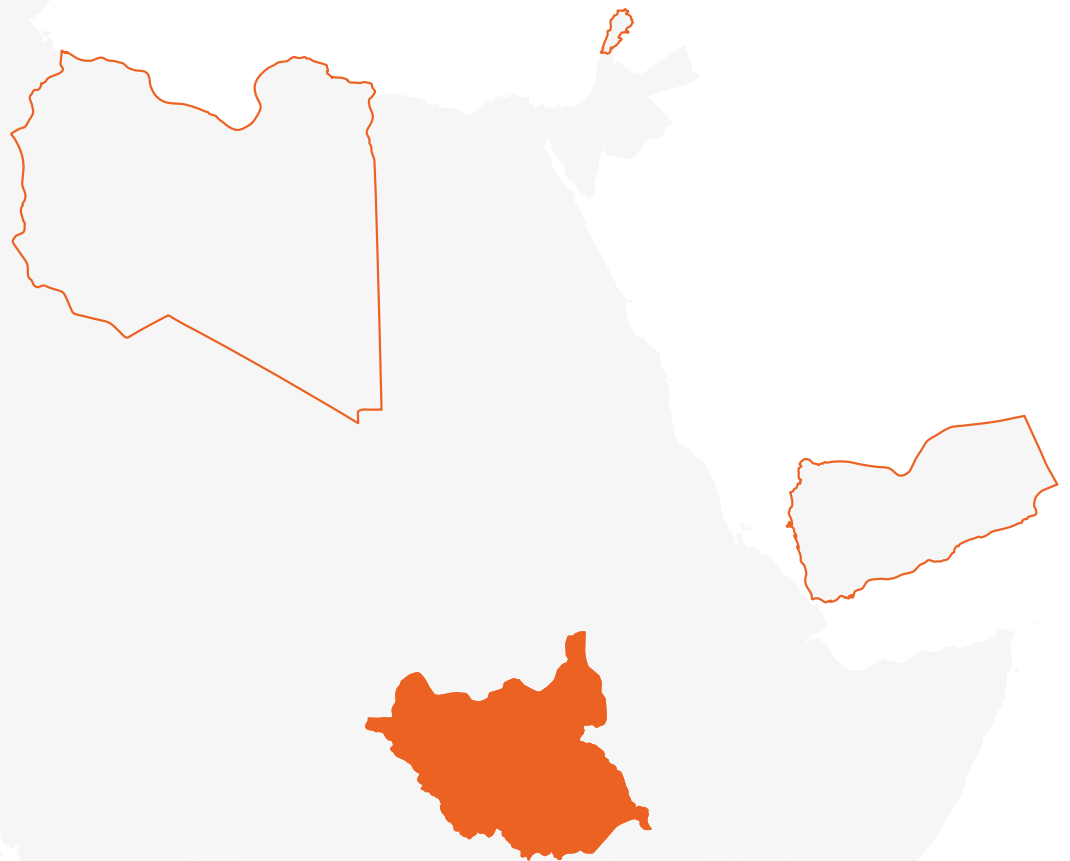**CONFLICT
SENSITIVITY
COMMUNITY HUB**

Supporting conflict sensitivity through country-focused facilities
Case Study: South Sudan Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility

Contents

Acronyms

Better Aid Forum (BAF)

Conflict sensitivity (CS)

Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF)

International Development and Humanitarian Partners (IDHP)

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

International non-governmental organisations (INGOs)

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

Terms of reference (TORs)

Theory of Change (ToC)

United Kingdom (UK)

UK DFID (Department for International Development)

UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)

United Nations (UN)

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA)

United States (US)

Methodology note

This case study is one of three on the conflict sensitivity (CS) facilities in Libya, South Sudan, and Yemen that were produced between April and September 2021. Together with a smaller case study on a slightly different type of facility in Lebanon, the case studies accompany an overall Lessons Paper.[1] Collectively, the Lessons Paper and case studies contribute to a learning initiative for the Global Conflict Sensitivity Community Hub (CSC Hub).[2]

The authors also exchanged analysis and key points with a research team led by CSC Hub member International Alert, who were producing a lessons and design report in the same timeframe for the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to inform a new CS facility in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The South Sudan case study was based on a literature review and a small number of key informant interviews. The literature review included results frameworks, monitoring and evaluation materials, learning products, and briefing papers. Ten interviews were conducted, five of which were with current or former staff of the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF) or its implementing agencies. Five interviews were conducted with partners and donors (see Annex for full interview list). As the CSRF has a robust and participatory monitoring, evaluation, and learning system in place, the review relied on existing documentation rather than placing another burden on the CSRF's partners' and donors' time. In addition, comments were sought from the CSRF team on the draft of this case study.

Due to its longer running time (about five years) with comparatively significant resources, a lot of information and several learning products have already been produced and were drawn on for this case study.

[1] Conflict Sensitivity Community (CSC) Hub (October 2021), 'Supporting Conflict Sensitivity through Country-focused Facilities: Lessons from Libya, South Sudan, Yemen and Lebanon'.
[2] https://www.conflictsensitivityhub.net/

I. Origin and structure of the facility

Initial interest among donors and other aid actors

The South Sudan Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF)[3] was the outcome of several years of intra- and inter-organisational conversations and advocacy within the aid community in South Sudan about the need to strengthen the conflict sensitivity (CS) of aid in the country. Saferworld advocated for the idea of a conflict analysis facility in 2011-12 and co-facilitated (with a United Kingdom [UK] Conflict Adviser) a session on conflict analysis and CS for the UK's Department for International Development's (DFID) country office.[4] The USAID-funded VISTAS programme commissioned some conflict analysis and hosted meetings with the UK, the United States (US), and other donors on CS pre-2013.[5] International Alert conducted CS advisory work with the Netherlands government at the global level and had a parallel, more targeted agreement to support the Netherlands Embassy and its partners in South Sudan between 2014 and 2016. Most of the projects were already being implemented, so Alert's focus was on helping agencies strengthen their analysis, course correcting if necessary, and promoting peer learning between them. This work raised the Dutch government's interest in and understanding of CS, but they did not join the CSRF from the beginning. One respondent (not from the Dutch government) thought this may have been because the CSRF seemed too strongly UK-driven and therefore potentially too political to function well.

But the idea of the facility gained some urgency when renewed armed conflict broke out in South Sudan at the end of 2013, starkly illustrating the fragility of the country's political settlement. Some international actors expressed surprise at the resumption of conflict, having assumed that peacebuilding was 'done' once the country became independent in 2011.[6] The resumption of conflict seemed to spark political interest in some donor capitals to do things differently. The UK DFID head of office in South Sudan floated the idea of a facility like the CSRF, immediately supported by the Swiss head of office. However, it then took several years until the CSRF came into being, and other members of the International Development and Humanitarian Partners (IDHP) Group in South Sudan joined the initiative.

Early conversations to get other donors on board in a way that was truly multi-lateral were challenging, with many donors seeking a prominent, visible role for themselves and a 'success story' to share with their capitals. Several were unwilling or unable to delegate authority and work with the UK's financial and administrative systems (as the lead donor). One respondent suggested that it was a miracle that the CSRF came into being at all, given how difficult it was to unify the donor community behind an approach that would prioritise the CSRF's positioning and independence above their own visibility and needs and overcome resistance to administrative delegation. Yet, in the end, the donors who joined the initiative believed in the potential of the CSRF and worked hard to overcome challenges and bring the CSRF into being.

