



# FEED THE FUTURE

The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative



## A PARTNERSHIP TO SCALE RESILIENCE IN A FRAGILE STATE SOUTH SUDAN'S PARTNERSHIP FOR RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

**FEED THE FUTURE: BUILDING CAPACITY FOR AFRICAN AGRICULTURAL TRANSFORMATION (AFRICA LEAD II)**

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# FEED THE FUTURE: BUILDING CAPACITY FOR AFRICAN AGRICULTURAL TRANSFORMATION (AFRICA LEAD II)

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

Conducted by the Africa Lead II team under a buy-in from the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID's) Center for Resilience, this case study of the Partnership for Recovery and Resilience (PfRR) in South Sudan examines the connective tissue—social bonds and institutional architecture—that binds communities, how it supports the response to shocks and stresses (especially conflict and civil insecurity), and how international assistance can strengthen resilience, particularly social cohesion. This case study captures learning from the first two years of the PfRR and provides observations, lessons learned, and conclusions of the PfRR's efforts to create an inclusive collective impact model for resilience programming. The PfRR brings together 14 donors, 17 United Nations (UN) agencies, and 98 national nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in a systematic, inclusive attempt—one that is still largely aspirational—to empower international and local communities to establish and implement recovery and resilience activities that will strengthen their abilities to prepare for, withstand, and even thrive in the face of shocks and stresses.

This case study documents how PfRR requires three interrelated slogans, including “two hands clapping”, which signifies cooperation between the international and local communities; “going with the grain”, which illustrates how the PfRR reinforces local community capacities and social cohesion; and “community first, but not alone”, which depicts the benefit of keeping decision-making close to the level of programming to have the most impact.

## METHODOLOGY OF THE CASE STUDY

The objectives of this case study follow:

- Document the lessons learned from the first two years of the Partnership for Recovery and Resilience (PfRR—also known as “the Partnership”).
- Unpack the eight building blocks as a methodological framework for establishing the Partnership's area-based programming in four locations (also known as “communities” or Partnership Areas [PAs]).
- Establish why one of the core pillars of PfRR—Building Trust in People and Institutions—is foundational to the integrity and performance of the Partnership and the Building Block framework.
- Build the evidence base for the Partnership Approach to resilience programming, whereby the international community engages and works with local communities to prioritize, design, and implement resilience activities in a fragile state context.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Partnership Approach is the overall PfRR meta-strategy while the Technical Methodology is a component of that strategy focused on how to set up and advance area-based programming. When the metaphor of “Two Hands Clapping” is introduced later in this study it should be taken to refer to the Partnership Approach.

To address the case study objectives, Africa Lead captured the knowledge gained by progress to-date to establish the methodological framework (implemented as eight building blocks) in the four PAs, and supplement that knowledge with feedback on PfRR structures, processes, tools, and products through an extensive listening tour with internal stakeholders from October to December 2019. In so doing, the team gathered through additional first-hand accounts insights into the effectiveness of, and how to strengthen, the eight building blocks. Finally, the listening tour provided an organized process to elicit feedback on PfRR structures, processes, tools, and products to insights to how they might be improved to strengthen decisions by internal stakeholders.

## BACKGROUND

### PfRR IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

In March 2018, the international community—led by USAID—came together to establish the Partnership for Recovery and Resilience (PfRR or the Partnership) in South Sudan to build resilience and reduce the vulnerability of households and communities. To do this work, the PfRR brings together 14 donors, 17 UN agencies, and 98 national and international NGOs.

The first two years of the PfRR in South Sudan proceeded alongside growing recognition at all levels that resilience matters. Drawing from a comprehensive review of definitions, the PfRR adopted the following working definition of resilience: *The ability of countries, communities, and households to anticipate, adapt to, and/or recover from the effects of potentially hazardous occurrences (natural disasters, economic instability, conflict) in a manner that protects livelihoods, accelerates and sustains recovery, and supports economic and social development.*



Development partners increasingly realized that the best way to strengthen resilience is to foster interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration through a Partnership that focuses on building capacities of people, communities, and institutions. South Sudan's operating environment is a complex social, environmental, political, governance, and economic system that has inherent vulnerabilities to specific shocks. When shocks hit, relationships may break down, and such systems may begin to fail. Sources of resilience such as strong institutions, leadership (governance), social capital and social learning are especially important to understand in the South Sudan context.

