

2026:1h

Sida Evaluation

Nordic Consulting Group A/S

Impact study of the Budi Nexus Pilot, South Sudan

A case study as part of the Central Evaluation of
Sida's work with Poverty



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Sida Evaluation 2026:1h

Commissioned by Sida, Evaluation Unit.

Published by: Sida, 2026

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Date of final report: 2026-01-19

Art.no.: Sida62844en

urn:nbn: se:sida-62844en

This publication can be downloaded/ordered from www.Sida.se/publications

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Abbreviations

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
ACoS	Act Church of Sweden
ACT	Action Churches Together
CDSS	Community Development Support Services
CIVSAM	Framework contract with Swedish NGO
CoS	Church of Sweden (also referred to as ACoS)
CP	Country Programme
CRSF	Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility
EES	Eastern Equatoria State
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
MDPA	Multi-Dimensional Poverty Assessment
ODW	Open Data Watch
PRePS	Promoting Resilience, Peace-building and Social Cohesion (PRePS) in Budi County
SEK	Swedish Kroner
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association

Executive summary

This report presents an impact assessment of the Contribution “**Nexus Pilot in Budi County in South Sudan**” (the “Nexus Pilot”). The Nexus Pilot (2020-2022) was implemented by Community Development Support Services (CDSS) in Budi County, in Eastern Equatoria State. The project was developed and managed by Church of Sweden under Sida's CIVSAM framework. Budi County faces severe violence from cattle raiding, ethnic conflicts, chronic displacement, droughts, and extreme poverty. Women and girls experience high levels of gender-based violence (GBV). At project onset, communities faced killings, resource conflicts, food insecurity, and limited economic opportunities.

The project aimed to address protracted conflict, displacement, and multidimensional poverty through an integrated humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach. Interventions included peace dialogues and conflict resolution mechanisms, Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) for economic empowerment, and infrastructure including a grinding mill and boreholes.

Available evidence on impact is contradictory and limited in confidence. Beneficiary interviews and project reports claim improvements in security perceptions, women's participation in decision-making, VSLA-enabled livelihoods, and reduced cattle raiding. However, these claims could not be triangulated with independent sources. Only three of five VSLAs functioned effectively. Claims of reduced GBV and improved gender equality could not be triangulated. Severe drought conditions from 2021 onwards may have counteracted project gains and amplified resource-related tensions, however this cannot be concluded with certainty.

As a pilot project, learning was a key objective, yet documentation was inadequate. No Theory of Change was developed jointly with partners as planned. No quantitative baseline data were collected. The main evidence sources—CDSS self-reporting and brief fieldwork conducted in July 2024—are assessed as having “limited confidence” and “sufficient confidence” respectively. Security constraints further restricted data collection. Church of Sweden did not provide sufficient monitoring and evaluation support to CDSS.

CDSS demonstrated a community-anchored, holistic approach in an extremely challenging context and merits recognition for its efforts. Yet the Nexus Pilot demonstrates both the potential and limitations of short-term integrated programming in fragile contexts. While the approach and the local knowledge of CDSS show promise in addressing multiple dimensions of poverty, the experience shows that addressing complex challenges requires sustained, larger-scale interventions and systematic evidence generation to enable learning. The failure to adequately document and monitor this pilot represents a missed opportunity for the broader development community to learn from both successes and failures in implementing nexus approaches in one of the world's most challenging operational environments.

1. Introduction

This report presents an impact assessment of the Contribution “**Nexus Pilot in Budi County in South Sudan**” (in the following referred to as the “Nexus Pilot”). The case study constitutes a part of the overall “Strategic Evaluation of Sida’s Work with Poverty”.¹ It aims to contribute to learning and informed decision-making rather than control or accountability.

This study tries to assess the impact of the project, as well as the learning done in relation to effects (since it is a Pilot).

This case study includes an extensive desk study combined with primary data collection. The selection of the Nexus Pilot as a case should be seen in light of the Evaluation exploring the impact on the poverty situation in a conflict affected local community in South Sudan. From a poverty perspective, the case is highly relevant noting the multi-dimensional aspects and high poverty levels in South Sudan and the protracted conflicts both at national and local levels.

Sida defines multidimensional poverty as deprivations within four dimensions - resources, opportunities and choice, power and voice and human security. Sida defines a person living in multidimensional poverty as being resource-poor and poor in one or several of the other dimensions.

Note that this definition is broader than the definition used in for instance OPHIs national multidimensional poverty index (MPI) and the World Bank definition of multidimensional poverty that uses the MPI in combination with monetary poverty.

Source: Sida (2019), Dimensions of Poverty, poverty toolbox.

The report is organised in the following way: In Chapter 2, the contribution case is presented and contextualised. Chapter 3 includes an outline of the main data sources and methods applied in the impact study (further details are presented in Annex 1). In Chapter 4 a “light” model of a constructed Theory of Change (ToC) is presented and discussed. This is followed by a presentation of key impact findings in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 presents the concluding remarks and key learning is presented in Chapter 7.

¹ There are seven other case studies, which are presented in separate reports.

2. The Contribution at a glance

2.1 CASE DESCRIPTION

Table 1. Overview of contribution	
Contribution name	Nexus Pilot in Budi County (part of the Resilience Pilot Project).
Partner	Act Church of Sweden ²
Implementing partner	Community Development Support Services (CDSS) in Eastern Equatoria State. CDSS is a local faith-based organisation ³
Period	2020 to 2022 (27 months).
Sida strategy	Framework contract with Sida (CIVSAM)
Total budget	SEK 1.8 million
Geographic coverage	Budi County in Eastern Equatoria State with some activities in the neighbouring county of Ikwoto (also named Ikotos), which was included as conflicts occur between ethnic groups in areas bordering the two counties.

The Nexus Pilot is a project implemented in Budi County, located in the Eastern Equatoria State in southeastern South Sudan. Some activities were also carried out at the border area between Budi and Ikotos Counties. The Nexus Pilot was implemented by the local faith-based organisation, Community Development Support Services (hereafter CDSS). The Nexus Pilot included:

- Installation of a grinding mill and boreholes (categorised as humanitarian support).
- Support to improvement of livelihoods and economic empowerment, for example through establishment Village Saving and Loans Association groups (VSLAs) (long term development assistance support).
- Introduction of conflict resolution techniques to achieve peaceful coexistence among ethnic communities.

The project aimed to integrate displaced persons into the host communities, enhance gender equality, include women in peacebuilding and economic activities, and protect them against high levels of violence.

² Act Church of Sweden is abbreviated. In the footnote Church of Sweden is abbreviated as ACoS

³ Information about CDSS can be found here: <https://cdss-ea.org/about-us/>

The Nexus Pilot was designed with an ambitious overall goal, three ambitious objectives and a considerable number of outputs and activities. The project aimed to address a wide range of specific problems in local communities.

The project goal aimed for towards “*Peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development through strengthened community resilience, enhanced social cohesion and transformed socio-economic well-being*”, and the three objectives were to

- Strengthen inclusive mechanisms and processes for *conflict prevention and resolution*.
- Improve *socio-economic well-being* of the most vulnerable and marginalized communities of Budi County through strengthening their capacities and resources.
- Facilitate the integration of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Returnees into the host community.⁴

The Framing of the Nexus Pilot

The *Nexus Pilot* was part of a larger *Strengthening Resilience Pilot* (henceforth “*Resilience Pilot*”), which was developed and managed by Act Church of Sweden (henceforth Church of Sweden) in Haiti and South Sudan (Figure 1). In South Sudan the *Nexus Pilot* in Budi County was one of four pilot projects implemented under the auspices of the *Resilience Pilot*.

The *Resilience Pilot* was an add-on to the strategic partnership between Church of Sweden and Sida CIVSAM (the Civil Society Unit of Sida) for the period 2018-2022. Funding for the *Resilience Pilot* was granted, based on the Sida decision in 2017 to make funding available for *Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus* initiatives in protracted humanitarian crises contexts.⁵ This decision was again a response to the Swedish policy framework for development cooperation and humanitarian aid allowing for more flexible funding to ensure coherence and operationalise humanitarian-development nexus co-programming in fragile contexts to strengthen the resilience of crises affected populations. Peace, as the third nexus leg, was added to programming to bring together policy frameworks across the three sectors and promote joint planning for shared outcomes.⁶ The *Resilience Pilot* focused on testing methodologies to increase the resilience of local communities through this nexus of interventions.