Design study

The UK DFID (now Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office [FCDO]) commissioned an independent study in early 2015 on behalf of the IDHP Group to research the need and propose a design for CS support to international aid actors. The study[7] recommended a two-tier mechanism:

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[3] https://www.csrf-southsudan.org/
[4] Author's direct experience.
[5] Interview, 1 June 2021.
[6] Author conversation in 2015 with Western donor official working on South Sudan.
[7] The study is not a public document, but its recommendations were largely taken up in the tender TORs. The authors were consultants who had done extensive work in the NGO and UN sector on peacebuilding and conflict sensitivity.

- **A Conflict Sensitivity Forum** that would agree shared principles, strategies, standards, and accountability measures at the policy and strategic level for participating governments and agencies. Members would be senior officials from engaged governments (ambassadors / country heads / head of development or humanitarian cooperation). The Forum would be voluntary, with no executive authority, and would act as advisory group to the CSRF; and
- **A Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility** that would support the implementation of CS at the programming and operational level. The four functions spelled out for this facility remained more or less the same for the CSRF in the subsequent pilot and implementation phases (see Section II below for a description of the functions).

Doing an initial design study before initiating the contracting process for the CSRF appears to have provided a space for the donors to discuss the idea in depth and develop it further before going to tender. This also made it easier for the CSRF to define its tasks – which is not the case for some of the new CS facilities (e.g. in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo), where the design is happening at the same time as the operationalisation of the facility.

Contracting/support modalities

The UK government funded the facility through a commercial tender, on behalf of the governments of the UK, the US, Germany, Switzerland, and Canada, who all intended to contribute financially.[8] In the end, the US and German governments did not proceed while the Netherlands joined in 2017. The terms of reference (TORs) for the tender followed the design report and foresaw that the Forum would engage other donors beyond those contributing directly, including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the European Union, Japan, and some United Nations (UN) agencies.[9] Participation in the Forum and the CSRF's services would be voluntary.[10] International donor agencies and governments and their implementing partners were stated in the TORs as the primary target audience for the CSRF's work, with "relevant South Sudanese stakeholders", including national and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), indicated as secondary target audiences.[11] However, the idea that the Forum should have some light measures for accountability on CS uptake among the donors was not included in the final TORs.

The commercial contract was awarded to a consortium of Saferworld (lead), swisspeace, and the CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, who implemented the CSRF for an initial pilot phase (28 months over 2016-2018), followed by another five-year implementation phase comprising Saferworld and swisspeace, with CDA and REACH named as possible sub-contractors (2019 to 2023).[12]

Implementation modalities

The CSRF was purposefully established as an independent entity to provide impartial advice and support, with each of the implementing consortium members leading on a particular work area[13] and all members collaborating on the outreach and convening activities. Together, the partners

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[8] UK Government (n.d.), 'Terms of reference for a service provider to implement a multi-donor conflict sensitivity programme', PO7638 ITT Volume 3, p. 2.

[9] UK Government (n.d.), 'Terms of reference for a service provider to implement a multi-donor conflict sensitivity programme', PO7638 ITT Volume 3, p 2, footnote 2.

[10] UK Government (n.d.), 'Terms of reference for a service provider to implement a multi-donor conflict sensitivity programme', PO7638 ITT Volume 3, p. 3.

[11] UK Government (n.d.), 'Terms of reference for a service provider to implement a multi-donor conflict sensitivity programme', PO7638 ITT Volume 3, p. 4.

[12] CSRF (2019), 'Strengthening Institutional Capability to Adopt Conflict-Sensitive Approaches: Five Lessons from the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility in South Sudan, 2016-2018', p. ii.

[13] Saferworld leads on capacity-building and institutional support; swisspeace leads on the research and learning agenda; initially CDA Collaborative Projects led on the learning and M&E work. This function was later taken up by a CSRF Learning Adviser base in Juba.

are responsible for the overall strategic direction of the CSRF, while Saferworld is responsible for overall contract and project management.

A dedicated CSRF team was recruited in Juba, with its own director and branding. A CSRF website[14] was created that explains the CSRF's services and includes a blog function, links to a Research Repository (see Section III), and some foundational CS tools and guidance. Initially, the team comprised three people, but expanded to seven full-time staff in Juba, with part-time contributions from a further five people.[15] Saferworld has hosted the CSRF due to its operational presence in South Sudan, but with a 'firewall' in management lines into Saferworld to avoid any potential or perceived conflict of interest. While this requires continuous and careful management, it has worked well to protect the CSRF's independence.

Given that collaborating with the CSRF is voluntary, the commitment of the original donor staff to support the CSRF's activities, introduce the CSRF team to senior managers within implementing partners, and encourage partners to work with the CSRF has been crucial. It has also made it important for the CSRF to develop carefully an impartial position and trusting relationships with partners and donors from the start.

The Forum was never established as envisaged, although there were later activities under the heading of a 'Better Aid Forum', with the intention of engaging a broader group of international actors on conflict-sensitive assistance in South Sudan (see Section III).

A Management Committee, made up of the contributing donors, was created that meets every six to eight weeks to discuss the CSRF's activities, to review reporting and work plans, and to discuss project adaptations proposed by the CSRF according to its adaptive management approach. They generally play a management rather than 'advisory' function, which has potentially helped reduce the risk that contributing donors may 'hijack' the CSRF for their own needs and agendas.[16]

Initially the donors were more specific in their own support needs from the CSRF and required much of the CSRF's time. However, as the facility became well-established and built up a good reputation, the CSRF was increasingly able to set its own agenda and engage with the aid system as a whole. This coincided with staff changes at the donors, while the CSRF team remained fairly consistent and partly became the repository of institutional and contextual learning for the donors. While being able to play a more independent, system-wide role is certainly seen as a positive, the support requests from the contributing donors have become more ad hoc and opportunities for the CSRF to support deeper institutional change may have reduced.[17]

Emerging lessons on the origin and structure of the facility

- It is unclear whether the preliminary work on conflict analysis and CS contributed directly to the birth of the CSRF. However, there was a relatively long lead-in time until a group of donors made the commitment to initiate a process for designing and funding the CSRF. The re-ignition of conflict and the active lobbying of particular individuals within the UK and Swiss governments appear to have triggered donor interest and eventual commitment to such a facility.
- The contracting process (design study, pilot phase) and the collaboration of several donors may have slowed down the process, but it also enabled some important conversations about conflict-sensitive aid and coordination in South Sudan.

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[14] https://www.csrf-southsudan.org/
[15] Initially: director, capacity-building coordinator, research coordinator; then expanded to: director, learning adviser, analysis and outreach manager, two capacity-building staff, research adviser, and project officer (in Juba); plus two part-time staff each in swisspeace and Saferworld headquarters and a part-time project officer with REACH in South Sudan. Interview, 26 May 2021.
[16] Interviews, 1 and 9 June 2021.
[17] Interview, 27 May 2021.

> - The CSRF was generally designed to focus – and remains focused – on the international aid system. Engagement with South Sudanese NGOs and other stakeholders was seen as secondary in the original TORs, although the CSRF in practice engaged with national NGOs as a direct target audience.
> - The CSRF was set up as an independent entity from the start, on the understanding that it cannot do its work efficiently if it is seen as being a mouthpiece for a particular donor or implementing agency. Nevertheless, the relationship with the supporting donors was initially closer to a 'service provider' model and developed into a more flexible model as time went by. This allowed the CSRF to engage more with the broader aid system and to flag and research issues that matter for the entire aid sector, while still being available for the particular support needs of the contributing donors.
> - A formal structure or 'Forum' for broader accountability of the donor community on CS was not pursued as originally proposed (but see Section III).

