

2026:1i

Sida Evaluation

Nordic Consulting Group A/S

Impact study of the UNDP South Sudan, Peace and Community Cohesion project

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



Authors: Anne-Lise Klausen.

The views and interpretations expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida.

Sida Evaluation 2026:1i

Commissioned by Sida, Evaluation Unit.

Published by: Sida, 2026

Copyright: Sida and the authors

Date of final report: 2025-12-10

Art.no.: Sida62850en

urn:nbn:se:sida-62850en

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

Table of contents

Table of contents	i
Abbreviations	ii
Executive Summary	iii
1. Introduction	1
2. The Contribution at a glance	2
2.1 Results Framework.....	4
2.2 Context	6
3. Data and Methods	9
3.1 Overall Approach.....	9
3.2 Data availability	10
3.3 Reliability and credibility of the summative evaluation.....	11
3.4 Limitations of the Summative evaluation	12
4. Theory of Change and Sida's Poverty Dimensions	16
4.1. Assessing the Theory of Change	16
4.2. Links to Sida's poverty dimensions	20
5. Findings on Outcomes and trajectories towards Impact	21
5.1 Overall Findings.....	21
5.2 Scale of Outcomes	25
5.3 Systemic Outcomes, iMpaCt trajectories and sustainability	25
6 Sida's Use of Evidence	28
7 Conclusions	30
8 Annex 1 – List of documents	32

Abbreviations

CRSF	Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility
CSAC	Community Security and Small Arms Control Project
ET	Evaluation Team
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
KII	Key Informant Interviews
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
MDPA	Multi-Dimensional Poverty Analysis
OPHI	Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative.
PaCC	Peace and Community Cohesion
R-ARCSS	Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict (i.e. the national framework for peace Agreement)
RTGoNU	Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
Sida	Swedish International Development Agency
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
ToC	Theory of Change

Executive Summary

This report presents an assessment of the development outcomes of the “**UNDP South Sudan, Peace and Community Cohesion project (PaCC), Phase 1**”, as well an assessment of Sida’s reporting thereof.¹

The contribution was implemented from 2017 to 2020. It addressed specific conflict drivers in order to reduce insecurity in five geographic areas (“conflict hotspot/cluster”). The contribution supported divided communities to implement joint projects of common interests, as a way to develop positive relationships. The contribution also helped to set up institutional peace institutions both at the local and national level.

Beneficiaries of PaCC Phase 1 reported improvements in a range of areas, including the perceived sense of security. However, the data does not allow us to clearly attribute these improvements directly to the project.

The security situation in the project areas remain volatile, however, and project gains are easily rolled back because of the recurring crises. The project has not been successful in addressing the fundamental issue of weak or absent institutions in South Sudan. Moreover, achievements in local communities could not be scaled up to national level. This points to the difficulties of achieving long-term sustainable impact in a fragile, and conflict-affected context, where there is limited political will and few incentives to institutionalise peacebuilding mechanisms.

The non-earmarked funding from Sida allowed for adaptive management and flexibility, enabling the funds to be spent across all activities of the PaCC, something that was perceived as being important for achieving positive results.

Sida’s reporting are based at the limited data available. However, the underlying data has clear limitations, and these are not reflected in Sida’s reporting.

¹ This case study constitutes part of the overall “Strategic Evaluation of Sida’s Work with Poverty”. There are seven other case studies, which are presented in separate reports.

1. Introduction

This report presents an assessment of the contribution “UNDP South Sudan, Peace and Community Cohesion project (PaCC), Phase 1”, implemented from 2017 to 2020.

The case study constitutes a part of the overall “Strategic Evaluation of Sida’s Work with Poverty”.² It aims to contribute to learning and informed decision-making rather than control or accountability.

The case study primarily draws on a desk-based study of secondary data, supplemented by a number of key informant interviews. The report is mainly based on a critical assessment of an independent *Summative Evaluation*, which is the sole comprehensive analysis of PaCC Phase 1. This case study assesses the evidence with a critical eye, and it also gauges how well the evidence, and the weaknesses of the evidence, is reflected in Sida’s reporting. This approach enables an understanding of the intervention mechanisms, the achievements and contextual factors, contributing to organisational learning in light of Sida’s engagement.

The case study is organised in the following way:

In Chapter 2, the case is presented and contextualised. Chapter 3 includes an overview of the main data sources and methods applied in the impact study. In Chapter 4, a reconstructed Theory of Change (ToC) for the case is presented and discussed. This is followed by key impact findings in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6 we discuss Sida’s use of evidence. In chapter 7 the conclusions are presented.

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 the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI’s) national multi-dimensional 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.

² There are seven other case studies, which are presented in separate reports.