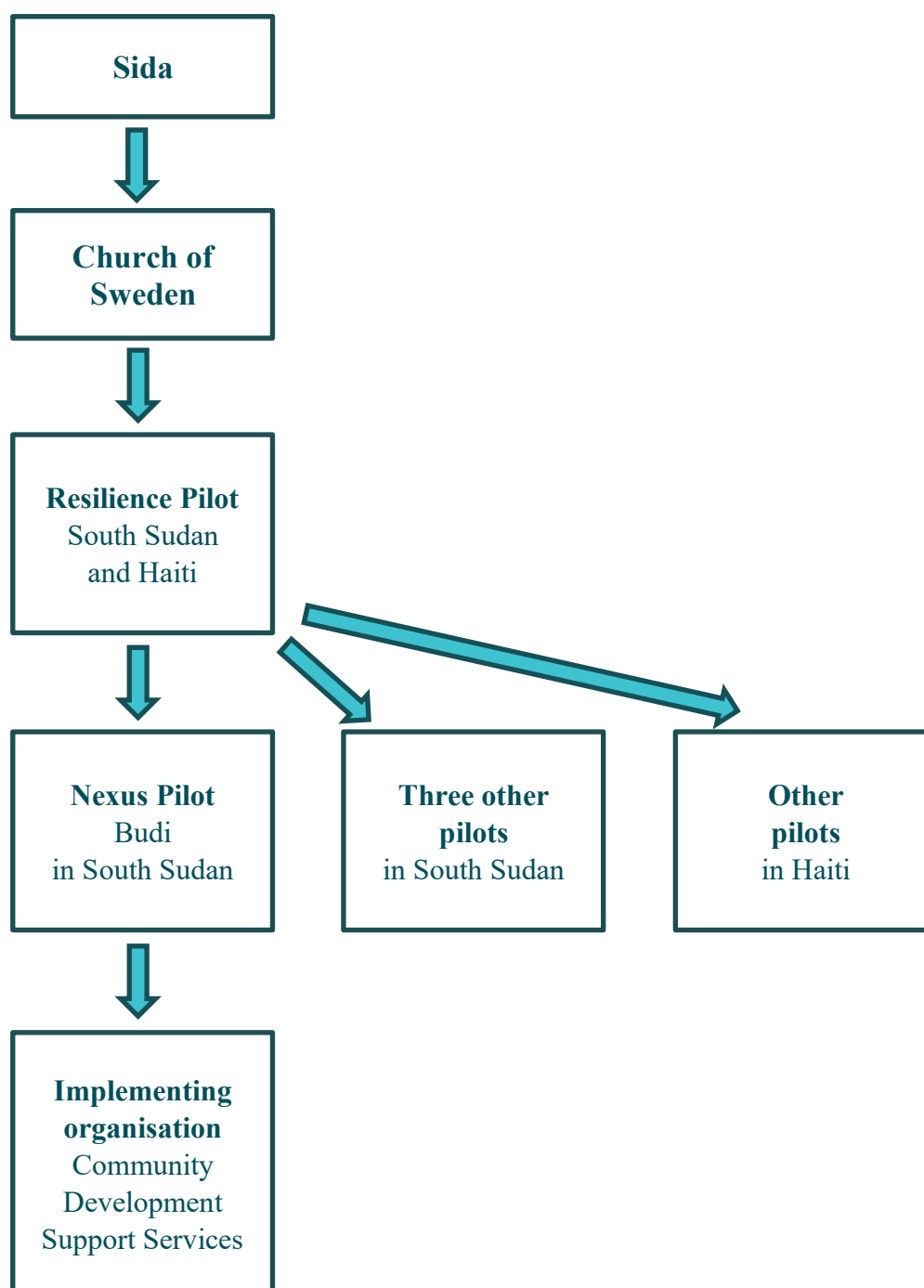
While the focus in this case study is on the *Nexus Pilot* case in Budi County, it is still important to understand the *Nexus Pilot* within the framing of the larger *Resilience Pilot* (Figure 1). In practice, however, the links between the *Resilience Pilot* and the *Nexus Pilot* turned out to be rather weak.

⁴ CDSS (2021), Updated narrative report for ACoS funded nexus project 2020.

⁵ Both Sida’s Humanitarian Strategy 2017-2020, and the Country Strategy 2018-2022 for South Sudan promote nexus approaches as the most relevant operational modality to programming in the country.

⁶ SIPRI (2019), Connecting the dots on the triple nexus.

Figure 1. The link between the Resilience Pilot and the Nexus Pilot



Other Community Development Support Services projects in the same location

The Community Development Support Services (CDSS) was the local implementing organisation, and this organisation also implemented two other projects in Budi and adjacent locations roughly at the same time or after as the *Nexus Pilot*:

- *Supporting Gender Justice, Peace, Food Security and Livelihoods*. This was a 12 month project cooperation also between Church of Sweden and CDSS.
- *PrePS (Promoting Resilience, Peace-building and Social Cohesion in Budi County, Eastern Equatoria State)*. This was implemented as a joint project with DanChurchAid and Church of Sweden after the completion of the Budi Pilot. This project seems to combine elements from the earlier Nexus Pilot and the Gender Justice projects.

We mention the two projects here because anecdotal evidence from our field work showed that there were integration and continuation of activities without a clear differentiation between the *Nexus Pilot* and these other projects. From the CDSS point of view the three projects seen together has strengthened their support to communities, because there was a better and larger flow of activities.

2.2 CONTEXT

Budi County in Eastern Equatoria State (Figure 2) is heavily affected by displacement, local resource conflicts, droughts and limited economic development opportunities. In the initial phase of the project CDSS reported to Church of Sweden that the local population faced constant insecurities due to killings, cattle raiding, and food insecurity caused by deforestation, droughts and abandoned farmlands. The situation was described as particularly dire for women and girls, as they were often targeted in conflicts, with gender-based and sexual violence (SGBV) being among the most common forms of violence.⁷

The Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF), a think tank in South Sudan recognised for its county wide conflict analyses, also described the situation in Budi County as being marred by a decade long perennial conflict situation.⁸ Moreover, Budi County is surrounded by communities that are hostile to each other and constantly participate in cattle raiding as a means of livelihoods and tradition.⁹ Prior to the project's start, there were numerous deaths due to revenge and counter-revenge killings between several ethnic groups. The violence occurred between the Didinga communities of Kikilai, Betalado, Lorema and Lotukei in Budi County on the one side, and on the other

⁷ ACoS and CDSS (2023), End of Project Narrative Report 2021-2022 - Strengthening Community Resilience of the most vulnerable right holders in Eastern Equatoria State through Peace Building Initiatives, Development and CBPS approach – Piloting Nexus in Budi County; CDSS (2021), “Updated narrative report for ACoS funded nexus project 2020.”

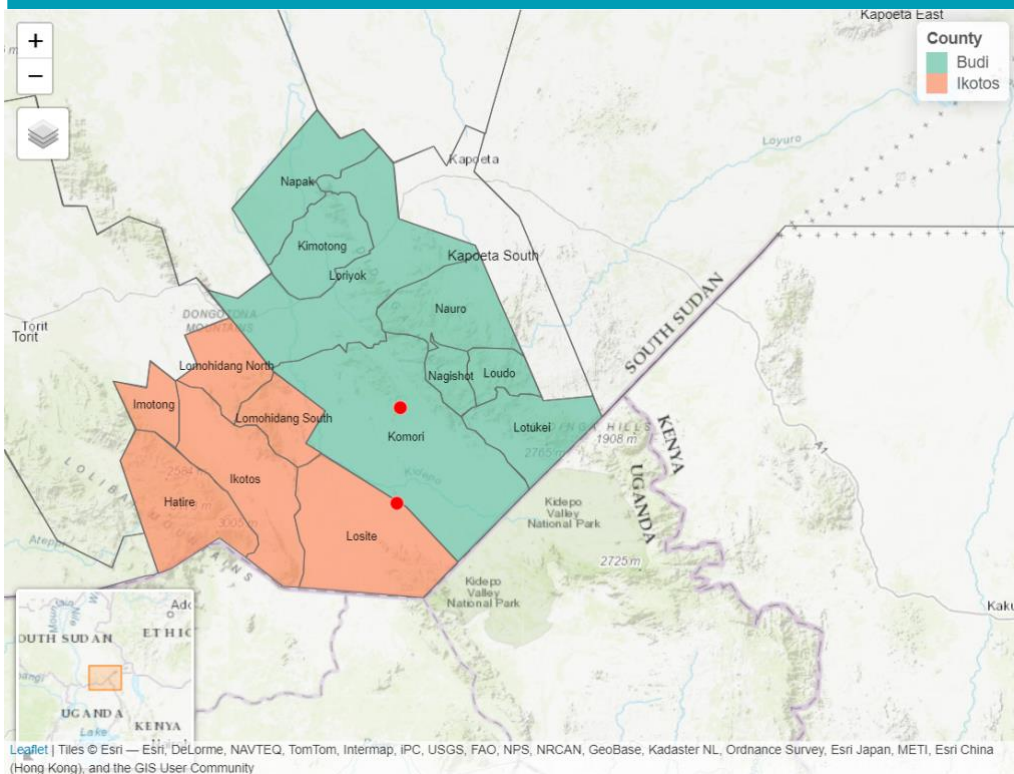
⁸ CSRF (2020), Budi - csrf-southsudan.

⁹ ACoS and CDSS (2023), “End of Project Narrative Report 2021-2022 - Strengthening Community Resilience of the most vulnerable right holders in Eastern Equatoria State through Peace Building Initiatives, Development and CBPS approach – Piloting Nexus in Budi County.” ; CDSS (2021), “Updated narrative report for ACoS funded nexus project 2020” ; Wild, H. *et al.* (December 2018), The militarization of cattle raiding in South Sudan.

side the Lorwama communities in Losite Payam, along with the Logir communities, and the Ketebo communities in Bira Payam.¹⁰

In 2020, at the start of the project, South Sudan faced extremely high levels of poverty countrywide, with around 82% of the population living under the international poverty line of \$1.90 per day. South Sudan also continues to face stark disruptions of livelihoods due to violence, climate change and natural disasters, which has displaced millions and severely affected agriculture, a primary livelihood for many South Sudanese.¹¹

Figure 1 - Map of Budi and Ikotos counties



Note: Map of payams in Budi and Ikotos counties. The red dots represent the locations of two out of three bomas visited during the field study. It should be noted that "Homiri" payam and "Komori" payam refer to the same payam, the former is commonly used by CDSS officials, whereas the latter is the official spelling. Date source: Administrative boundaries from OCHA: South Sudan - Subnational Administrative Boundaries - Humanitarian Data Exchange. Map developed by Evaluation Team

¹⁰ ACoS and CDSS (2023), "End of Project Narrative Report 2021-2022 - Strengthening Community Resilience of the most vulnerable right holders in Eastern Equatoria State through Peace Building Initiatives, Development and CBPS approach – Piloting Nexus in Budi County."