II.   Approach of the CSRF

Defining conflict sensitivity

CSRF staff acknowledge that CS can be interpreted and approached in different ways and at different levels. Notably, there is often a tension between those who treat CS as exclusively a technical endeavour – requiring clear 'technical' steps and tools, training, check lists, and policies – and those who see it as more informal and political. The CSRF regards the technical elements as important to help organisations strengthen their programming and institutional CS. But the CSRF also recognises that there is an informal, less structured side, which is about relationships, ongoing problem-solving, informal conversations about the context, and other unstructured and undocumented elements.

Formally, the CSRF uses a standard CS definition: "understanding the context in which you are operating, understanding the interaction between your engagement and the context, and taking action to avoid negative impacts and maximise positive impacts on conflict and stability."[18] It further recognises that in practice agencies position themselves on "a spectrum of ambition", from avoiding or mitigating the risks of doing harm to proactively contributing to peace.[19]

Moreover, the CSRF's approach to CS seems to be based on an understanding that the incentives and disincentives in the international aid system are not conducive to truly conflict-sensitive behaviour, as donor government agendas and perspectives heavily influence engagement with conflict-affected states, including South Sudan. This in turn necessitates that the CSRF targets its work at the programmatic and institutional levels, as well as influence the aid system as a whole.

While not made explicit in the foundational definitions of the CSRF's work, **gender sensitivity** is integrated as a core approach across activities, although this has also faced challenges. The CSRF continues to aim for equal representation of men and women in its activities and does training on CS and gender, but finds it difficult in particular to engage with South Sudanese women given the prevailing gender norms and systems of access to education and jobs in the aid sector for South Sudanese women. At the same time, the CSRF tries to go beyond gender sensitivity and support

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[18] CSRF (2019), 'Strengthening Institutional Capability to Adopt Conflict-sensitive Approaches: Five Lessons from the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility in South Sudan, 2016-2018', p. 4.
[19] CSRF (2019), 'Strengthening Institutional Capability to Adopt Conflict-sensitive Approaches: Five Lessons from the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility in South Sudan, 2016-2018', p. 1 and 4.

partners to challenge gender norms that facilitate conflict and violence in their analysis and programming. This work is challenging and a continuing area of reflection and learning.

In its engagement with aid agencies in South Sudan, the CSRF's impression is also that the context is so complex and aid agencies are navigating such sensitive spaces (including on ethnic identity, security threats, etc), that integrating gender in a meaningful way is difficult for most of them.

Overall intended impact, outcomes, and Theory of Change

Articulating what it intends to achieve, the CSRF states its ultimate intended impact as: *"More effective development and humanitarian assistance is provided to South Sudan"*;[20] and its envisaged overall outcome (towards this impact) as: *"Aid initiatives in South Sudan are adapted in significant and measurable ways so as to avoid causing or exacerbating conflict, instead contributing to peace whenever possible"*.[21] The underpinning Theory of Change (ToC) for the CSRF programme is contained in Box 1.

Box 1: CSRF Theory of Change

IF
   a) the CSRF can help **improve the skills** on conflict analysis and conflict sensitivity of individual aid workers and the capability of organisations in South Sudan to allow for deeper understanding and **integration** of local conflict and power dynamics **into their management systems and decision making**; AND
   b) the CSRF can **improve** aid workers' and organisations' **access to and usage of information** about conflict power dynamics in South Sudan to inform decision-making; AND
   c) the CSRF can **strengthen relationships** between aid workers, organisations, and other stakeholders in the aid system to stimulate interest, shared understanding, and collective action to promote the uptake of conflict-sensitive approaches in South Sudan; AND
   d) the CSRF donors support the **project's ability to adopt organisational practices** that promote ongoing reflection and adaptation, and identify and share entry points for CSRF to pursue emerging opportunities for change,

THEN
   e) aid workers, donors, and implementing agencies **will change their attitudes, behaviours, relationships, and policies** in ways that mitigate the risk of deepening drivers of violent conflict and increase the likelihood of making positive contributions towards peace in South Sudan,

BECAUSE
   f) the large scale and long duration of international aid means it has played, and continues to play, a significant role in shaping the conflict, politics, economy, and culture of South Sudan at different levels; AND
   g) a high turnover of senior organisational decisionmakers (international) lead to a lack of awareness or relevant information, weak organisational capability, and inter-organisational fragmentation in the aid system that are obstacles to turning knowledge and analysis into understanding, and subsequently, into practice.[22]

(Author's emphasis)

Interestingly, the ToC includes a focus (in component d) on the CSRF itself to be adaptive and prioritise learning, and for its donors to enable this. It further identifies the types of changes sought as change in attitudes, behaviours, relationships, and policies, and reflects this categorisation in its outcome harvesting and other Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practices (see Section III).

Focus areas of work

In operationalising the CSRF's ToC, the work has centred on four areas, currently framed as:[23]

- Institutional support and capacity-building (training, guidance, accompaniment);
- Knowledge generation (research and analysis);
- Outreach and convening (for shared understanding and relationships that stimulate collective action); and
- Management and learning for the CSRF (project-focused M&E, peer learning).

Overall, these areas have broadly been consistent from the design study through the pilot phase and into the current implementation phase, which suggests that the logic has been validated. The outreach and convening component evolved from a narrower conception of disseminating research and analysis to a more proactive role in building connections between organisations and people and catalysing cultural shifts. There has also been a change to the management and learning function, which since the start of the implementation phase has been led by a Juba-based CSRF learning adviser. The adviser supports the rest of the team on day-to-day M&E and facilitates a learning culture across the CSRF's work strands. Externally, the adviser also supports aid actors on peer and other collective learning activities on conflict-sensitive practice, with a view to stimulate change in the overall aid sector.[24]

Outside of the CSRF's direct activities, the intended Forum was never established by the contributing donors. The CSRF supported the contributing donors to formulate principles for engagement in South Sudan, but these went through a number of revisions and discussions about their aims and were ultimately dropped. Some respondents suggested that the principles were too general to be meaningful – while no agreement could be reached for them to be more specific given each donor's particular agenda, risk appetite, and organisational systems in South Sudan.[25] Recent experience on a set of common humanitarian principles for aid in South Sudan (outside of the CSRF's work) was that it took significant time and investment for these to be signed off at the headquarter level, illustrating how difficult it can be to get donors to agree on common principles.

Adaptive management

The CSRF and its donors acknowledge that efficient CS support requires a high degree of flexibility and adaptive management to deal with the volatility of the South Sudan context as well as the specificity of the relevant partners.[26]

Yet the commercial contract format for the CSRF's funding normally requires setting out and costing milestones in advance for the duration of the contract. To ensure that adaptive management is built into the contracting arrangement, the CSRF and the UK, with the other donors, agreed the value of the milestones for the entire five years of the current implementation

[23] CSRF (unpublished), 'Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF) Results Framework', version last updated in Quarter 8 (December 2020).

[24] Interview, 27 May 2021.

[25] Interviews, 1 and 9 June 2021.