2. The Contribution at a glance

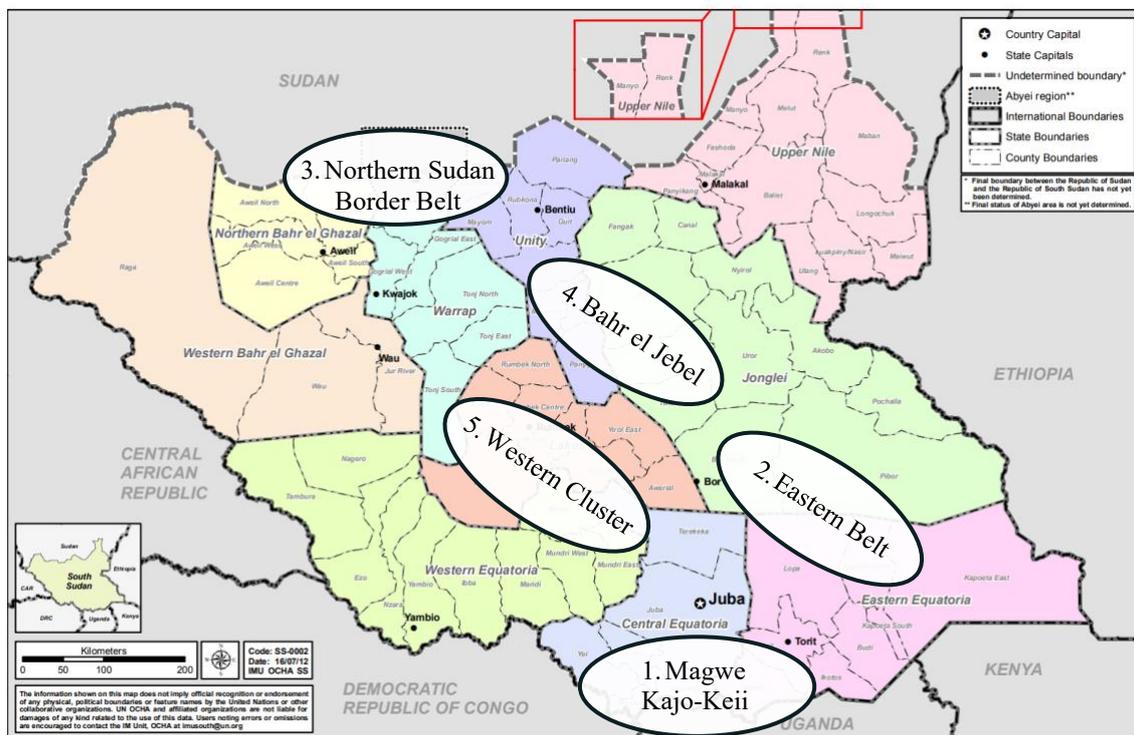
Table 1. Overview of contribution

Contribution name	Peace and Community Cohesion project Phase 1 (PaCC) PaCC was set up as one of several programmatic elements in the UN engagement in South Sudan's peacebuilding efforts led by the Security Council mandated UN mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). ³
Partner	UNDP
Implementing partners	UNDP, CSO's, NGO's and Government Stakeholders in South Sudan
Implementation period	Phase 1: 2017-2020 Phase 2: 2020-2024
Sida strategy	South Sudan Strategy (dev. cooperation) 2014–2016, ext. to 2017 South Sudan Strategy (dev. cooperation) 2018-2022, ext. to 2023
Total budget	Phase 1: USD 18,664,338 Phase 2: USD 35,000,000
Total Sida contribution	Phase 1: SEK 60,000,000 Phase 2: SEK 150,000,000
Other donor contributions	Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) Japan United Nations Peacebuilding Funds (PBF).
Geographic coverage, Phase 1.	Phase 1 included 5 conflict clusters: 1. Magwi–Kajo-Keii (Green Belt area along the Uganda border); 2. Eastern Belt (Boma, Pibor, Bor, Lopa/Lafon and Kapoeta); 3. Northern Sudan Border Belt (Aweil, Abyei, Pariang, Abiemnom); 4. Bahr el Jebel (Duk, Ayod, Panyijar, Koch); 5. Western Cluster (Awerial, Mvolo, Terekeka, Mundri, Yiro, Twic East)
Geographic coverage, Phase 2.	Phase 2 included the same clusters as Phase 1, with two additional clusters in: 6. Upper Nile and 7. Warrap.

³ A Multi-donor Trust fund was also set up in 2019 (RSRTF) to strengthen and streamline a systematic and joint approach for peacebuilding and reconciliation. Sweden was also a contributor to the fund together with likeminded donors: UNDP (2024), South Sudan RSRTF.

2. THE CONTRIBUTION AT A GLANCE

Figure 1. Map of PaCC implementation areas in phase 1



Source: Kimote, John., Deng, Philip UNDP South Sudan - Peace and Community Cohesion (PaCC) Project, SUMMATIVE EVALUATION, FINAL REPORT (January 2020).

PaCC was implemented in two phases. In this study, the focus is on Phase 1 implemented from 2017-2020. PaCC is a continuation of the Community Security and Small Arms Control (CSAC) project initiated in 2008, which Sida supported from 2015-2017.