¹¹ World Bank Group (2024), Overview.

3. Data and Methods

This chapter summarises the key data and methods, we have applied for the analysis (for a more detailed account of the data and methods applied, see Annex 1).

3.1 DATA AVAILABILITY

No quantitative baseline data were collected for the Resilience Pilot nor for the Nexus Pilot. However, there were a number of studies with a qualitative focus. To complement these, we also collected some own data. All sources are described below.

Table 2 - Overview of sources

Nr	Name of report	Date	Remarks
1	Resilience Pilot Pre-Study	2019	Concerns the Resilience Pilot
2	Mid-term Evaluation of the Resilience Pilot	2022	Concerns the Resilience Pilot
3	CDSS narrative report for Budi nexus pilot 2020.	Dec. 2020-May 2021, (6 months piloting)	Concerns the Nexus Pilot
4	End of Project Narrative Report, submitted by CDSS to Church of Sweden (2020-2022).	2020-2022 (27 months).	Concerns the Nexus Pilot
5	Scoping mission to Juba	February 2024	Meeting online with CDSS, no other information on the Nexus Pilot.
6	Qualitative data collected in Budi County	July 2024 (one week)	Data collected by us. Concerns the Nexus pilot
7	Open source data (ACLED, DTM, SPEI)	N/A	Concerns the counties of Budi and Ikotos

3.1.1 Resilience Pilot Pre-study

Church of Sweden commissioned a Resilience Pilot Pre-Study in 2018 (Final report in April 2019) with organisational and modality aspects in mind, but this study hardly mentioned the *Nexus Pilot*.¹²

¹² Niras (2019), Pre-study: Nexus based resilience pilot South Sudan, Final report.

3.1.2 Mid-term Evaluation of the Resilience Pilot

A Mid-term Evaluation of the *Resilience Pilot*¹³ was, like the Pre-Study, also largely qualitative and provided limited evidence to validate impact-level statements.¹⁴

3.1.3 CDSS Narrative Report for Budi Nexus Pilot

No “project document” that describes the *Nexus Pilot* (with a Theory of Change and a results framework) was prepared. Instead, a Narrative Report¹⁵ was written after the six-month long inception phase. This document describes the rationale for selection of sites for infrastructure installations, VSLAs and peace building activities. The Narrative Report also includes a description of the process of identifying project locations and a discussion on how to address root causes of poverty. The document outlines expected outcomes and outputs. Unfortunately, the Narrative Report was only shared with us after the fieldwork was completed (see below).

3.1.4 End of Project Narrative Report for Budi Nexus Pilot

CDSS submitted an End of Project Narrative Report (2020-2022)¹⁶ to Church of Sweden. This is the main report informing this case study report together with the brief fieldwork we conducted (see below). Moreover, the End of Project Narrative Report was the only document available to us that goes into some depth with the project. The report was shared by Church of Sweden in August 2023 and was the basis for selection the *Nexus Pilot* as a case study in the Strategic Evaluation of Sida’s Work with Poverty.¹⁷ This report presents specific indicators and highlights achievements of the *Nexus Pilot* in terms of strengthening resilience and conflict prevention and resolution in Budi County. The field data collected for the End of Project Narrative Report is mainly qualitative.

3.1.5 Scoping mission to Juba

We visited Juba for one week in February 2024. The original intention was to visit Budi County and speak directly to the CDSS about conducting fieldwork. However, due to security reasons, we could not travel outside Juba and the CDSS project manager was

¹³ Professional Management, *Evaluation of the Resilience Pilot for the Period 2018-2021*, 17 June 2022. It is our understanding that this evaluation was delayed due to Covid-19 and therefore in reality became an end of project evaluation rather than a mid-term evaluation.

¹⁴ For example, the Mid-Term Evaluation notes that violence against girls has been reduced, and that unruly and anti-social behaviour among youth has been reduced as impacts of the pilot; however, there are no concrete measures included, nor any indication of the scale of the impact, and it is unclear how the evaluation arrived at these conclusions.

¹⁵ Referenced as CDSS: (19/7 2021) Updated narrative report for ACoS funded nexus project 2020.

¹⁶ Referenced as CDSS (March 2023): End of Project Narrative Report 2020-2022.

¹⁷ There are seven other case studies, which are presented in separate reports.

unable to travel to Juba. Instead, a telephone conversation with a poor connection was held.

3.1.6 Data collection in Budi County

We conducted fieldwork in Budi County for one week at the end of July 2024. The fieldwork was characterised by security related delays and logistical challenges. We asked the local researcher to use a qualitative data collection approach and if possible, to use contribution analysis to evaluate the impact/outcomes of the project with the caveat that it was not clear to what extent outcomes actually can be contributed to the *Nexus Pilot* alone or to the related projects as alluded to in Chapter 3. The locations pre-identified included: Lotome in Losite, where a grinding mill has been installed, and a Women for Peace group and an Anti-Cattle theft & Raiding Committee; Lotak Community Water Supply System in Monita in Homiri; VSLA Groups, kitchen gardening and peace committees in Kibiric in Homiri. The field work plan could not be carried out as planned due to security and access constraints. The following locations were visited (Table 3).

Table 3 - Interviewees and location

Name of interviewee and affiliation	County	Payam	Boma
CDSS Food Security Livelihoods Officer	Budi	Chukudum	Chukudum
CDSS Project Manager	Budi	Chukudum	Chukudum
Members Lotak Community Water Supply System	Budi	Homiri	Monita
VSLA group members women	Budi	Homiri	Kibiric
VSLA group members men	Budi	Homiri	Kibiric
Peace committee members	Budi	Homiri	Kibiric
Grinding Mill committee members	Ikotos	Losite	Lotome
Members women for peace group	Ikotos	Losite	Lotome

3.1.7 Open-source data

As a supplement to the field data collection, we used a series of open-source data sources to assess relevant development trends both in Budi County and in the neighbouring Ikotos County. The following data sources were used:

- The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).¹⁸ Conflict exposure is estimated using ACLED data on the placement and the severity of violent events, combined with proximity to populated areas from WorldPop program.¹⁹

¹⁸ Raleigh, C. *et al.* (February 2023), Political instability patterns are obscured by conflict dataset scope conditions, sources, and coding choices.

¹⁹ Raleigh, Clionadh *et al.* (2024), Assessing and Mapping Global and Local Conflict Exposure.

- The Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)²⁰ is a data collection system initiated by the International Organisation for Migration to track and monitor Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).
- The Standardized Precipitation Evapotranspiration Index (SPEI),²¹ which combines precipitation data with atmospheric evaporative demand to assess drought conditions in the two counties.

3.2 DATA RELIABILITY AND CREDIBILITY

Besides the measure of violence, internally displaced populations, and drought (see list of open-source data above), no area specific quantitative data were available, and it was not possible to conduct quantitative data collection in the location. With regard to qualitative data, the two CDSS reports are consistent in the reporting against outcomes to report progress (Table 2).

We therefore triangulated our own field data with the independent open data sources discussed above (see section 3.1.5). The results of the triangulation are discussed in Chapter 5.

With regard to ensuring as much reliability and credibility as possible of the qualitative data we collected in the field, we emphasised careful selection of community members for participation and ensuring that they were all beneficiaries. While the CDSS team provided support in the selection process, they did not participate in the Focus Group Discussions and the Key Informant Interviews with the beneficiaries.

As an organisation, CDSS is considered an effective and knowledgeable change agent in the local context - according both to Church of Sweden and DanChurchAid.²² However, the overall reliability and credibility of the main source used in this evaluation is limited because the assessment lacked a structured approach. That being said, anecdotal evidence during our fieldwork suggests that the CDSS staff were very knowledgeable about the achievements of their activities in the different project locations. Nevertheless, the End of Project Narrative Report by CDSS is considered a report of *Limited Confidence* because of the lack of structured and systematic approach to the data presented in the report. The data collected during our fieldwork mission is considered to be of *Sufficient Confidence* (see further description in Annex 1). Thus, overall, the main data material available for the analysis in this case study cannot be considered being of good quality.

²⁰ International Organization for Migration (2024), DTM API. Displacement Tracking Matrix.

²¹ Beguería, S. *et al.* (August 2014), Standardized precipitation evapotranspiration index (SPEI) revisited.

²² CDSS (2021), "Updated narrative report for ACoS funded nexus project 2020.", and Email exchange with DanChurchAid in South Sudan.

3.3 LIMITATIONS

A general point regarding data limitations is illustrated by Open Data Watch (ODW), which ranks South Sudan number 193 out of 195 countries and territories in terms of openness. In terms of data coverage (i.e. availability of national and subnational data on population dynamics, health, education, food security etc.) South Sudan scored 3 out of 100.²³ We have scanned through data collected by the World Bank and data put together in the Sida Multi-Dimensional Poverty Assessment but have not found these to be disaggregated at county level and sufficiently detailed to inform the *Nexus Pilot*.

As mentioned above, security restrictions were imposed on travelling to some locations, and access to other locations had to be organised with armed escort. The data collection was therefore intersected, and with less time for data collection time than anticipated. Additionally, although participants were selected to be as representative of the beneficiary population as possible, the absence of random sampling methods limits the study's generalisability.

Finally, it is to be noted that ACLED data only capture a partial picture of the broad range of violence taking place. The data source is likely to underestimate the true number and severity of the events and therefore should only be used to assess trends in violence. Subsequently, estimated conflict exposure does not capture the effect of violence on displaced and migrant populations.