[26] CSRF (September 2020), 'Learning Note: Lessons from CSRF's adaptation to COVID-19'.

phase; but the specific deliverables (at the outputs/activity level) for each milestone are agreed on a quarterly basis with the Management Committee.[27] Generally, this has worked well and has reduced additional reprogramming and re-budgeting work to revise activities.[28]

The CSRF therefore uses a results framework with high-level outcomes / milestones that remain relevant despite changes in the context and quarterly results targets and milestones that mirror each other and focus more on the activity / output level.[29] The results framework includes 'progress markers' towards the respective outcomes as a way to capture changes in each of the three areas targeted by the CSRF: i) improved individual and organisational capability; ii) improved access to and usage of information; and iii) strengthened relationships and collective action. In addition, the results framework also tracks adaptive management and learning practices.[30]

This adaptive approach became even more crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic. The CSRF adapted activities by moving trainings online and adding a new course on COVID-19 and CS and by providing financial assistance and remote advisory support to national NGOs who would otherwise have received in-person CS mentoring.[31] However, there were challenges too; for instance, CSRF staff attended more inter-agency meetings as these became more accessible online, but the additional activities and adaptations significantly increased the team's workload.[32] The CSRF also found that while they could engage more people within and outside South Sudan with the online format, the ability of some national actors to participate was undermined due to inadequate internet access; and while more participants enrolled for the online courses, the actual attendance rate per course reduced.[33]

Crucial to this ongoing flexibility has been the willingness of the donors to be not only flexible and adaptive (e.g. in formulating the milestones) but also supportive to the CSRF's way of working, listening to concerns, and making decisions that enable the CSRF to try out innovative ideas (and sometimes failing) and to make context-relevant adjustments to project activities.[34]

Multi-stakeholder approach
The CSRF is **multi-stakeholder** in three respects. First, it was initiated and funded by a group of three, then four, **donor governments** (UK, Canada, Switzerland, and the Netherlands). This has provided some continuity, although key staff have changed, and also increased the credibility of the CSRF as not representing the views and aims of one donor.[35] As mentioned, a perception of UK dominance may have influenced the Netherlands government's decision not to join the CSRF from the start. However, once they joined and the support from International Alert had ended, they found it helpful to progress from awareness-raising to operationalising their CS commitments.

Generally, binding the donors together under the UK's lead is seen to have worked well, and even to have 'forced' the collaborating donors to be more streamlined in their aims, potentially creating a space for strategic conversations that may not otherwise have taken place. Donors further had

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[27] CSRF (September 2020), 'Learning Note: Lessons from CSRF's adaptation to COVID-19'.
[28] One small contract change was necessary to enable financial support to national NGO partners to implement CS and positive COVID-19 messaging, CSRF (September 2020), 'Learning Note: Lessons from CSRF's adaptation to COVID-19'.
[29] CSRF (September 2020), 'Learning Note: Lessons from CSRF's adaptation to COVID-19'; CSRF (unpublished), 'Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF) Results Framework', version last updated in Quarter 8 (December 2020).
[30] CSRF (unpublished), 'Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF) Results Framework', version last updated in Quarter 8 (December 2020).
[31] CSRF (September 2020), 'Learning Note: Lessons from CSRF's adaptation to COVID-19'.
[32] CSRF (September 2020), 'Learning Note: Lessons from CSRF's adaptation to COVID-19'.
[33] CSRF (n.d.), 'Year 2 – Summary of emerging lessons', CSRF, p. 1, 3.
[34] CSRF (September 2020), 'Learning Note: Lessons from CSRF's adaptation to COVID-19'.
[35] CSRF (2019), 'Strengthening Institutional Capability to Adopt Conflict-sensitive Approaches: Five Lessons from the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility in South Sudan, 2016-2018', p. 11.

to engage with each other's systems in order to transfer the funds to the UK as the lead contracting agency – which has had its challenges and may have contributed to some donors like the World Bank and USAID not joining the CSRF funders group. The FCDO is the largest among the current CSRF donors and has had a bigger team of people engaging. Despite the difference in size and resources among the donors, the UK is credited with managing the relationship with other donors well.

Importantly, donor respondents felt the multi-donor character of the funding was not only an opportunity for better coordinated aid among them but also reduced the risk that one donor would unilaterally cut its funding when its priorities changed. Although no respondents made the connection, this may have played a role in the UK's decision to reduce, instead of completely remove, its funding support to the CSRF when major aid cuts were made in the UK in 2020/2021.

From the CSRF's perspective, engaging with the donors as a group vastly simplifies project management and reporting, and further administrative complications are avoided by new donors joining the existing arrangements. A productive relationship has developed with the donors – with some like the Swiss Embassy playing a strong role in hosting events and catalysing important conversations with other international actors. The donor group was, overall, seen as being supportive and actively helpful in encouraging partners to work with the CSRF.[36]

Second, the CSRF is multi-stakeholder in its implementation by an **INGO consortium**. Those interviewed saw this partnership as adding value, because staff from Saferworld, swisspeace, and (for the pilot phase) CDA brought complementary skills and experiences, including from the academic, peacebuilding, and CS and humanitarian spheres. The partners forged a strong common vision from the start (including through an in-person, co-design meeting of the facility for the initial tender) and established positive working relationships. There is also a sense that Saferworld hosting the CSRF in South Sudan from the start was crucial to getting up and running so quickly, providing better value for money than establishing the CSRF as a stand-alone institution in the country.[37]

Third, those involved in CSRF activities are from **multiple stakeholder audiences**. For instance, the capacity-building component targets participants from donor governments, international and UN agencies, INGOs, and national NGOs. In-depth support has been provided to the contributing donors (UK, Switzerland, Netherlands, and Canada), their implementing partners (including, for instance, the International Organization for Migration and World Food Programme), and to national NGOs through the mentorship programme. For instance, during the pilot phase, more than 15 donor and implementing organisations received support from the CSRF, alongside 10 national NGOs.[38] The outreach and dissemination events reached beyond the direct targets of the CSRF to include representatives from the broader aid community in South Sudan.[39]

Engaging with such different constituencies has the potential to create wider impact across the aid system and to move towards a shared understanding of CS issues and dilemmas, as well as collective and more conflict-sensitive action. In its lessons paper reflecting on the pilot phase, the CSRF highlighted two particular lessons that seem to support this:[40]

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[36] Interviews, 26 May and 1 June 2021.
[37] Interviews, 26 and 27 May and 6 June 2021.
[38] CSRF (2019), 'Strengthening Institutional Capability to Adopt Conflict-sensitive Approaches: Five Lessons from the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility in South Sudan, 2016-2018', p. 11.
[39] CSRF (2019), 'Strengthening Institutional Capability to Adopt Conflict-sensitive Approaches: Five Lessons from the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility in South Sudan, 2016-2018', p. 11.
[40] CSRF (2019), 'Strengthening Institutional Capability to Adopt Conflict-sensitive Approaches: Five Lessons from the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility in South Sudan, 2016-2018', p. i-ii.

- Delivering training at scale can help create a shared vocabulary and understanding of the issues and create a community of practice; and
- Change at the system level requires work between organisations to promote coordination, broker relationships, and build trust.