PaCC is a community level conflict mitigation programme implemented in five geographic conflict hotspots/clusters.⁴ The programme has adopted a conflict clusters approach meaning that peacebuilding interventions were designed in geographic areas with specific conflict dynamics and spanned across several administrative boundaries (i.e. counties and smaller administrative units) (Figure 1).

PaCC supported divided communities to implement joint projects of common interests to develop positive relationships. To sustain peaceful coexistence, it also helped establish institutional mechanisms locally. Furthermore, the programme supported institutional peace infrastructure at the national level.

The UNDP analysis that underpins the PaCC design outlined five contextual conflict drivers to be addressed in order to *contribute to the reduction of and mitigation of*

⁴ PaCC is presented as a programme, but the title is the Peace and Community Cohesion (PaCC) project. In this case study, the terms programme and project are used interchangeably about PaCC. This is in line with how UNDP described PaCC to us.

*community level conflict and insecurity by investing in initiatives that address key drivers of conflict and enhance community interdependency and social cohesion.*⁵

The suggested drivers of conflict were:

1. *Weak community relationships:* there is a deep culture of intolerance and revenge in some communities, and a general scarcity of justice, law and order services.
2. *Availability of small arms:* the estimated rate of private gun ownership (both licit and illicit) was as high as 28.23 firearms per 100 people.
3. *Youth despondency:* youth suffer from a lack of job opportunities, high levels of illiteracy, poverty, inadequate life skills, drug addiction and indulgence in criminal activities.
4. *Sexual and gender-based violence:* there is a deliberate targeting of women and children to destabilise and traumatise communities.
5. *Politicisation of ethnicity and erosion of social cohesion:* ethnic differences are powerful negative factors and used for manipulation.

2.1 RESULTS FRAMEWORK

PaCC was set up as one of several programmes in the UN engagement in South Sudan's peacebuilding efforts. Hence, the results framework of PaCC is based on the premise that PaCC is just one among several elements ("pieces in the puzzle") of the UN country programme.

In line with this, the impact level goals are most clearly articulated at the level of the UN country programme and it reads: "*The South Sudanese population, particularly the most vulnerable groups, benefit from strengthened peace infrastructures, increased cohesion, reconciliation, trust, and accountable governance at all levels.*"⁶

The PaCC programme logic, on the other hand, is based on the premise that it is one of several pieces that contribute and support the country programme goal. To achieve this the PaCC has one outcome and three outputs (this is further discussed in Chapter 4 on the Theory of Change):

The PaCC project outcome for phase 1 was "*Peace and governance strengthened at national and local levels*". This will be achieved through three outputs described below and implemented across all the five conflict clusters.⁷

⁵ UNDP (2017), PaCC, Project Document: p. 6-7 - The text above is shortened from the Project Document. *Hereafter referenced as Project Document.*

⁶ The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for South Sudan (2016-2018). This framework aimed to support South Sudan's transition to recovery and long-term development through a variety of initiatives. The UNDAF focused on several key areas, including building peace and strengthening governance, improving food security and recovering local economies, strengthening social services, and empowering women and youth. These efforts were intended to help the South Sudanese population, particularly the most vulnerable groups, by enhancing peace infrastructures, increasing social cohesion, reconciliation, trust, and promoting accountable governance at all levels.

⁷ UNDP (2017), PaCC, Project Document: Annex 1 p.18

Output 1: *Local and traditional mechanisms for addressing conflict drivers and insecurity strengthened.* To achieve this output, PaCC worked closely with community leaders, elders, and government counterparts to establish and operationalize 71 community peace committees. Training sessions were delivered to these committees on mediation, conflict analysis, and negotiation techniques.

In addition, the project facilitated linkages between traditional leaders and formal authorities, enabling better coordination for addressing disputes over land, cattle migration, and resource use.

Output 2: *Relationships improved between divided communities through projects that build on common interests.* To achieve this output PaCC organized a series of inter-communal dialogues, peace conferences, and cultural exchange activities to address long-standing divisions. These events created safe spaces for negotiating migration routes, resolving cattle-related tensions, and developing seasonal cooperation agreements. Joint community projects, such as shared grazing infrastructure and small rehabilitation works, were implemented to promote collaboration and interdependence between previously divided groups.

Output 3: *Policy frameworks and institutional mechanisms enabled at the national and sub-national levels for the peaceful management of emerging and recurring conflicts and tensions.* To achieve this output, PaCC supported the development of policy frameworks and institutional mechanisms at both national and sub-national levels for peaceful conflict management. This included strengthening the Ministry of Peacebuilding and state peace commissions and linking them with local peace committees and customary mechanisms. The project provided capacity building for officials in mediation and early warning systems, while also promoting multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms to ensure inclusive participation of CSOs, women, and youth.