For USAID, strengthening the ability of people, institutions, and systems to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to shocks and stresses in fragile countries like South Sudan means strengthening the interface between peacebuilding, humanitarian, and development resources, otherwise known as the “triple nexus.” If actors from these three sectors work together, this “triple nexus” could strengthen the cooperation upon which resilience depends. The aim is to move from a reliance on humanitarian aid that meets needs to a loftier goal of reducing needs, at lower cost, by strengthening resilience and agency.

The PfRR represents a new way of working based on this “triple nexus” of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts. Never before in South Sudan have so many disparate actors and community-level authorities agreed to work together to build resilience and reduce chronic vulnerability, including in South Sudan. In order to reach this goal, the PfRR has highlighted a need for more “convergence”—whereby agencies bring complementary resources, ideas, efforts, and technologies to bear on mutually determined priorities—for better results.

The PfRR suggests that convergence is the best programming approach to achieve sustainable resilience results. United in this agenda, the partners in South Sudan are targeting investments in the same geographic locations, sharing information and operational resources, and aligning actions and results to maximize outcomes. By clustering (layering, sequencing, and integrating) activities, they hope to achieve greater coherence and synergy. By working side by side, they anticipate greater resilience outcomes. Early successes are mostly anecdotal, but the PfRR is building evidence that demonstrates the benefits of strengthening resilience through a collective impact model.

## THE PfRR IN THE CONTEXT OF SOUTH SUDAN

Political disunity had caused 50 years of war before South Sudan’s independence in 2011. In 2013 a new civil war erupted in the capital city, Juba, and spread across the country. Community defense groups that had long protected land, cattle, and clans from danger became embroiled in the national conflict. Their local grievances exacerbated tensions, which led to widespread fighting until the internationally brokered peace process resulted in the formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity (TGNU) on February 22, 2020. After decades of humanitarian investments, the international community was frustrated with the high cost to repeatedly provide humanitarian aid without lasting results (not reducing poverty and chronic vulnerability), and after decades of fighting, so too were the people and communities of South Sudan. From this context, the PfRR was established.

Partnerships of such ambitious scope face many challenges to success. In addition to the unique challenges of South Sudan, UN member states and agencies were hindered by institutional silos, organizational politics, a breakdown of trust, and a hefty dose of inter-agency competition. While the ideal of “One UN” among the UN member states and agencies has not been fully achieved in practice, there is still significant momentum toward greater collaboration. Convergence must be actualized across donors, agencies, levels, and sectors for the resilience partnership to be successful.

Fortuitously, a group of determined champions from Yambio—a community along the border with Congo—stepped in to create an environment of trust, where this type of partnership can succeed. In Yambio, many youths had joined militias out of desperation and relied on banditry for survival. Through their daring efforts, community leaders ended the local rebellion and forged a fragile

peace, but they knew it would not last without tangible benefits to youth. For this reason, they approached the international community with their appeal.

During this time, champions from the major donors, UN agencies, and NGOs promoted their own separate resilience initiatives. USAID rallied these international forces to agree to work together and focus their efforts around “5 C’s”— Cooperation, Co-location, Coordination, Collaboration, and Commitment, centered on the principle of “Community first.” Yambio volunteered as the first Partnership Area (PA), which meant the Yambio champions would work to create an environment of peace, security, and goodwill that would allow the international partners to operate outside of existing humanitarian programs.

While overcoming the post-conflict trauma and trust issues marked the biggest challenge for the people of Yambio, international actors—who had long worked side by side but not as frequently together—had to build their own connective tissue to meet the ideals of partnership. Given this context, *trust in people and institutions* emerged as the first pillar of the PfRR, which provides a foundation for the other three pillars. The second pillar – *restoring access to basic education*, the third pillar – *strengthening productive capacities*, and the fourth pillar – *nurturing the partnerships*, are all built upon the first pillar – *trust in people and institutions*.