Emerging lessons on the approach of the CSRF

- The CSRF recognises that conflict-sensitive aid requires changes on a number of fronts, including: context knowledge; the ability of staff and partners to use the context knowledge to adapt how they work; and a conducive organisational environment for conflict-sensitive practice. In addition, the CSRF emphasises relationships and collective action to translate individual and organisational change into systemic change.
- Its focus areas of work have remained more or less consistent from the design study through the pilot and into implementation phase – suggesting the logic of this approach has been validated.
- The CSRF is able to respond flexibly to the needs of its partners and the context thanks to its adaptive management approach, the foregrounding of learning (an explicit element in the ToC), and the willingness of its donors to use a normally restrictive contracting modality in a flexible way (i.e. agreeing overall outcomes for the duration of the contract, but with specific targets agreed quarterly).
- Having multiple donors supporting the CSRF helps it retain some measure of independence, while facilitating collaboration among the donor group and tying them into a multi-actor commitment.
- The original idea of an accountability mechanism for the donors was dropped, and efforts to agree CS principles floundered. This underlines the difficulty of achieving policy coherence and effective CS practices across donor institutions and the importance of the CSRF to engage at the strategic / policy level as well as the programmatic / operational level.
- The implementing consortium for the CSRF each bring particular skills, resources, and relationships, and this has worked well in delivering such a complex suite of activities and services.
- Engaging with a range of international actors, and connecting with national actors, has allowed the CSRF to grow into a trusted analyst and facilitator of conversations about key issues arising in the context. However, there are questions about how best to sustain the services it provides with the potential future absence of donors willing to fund such a mechanism as a project (see also Section IV below on sustainability).

III.   Evolution and changes to which the facility has contributed

The CSRF's work has evolved over the last five years across its focus areas (each dealt with separately below), with significant changes as well as challenges and dilemmas emerging.

Focus area 1. Knowledge generation: Improving access to and usage of information

Understanding the context is the foundation for any conflict-sensitive work, and this is particularly challenging for international aid workers who are not from South Sudan and have short tenures in country. While some agencies have in-house skills and capacity for conflict analysis in South Sudan, many do not and expect this as a core service from the CSRF. However, given South Sudan's and Sudan's long history of international aid, much analysis and research already exist and continue to be produced. The complexity and volatility of the context also means that producing and regularly updating conflict analysis could easily take up all of the CSRF's resources, while still not producing granular knowledge and access for every specific sub-national context. The CSRF is

therefore seen as better placed to facilitate collective discussions and disseminate analysis and research to donors and other aid agencies than to produce it all itself.

The CSRF structures its research and analysis work as follows:

- A **Research Repository**[41] that pulls together existing materials and hosts new CSRF and other related research and analysis pieces.
- **New pieces of research on specific themes** that are particularly relevant to the dynamics in South Sudan (e.g. on how local-level violence and nationwide political economy dynamics are connected).
- **Conflict analysis with/for partners** for the purpose of informing their work on a specific project or area.
- **Blogs** on the CSRF website to challenge the aid community on topical issues.
- **Fact sheets** (in the style of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA] country updates) that provide quarterly information from key informant surveys conducted by CSRF partner, REACH, on current and future conflict trends.
- **Outreach on and dissemination of** research and analysis findings, including a regular newsletter and in-person / online outreach events (see Focus area 3, below).

While the first three areas of work were developed during the pilot phase, the rest (blogs, fact sheets) were added later as the team and its outreach role expanded. This approach has enabled the facility to produce operationally relevant research and avoid duplicating existing work. It has also been useful to do objective research pieces on some of the more sensitive topics and then use these papers as the basis for discussion among agencies. Blogs have served to articulate further analysis or provide a platform for other organisations to disseminate their lessons and reflections.

The research agenda has been led by a senior researcher from swisspeace, working with a research coordinator/adviser in the CSRF team in Juba and hiring specific topic experts (international and South Sudanese) for each product.

The research and analysis products are widely seen as useful,[42] as evidenced by the interest of several international agencies for the CSRF to provide individual, bespoke analysis and research. The CSRF, however, only conducts research when the topic is of interest to more than one agency and can be shared more widely, so as to continue its focus on broader collective change and avoid becoming a research consultancy.[43] The team has also been responsive in the research and knowledge generation function; for instance, for a few months in 2020, one staff member switched to spending part of their time on producing a weekly newsletter on conflict-sensitive COVID responses, working with an external consultant. This was stopped when it was no longer needed.[44]

One challenge has been how best to make sure that the analysis actually informs policies, programming, and decision-making. Not only has the CSRF used the outreach activities to make sure the findings are disseminated but it has also done targeted work with specific partners on a particular theme, project, or geographical area. The CSRF has experience of doing this analysis for an agency and then handing it over, as well as working with a donor government in doing the analysis together. The team's feedback was that doing the analysis together opened many more opportunities for influencing and increased the likelihood that the analysis would be used.

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[41] https://www.csrf-southsudan.org/repository/
[42] Mentioned in several CSRF M&E documents as well as by interviewees with CSRF's donors and partners.
[43] Interviews, 26 May 2021 and 18 June 2021.
[44] Interview, 26 May 2021.

At times, the ability of the CSRF to gather information from across the country has led to requests from donors to collect information that could be seen by others as intelligence-gathering; the CSRF has pushed back on such requests to protect their trusted and transparent positioning.

Emerging lessons and dilemmas on knowledge generation
- Good quality applied research is valuable for agencies to use in their programming and strategic decisions. However, doing analysis on demand for individual agencies could take up most or all of the CSRF's time, while not necessarily leading to any change (especially if done *for* rather than *with* agencies). Research and analysis with broader relevance for several agencies has been useful to facilitate collective reflection and action.
- Paid research and analysis services could potentially be one avenue to fund such a mechanism in future, but could compromise the CSRF's independence and its ability to flag important and often sensitive issues to the aid community. It could also create perception challenges regarding the independence of the CSRF's research.

Focus area 2. Institutional support and capacity-building: Improving individual and organisational capacity

The needs under this focus area were originally steered to a large extent by the CSRF's donors, who focused on strengthening CS in their own spheres of influence. The UK and the Netherlands were particularly focused on their own supply chains and partners being more conflict sensitive, which led to the CSRF designing some detailed technical support programmes and activities with partners and sometimes the DFID/FCDO team in country. Switzerland was more interested in reflection on their strategy, internal culture, and ways of working, which meant more of a reflective accompaniment relationship with the CSRF.[45]

The CSRF has offered individually focused activities like trainings and sessions to explain the context to new aid workers (that remain popular given rapid turnover of international staff). Other training activities focused on the basic concepts of and steps for conflict-sensitive programming and M&E (including conflict analysis), and later targeted courses were added on applying CS to specific functional areas (e.g. procurement) and gender. CSRF's and the donors' monitoring show that activities like the training sessions on CS and conflict analysis have increased knowledge and skills among individual participants and helped contribute to attitudinal and, in many cases, eventual behavioural change (see Box 2).

Box 2: Reported changes to which CSRF activities contributed

Through open training:
- An increase in demand for and attendance in the CSRF's training and orientation sessions, including virtual orientations on COVID-19 and CS, indicating an aid worker constituency with an increased awareness of the need for CS, as evidenced during the onset of the COVID crisis.
- Changing the CSRF's support to national NGOs during the COVID-19 crisis, to provide technical assistance and funding for conflict-sensitive COVID awareness and outreach activities, which contributed to seven NGOs deciding to target marginalised communities in their activities and countering divisive messaging and perceptions.

Through institutional support:
- One donor changing its own strategy after CS support and reflection with the CSRF, requiring its implementing partners to integrate CS in all project design, which led to

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[45] Interviews, 27 May 2021.

> more requests to the CSRF to help partners integrate CS, while donor staff used CS as part of their assessment of which projects to fund.
> - A large multi-lateral agency working with the CSRF to adapt significantly the design and roll-out of new projects to be more conflict-sensitive, grappling with the risks of governance actors' manipulation of the new resources; and eventually integrating elements of the action plan they developed on CS with the CSRF into their own performance plan (thus going from a project-focused change in behaviour to a more policy-focused change).