Through all its activities, PaCC Phase I aimed to lay the groundwork for sustainable peace by empowering local structures, fostering trust, and supporting the livelihoods of vulnerable groups. The results framework and the Theory of Change can be found in Chapter 4.

Based in part on the *Summative Evaluation* of Phase 1, Phase 2 was designed with more emphasis on the participation of vulnerable groups⁷ in activities, as well as local level peace processes with specific beneficiaries.⁸ Phase 2 also included a more direct formulation of support to the implementation of the national Revitalised Peace Agreement (R-ARCCS), which at that point in time had been agreed and signed. The R-ARCCS included systemic strengthening of the peace infrastructure, particularly at sub-national level, by codifying conflict management practices, meaning that best practices

⁸ Interview with project staff during the field mission to Juba (February 2024). We also met with a representative from an organisation advocating for the inclusion of physically handicapped persons in project activities, noting that disability because of violence is a major hindrance for people in conflict affected areas to establish viable livelihoods.

at local level were shared with a view to become institutionalised with the National Peace Commission (see Section 2.2.)

For Sida, the PaCC marked a shift from project to programme support in line with Sida's portfolio aspirations in South Sudan after the re-occurrence of civil war in 2015/16. The shift meant that Sida contributed to partners' programmes, rather than designing bilateral engagements on its own. With no end in sight of the multiple levels of conflicts, and in line with fragile states principles, and good donorship in fragile states,⁹ programmatic support was seen by Sida as the most suitable support modality. A main point was to allow partners to adapt implementation approaches to be relevant in the volatile context and not be locked into an inflexible project frame.

2.2 CONTEXT

Since Independence in 2011, the development trajectory in South Sudan has been marred by conflicts starting already shortly after Independence and going to a full-blown crisis in 2013, followed by another major outbreak in 2016. As summarised by the World Bank, the consequence of this is that: *"More than a decade after independence, South Sudan remains impacted by fragility, economic stagnation, and instability. Poverty is ubiquitous, exacerbated by conflict, displacement, and external shocks."*¹⁰

The national level conflict peaked in 2013 and resulted in nearly 400,000 deaths between 2013 and 2018. Over 4 million people were displaced during this period, including almost 2 million internally displaced persons (out of a population of around 12 million people).¹¹ These large scale conflict eruptions together with numerous and continuous outbreaks of local violence have undermined the country's development gains and exacerbated its humanitarian situation. The general economic mismanagement and the elites' embezzlement of the country's oil resources is alarming for a country endowed with large deposits of natural wealth. The public spending also takes preference in allocations to the military at the expense of social sectors, infrastructure and other purposes of public good, leading to alarming poverty levels and the continued militarisation of the society.¹² While the civil wars and local conflicts often are portrayed as ethnic strife, there are also expert views noting that political identity has defaulted to ethnic identity due to the absence of strong political institutions. South Sudan also grapples with a past where divide and rule paradigms were pursued by the colonial power to keep South Sudan from building statehood, which today can be assumed to be a further complication in sustaining peace.¹³

To seal the eruptions of civil war in 2013 and again in 2016, peace processes were negotiated at different levels of society. The signing of the overarching R-ARCSS in

⁹ Schreiber, D. *et al.* (2020), Fit for Fragility.

¹⁰ World Bank Group (2024), Overview.

¹¹ Checchi, F. *et al.* (2018), Estimates of crisis attributable mortality in South Sudan, December 2013 April 2018 - A statistical analysis.

¹² de Waal, A. (2019), Security Arrangements in South Sudan's Peace Deal.

¹³ Ibid.

2019 was a major attempt to push reforms in the direction of peace and setting up a degree of robustness in rule of law institutions. On the backdrop of the signing of the peace agreement, the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGoNU) was finally formed in early 2020. However, sustaining peace continues to the present day to be challenging and intricate. Especially, the security provisions of the peace settlement are very complex.¹⁴ Analysts have noted with considerable doubt that the creation of a Unified Military Force, which is a key point in the agreement, will not be viable, because of the scale of such an operation and lack of incentives for a real solution to demilitarisation.

Another difficulty has been to reach agreement on the number of states and the establishment of polity, i.e. the organisation of the state and its politics in general. In 2015, the Government expanded the number of states per decree from initially 10 to 28 and, then further increased the number to 32 (2017). The increase has been interpreted as an integral approach of the political marketplace logic, noting the logic of expansion as “payroll peace”, i.e. an expansion of government positions at several levels that can then guarantee/institutionalise the inclusion of a multiplicity of strongmen and power blocs on the government payroll. Eventually, the number of states were again reduced to 10, which is the current number.

These deliberations on the size and system of the state have delayed domestic policies and investments in social and economic sectors, raising of welfare and reduction of poverty, because the state system across the territory has been in limbo during these deliberations. PaCC Phase 1 therefore operated in a state system vacuum, and it was only at the end of Phase 1 that the peace agreement was signed, and a government was established. In that light, it was a viable approach to focus on conflict clusters and community coherence rather than administrative and political boundaries.