²³ Open Data Watch (2023), South Sudan Open Data Inventory Profile.

4. Theory of Change

4.1 THE RESILIENCE PILOT AND THE NEXUS PILOT

Neither the *Resilience Pilot* nor the *Nexus Pilot* were developed with a concrete Theory of Change. Hence, we had to rely on assumptions found in a range of supporting documents.

4.1.1 The Resilience Pilot

The *Resilience Pilot* was described in the Concept Note to Sida as a step for Church of Sweden to build capacity within the organisation and to internalise a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach, and then to transfer this capacity and knowledge to partners. The Pre-Study commissioned by the Church of Sweden (April 2019) alluded to plans for a participatory process with partners to develop both a ToC and a common framework for results for the pilot projects in South Sudan. The aim was, according to the report, to strengthen partner capacity to deliver assistance, with the ultimate goal of increasing community resilience – i.e. reducing the risk for disasters and improving the capacity to handle these when they occur. We cannot find trace in the documentation of a joint development of a Theory of Change between Church of Sweden and CDSS.

The change process as described in the Pre-Study focused on training of partners, joint partner workshops, and the application of an Integrated Community-based Psychosocial Support (CBPS) approach during implementation. However, delays and gaps in implementation appear to have disrupted the original workplan and challenged the intended change process. Some planned training sessions were not carried out. Although COVID-19 likely disrupted activities, it cannot fully explain the delays at the start of the roll-out in 2019 and 2020.²⁴

²⁴ Summarised formulation by the Evaluation Team on the basis of *Concept Note – Strengthening Resilience Pilot, 2017*, CoS, Niras: Pre-study: Nexus based resilience pilot, South Sudan, Final Report, Evaluation of the Resilience Pilot for the period 2018-2021, ACT Church of Sweden: Management response Resilience Pilot evaluation

4.1.2. The Nexus Pilot

As for the Nexus Pilot, less information is available. The documents available for the Nexus Pilot includes indicators, three specific objectives and one overall objective. The project has only specified its activities and outputs in the form of indicators. Neither assumptions nor risks were developed for the project. A simplified ToC for the *Nexus Pilot* is shown in the right column in Table 4, based on the End of Narrative Report.²⁵

Table 4 – Simplified Theories of Change

Constructed ToC of the Resilience Pilot	Constructed ToC Nexus pilot
1. <i>If</i> Act Church of Sweden has an understanding of partners' capacities and needs to work with nexus, and an understanding of the gaps, needs and challenges to do so in South Sudan, and	
2. <i>If</i> Act Church of Sweden uses this knowledge to support partners and strengthen their capacities for conflict sensitive programming, inclusive and on-going conflict analysis, and in promoting the concept of a peace dividend in communities,	
3. <i>Then</i> local partners have a strengthened capacity to work across the nexus, to contribute to peace and social cohesion and addressing root causes,	
4. <i>Then</i> local partners apply this capacity to programming, leading them to more effectively implement resilience strengthening interventions;	<p><i>If</i> inclusive mechanisms and processes for conflict prevention and resolution are strengthened,</p> <p><i>And if</i> the most vulnerable and marginalized communities of Budi County have their capacities and resources (i.e. socio economic opportunities) strengthened,</p> <p><i>And if</i> the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Returnees are integrated into the host community.</p>
5. <i>Ultimately leading to</i> strengthened capacities of communities' and persons' resilience to handle, recover and reduce/prevent disasters and risk.	<p><i>Then</i> the communities will experience inclusive and peaceful coexistence,</p> <p><i>Ultimately leading to</i> strengthened community resilience, enhanced social cohesion and transformed socio-economic well-being and thereby reduction of widespread and deep poverty levels.²⁶</p>

²⁵ ACoS and CDSS (2023), "End of Project Narrative Report 2021-2022 - Strengthening Community Resilience of the most vulnerable right holders in Eastern Equatoria State through Peace Building Initiatives, Development and CBPS approach – Piloting Nexus in Budi County."

As a way to analyse these ToCs, we make use of the indicators of the qualitative reporting of CDSS and the fieldwork data to provide possible evidence of impact of the Nexus Pilot (see Chapter 5).

4.2. SIDA POVERTY DIMENSIONS

The indicators of the *Nexus Pilot* have been “matched” against the Multi-Dimensional Poverty Approach dimensions. The abbreviated overview below shows that the project matches one or several poverty dimensions. For a full overview, see Annex 2.

Table 5 – Sida Poverty Dimensions

Component	Indicators (full list)	Poverty dimension
Specific Objective 1: <i>Strengthened inclusive mechanisms and processes for conflict prevention and resolution.</i>	Behaviors and mindsets of men towards gender equality and equal participation in decision making processes by women positively changed	Power and voice
	Increased awareness and knowledge among the communities on the Conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms and processes	Power and voice, human security
	Increased knowledge and positive attitude by community of gender equality and participation of women and youth in decision making processes	Power & voice
	Reduction in cattle raiding and rustling among the cattle keepers	Opportunities and choice, resources
	Increased sense of local ownership over peace process, identification of problems and search for solutions, safety	Power and voice, Human security
	Increased trading activities and movement between and among the formerly conflicting communities; production etc	Opportunities and choice, resources, power and voice
Specific Objective 2: <i>Improved socio-economic well-being of vulnerable & marginalized communities through strengthened capacities and resources.</i>	% of the VSLAs established & providing loans to the members (small, or medium-sized enterprises established/ expanded by women and men; operational and profitable)	Resources
	Reduced incidence of GBV at the family level and the community	Power and voice, human security
	Increased awareness and knowledge among the communities on the impact of savings on economic sustainability, improved incomes and diet.	Resources, opportunities and choice
Specific Objective 3: <i>Facilitated the integration of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Returnees into the host community.</i>	Improved understanding of men and women leading to reduced incidents of GBV related to grinding problem in the project areas	Power and voice, human security
	Men and women realized, promoted, protected, and uphold women’s human rights and equality	Power and voice
	Improved psychosocial well-being of women in the community (IDPs/Returnees and Host Community)	Power and voice, human security
	A well protected, preserved, and sustainable environment, decreased rate of deforestation	Resources, opportunities and choice

5. Findings on Impact

5.1. PRESENTATION OF OVERALL FINDINGS

Based on the outcome indicators identified during the six month inception phase of the *Nexus Pilot* in 2020, three broad lines of intervention were identified. These were in line with a nexus approach: A *peace* component, a *development* component, and a *humanitarian* component. Each component is analysed below against the project's achievements. We use the End of Project Narrative Report, our fieldwork conducted in July 2024,²⁶ and other identified sources of evidence in an attempt to cross validate the analysis.

As emphasised above there is a general lack of documentation, and findings presented in this chapter should be considered to have *limited confidence*, when it has not been possible to pair information from the project with other sources of evidence. Data from the End of Project Narrative report and the fieldwork for each component by indicator are presented in Annex 5 in a table format, thereby making direct comparisons possible between the two main sources and the fieldwork.

5.1.2. The Peace Component

Specific Objective 1a: Strengthened (gender) inclusive mechanisms

When it comes to *gender inclusive decision-making* and a change in men's mindset concerning gender equality, there is anecdotal evidence from our beneficiary interviews of a positive change. First, a shift from male-dominated decision-making to more inclusive practices was reported. This includes improved community attitudes towards gender equality and women's participation. Subsequently, statements from grinding mill committee members and peace committee members highlight that they experienced a notable change in men's mindset concerning Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and rape, leading to a reduction in such violence. We have not been able to triangulate this statement with external sources of information.

²⁶ The key findings against the reported achievements are shown below, while a more detailed findings overview is presented in Annex 3.

Specific Objective 1b: Effects of strengthened mechanisms and processes for conflict prevention and resolution.

Focusing on whether the establishment of community led *conflict prevention* mechanisms led to a reduction in conflict, the evidence is contradictory and inconclusive. Project documents and our field interviews display a more positive view, whereas the ACLED data paint a more pessimistic view.

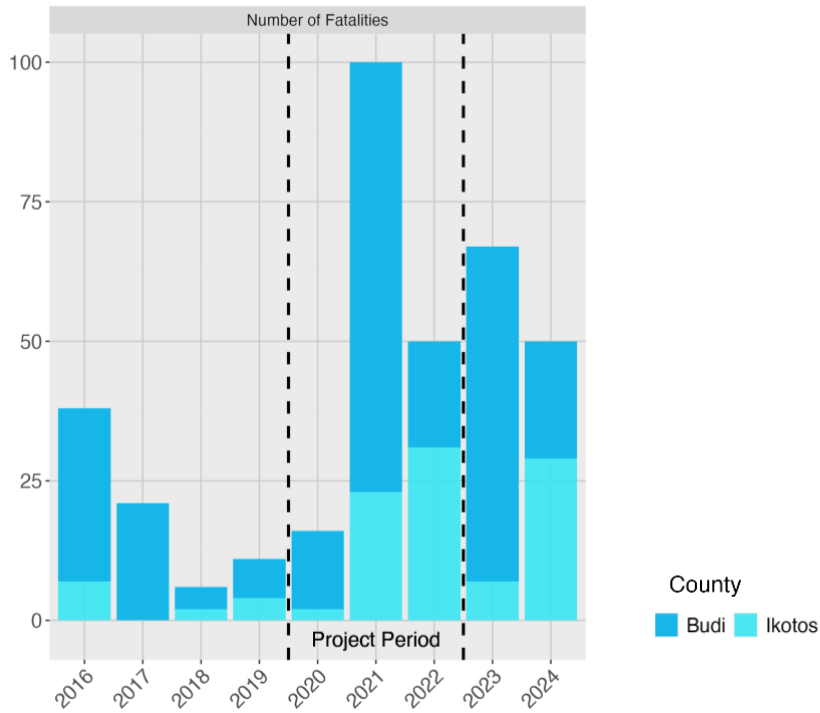
The Peace Committees and the Rescue Committees seem to report mixed results in promoting inter-communal dialogue and reducing violence. Because of the difficulties in the establishment of effective conflict prevention mechanisms, the project adapted its intervention strategies, and CDSS updated its approach to be more inclusive. Hence, the project strengthened the awareness raising and training to support community committees to successfully lead initiatives. The project documentation claims that the adapted approach has resulted in a decrease in revenge killings and improved safety for vulnerable groups, particularly women and children. This statement cannot be triangulated with independent sources.