In parallel, the CSRF engages in institutional change, so that individual learning can translate into improved organisational practice. The initial target audience for the CSRF's institutional support was implementing partners that were selected by the CSRF donors – although their engagement remained voluntary. This approach is sometimes challenging, when partners are not interested in the support or nervous of the reputational risks it may entail for them if the CSRF were to 'report' on their challenges to the donors. For agencies nominated by their donors, the CSRF has had to develop a careful relationship-building approach, which has included working with TORs rather than a Memorandum of Understanding with partners, in order to avoid getting entangled in legal discussions.[46] Another important evolution has been that the CSRF started launching a public call for expressions of interest for partners, rather than relying on nominations by the donors. This has meant agencies that are already interested and ready to engage are applying, which creates a more constructive partnership dynamic.

The initial institutional support methodology of the CSRF started with an 'institutional assessment' as a way to establish which conflict-sensitive practices were already in place and where the challenges and opportunities were for improving on this. But this assessment was experienced by some partners as a type of evaluation and created mistrust in the CSRF and the process. This element therefore evolved into a process of consulting with potential partners on what problem-solving support they would like from the CSRF. For one partner, after a difficult start, this change in process was very successful: the partner became a champion for the CSRF and its work in South Sudan (see Box 2 for more examples of changes achieved through the institutional support work).

On the institutional change processes, some valuable lessons have emerged. The presence of internal 'CS change agents' (for instance, conflict advisers or other staff with relevant interests) seems to be one potential success factor. These individuals often benefited from the CSRF engagement as it provided an opportunity to bring the CS agenda to the fore organisationally. However, even with internal allies, the CSRF still needs to assess which agencies are ready to receive its support, and what the best strategy may be to support internal change (with whom, at what level – field office, country office, headquarters). Access to organisational leadership was also sometimes a challenge and, on a few occasions, the CSRF's donors helped facilitate the initial contact.

High turnover of staff – a structural working condition for international aid staff in South Sudan – further undermines the potential for sustainable institutional change, which rests as much on the commitment of agency staff and institutional memory as it does on policies or guidance documents.

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[46] One INGO backed out of an institutional Memorandum of Understanding because of legal worries if sensitive information was shared with donors or partners; CSRF (n.d.), 'Year 2 – Summary of Emerging Lessons', CSRF, p. 3.

The CSRF's provision of mentoring support to national NGOs in particular helped to identify institutional challenges, such as how their operations, logistics, and human resources policies may be leading to conflict-*in*sensitivity.[47] Even though the CSRF was able to allocate some resources to these NGOs during the COVID-19 crisis, this type of change really needs longer-term support.

One common institutional challenge that emerged across agencies was around the sensitivities involved in, and importance of, policies and processes that ensure appropriate diversity of ethnicity and gender among staff and partners. Standard practice of recruitment that is solely merit-based has led to many international agencies having a staff body dominated by people from the southern regions and ethnic groups of South Sudan, as they have had greater educational opportunities as refugees in neighbouring countries. This skews the internal analysis of the organisation and has contributed to perceptions of ethnic bias.

Another challenge is that the CSRF's support could potentially remove the incentive for a donor government or other agency to create in-house capacity for CS. For instance, the CSRF is regularly asked to provide rapid analysis to humanitarian agencies for developing emergency responses. However, this 'substitution role' could undermine the ownership of the analysis[48] as well as sustainable organisational change to strengthen internal CS capacities and take up conflict analysis as a standard institutional practice.

The CSRF also experienced an increase in requests for ad hoc support from a range of actors over the 2019-2020 timeframe, including from INGOs, national NGOs, UN agencies, and multilateral and bilateral donor actors (for instance, during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CSRF received between 20 and 30 such requests). While this shows a positive increase in awareness and interest in conflict-sensitive ways of working, it also risks the CSRF spending more time on ad hoc requests rather than in-depth institutional change processes.

One important lesson from the CSRF's work in this area is that it has to stay relevant. This means keeping track of the issues that most affect the aid community; staying in touch with cluster leads who are abreast of the discussions; and adopting a practical, pragmatic, problem-solving approach. For instance, some of the most impactful work, according to some CSRF staff, came from being able to help groups of aid agencies think through practical dilemmas they face (e.g. around local leaders' attempts to manipulate aid).

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Emerging lessons on institutional support and capacity-building

- Conducting training and capacity-building that target individuals can be one element of broader institutional change, while also creating a shared vocabulary across the aid community to discuss CS.
- There is ongoing need for introductions to the South Sudanese context and conflict issues due to quick turnover of international staff across agencies.
- Providing institutional support on CS is a sensitive process that requires partners to trust that it is a 'safe space' and that they would not be penalised by their donors for admitting to dilemmas, problems, or mistakes.
- There are a few elements that seem to support institutional change towards CS practice. These include: internal change agents with a supportive (or at least not blocking) internal environment, leadership support, and a strategy to identify and engage with the right people and entry points to make change happen.
- Some elements could undermine institutional change towards CS practice, including high turnover of staff (and accompanying loss of institutional memory) and blanket

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[47] CSRF (n.d.), 'Year 2 – Summary of Emerging Lessons', CSRF, p. 3.
[48] CSRF (n.d.), 'Year 2 – Summary of Emerging Lessons', CSRF, p. 3.

> policies that have a conflict-insensitive outcome in the South Sudanese context (e.g. recruitment policies that result in overrepresentation of certain identity groups).
> - It can be difficult to find the right balance between the CSRF providing agencies with what they need (e.g. conflict analysis, ad hoc advice) and working with the agencies to do this themselves, to increase internal ownership and build their own capacities.
> - The CSRF has been most appreciated when it stays relevant (e.g. keeping track of key issues of concern for the aid community) and pragmatic (e.g. helping brainstorm or problem-solve on day-to-day dilemmas of aid delivery).

Focus area 3. Outreach and convening: Strengthening relationships and supporting collective action and learning

While change towards more CS practice at the individual and organisational level is important, ultimately, the overall aid system generates incentives and pressures that may undermine conflict-sensitive efforts at other levels. The CSRF's work on knowledge generation, capacity-building and institutional change, and learning and reflection aim to 'add up' to facilitating system-level change.

The CSRF brings its work together by convening contributing donors and broader constituencies of international and local actors around specific research and analysis topics and issues. Sharing this type of analysis across aid agencies remains challenging, as reports are not shared for reasons of institutional or political sensitivity, lack of reciprocity, concerns about quality, and intellectual property of the work. This undermines opportunities for effective collective action and places a much larger burden of (repeated) information-extraction on local stakeholders and communities.[49]

The CSRF therefore sees its role as facilitating such sharing and collective reflection, and it has been helped in this by the Swiss country delegation in South Sudan. This built on the Swiss delegation's pre-existing commitment to have an 'open space' in its compound in Juba where anybody would be welcome, and where sensitive conversations could be had while modelling the importance of dialogue (as opposed to violent solutions to political problems). This active convening role and the availability of the physical space strongly contributed to facilitating conversations among not only aid community members but also with and among South Sudanese civil society and other actors.[50] In the COVID-19 context, this physical space has been less significant due to restrictions on gatherings. It remains to be seen whether in-person meetings could again play this role in future.

One important change to which the CSRF has contributed in this systemic influencing role is to reframe the aid community's understanding of 'inter-communal violence' – long regarded and responded to as 'local-level' conflict. Research produced by the World Food Programme, a CSRF partner, highlighted how these conflicts were often in fact one layer of multi-layered conflicts that often have an anchor in national level political and conflict dynamics. UN OCHA then requested the CSRF to convene discussions on the implications of the findings of this research for programmes and operations in South Sudan. This reframing has now been broadly accepted, illustrating the potential catalytical effect of the CSRF working with other organisations.