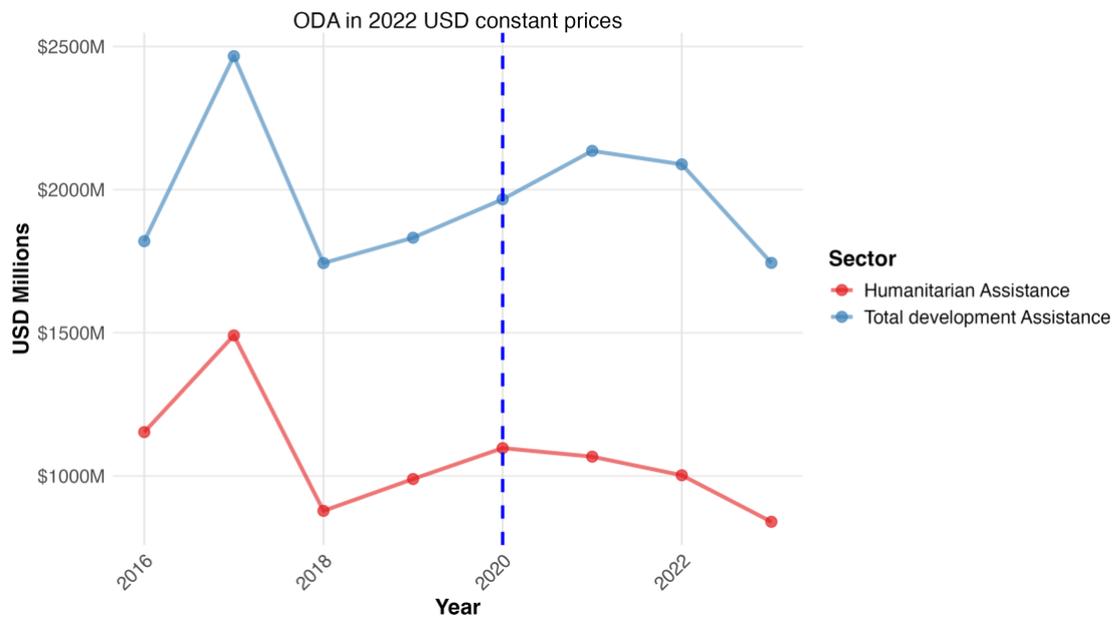
The continuous conflicts have resulted in donors increasingly reverting to humanitarian assistance or simply pulling out of South Sudan altogether. Following the major conflict in 2016, there was a substantial surge in humanitarian aid in 2017, which reached approximately \$1.154 billion and represented 66% of the total Official Development Assistance (ODA) (Figure 2). Both humanitarian assistance and development cooperation dropped to much lower levels in 2018, reflecting the uncertainty of political settlement and agreement on a peace deal. Assistance raised slightly again in 2019 and 2020, when the peace agreement was signed and a government formed. Donor fatigue and for some donors dwindling aid budgets have also kicked in, and countries such as Denmark and Sweden have now stopped their programmes.

UNDP has therefore taken more lead on peacebuilding initiatives over time, including that UNDP is carrying forward the peacebuilding activities as mandated to the UN in the peace agreement. The PaCC project is one corner stone in this regard.

¹⁴ Ibid.

2. THE CONTRIBUTION AT A GLANCE

Figure 2. Official development Assistance to South Sudan



Source: OECD CRS

3. Data and Methods

3.1 OVERALL APPROACH

The overall aim of the case studies has been to assess the impact of Sida’s contributions on poverty, in line with the overall objective of Swedish development cooperation, namely, “to create preconditions for better living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression”.

This particular case study aims to assess the degree to which PaCC, as one of several elements in UN’s peacebuilding efforts in South Sudan, has contributed to higher-level outcomes at the level of PaCC or impact at the level of the UN country programme that benefit people living in poverty. To do this we primarily relied on one key secondary source: *The Summative Evaluation of Phase I (2020)*. That independent evaluation surveyed, among other things, how beneficiaries perceived changes in key outcomes, such as their sense of security.

There are no other independent data sources available for the conflict clusters and related areas where the project operates (see below). We managed to supplement this source with a modest number of interviews with UNDP PaCC staff as well as online interviews with a few selected beneficiaries (implementing organisations and direct beneficiaries). We did these interviews during a brief mission to Juba in February 2024. In addition, we cross-checked some of the sources used by the *Summative Evaluation*.

An additional aim of this study was to assess how UNDP and Sida represented the available evidence in their own reporting. To do this, we reviewed key reports and documents from both organizations and complemented this with a few interviews with their staff.

3.2 DATA AVAILABILITY

In this section we discuss the main data sources available.

The Summative Evaluation of Phase 1 (2020) was conducted by an independent team of one international and one national consultant.¹⁵ This evaluation is, as mentioned above, the only independent analysis of PaCC Phase 1, and our main source for assessing the outcomes of the programme.