Yambio was selected as the first Partnership Area because the people of Yambio took it upon themselves to end their local rebellion, build their social cohesion, and support this newly formed group of PfRR partners. These local efforts made it easy for the PfRR to agree on this initial geographic selection. These efforts also set a high bar for other areas that had to demonstrate their readiness for partnership. To date, some of the preliminary indications of the Partnership taking hold in Yambio—where the activities of the PfRR are more advanced—have been significant, including building trust through reinforcing the local reconciliation peace process, restoring basic services such as education by supporting the construction of primary schools, strengthening the productive capacity of local farmers (e.g., increased access to inputs, training, and crop diversification), and nurturing effective partnerships by training community-based organizations.

Since the launch of the PfRR in March 2018, this connectivity has been built through interpersonal relations of champions within agencies, through institutional relations among agencies, and by developing a shared donor agenda. While hands-on leadership by the USAID champions got the Partnership moving, its evolution into a more facilitative leadership structure was necessary as other donors, United Nations agencies, and international NGOs also stepped forward to take collective ownership and demand a more distributed authority. Key PfRR leaders supported this evolution. In doing so, they protected the Partnership’s early gains, mitigated concerns over any perceived domination by individual donors, and introduced a facilitative leadership well suited for the Partnership’s work moving forward.

### Origin of the PfRR: Key Voices

As part of this case study, the USAID Center for Resilience commissioned DAI to create a video documentary telling the story of the PfRR, its roots in the local peace in Yambio, and its vision of building resilience and reducing vulnerabilities in South Sudan’s fragile state context. The video features diverse voices from across the Partnership. It is meant as a complement to this narrative case study, documenting an important foundational period in the Partnership for Recovery and Resilience.

The URL for the video is:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZYvwfVm03bgEuFg3y>

## HOW THE PfRR IS ORGANIZED

Through this case study and Africa Lead's role in facilitating the PfRR, we have observed that social cohesion is a critical influencer of resilience outcomes. In the South Sudan context, supporting social cohesion within and across communities is linked to, and can unlock, other entry points to strengthen resilience capacities at the local community level. To build this connectivity, the role of leadership is paramount, but so too is technical precision. Defining **Building Blocks** for area-based programming provides a comprehensive understanding of the evidence, community engagement, and implementation priorities. These building blocks are organized into a methodological framework called the "Building Block Framework." The completion of the building blocks is not an end unto itself, but rather a milestone in the process that will involve continuous review and learning. In South Sudan, the following four axes are used for the purposes of this case study to organize the eight building blocks: 1) stakeholder engagement; 2) measurement and evidence; 3) programming; and 4) convergence. Completing these building blocks will result in coherence emerging in these PAs in terms of a uniform and accessible set of concepts and terminology. Organizing PfRR's work along these building blocks has helped to advance the Partnership with some early wins and produced improved resilience programming. Partners produced agreements on common frameworks, created simple, harmonized, and contextualized metrics and analytics; facilitated joint decision-making about what to do, where, when, and how; and witnessed commitments of resources to specific activities based on local priorities and mutual accountability.

Having articulated a building block framework for strengthening convergence based on these four axes and eight building blocks, the PfRR has pioneered a space where the international and local communities—in several geographic locations—are beginning to sit together and jointly determine their priorities, contributions, and desired outcomes. Partners must still communicate evidence in ways that make sense to all concerned in the Partnership, whether in Juba or the PAs. It is anticipated that the building blocks likely will be streamlined and simplified through experiential learning. Nevertheless, significant progress has been made in a short time.

## WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

From the two years of experience of the PfRR in South Sudan, we have learned that determining priorities "in-house" within international and local communities is a key first step for these two communities to then engage in meaningful dialogue around their collaboration. Our learning related to facilitating this process of coordination and multi-stakeholder collaboration can be summed up in the following three slogans:



**"Community First, But Not Alone."** People are resilient. Communities are already committed to the journey of self-reliance, but they need technical and material assistance, which may come from the outside.