The CSRF has also proactively created spaces for reflection and discussion of CS issues within and between organisations and agencies. An external review found that this created a common vocabulary for aid staff from international and national organisations to speak about the

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[49] CSRF (n.d.), 'Year 2 – Summary of Emerging Lessons', CSRF, p. 2.
[50] Interviews, 1 June and 6 July 2021.

challenges and opportunities. It also concluded that the combination of the CSRF's analysis, capacity-building, institutional accompaniment, and policy dialogue activities reinforce each other well. No single 'pathway for change' could be identified; rather, the review and the conclusions from the CSRF's own M&E and learning found that change happened organically, across work areas, iteratively, and sometimes in ways that are unexpected.

It could be said, however, that policy- and project-level changes have been mutually reinforcing, with policy and normative CS commitments creating the enabling environment for more conflict-sensitive practices at project and programme level; and projects illustrating or allowing experimentation for putting into practice policy and normative CS commitments.

In the same vein, changes in individual behaviour (or the presence of individual champions for CS) contribute to changes in organisational practices, and an enabling organisational environment creates space and incentive for individual behaviour that is more conflict sensitive.

During the COVID-19 response, the CSRF also targeted coordination mechanisms to ensure CS is taken up across the board; for instance, UN OCHA integrated CS considerations in its COVID response planning.

However, it remains challenging for the CSRF to impact the aid system as a whole in South Sudan, given the complexity of the system and the fact that change cannot be measured in a linear fashion. Furthermore, individual agencies that behave in a conflict-blind way could undermine everything that others are trying to achieve.

One review therefore concludes that additional mechanisms, notably at the level of donors and international agencies, are needed to reinforce and hold each other accountable for CS practice. Yet while such mechanisms were envisaged in the original CSRF design in the form of the Conflict Sensitivity Forum (see above), this did not materialise in the end. There was an attempt to write some CS principles for aid in South Sudan, but after several drafts, this was quietly dropped and later replaced by a commitment to strengthen learning and coordination between donors. Respondents ascribed this to several factors:

- It was difficult to get agreement on what the purpose of the principles would be;
- In order to come to principles that everybody was happy to sign up to, they became so broad and general that they lost their value.

The CSRF also produced a paper comparing approaches, standards, and principles between the contributing donors and facilitated a peer learning conversation between them on this basis. It has been positively received and donors have expressed interest in continuing these conversations focusing on learning and exchanging good practices and tips, rather than discussing accountability measures for donors.[51] Several respondents (including from donor agencies) suggested that the aid system incentivises career promotion and looking good in aid capitals, which makes such an accountability system too risky. Changing the system is therefore challenging when the incentives push people and institutions in a different direction.

To try and address this gap, despite the challenges, in mid-2019 the CSRF initiated the Better Aid Forum (BAF) to facilitate a conversation with donors, researchers, and civil society representatives (including students) on aid in South Sudan. It started from the premise that after 30 years of aid, the country still faced enormous challenges, and asked what the vision is for the next 30 years of aid. The aim was to get out of the short-term 'crisis' thinking and design a long-term engagement

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[51] Interview, 27 May 2021.

with South Sudan that transforms some of the long-standing conflict- and crisis-generating dynamics.

Alongside the Forum discussions, the CSRF also produced an internal paper that highlights five challenges of providing aid in South Sudan where donors could lead in changing the aid *system* – rather than expecting implementing agencies to overcome these challenges individually. One of the recommendations is, for instance, that donors operationalise their commitments to 'value for money' and 'aid efficiency' in a way that allows implementers sufficient staff and resources to engage with communities, reflect, and learn from their work – instead of cutting budgets to the bone in the name of financial efficiency, but to the detriment of quality programming.[52]

While the 2019 BAF events and discussions were useful in identifying the blind spots of aid responses in South Sudan, it is not yet clear what other impacts resulted from this work. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic shifted the attention back to short-term crisis response and the CSRF reframed the BAF conversation for 2020-21 around "aid in a time of transition", to connect with the humanitarian response. Some within the CSRF team were also concerned about getting drawn into more political regional discussions of the South Sudan conflict (an envisaged component of the BAF), feeling that this would put CSRF staff at increased risk and draw the CSRF into doing political analysis that is already done by others like the embassies and the UN mission's Joint Mission Analysis Centre.[53] An informal space has been maintained – flowing from the BAF discussions – for donors to discuss pertinent topics like aid and COVID, and disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration and returns. This space is reported as useful for new staff and for the opportunities to expose donor staff to people with long-term experience in South Sudan.[54]

The CSRF used the move to online meetings as an opportunity to expand its participation in coordination and UN cluster system groups during the COVID-19 response, thus focusing on the collective spaces in the humanitarian system as an avenue for promoting CS practice. The CSRF's December 2020 outcome harvesting captures two particular examples of change in collective spaces, relating to two working groups respectively strengthening their collective conflict analysis and coordinated action and adopting common positions and advocacy considerations into their work.[55]

This shift to the more collective and systemic level was partly made possible by the CSRF's donors increasingly trusting it to set its own agenda, alongside ongoing bilateral support to the donors and their partners. The CSRF could then play a stronger role in flagging issues that affect aid agencies across the board. In addition, the CSRF's reputation had started translating into trust in its analysis and work, which made it the repository of a lot of learning and knowledge in a context of frequent donor staff turnover. The trade-off of this evolution in the relationship between the CSRF and its donors is that some of the donors perhaps became less engaged in directly supporting CSRF activities and outreach[56] or in their own internal change.

However, many of the significant challenges to conflict-sensitive international aid policies and decisions lie at the political level of the donor countries. There are different opinions about whether this is something the CSRF should and could influence. Respondents from both the CSRF staff and donors felt that the facility was producing all the right analysis and raising the alarm on

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[52] CSRF (unpublished), 'Fixing the Blueprints: Donors as the Architects of the Aid System'.
[53] Interview, 26 May 2021.
[54] Interview, 27 May 2021.
[55] The Conflict Dynamics Working Group and the Informal Returns Advocacy Working Group; CSRF, 'Summary of Outcomes', v6, updated 20/01/2021.
[56] Interview, 27 May 2021.

key issues, but that it then had to rely on allies within the donor government agencies to take this forward internally. Given its careful positioning, the CSRF was not seen as best-placed to influence upstream decision-making through, for instance, donor capital advocacy.[57] It has, however, shared its learning in other fora outside of South Sudan, such as the CSC Hub.

Emerging lessons on outreach and convening

- Systemic change is needed to make sure that change at other levels (individual and organisational) can be sustained and not undermined by conflict-insensitive incentives in the broader system. But this is difficult for the CSRF to achieve as it is challenging to work across all sectors and influence some of the political decisions that determine in-country donor priorities.
- The CSRF can and does play an important role in facilitating collective sharing of knowledge, reflection, and discussion of CS dilemmas for aid delivery in South Sudan. Partnering with the Swiss government, in particular, has been valuable for its well-respected convening role – although less relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- While there has been little appetite from the donors for accountability-focused initiatives, spaces for peer learning and critical reflection have been appreciated.

Measuring change

Measuring how the CSRF contributes to change is a challenging task, since the change is not linear and data can be difficult to obtain and requires a lot of time from the CSRF's partners. The CSRF has designed its M&E around measuring progress in three outcome areas (see Box 3). As intermediate outcomes to pinpoint what sort of changes are being observed, the CSRF designs its activities to deliver and measures changes in attitudes, behaviours, relationships, and policies. It then monitors progress through outcome harvesting.