The summative evaluation, as well as the programme results framework and the ToC for both Phase 1 and Phase 2 do not explicitly speak in terms of *impact measurements* (as defined in the OECD DAC evaluation criteria). However, the outcome level of PaCC, speaks of “Peace...strengthened”, which in principle might be labelled as impact. Furthermore, in line with the goal formulated for the UN country programme, the summative evaluation includes a focus on the benefits for the population and vulnerable groups.

Because PaCC operates in “hard to reach” conflict clusters and researchers and consultants cannot access these areas for fieldwork and research there is a vacuum of information on lasting changes both for PaCC and from other project interventions or research. In the absence of different independent data sources and access, the *Summative Evaluation* results seem to be stated, or repeated, as the “unfiltered truth” by Sida and UNDP in all information available and without caveats. Indeed, the *Summative Evaluation*, is thorough and it draws on a range of data sources, which we discuss in more detail in the next section.

Structured progress reporting of output and outcome data, based on reporting from local staff. The data was prepared quarterly throughout the project’s lifetime. The reports detailed progress (and delays) against output indicators and baseline data. They served both as a management tool and as a source of information to donors, including Sida.

Sida used the reports in its ongoing dialogue and project level management, as well as in its annual strategy reporting. The quarterly reporting also provided narrative reporting against the output indicators. The progress report showed that monitoring data are collected systematically at ground level across all activities performed for each output. Risks and challenges were also well elaborated.

Impact stories published by UNDP.¹⁶ These were collected by project staff from each conflict cluster. They are anecdotal stories of impact and were made for communication purposes.

Field mission 2024. We spent one day with PaCC during the field mission in February 2024. Meetings were restricted to Juba for security reasons. Meetings included representatives of local organisations in person and online. We met one senior official in

¹⁵ UNDP *et al.* (2020), PaCC Summative Evaluation.

¹⁶ UNDP (2018), Reconciling Communities: Impact stories from the PaCC project in South Sudan.

the Ministry of Peace Building and members of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission. At the PaCC project office, we held meetings with senior project staff and discussed the achievements of Phase 1. One key staff had been working with PaCC since the start, other staff were employed after closure of Phase 1. This case study has been sent to PaCC/UNDP South Sudan for comments, the only correction suggested was a minor editorial change.

Conclusions on Performance by Sida is available for 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021. These reports are generally positive, short, and with limited detail.

The final report to Sida. The PaCC team also prepared a Final Project Report for Sweden (October 2020)¹⁷ (hereafter called the Report to Sida). The Report to Sida builds on the findings and conclusions of the *Summative Evaluation*.

Several international organizations maintain robust conflict-related datasets for South Sudan. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program and Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) provide detailed, geo-referenced event data on organized violence. Additionally, the Council on Foreign Relations' Global Conflict Tracker offers comprehensive conflict analyses. The UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan publishes annual reports on human rights violations and conflict dynamics, and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre maintains statistics and analyses on internal displacement people caused by conflict and violence.

We have scanned for the availability of official statistics generated by authorities in South Sudan, but these are extremely limited. Demographic data, social sector data (health, education), economic activity data are basically not existing due to weak statistical capacity. National stakeholders, including UNDP and other development actors engaging in South Sudan, face the general challenge with data scarcity including shortage and non-existing of recent and high-quality data across most of the SDG indicators, combined with limited access to project locations due to insecurity.

3.3 RELIABILITY AND CREDIBILITY OF THE SUMMATIVE EVALUATION

The *Summative Evaluation* draws on a range of data sources. The main ones are:

Baseline data collected in 2017 at the start of Phase 1.¹⁸ This is mainly a survey of the perceptions of a random sample of the population. This baseline survey is actually the endline study of the project that preceded PaCC, i.e. the CSAC project. However, due to the similarities of the projects, it also served as the baseline for the PaCC. The survey is

¹⁷ UNDP (2020), Peace and Community Cohesion Project Project Number: 00102663 Agreement/donor reference number: Final Project Report. Prepared for: Sweden October 2020.

¹⁸ This baseline survey is actually the endline study to the CSAC project, the preceding project to PaCC: UNDP and DGSU (2018), Endline Study on Peace, Security and SGBV in South Sudan. However, due to the similarities of the projects it also serve as the baseline for the PaCC.

to some extent compatible to the beneficiary survey done in 2019, but not following the same beneficiaries (see below). Both projects share indicators on safety, trust, and dispute resolution, but PaCC had a broader scope, including trauma healing and livelihoods. The geographic and beneficiary coverage partly overlaps, but there appears to be some differences in the specific communities reached within the clusters (although we cannot verify this on the basis of the available documentation). Minor variations in question wording also seem to reduce precision.