**"Go with the Grain."** The first issue of concern is social cohesion among the people, institutions, and systems that comprise each community, as well as the relationship between them. These issues should be approached with a conflict sensitivity lens and an understanding of the inner logic of how each operates to work with and reinforce them to strengthen household and community resilience. Aside from significant progress in determining processes and structures that can advance geographically based partnerships, other important learning focuses on social cohesion and its relationship with resilience.





**“It Takes Two Hands to Clap.”** The international and local community actors are both communities, each with their own internal structures, processes, and logics. Coordination can be strengthened separately, and then a space created for meaningful interaction across these communities. Investing in a sufficient level of coherence and connectivity at the PA level is necessary for the Partnership Approach to be effective, and for accelerated convergence to deliver the intended results of the PfRR. While still in its early days, the building block framework currently under development among PfRR partners offers exciting potential to build this vertical and horizontal coherence among local actors in the PAs, among the international community, and between the two.

Some key findings follow:

- We note that people and communities tend to compete and cooperate over the same assets, depending on conditions. However, some assets exhibit more conflict, while others more cooperation. Specifically, land, livestock, and forests experience higher levels of conflict while markets and agricultural developments experience higher levels of cooperation.
- Conflict tends to center more on inter-communal relations (between communities) than intra-communal relations (within community). The internal cohesion within ethnic communities is rather strong in South Sudan. However, dysfunctional links to the state increase conflict, as some politicians tend to divide communities by appealing to their interests, particularly competition over resources.
- Conflict tends to be higher in communities that experience environmental shocks, whereas cooperation is higher in communities that practice environmental conservation.
- Resilience is experienced differently by men and women, female- and male-headed households, and across age groups. It also differs by location, with some evidencing a disproportionate reliance on adaptive capacities (like educational level); assets (particularly livestock, seeds, and tools); social safety nets (including access to finance); and access to basic services (like schools). It is certainly not a "one size fits all" approach but requires the right inputs at the right time given a range of context specific factors—not least of which is the type of shocks and stresses.
- Still, what is clear across South Sudan is that the traditional institutions do go with the grain and follow the flow of community. While they have been weakened through successive shocks of war, they still have the trust of the people and can contribute significantly to resilience. For traditional institutions to participate fully in the Partnership, they need transport, communications, and administrative capacity. In addition, their relationship with local governments needs to be mutually reinforcing; these institutions are also playing an indispensable role that cannot be ignored or sidelined even as civil society organizations (CSOs) emerge to complement the roles of these more formal institutions.

The PfRR represents a challenge to build greater coherence across actors, sectors, and levels. To achieve these goals requires various forms of cooperation, most importantly at international and local levels, but also between these two communities. The partnership must recognize this need by adopting an approach that is compatible with the inner logic of each of those communities and the interface between them.

## CONCLUSIONS

The high-level conclusions of this case study follow:

- In fragile states, with recurrent crises and civil insecurity, resilience capacities still exist that can, while weakened, be identified, assessed, and strengthened.
- Social cohesion is critical to understand and integrate into fragile states as a foundation to build community-led resilience programming.
- When it comes to the international and local communities, there is a need for “two hands clapping” to ensure that locally identified needs, priorities, and resources are respected and incorporated into inclusive resilience programming.
- Backbone support to the Partnership—in terms of technical leadership—must be seen as an honest broker to play its facilitative role.
- While “community first” has to be the starting point, the Partnership is not “community alone” but a collaboration of partners between the international and local communities.
- The agent of resilience programming is a “person within community”.
- A strong, flexible, easy-to-explain, and periodically reviewed methodological approach for PfRR is necessary.
- By managing community expectations from the outset, particularly with regard to resources that might become available through the Partnership, much confusion can be avoided.
- In a fragile state focusing on resilience is a means to achieve greater impacts of programming by building resilience capacities and agency.