Box 3: Measuring progress[58]

The CSRF's overall envisaged outcome is: *"Aid initiatives in South Sudan are adapted in significant and measurable ways so as to avoid causing or exacerbating conflict, instead contributing to peace whenever possible."*[59]

Progress towards this overall outcome is measured in *three outcome areas* that relate to:
- organisations institutionalising CS in their strategy and organisational documents;
- inter-agency strategies and guiding documents incorporating CS commitments and principles; and
- case studies that provide evidence of CSRF's contribution towards the adaptation of aid initiatives and mitigated conflict, or greater peace.

The CSRF will continue to review the appropriateness of these outcome areas as indicative of broader changes achieved.

An external review found that while the causal relationships between the different types of changes may not be clear, the combination of changes in attitudes, behaviours, relationships, and

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[57] Interviews, 26 June 2021 and 7 July 2021.
[58] CSRF (unpublished), 'Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF) Results Framework', version last updated in Quarter 8 (December 2020), p.1.
[59] For the current five-year implementation phase; CSRF (unpublished), 'Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF) Results Framework', version last updated in Quarter 8 (December 2020), p.1.

policies appear to create an enabling environment where the changes become mutually reinforcing.

From the CSRF's outcome harvesting, changes in attitudes, behaviours, and policies were recorded across quarters, albeit with some categories of change being more numerous than others and with them being ranked at different levels of importance.[60]

There is also a sense from CSRF staff that agencies on the whole have changed their positioning on the CS spectrum from focusing on avoiding or mitigating doing harm, to contributing to peace. For instance, some of the humanitarian agencies who have partnered with the CSRF changed the framing of their ambitions to more proactively look for peace-contributing opportunities. This shift may in part be supported by the broader context of the Triple Nexus conversations, where the language of 'sustaining peace' has become more prominent for UN agencies in particular.

At the same time, it is clear that change often starts with bigger awareness of CS and an initial change in attitudes and relationships on discussing these issues, before leading to more significant behavioural and policy changes. The M&E and learning system therefore needs to look out for these different types of changes, as well as identify and capture unanticipated changes.

Sharing lessons emerging from the CSRF's work has been valuable in engaging with donors and partners, maintaining their trust, and identifying opportunities to engage with organisations on other elements of change. As mentioned above, the contracting model for CSRF was adapted to ensure that it not only remains accountable but also retains flexibility to respond to changes in context and the needs of different organisations. This seems to have worked well for the CSRF.

IV. Sustainability – what could this look like in future?

The CSRF has about two more years of funding remaining and is considering its exit strategy in case no new funding is secured. Given the clear need for its work, the question arises of how some or all of its current functions could be sustained or taken up by others. The CSRF's successor would need to be not only independent but also have credibility and contextual knowledge. It would also need to recruit and retain staff that have both in-depth context knowledge and knowledge about the aid system.

Among those interviewed, there was a sense that what the CSRF does cannot be taken up into a donor agency as donor capital agendas would dominate the initiative,[61] thus undermining the impartial nature of the work. There was also a sense that the CSRF had an 'activist' approach, one that prioritised change, and that this would not be possible for donor agencies to do in the same way. At the same time, there is a continued and strong need for donors to place much more emphasis on their understanding of the South Sudan context (and all other contexts where they work) as a principle for aid engagement. Some of this analysis (conflict, anthropological, etc) could and should be taken up internally; but in addition, having opportunities in-country to discuss the analysis with others was really valued by donors and implementing agencies alike.

UN agencies, it was felt, are not well-positioned to take on such a function, given the nature of their relationships with government authorities. The Protection Cluster was discussed as one option for hosting a CS facility and bringing it into the large humanitarian response structure for South Sudan, but there would be multiple challenges for it to take on such a role. One is that it

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[60] CSRF, 'Summary of Outcomes', v6, updated 20/01/2021.
[61] See, for instance, on the securitisation of UK aid: Petrikova, I. and M. Lazell (2021), '"Securitized" UK Aid Projects in Africa: Evidence from Kenya, Nigeria and South Sudan', *Development Policy Review*, 00, pp 1-42, available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/dpr.12551

already has a very heavy agenda, including issues like child protection, gender-based violence, and mine action, so CS would become yet another cross-cutting priority. The chair/s of the cluster would have to lead on this initiative, which may be challenging in terms of its independence, its technical skills to engage on the issues, and its reputation as a credible advocate for CS. In addition, in the Protection Cluster in South Sudan, there is still a live conversation about the extent to which the cluster should support members to work on the minimalist side of CS in not doing harm versus supporting them to contribute to peace.

Handing over to national NGOs would be one option, so that local activists and conflict and peace specialists can not only increase their direct engagement with the international aid community but also bring their grounded experiences to bear on aid policies and decisions. One respondent suggested a sort of 'subsidiarity' principle, where ideally civil society from the context will lead something like the CSRF; but if the political context does not allow for this, a combination of international organisations with national staff and local civil society partners should take it forward. Whatever their profile, it is important that those leading the facility really understand what drives decision-making within donor institutions as well as navigating the local context.

There are also risks around making sure that a locally led CSRF is representative and able to reflect the views of a broad range of constituencies, and that it will not be politically captured by one or other faction. One respondent also flagged that, despite much talk about decolonising aid and the localisation agenda, South Sudanese voices were easily dismissed by aid agencies as presumably biased, especially on hot political topics like the status of Abyei. There would need to be significant changes in attitudes and a space for different kinds of conversations to overcome this challenge – which needs to include acknowledgement that internationals have their own biases on the South Sudan context and aid objectives.

There are also real risks to the safety of national NGOs taking on the CSRF's work, given that conflict analysis and peacebuilding, as well as any critical analysis of government actions, are already highly sensitive and often seen as intelligence-gathering or spying by authorities in South Sudan.

The CSRF had tried to engage with the national staff of international aid agencies as one element of a sustainability strategy, given that they would likely be with these agencies much longer than their international counterparts. They were brought together in CS training and a WhatsApp group was created to help organise a dedicated networking space. However, this initiative seemed to lose energy after a few months and likely needs more active accompaniment and ownership from the donor agencies for it to be sustained with a clear purpose in the longer term.

In terms of the CSRF as a 'model', for South Sudan this seems to be working well. However, given funding pressures and, as one respondent mentioned, the tendency of donors to want to 'innovate' and change things regardless of whether they are working well, there will likely be pressure in the short term for the CSRF to generate some of its own income or to change the model in other ways. Any such decisions will have advantages and disadvantages and need to be weighed against what changes would mean for the CSRF's impartiality and influencing role.

Annex

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Interview List

No.	Name	Organisation	Position
1	Besson, Philippe	In his personal capacity	
2	Bottjen, Audrey	Independent Consultant	Former CSRF Director, current Conflict Sensitivity Facility Senior Advisor (in Sudan)
3	Brown, Summer	Institute for Social Studies	PhD/Independent Consultant
4	Dittli, Roland	Swisspeace	Head Analysis & Impact Program
5	Lee, Hsiao-Wei	World Food Programme	Head of Programme South Sudan
6	Midgley, Tim	Saferworld	Programme Director
7	Morris, Robert	CSRF	Learning Adviser

8	Rynn, Simon	Royal United Services Institute / Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office UK	Senior Research Fellow/ Former grant manager at DFID (now FCDO)
9	Van Tonningen, Leslye	Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility	Director
10	Watanabe, Makiko	World Bank Group	Senior Urban Specialist

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