According to members of the Lotak water supply, the committees' active role in facilitating dialogue has been particularly impactful in resolving inter-communal violence and preventing cattle-raiding between Logir and Didinga communities, which traditionally have been catalysing of violence in the area. Contrary to the decrease in revenge killings reported above, CDSS officials noted that revenge killings between Logir and Didinga persisted and banditry along the roads remained unchanged.

Increased trade between Logir and Didinga communities and cross border trading with other communities in Uganda and markets in Juba were reported by male VSLA group members. The increase in trade was said to enhance food security and creating the foundation for more peaceful coexistence between groups. Yet, it was observed during the fieldwork that trade relations were still in their infancy.

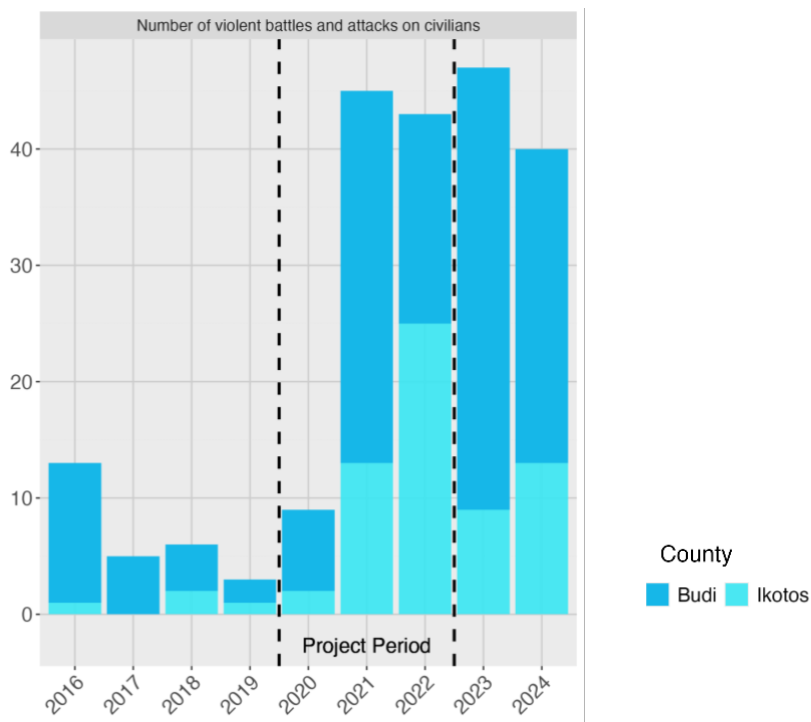
Based on the findings above it cannot be concluded to which extent the project has resulted in a reduction of conflicts and more peaceful coexistence. However, it is possible to cross-check the reported reduction in violence and cattle raiding in the region. Looking into quantitative data of violence at the county level, broader trends across time and potential spill-over effects can inform the analysis (see figure 3 and 4 below).

Figure 3 –Fatalities in Budi and Ikotos Counties Across Time



Source: Aclad

Figure 4 – Violent Encounters in Budi and Ikotos Counties Across Time



Source: Aclad

At the project's onset in 2019-2020, Budi and Ikotos counties experienced a relatively peaceful period. This period was disrupted in 2021, due to an increase in both the reported number of fatalities and number of violent events. In Budi County, 69 people were killed in 2021 because of mostly one-sided violence against unarmed civilians and in cattle raiding. However, in the following years both counties experience some "stability", and a decrease in fatalities.

Nevertheless, the number of violent incidents has remained high. It is uncertain whether these violent incidents are confined to "hotspots" areas, thus having a limited impact on the broader population of the two counties, or if they are more widespread. Figure 3 and 4 above illustrate the distribution of the estimated number of people affected by violence in the two counties taken together by year.

Taken together, these indicators for Budi and Ikotos Counties point at a sharp increase in 2021 and high level in violence in subsequent years, with 2023 being an outlier. This contrasts with both the project's broader aims of preventing violence and establishment of conflict resolution mechanisms in the area. Therefore, the evidence is contradictory, especially between some of the more positive claims from our interviews and project documentation, on the one hand, and the negative picture from the Acled data, on the other hand.

Several potential explanations may account for this contradiction: a) An overreporting of positive results in the interviews and project documentations. b) An overreporting of the negative trends in the Acled data. c) The two sources talk about different things, so there is no actual contradiction. d) Events unrelated to the project contributed to an actual increase in the conflicts, which raises the possibility that conflicts would have been even worse in the absence of the project.

Explanation (a) is possible, of course, particularly since the positive results largely originate from sources with a vested interest in the project. Explanation (b) cannot be excluded either. While Acled has no stake in painting a negative trend, the possibility remains that the data reflect inaccuracies or misreporting. Explanation (c) is difficult to assess, but as mentioned above, it is not clear exactly where the reported incidents took place. Hence, it is least possible that the project and the incidents were unrelated geographically.

Regarding explanation (d), we can explore several potential external drivers behind the observed increase in cattle raiding and violent events more broadly. We will examine three factors: the socio-economic hardships linked to COVID-19, the intensification of drought conditions, and the rise in the number of internally displaced persons.

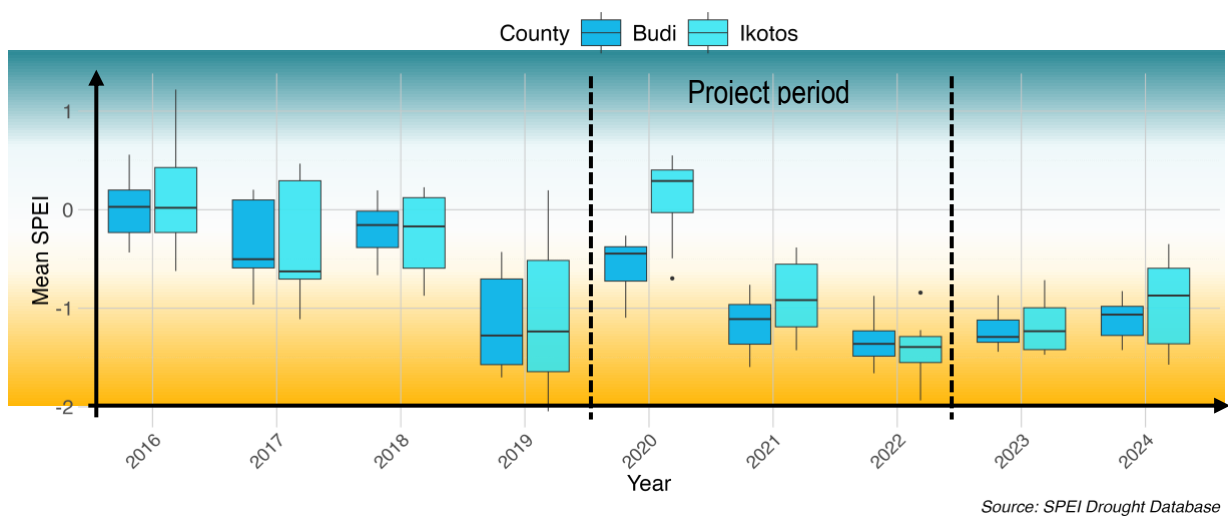
COVID-19 with socio-economic hardships affected South Sudan from March 2020 to May 2021 (schools reopened in May 2021). These dates partly coincide with the

increase in violence from 2020 to 2021. However, we lack information to assess whether the pandemic contributed to the increase in violence.

Increased drought might also have contributed to the increase in violence. More extreme weather patterns, and in particular drought situations, could disproportionately affect the livelihoods of communities living in Budi and Ikotos counties, where inhabitants rely both on arable farming and pastoralism for their subsistence. We use the mean SPEI index to measure drought in Budi and Ikotos counties. The SPEI index combines precipitation data with atmospheric evaporative demand to assess agricultural drought conditions in the two counties, and the feasibility of farming. The SPEI index ranges from -2 , which is extreme drought and -1 is drought, up to $+2$, which is extremely wet.

Figure 5 depicts the variation in the SPEI index per year. The two counties were dry in 2019, and in every year from 2021 and onwards. The variation across the months of a single year in the index has decreased, meaning that throughout the studied period, the two counties have been affected by sustained drought for a longer period. A finding also verified by other sources.²⁷

Figure 5 – Wetness (SPEI) by Year and Administrative County



²⁷ Kerblat, Y. and World Bank Group (2023), Water Security and Fragility: Insights from South Sudan.; FAO and T. Birkbeck (November 3, 2022), Hunger and malnutrition being driven by climate crisis and conflict in South Sudan | World Food Programme.

