

CSRF Case Study #1: Inclusion and Consultation

Conflict Sensitivity at the Activity Level

Conflict sensitivity outcomes at the activity level provide tangible demonstrations of how good practices can reduce contributions to conflict and improve contributions to peace. They are context specific and require strong local understanding. They can be identified during the programme design stage, but also can be identified and acted on as activities are implemented.

Background

National NGOs (NNGOs) are the backbone of the South Sudan aid sector, implementing a wide range of projects in many of the most difficult areas where aid is delivered. While their language, cultural skills, and local knowledge provide them with invaluable conflict sensitivity tools, they often face additional challenges around actual and perceived neutrality, gender inclusion, institutional strengths, and organisational resources. The CSRF's NNGO Mentorship Programme supports NNGOs to understand and act on the conflict sensitivity dynamics of these issues, which can have direct and visible impacts on the conflict-affected communities where they work.

This paper is one of four case studies commissioned by the CSRF in February 2022 to better understand where and how contributions to conflict sensitivity have been made, and to draw out lessons for future engagement by the CSRF or other similar facilities. The case studies examine and compare outcomes at the activity, programme, sector, and paradigm level.

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The experience of UNYMPDA,¹ one of the CSRF's NNGO mentoring partners, illustrates the immediate and tangible nature of this support. At the time of its participation in the Mentorship Programme, UNYMPDA was implementing peacebuilding wrestling activities in Jonglei State on behalf of UNDP. Traditional wrestling is enormously popular in this area. Wrestling events can draw huge crowds and build unity and social cohesion. They also have in the recent past turned violent, illuminating and reinforcing divisions amongst groups within the community.

Tensions between communities have increased in recent years due to political rivalries within the state. This manifests in marginalization, community-level physical violence (usually from young men), and enmity expressed through 'hate songs' (usually from women), social media, and other forms of communication. The divisions between community groups makes it easier for conflict actors to continue to destabilise the area for political aims by using their home communities as proxy forces. UNYMPDA's wrestling events therefore had the potential to either inflame local tensions, or to help build bridges between communities.

CSRF Engagement

Through the 2021 NNGO Mentorship Programme, the CSRF provided UNYMPDA training on conflict sensitivity, an opportunity to reflect and brainstorm approaches to community engagement and inclusion, and mentorship. The mentorship programme focused particularly on helping NNGOs develop strategies for broadening inclusivity and engagement with a wider range of actors. UNYMPDA agreed to experiment with expanding its approach to consultation, adding a one-day dialogue with the wrestling association, and through increased outreach to several stakeholder groups, including local authorities and the local women's group to learn more about what had led to violence at previous wrestling events. These consultations were valuable both in process and new ideas which

¹ Upper Nile Youth Mobilisation for Peace and Development Agency

helped to reduce the chance of the wrestling events leading to violence, instead providing a positive opportunity for communities to come together.

Outcomes

The very act of consulting created more allies for UNYMPDA, as they built support for the activity, as well as the peaceful intention behind it. It also built their relationships with a wider range of people, helping them to better why previous wrestling events had led to violence, including from the perspective of women and girls who had previously not been involved. Ideas that came from the CSRF, and the community consultations spurred adaptations that were equally useful and included:

- **A greater appreciation of the role of women in contributing to both conflict and peace:** UNYMPDA worked with the women's group to convince participants not to sing 'hate songs' against certain groups or taunt the losers. Instead, the women and girls agreed to sing traditional songs that all attendees knew and could sing along with.
- **UNYMPDA provided trophies for both winners and losers for the second event:** Instead of only providing trophies to the winners, as planned, providing trophies to both winners and losers help to illustrate that the objective was not defeating the other community, but building relationships.
- **Involvement of the wrestling federation:** UNYMPDA engaged with the wrestling federation, who helped to message and take forward the peacebuilding intent of the programme with the wrestlers themselves.
- **Involving the local government:** This allowed UNYMPDA to work with authorities to align the messaging and try to avoid letting politics interfere with the event. The Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports and the Ministry of Peace lent their support to the process, further enabling the peacebuilding impacts.

UNYMPDA's improved understanding of the context, and the adaptations it undertook, led to a wrestling event that allowed the communities to come together without violence, celebrating a cultural tradition in a way that helped to repair relationships and build common ground.

Key Findings and Lessons

- **NNGOs working directly with communities are very well positioned to develop and act on local knowledge of conflict dynamics.** Because of their cultural and language skills, they can understand local drivers of violence and peace, and work with local groups to develop and act on improved approaches.
- However, NNGOs benefit from support in developing and using these skills. **The CSRF's NNGO Mentorship Programme was instrumental in helping UNYMPDA take a more rigorous and inclusive approach to consultations,** which enabled better analysis and adaptation.
- **Flexibility on the part of both UNYMPDA and UNDP was also key** to helping to action these adaptations, including changes to the budget to purchase additional trophies.
- **There is an opportunity for the CSRF to build lessons from these sorts of tangible changes back into its capacity building, analysis and convening roles.** They provide the practical examples that help those new to conflict sensitivity, as well as opportunities for actors working in specific areas to build on past successes and learn from others' challenges.
- NNGOs play a critical role in the conflict sensitivity of aid delivery, but the aid sector does not invest in them very strongly; they tend to receive only short-term contracts, few overhead contributions, and limited support to institutional development. The CSRF is not equipped to change this structural feature of the aid system but as part of its agenda on localisation **may be able to expand its agenda to focus on the relationship between NNGOs and their funders, rather than NNGOs as independent actors.**