Beneficiary survey collected in 2019 based on a random sample of programme beneficiaries.¹⁹ A mix of multi-stage cluster sampling and systematic sampling methods were used to select community members who had benefitted or were involved in the different project activities. Of the five conflict clusters where the project was implemented, three were included in the survey. The survey targeted 450 respondents (150 per cluster). Respondents were asked whether they perceived that specific problems had increased, decreased or remained the same. They were also asked what they believed were the reasons for these changes, along with some other questions about project activities.

Focus Group Discussions conducted in 2019. The participants were mainly “local implementers”. There were in total 24 focus groups with peace committees, youth groups, women groups, IDPs, returnees, psychosocial and economic empowerment groups and community members at interdependency projects.

Key Informant Interviews collected in 2019. These included project staff, academics and government officials.

Other sources. The *Summative Evaluation* also draws on some of the other data we mentioned in the previous section, e.g. the structured progress reporting and the Impact stories published by UNDP.

3.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE SUMMATIVE EVALUATION

While the *Summative Evaluation* provides valuable data, it is also important to highlight its limitations. When discussing these limitations, we need to differentiate between “absence of evidence” and “evidence of absence”. The former refers to when data is insufficient for drawing firm conclusions (whether positive or negative). The latter refer to when we have sufficient data for drawing conclusions, and the conclusions are that the programme is ineffective and does not deliver on the planned results. The limitations

¹⁹ “Perception of the Community on Safety and Security in the five Conflict Clusters of South Sudan” (2019). The *Summative Evaluation* conducted a beneficiary survey, but in some places in the report there is reference to an “individual survey”. However, there was one single survey aimed at capturing beneficiary perspectives, experiences, and outcomes but two ways of referring to the instrument in the report.

we discuss here generally imply an “absence of evidence”, not “evidence of absence”. The limitations include:

Most respondents have a stake in the programme. The *Summative Evaluation* mostly builds on data that originate from persons with some kind of stake in the programme’s continuation. This increases the risk of underreporting problems and shortcomings. In some cases, the sources that are either programme staff or community members directly involved in the programme. This is the case for some of the focus group participants, some key informants and the structured progress reporting (which is based on monitoring data reported by programme staff). These individuals have a more direct stake in the programme.

In other cases, the respondents are direct or indirect beneficiaries of the programme, e.g. the 2019 beneficiary survey, some of the focus group participants, the impact stories and (partly) the baseline data from 2017. While these groups may have more incentives to report problems, they might nevertheless still have a stake in the continuation of the programme, as long as they see at least some benefit from it. The impact stories, furthermore, were made specifically made for communication purposes, and hence focus on cases of success.

However, there are some respondents that potentially has little or no stake in the programme, e.g. some of the key informants, such as academics. The *Summative Evaluation* report also mentions that the different sources were triangulated, though the details of how this was done are not always transparent.

None of this does mean that the data are unusable. However, the data need to be treated with caution. The positive reporting from beneficiaries could, at the very least, indicate that the programme is perceived to contribute with at least some net-benefits. Furthermore, the shortcomings that are in fact reported can be treated with much higher confidentiality.

The data rarely allows us to establish causality. In most cases, respondents were asked to describe how they perceived that the situation has changed. For example, one of the questions in the 2019 beneficiary survey was: “What is your perception about intercommunal conflict compared to 2017?” The response options were: increased, the same, decreased or don’t know.

Such data can tell us how things have changed, or at least how they are perceived to have changed, but it cannot tell us whether the programme had anything to do with it. The data do not allow for the construction of control groups or similar comparisons. They also contain too little to trace a causal chain with any certainty. Some survey questions do ask respondents for their views on why the situation changed, and these responses are occasionally referenced in the report. However, as far as we can tell, they have not been analysed in a systematic manner. Furthermore, it is uncertain that individuals are well-placed to assess the causes of changes at the community level.

That said, it is reasonable to conclude that the programme played a role in creating preconditions for some improvements, and that these preconditions could not have emerged without the programme. However, we have not had the resources to assess this systematically with the data available, but interviews with beneficiaries emphasised the

PaCC's ability to create conducive conditions not least for productive livelihoods (business capital, farming inputs).

Limited data at the impact level. The *Summative Evaluation* does not speak in terms of impact but speaks of 'outcomes'. It does discuss the benefits of programme activities for the population, particularly vulnerable groups. Impact assessment was seemingly not requested in the Terms of Reference, because project programmes in the UN Country Programme are designed with results frameworks which do not formulate impact goals (as also discussed in Chapter 2). PaCC impact is presented anecdotally as personal accounts in the impact stories publication.²⁰ Meanwhile the *Summative Evaluation* includes quotes from FGD and KII, which we interpret as ways of describing impact as perceived by beneficiaries, in addition to the data collected which speak directly to the UN country programme goal. In this way we find that even if PaCC is not explicit on impact there are elements in the Summative Evaluation approach and methods, which present findings that are core to the UN country programme impact goal.