In theory, the above situation should result in stresses related to resource scarcity and potentially increase the incentive for individuals to resort to cattle raiding or other violent means to secure their livelihoods²⁸ as has been the tradition according to CSRF.²⁹

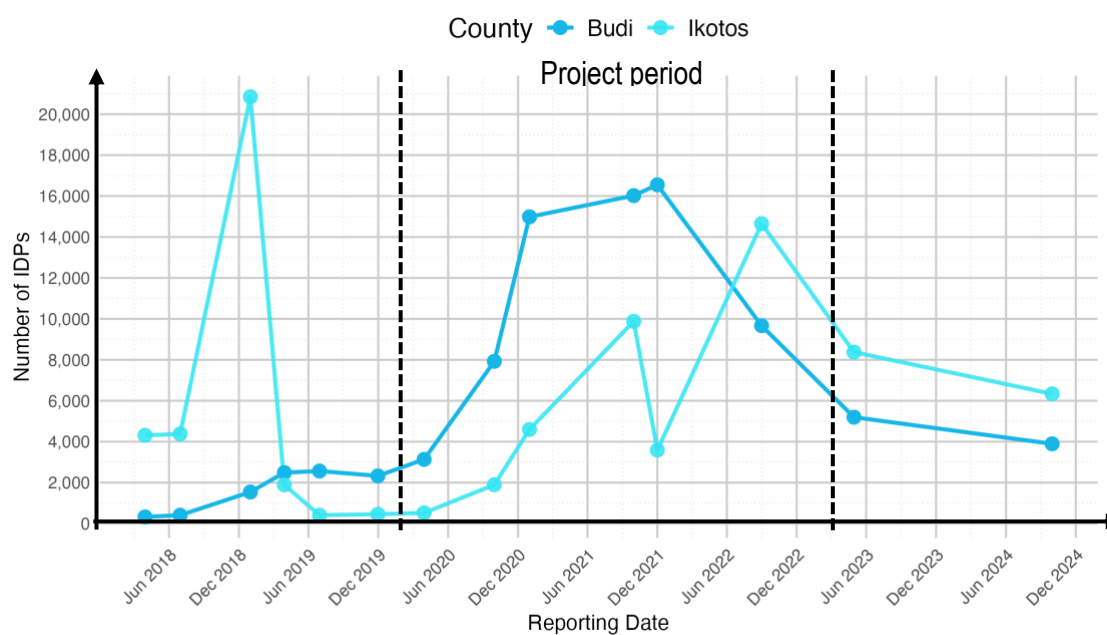
Interestingly, drier conditions from 2021 and onwards correlates somewhat with the increase in violence. The main exception is 2019, a year with drought, but with little violence. It is not within the scope of this analysis to assess if a causal connection between local climate change in the two counties and violence can be established, though it seems plausible according to other studies from South Sudan.³⁰ However, this cannot be verified in the counties of Budi and Ikotos, as it is also common that violent conflicts are politically instigated according to CSRF.

The number of internally displaced persons also partly correlates the level of conflict and the degree of displacement, at least in Budi County. Figure 6 shows that displacement levels are high in Budi County from mid-2020, peaking in December 2021 and then declining. Ikotos County has a higher degree of variations, however.

²⁸ Burke, M. *et al.* (August 2015), Climate and Conflict.

²⁹ CSRF (2020), "Budi - csrf-southsudan."

³⁰ Climate-Diplomacy (2025), Climatic Changes and Communal Conflicts in South Sudan; Climate-Diplomacy (2025), Conflict between Didinga and Toposa in South Sudan. Franchini, M., Kayitakire, F., & Pigaiani, C. (2017). *Conflicts and climate: A focus on Sudan and South Sudan*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://doi.org/10.2760/546152>, and more recently Höglund, K., Rustad, S. A., & Tvedt, M. W. (2025). *Climate, peace and security fact sheet: South Sudan*. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) & Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI). <https://doi.org/10.55163/KBWB8715>, show that droughts and floods amplify resource competition and mobility pressures, helping trigger local communal violence in South Sudan.

Figure 6- Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Source: IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix

In conclusion, it cannot be excluded that the CDSS projects have had a localised effect in reducing cattle raiding and modifying the levels of violent behaviour by strengthening inclusive mechanisms and processes for conflict. There is consistent reporting that mechanisms/committees promoting dialogues on critical and conflict related issues have been instituted and seemingly work.

However, using other sources of evidence to track violence, displacement and in particular drought in the two counties, the project effects are not significant. Due to the overall uncertainties inhibited in the data, it cannot be established with high confidence if there has been an impact of the project interventions. Rather, it seems plausible that a severe drought in the area has created additional pressures on resources and livelihoods that may have counteracted some of the project's supposed positive impacts on conflict reduction. This suggests that future interventions in conflict prevention and peace building might need to consider more integrated approaches that address both conflict resolution and climate resilience simultaneously.

5.1.3. Development Component

Specific Objective 2: Improved socio-economic well-being of the most vulnerable and marginalized communities of Budi County through strengthening their capacities and resources.

Positive effects of the VSLA were reported in CDSS documentation and in the reporting by CDSS and in the field interviews. These sources indicated that most beneficiaries perceived that the project changed community dynamics through the formation of the

VSLAs. The VSLAs were reported to have supported both men and women with capital to engage in viable economic activities.

Some shortcomings in the VSLA were reported. According to female members of the VSLA group in Homiri, it was only three out of the five VSLAs established that provided loans to their members, due to lack of loan repayment by members. The CDSS self-reporting does not provide this information, which limits the known impact of the project. There were no opportunities during the fieldwork to interview those VSLA's who did not provide loans during the fieldwork.

Members of the more successful female VSLA group reported that the loans helped them start their own businesses, and that the money they subsequent earned was used to pay for their children's school fees. The interviewed VSLA members also stated that the project has enhanced the benefitting households' capacity in marketing and managing production of both agricultural and non-agricultural products.

The fieldwork responses were in line with the reporting by CDSS that members in the functioning VSLAs underscored the value and importance of the project's loans and savings support for livelihood improvement. The beneficiaries reported tangible improvements in household income and diet. The feedback from FGDs and KIIs during the fieldwork claimed that VSLA members and their families both experienced enhanced food security and social cohesion, and reduction in cattle raiding among the communities, noting the close interrelation between socio-economic improvement and peaceful co-existence. The Didinga and Logir/Lorwama were reported to transact petty trade on agriculture produce and goats. Agricultural foodstuffs such as onions, cabbages, tomatoes and potatoes were locally produced, while manufactured goods like salt, soap etc. were bought from either Uganda or Kenya.

There were conflicting reports regarding help with farming equipment and farm productivity. Beneficiaries reported during the fieldwork that the *Nexus Pilot* has helped them acquire farming equipment, which in turn boosted agricultural productivity. However, CDSS staff could not confirm this. There could be a mix-up with activities from other projects.

We therefore looked into possible comparative data from AVSI, an Italian NGO working in Ikotos county on agricultural input distribution.³¹ AVSI has found that their project has impacted positively on agricultural productivity. The distribution of improved seeds, agricultural tools and agronomic practices have helped farmers utilising these inputs to sell twice as high a share of their production compared to farmers not using such measures (10% of their share compared to 5%).³²

³¹ The AVSI project is quite different in design and scope from the CDSS project. Furthermore, the *Nexus Pilot* is primarily in areas where pastoralism is the main occupation, while AVSI works in farming communities (in Ikotos County).

³² AVSI (2018), Monitoring and Evaluation of agricultural inputs distribution and key figures on farming and food security in Greater Ikwoto.

However, according to a survey of randomly selected households in Budi County,³³ 76% of the households had inadequate food consumption and 79% reported having moderate hunger,³⁴ while the remaining 21% of the surveyed households reported having slight or no hunger. The survey also found that agricultural challenges in the form of pests and diseases destroying crops (42%), or lack of rain/drought (40%) are major factors negatively affecting hunger.

CDSS officials we interviewed during the fieldwork claimed that the successful VSLAs decreased domestic violence and GBV at community levels. It has not been possible to triangulate this information. Although a representative survey of randomly selected households in South Sudan conducted in 2021, Budi County has the lowest acceptance of GBV compared to other counties³⁵, we do not find the correlation claim by the CDSS officials is substantiated.

In summary, the data is too weak for any firm conclusions. However, there are indications that the *Nexus Pilot* (and related CDSS projects) contributed to several positive outcomes, not least for the VSLA members. There *could* be spillovers to social cohesion, reduced cattle raiding and reduction in cases of GBV.

5.1.4. Humanitarian Component

Specific Objective 3: Facilitated the integration of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Returnees into the host community.

The specific objective for the humanitarian component does not correlate well with the actual project activities and indicators. It can also be argued that the activities cannot fully be categorised as humanitarian assistance understood as emergency support to vulnerable groups including displaced populations. In fact, the activities indicate that the project aimed to cover a variety of challenges in the county and only to a limited degree focused on integration of displaced persons (indicator 3). Of other activities (according to the indicators) there is a focus on gender based violence (GBV) against women who had to flee from Budi County and women's/girls' rights protection, and equality are included in indicators 1 and 2. Indicators 4 and 5 are about nature conservation.

During our fieldwork, significant strides were reported to have been made to reduce GBV, rape, and the harmful practice of compensating for killings with trading of girls (indicators 1 and 2). It was reported that men had changed behaviour, because of

³³ Action Against Hunger and G. Shimelis (2022), Nutrition and Mortality SMART Survey Final Report - Budi County of Eastern Equatoria State, South Sudan.

³⁴ The household hunger scale was used as a proxy for hunger. The scale is a proxy indicator of household's food access that captures insufficient food quantity based on the physical consequences of hunger experienced in a household over the past 4 weeks/30 days prior to the survey date.

³⁵ USAID and MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (2022), Baseline Household Survey Republic of South Sudan.

trainings and awareness-raising efforts. Incidences of domestic violence were also reported to have been diminished, and men were said to have started to consult their wives before selling assets like goats. These statements of reported results cannot be triangulated and verified.

