**The Resilience Exchange Network**

**Conflict and Resilience: Lessons Learnt and the Way Forward**

**October 18, 2018**

On Thursday, 18 October, the Resilience Exchange Network Technical Working Group organised a learning event with partners who have experience in resilience/conflict nexus. The event took place at the NGO Forum and was chaired by World Vision in their role as the chair of the Resilience Exchange Network. Presenters included the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (discussing governance, cash programming, land rights, location selection); Help Restore Youth South Sudan (transitional justice, legal aid and social cohesion); Trust Action Youth Association (local buy-in, savings groups); AECOM International (contextual analysis, trauma awareness, layering/sequencing); Titi Foundation (energy-saving stoves and briquettes); and Catholic Relief Services (role of faith leaders). Approximately 60 participants from international and national NGOs attended the learning event.

With the event’s focus on lessons learnt, presenters zeroed in on what had and hadn’t worked, and what they would do differently inthe future. Overall, through presentations and discussion, aimed to address the questions “Can we do resilience programming in conflict-affected areas? *Should* we? *How* should we?”

**Highlights from the learning event:**

* Targeting exclusively ‘islands of peace / hubs of stability’ with resilience and other long-term programming is a political move, as well as being under-ambitious. Instead, resilience programming should target and build on existing “shared spaces” (e.g. market spaces, grazing areas, fishing grounds in “border” areas) and aim to create new ones. Shared spaces can lead to interdependency, but they are both an opportunity and a risk – conflict sensitivity becomes that much more important.
* “Building on shared spaces” means not just doing your regular (resilience) intervention in a conflict-sensitive way, but addressing conflict and peacebuilding head-on (cf. “mainstreamed” and “targeted” approaches). Facilitate dialogues/airing of grievances, use of media (access to accurate information to counter rumors, dissemination of peace agreements), trauma counselling.
* Mutually reinforcing relationship between resilience and peacebuilding activities. Pairing with peacebuilding activities “creates space” for resilience/food security programming, in a quite literal sense of ensuring local security conditions are calm enough to implement. Resilience/food security activities can act as a concrete draw to interest community members in more abstract peacebuilding work – it also can directly address drivers of conflict (e.g. degraded/scarce natural resources).
* Partners agreed that peacebuilding/resilience programming is a key tool to bridge the humanitarian-development nexus in South Sudan, but are finding the dominant emergency framework is blocking attempts to implement this type of programming.
* Local contextual analysis is critical – cannot be generalized from project to project or location to location. Identify specific actors, groups, conflicts. Build this into project budgets.
* Work with communities to address conflict at local level – this helps to remove local threats of conflict from the national conflict landscape, and empowers communities who may otherwise believe that conflict comes entirely from above. Subsidiarity approach – any conflict that cannot be resolved at local level is bumped to the next level up.
* Building social networks and cohesion across inter-communal/inter-ethnic lines – forcing people into mixed groups can backfire, particularly when there is money involved! (e.g. VSLAs). Better to take a mixed strategy – allow people to self-select into some groups (which will likely be homogenous), but enable/encourage mixing at higher scales/levels – e.g. FFS. Cf. Recent MercyCorps Horn of Africa research finding intra-communal social cohesion as or more strongly correlated with improved peace and food security than inter-communal social cohesion.
* Buy-in from local leadership and the broader community is key in identifying “hunger as our shared enemy”, reducing other forms of conflict. This takes deep engagement with communities.
* Land tenure and conflicts resulting from land tenure was agreed to be a huge topic. Other than a general agreement that customary land tenure usually works pretty well at resolving conflicts (other than tending to re-entrench some inequalities e.g. along gender lines) and is viewed as legitimate. This topic may be revisited in depth in a future learning event.
* Activities that are a one-time intervention and not linked to a larger strategy tend not to have as much impact and buy-in from local communities.
* Religion leaders / the church have access to political leaders and are widely perceived as impartial actors/conveners. However, involving traditional leaders is still critical.

**“This idea must die” – what concept or approach is holding us back?**

* The expectation that short-duration funding will get traction.
* The illusion of aid-worker remove or impartiality. Humanitarian aid (including cash programming) is being politicized by conflict actors – instead of naively ignoring this, engage directly in peacebuilding. Meet politics with politics.
* Peacebuilding as “project” – rather, it is a process that may not fit well in programming cycles.
* Proliferation of peacebuilding groups/actors – instead, work with existing structures, and focus on making sure they are inclusive.

**Next Steps**

Natural resources and resilience learning event – tentative date Tuesday, 27 November.