and incentivize peace.

About the author

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