The installation of a grinding mill was said both in the project's reporting and repeated during the fieldwork to have contributed not only to reduced GBV but also to an increase in women's savings. The End of Project Narrative report notes horrific incidents of domestic violence, such as setting women's houses on fire, to be common. If such practices have been somewhat reduced by the project's trainings and awareness raising, livelihood activities and infrastructure such as the grinding mill, this is indeed a positive impact. It can however not be substantiated and triangulated and the CDSS reporting also goes back and forth regarding the actual achievements. It is said that despite GBV, child abuse and child marriages remain a problem in many households.

Moreover, the voice of youth and women in decision-making at the household level are still overshadowed by men; and while women and youth participate more actively in peace dialogues, the burden of domestic chores also continues to fall disproportionately on women. Nonetheless, awareness of women's rights and property inheritance rights seem to have grown.³⁶

The number of IDPs in both Budi and Ikotos county is quite considerable although it varies from year to year (Indicator 3). Towards 2021, the number of IDPs increased but have since gradually decreased (see Figure 6). This displacement pattern may both be quite local but could as well be rooted in events in other areas of South Sudan, due to conflict and/or climate change. Although the *Nexus Pilot* did have some focus on the displaced persons, it is not possible to draw any conclusion regarding the project's impact on their situation.³⁷

According to the End of Project Narrative Report and our interviews with beneficiaries, CDSS's awareness-raising efforts had an effect on deforestation through environmental conservation education, tree planting initiatives and advocacy for conservation laws (indicators 4 and 5). While some tree cutting continues for agricultural purposes, overall deforestation was said to have declined due to enhanced community understanding. CDSS and other organisations have distributed thick tree seedlings and provided training in agroecology and sustainable farming methods like crop rotation. These initiatives were reported to have raised conservation awareness in communities. However, interviews with local CDSS officials indicate that the anticipated impact

³⁶ In the view of the Evaluation team the reported outcomes related to women's rights and justice issues could be attributed to the Church of Sweden and CDSS cooperation on Gender Justice rather than the *Nexus Pilot*, this could however not be verified during the fieldwork.

³⁷ During the fieldwork it was not possible to establish the patterns of displacement, and the assessment has therefore worked with assessed *inclusion/integration into the host communities*. The End of Narrative Project report of CDSS has taken a similar approach.

became partly eroded because of drought and the influx of IDPs, which could indicate that both the End of Project Narrative report and our interviews with beneficiaries painted too “rosy” a picture of the project impact.

Overall, the humanitarian component seems to have mixed results across its key focus areas. Reports indicate reduced GBV (although this is not consistent), and increased women's participation in legal proceedings following awareness raising activities, though household decision-making remains male-dominated. While IDP numbers have decreased since 2021, returnees continue to face significant challenges (with property rights). Environmental initiatives have reportedly, on the one hand, reduced deforestation through community-based conservation efforts and sustainable farming practices while, on the other hand, the impact cannot be sustained due to factors of IDP influx and recurring droughts.

5.2. SCALE OF IMPACT

CDSS aimed to target 4,680 persons (2,509 females and 2,171 males) in several villages, mainly at the border between Budi and Ikotos counties where conflicts are rampant. Based on the available data and information, it is not possible to draw a conclusion regarding the number of persons impacted.

Without mentioning the scale of impact, Church of Sweden informed Sida that through the Nexus Pilot interventions “*CDSS has scaled up the work with peacebuilding on communal level, focusing on strengthening community structures and preventing conflicts between different ethnic groups, IDPs, returnees and receiving communities while at the same time supporting VSLA groups to promote their livelihood*”.³⁸

Church of Sweden also alluded to the scale/nature of impact in the reporting to Sida in 2021. The statements noted improvement of social relations among villages and increased security; establishment of early warning systems to create preparedness; and increase in rights holders’ possibilities to counteract incidents such as cattle raiding and build resilience.³⁹ There is no evidence based written sources available to us which can substantiate these impacts. On the other hand, there could be studies and evidence beyond the information in the End of Project Narrative Report. It is though more likely that Church of Sweden has used the findings of that report at “face value”.

Nevertheless, we recognise that there could be a horizontal level scaling potential for impact to other communities, for example if peace committees have been able to prevent or reduce the levels of conflict. In the findings reported anecdotally by CDSS, there are indications that there is a degree of institutionalisation of conflict resolution into peace committees; the installation of a grinding mill is also said to have increased

³⁸ ACoS (2021), ACoS Status report to Sida 2021.

³⁹ Ibid.

personal security for women who then had shorter distance to the milling point; and some VSLAs have served as the foundation for further economic activity. Another point concerns the role of change agents, who can be instrumental in changing customs and practices over time, such as more girls being allowed to go to school (which has been reported by the project). We cannot, however, substantiate such trends based on the available information.

5.3. IMPACT FOR SPECIFIC TARGET GROUPS

In the *Nexus Pilot*, the target group is defined as *vulnerable communities*, particularly women and youth, in specific locations in Budi County. While the project aims to promote peace and stability for the communities in general, it places special emphasis on addressing the needs of women and girls.

Project activities have, at the core, been strengthening women's rights and protection. There has been a focus on reducing child marriage, teenage pregnancy, child abuse, and sexual exploitation, and shift community norms and behaviours in the direction of rights and protection.

From the reporting available there has been considerable project efforts on reducing the discriminatory practices and the extreme levels of GBV. The various reports and the fieldwork reconfirmed that GBV in its various forms often is associated with stigma and a culture of silence, and the practices are deeply rooted. It is therefore not possible to conclude to what extent there has been impact of the project interventions (see also section 5.1.2). On a positive note, it was reported that more girls are allowed to go to school.⁴⁰

The introduction of a reliable water supply and the installation of a grinding mill were said to have significantly improved the health and safety of community members in those villages where the installations were made. Moreover, it was reported that there has been a shift in family dynamics, where men increasingly consult their wives on important decisions regarding daughters' dowries and the sale of livestock.

5.4. SYSTEMIC IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Given its limited size and coverage, the project cannot on its own resolve the deep-rooted causes of violence, conflict, and poverty. Such systematic challenges go beyond what a small project, or even a series of smaller projects, can accomplish. More

⁴⁰ The incidence of girls' schooling would be a relevant indicator for the project to monitor for impact and sustainability, but such data are not available.

sustainable changes in areas related to gender equality, youth empowerment, local peacebuilding, safety, security, and sustainable economic growth require a more lasting peace framework in South Sudan, along with public funding of the social sectors, and economic policies that promote equal access to resources and instruments of economic empowerment.

It cannot be concluded that the achievements at project level are sustainable. Meanwhile, the establishment of early warning systems for conflict prevention could point towards sustainability in as far as it can enhance community preparedness and resilience in facing challenges such as cattle raiding. In this regard CDSS reported that:

“Communities have taken up initiatives of their own, to dialogue between themselves in case of misunderstanding that could have resulted into violent conflicts, and diffuse them on their own, by creating means and avenues for consultation and dialogues without external support”.⁴¹

Church of Sweden addressed the sustainability issue in the form of local ownership in the 2021 reporting to Sida:

“The Pilot has contributed to improved development effectiveness and accountability by placing rightsholders and local community participation at the centre. Halfway through the programme CoS saw significant results in terms of increased local ownership and strengthened capacity to address root causes and identify upcoming humanitarian needs”.⁴²

The Evaluation of the Resilience Pilot also underlines the systemic impact and sustainability, with the following examples:

- *“Empowered communities were the most common words used to describe the impact of the pilot by interviewees. Women assuming leadership roles in their communities overcoming cultural and historical discrimination is another frequent impact especially in South Sudan.”*
- *“Another example is the Community Development Support Services (CDSS) project that has been successful in eliminating cattle raiding from neighbouring tribes by organising community meetings to achieve a common understanding and peaceful co-existence. By inter-tribe dialogue the project has also been successful in elimination violence towards girls and secure the roads so girls*

⁴¹ ACoS and CDSS (2023), “End of Project Narrative Report 2021-2022 - Strengthening Community Resilience of the most vulnerable right holders in Eastern Equatoria State through Peace Building Initiatives, Development and CBPS approach – Piloting Nexus in Budi County.”

⁴² ACoS (2021), “ACoS Status report to Sida 2021.”

*and boys can go to school. The project has reduced unruly and anti-social behaviour among youth.”*⁴³

Both Church of Sweden, in its reporting to Sida, and the Evaluation of the Resilience Pilot emphasise the local ownership and the capacity of communities to take action to solve their problems. While there are indications that CDSS has done a very good job, with limited resources, in a complex and conflict ridden environment, the implementation of a pilot project does require that the leading organisation supports the collection and analysis of data on trajectories towards impact and sustainability.

This does not appear to have happened in this case and the assumptions regarding impact and sustainability are indeed “hopeful guesswork”. It would have been useful to have had solid evidence based on analysis and rigorous evaluations pointing to the overriding contextual factors which would explain the limited impact and sustainability of projects. A number of studies document such limitations.⁴⁴

⁴³ Professional Managment (June 17, 2022), “Evaluation of the Resilience Pilot for the period 2018-2021.”

⁴⁴ Independent Evaluation Group (IOB). (2022). *Community-level interventions in fragile and conflict-affected settings: A meta-evaluation*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB).
Independent Evaluation Group (IOB). (2023). *Inconvenient realities: Evaluating aid in South Sudan*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB).
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2022). *Independent country programme evaluation: South Sudan*. Independent Evaluation Office, UNDP.
Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF). (2023). *Meta-analysis of peacebuilding in South Sudan*. Juba: CSRF.

6. The Nexus Pilot as a pilot

It is important to reiterate that the Nexus Pilot (and the Resilience Pilot) was indeed a *pilot*, i.e. one key purpose was to generate learning on how to best achieve results for the beneficiaries. The intention was spelled out in the Mid-term Evaluation of the Resilience Pilot, which stated that

“Experience and results should be documented in a way that makes it possible to replicate the work in other locations and that the learning process should be documented clearly outlining how experience from partners and rightsholders is gathered and shared in a systematic way”.

The documentation of the *Resilience Pilot* and its linkage with the *Nexus Pilot* is poor. Because of this, Sida, Church of Sweden, and CDSS are not able to draw on lessons learned from the project for future programming in similar contexts.

In the *Nexus Pilot*, CDSS has not been adequately supported in developing a well-documented planning and monitoring framework, which could have strengthened the importance of the work done and the replication potential. It is unrealistic to expect that a small local community based organisation like CDSS, should be able to generate and maintain its own data sets. However, being part of a Sida financed pilot project, and with Church of Sweden managing several nexus pilot projects, it should have fallen on them to support CDSS in this matter. The limited support from Church of Sweden has simply limited the potential for learning from the Nexus Pilot.

When working with small local organisations and not least in conflict affected contexts, international partners need to provide robust support for monitoring and evaluation, not just to rely on reporting, because learning from what works and from failures is paramount for providing assistance that support poverty reduction and peaceful coexistence. This is particularly important in pilot projects where learning is a key objective. Having said this it should be acknowledged that Church of Sweden may have had problems travelling to the project location in the period of implementation because of Covid-19, which could be a factor explaining the limited support.

The documentation that was produced mostly focused on internal processes at Church of Sweden and there was somehow an assumptions that changes in the internal organisation a more coherent nexus approach would filter into project activities in partner organisations, which may be the case but there was no efforts to provide support to rigorous measuring and monitoring to substantiate if and how this would take place. There were statements about impact, but these were of a qualitative nature, and they

were not triangulated. Indeed – in some cases we found contradictory evidence (i.e. the conflict data showing an increase), but the positive results were restated by Church of Sweden at face value. Our own inquiries remind us of how difficult it can be to get correct information, and that anecdotal evidence always should be treated with caution. It is in the interest of CDSS to show good results and not point to problems or request for studies to be financed. They seem to be deeply dependent on donor support to continue their project interventions, and their interest is in maximizing their funding to support communities rather than conducting studies.

From the viewpoint of our assessment, we were surprised that so little documentation existed, and that this was not communicated to us. Initially, the messages from Church of Sweden and CDSS to us were that quantitative baseline data had been collected and analysed and would be available. After several months it was finally communicated that there were no baseline data. The lack of information and data has complicated the work and underscored that pilot projects should be well documented. The lack of data has led to limited learning sessions for the organisations, for Sida and the broader local and international aid community.

7. Concluding Remarks

The available evidence on impact of the Nexus Pilot is mixed and remains inconclusive. Beneficiaries report a range of positive changes, including improved security perceptions, reduced cattle raiding, stronger women's voices in certain decisions, and livelihood gains among VSLA members. These claims cannot be triangulated and, in some instances, they are contradicted by other accounts. Functionality of VSLAs is uneven (only some groups operate well).

The local implementing organisation, CDSS merits recognition for a holistic, community-anchored approach in a fragile, conflict-affected context. As a local actor, it brings relevant contextual understanding, it knows the root causes of conflict, and tackles multiple poverty dimensions. The project therefore in our view demonstrates attempts towards a community-level 'nexus' model, integrating peacebuilding, socio-economic support and elements of humanitarian response, to reduce drivers of violence and improve wellbeing. However, the challenges are immense and cannot be fully addressed by project level interventions. Sustainability will depend on political settlement at higher levels and serious attention to structural conflict drivers and behaviour change over time.

Evidence, although this cannot be triangulated and verified, points to emerging, localised outcomes rather than system-wide change. Peace dialogues and functioning peace committees correlate with improved security perceptions and fewer reported cattle raids (noting a 2021 spike as a statistical outlier). Women's participation shows early gains where they are integrated into peace committees and VSLAs, though social norms remain uneven and deep-rooted. Economic activities, especially VSLA-enabled savings/loans and small asset acquisition, were reported to be associated with more balanced diets and increased trading between previously divided communities.

Drought and resource scarcity have periodically amplified tensions and undermined progress, highlighting that peacebuilding and livelihoods must explicitly incorporate climate resilience to protect development gains. This trajectory could suggest incremental improvements in social cohesion and household resilience where multiple interventions overlap and are consistently supported, nevertheless such evidence is also speculative.

The project has delivered outputs in terms of establishing peace committees, dialogue forums, and early-warning mechanisms that have reportedly reduced cattle raiding and created safer conditions for trade and inter-communal interaction. Women's participation in decision-making, although still fragile, has increased through their integration in peace committees and VSLAs. The installation of a grinding mill, intended to reduce GBV and women's workload, also created spaces for women to meet, organise, and discuss shared concerns.

However, the project reporting noted that impact for IDPs and returnees remains weak. Asset loss, marginalisation, and limited access to services continue to constrain integration, suggesting that short project cycles cannot overcome deeply rooted vulnerabilities.

The sustainability of results depends heavily on continued local ownership and institutionalisation of community mechanisms. Peace committees, women's networks, and VSLAs show promise but require consistent long-term support to remain functional and expand influence. Changing entrenched gender norms will require sustained engagement beyond short cycles, particularly in contexts with strong patriarchal traditions.

While the project is grounded in local realities and a strong community-driven approach, it has also risked overstressing few resources to attempt to address a very wide range of issues. For future sustainability, there is a need for greater focus and prioritisation, stronger monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems, and integration of climate resilience. Linking local results to higher-level policy or government systems could further enhance sustainability, especially where local authorities show readiness to engage.

Table 8 - Summary of impact reported by the CDSS reporting

Legend: Light green shows a positive result; orange shows status quo or lack of credible result.

Indicators (abbr.)	Results	Remarks	ToC
Specific Objective 1			
Gender equality/ women in decision making.	Positive behaviour change observed, women role in decision making on schooling.		If inclusive mechanisms and processes for conflict prevention and resolution are strengthened, (Specific objective 1)
Conflict prevention/ improved security.	Peace dialogues, and peace committees functioning; improved security		
Reduction in cattle raiding / rustling.	Cattle raiding and number of fatal incidents reduced	High level of incidents (may not coincide with project locations) reported in 2021, as an outlier (ACLED).	
Increased inter-communal trading/ production.	Increased trading between communities and production reported.		
Specific Objective 2			
Reduced incidence of GBV	Positive change reported and number of incidents decreased	GBV/rape may be underreported, information not direct from women/girls - survivors.	And if the most vulnerable and marginalized communities of Budi County have their capacities and resources (i.e. socio economic opportunities strengthened,
Increased capacity: agricultural and non-agricultural products	Positive change, because of VSLA loans and revolving funds; increase in assets, grinding mill installation.	5 VSLAs established; 3 of these provide loans and function well	
Increased awareness: savings on economic sustainability	VSLA saving schemes have demonstrated the value of economic sustainability	5 VSLAs established; 3 of these provide loans and function well	
Improved household income and diet of the VSLA groups’ members	More balanced diets and new assets acquired	5 VSLAs established; 3 of these provide loans and function well	
Specific Objective 3			
GBV/ grinding problem awareness	Fewer incidents of “beatings” and cases of GBV after grinding mill installation. Men have changed their behaviour.		And if the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Returnees are integrated into the host community.
Awareness women’s human rights/ equality	Women and girls are more respected. More girls attend school. Girl child/blood compensation/forced marriages have decreased.	Statement from CDSS reporting. Statements on equality repeatedly stated in indicators. No information on forced marriage obtained by ET.	
Psychosocial well-being (IDPs/Returnees and Host Community)	Situation for returnees not changed, they face loss of their assets.	Well-being improved for women and girls in host communities, also reported under other indicators	
Sustainable environment/decreased in deforestation	Decrease in deforestation	Although tree cutting still occurs	

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Then</i> the communities will experience inclusive and peaceful coexistence, |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ultimately <i>leading to</i> strengthened community resilience, enhanced social cohesion and transformed socio-economic well-being and thereby reduction of widespread and deep poverty levels. |

Annex 1 to 3

See separate annex report, available [here](#)

Annex 1: Details on Data and Methods

Annex 2: Case indicators and MDPA dimensions

Annex 3: Findings shown in Tables

Annex 4: List of documents

ACLED data - see Raleigh, Clionadh *et al.* (2024) below.

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The Nexus Pilot (2020-2022) in Budi County, South Sudan addressed conflict, displacement and poverty through e.g. conflict resolution mechanisms, Village Savings and Loan Associations, activities aimed to reduce gender based violence, a grinding mill and boreholes. It was a pilot to learn more about the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach managed by Church of Sweden.

Main evaluation method: Narratives from partner reporting and interviews with local stakeholders, triangulated with independent statistics.

Positives: The shortcomings below mainly reflect an “absence of evidence”, not “evidence of absence” of impact. It is plausible that the project achieved at least some of the suggested impacts.

Potential shortcomings: The evidence is contradictory and of limited confidence. Beneficiary interviews and project reports make numerous positive claims, but these could either not be triangulated or were sometimes seemingly contradicted by independent statistics. As a pilot project, learning was a key objective, yet documentation was inadequate. No quantitative baseline data were collected. The implementing partner received insufficient monitoring and evaluation support.



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