While the *Summative Evaluation* robustly addressed peacebuilding and social cohesion outcomes, its analysis of poverty reduction as an outcome of the project was limited. Nevertheless, the evaluation documented improvement in livelihood opportunities, social cohesion and resilience, gender inclusion and inclusion of vulnerable groups, which can be seen as proxies and in line with the MDPA.

²⁰ UNDP (2018), *Reconciling Communities: Impact stories from the PaCC project in South Sudan*.

Table 2: Assessment of data robustness

Criteria	Summative Evaluation (2020)
Usability:	Provides an overview of achievements of Phase I focusing systematically on achievement of outputs and outcome contribution. In this respect the focus is on the overall effectiveness of the project.
Credibility:	External independent evaluation. It draws on routine monitoring data collected by the PaCC but also includes primary qualitative and quantitative data collected through interviews / surveys. With regard to “absence of evidence” vs. “evidence of absence”, it is found that data gaps reflect limited data, not proof of programme ineffectiveness (i.e. “evidence of absence”).
Results level:	Output and outcome level; ‘impact’ is omitted as a DAC criterion (see below).
Data quality	<p>Mixed methods were appropriate. Stratified sampling in selecting the survey sample, a mix of multi-stage cluster sampling and systematic sampling methods were used for the selection of benefitting community members however aggregated for all clusters. Specifically related to data quality it was observed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder bias – Many respondents (staff, beneficiaries) have a stake in programme continuation; risk of overly positive reporting. • Selective success stories – Impact stories focus on positive cases for communication purposes. • Causality not established – Data capture perceived changes; lack of control groups or causal chain analysis. • Unsystematic cause analysis – Some questions on reasons for change, but no structured analysis. • No impact-level indicators – Programme has only output and outcome data; no explicit impact goal. • Limited poverty reduction analysis – Stronger evidence for peacebuilding/social cohesion than poverty reduction.
Quantitative/ qualitative evidence:	Both – in addition to the questionnaires conducted (described above), key informant interviews were undertaken.
Reliability:	Reliable with limitations stated above and, in the text, however throughout Phase 1 there have been conflict outbreaks occurring, which limited access to project areas and beneficiaries. The Evaluation team appear to have had some difficulties in accessing all conflict clusters with the same level of resources.
Conclusion	<p>Sufficient confidence.</p> <p>The Summative evaluation is credible and reliable enough to draw on for the analysis, with the caveat that no impact data have been collected, the main data are at output level.</p>

High confidence	Sufficient confidence	Limited confidence	Insufficient evidence
Based on usability, addresses impact level, identified bias mitigated, good data quality	Confidence reduced by shortcomings to usability, indications of bias not mitigated, less convincing data quality	Low confidence due to lack of usability, clear bias not mitigated, poor data quality	Insufficient evidence to support a contribution judgement

4. Theory of Change and Sida's Poverty Dimensions

4.1. ASSESSING THE THEORY OF CHANGE

In this section we make an attempt to reconstruct the programme ToC to understand how PaCC has developed the programme logic and the related assumptions. We base this reconstruction on programme documents and other UN Country Programme documentation, as well as staff interviews. The ToC is illustrated in Figure 3 below, and the activities and assumptions are listed in Table 3 on the subsequent page.

The ToC lists 10 key activities, and their achievements are assessed by a number of indicators, and they are all striving towards the three outputs, which in turn are supposed to benefit the overall outcome of peace and governance. The Figure includes our assessment on how all of this fits into Sida's poverty dimensions. Even if the PaCC activities are presented as a linear flow in the Figure 3 (from left to right), there were progress and steps-back which depended on the volatility and conflicts beyond the programme's influence, and implementation would need to be adjusted accordingly.

Other observations of the ToC include:

The term impact is not used. The different programmes that are part of the overall UN country programme specifically refrain from using the term impact when speaking of their own goals (as mentioned above). However, the ToC of PaCC is nevertheless highly ambitious and generic in relation to the progress and expected achievements of peace and governance both at local and national level in South Sudan.

The programme contains a wide spread of outputs and activities, while these also are highly intertwined. It could be argued that Output 1 and Output 2 are “inseparable twins”: Output 1 cannot be delivered unless Output 2 is delivered. Moreover, the activities of Output 1 and Output 2 are so closely interrelated and subject to a conducive environment in the area of operation that the implementation has to be flexible and adjustable at all times. Furthermore, based on the discussion below, we argue that improvements at the local level (Outputs 1 and 2) cannot be sustained in the longer term unless there is progress at the national level (Output 3).

The spread and wide range of activities in the programme, could be questioned from an effectiveness and efficiency point of view, the assumption being that spreading resources on many different activities would “thin” the results. A spread of activities

requires many different skillsets in a project organisation and among partners to deliver results of quality on all outputs. During the field mission we raised this question, and it was argued by stakeholders interviewed (not only PaCC staff) that it is a “lessons learned” in South Sudan that peace building initiatives need to take a multipronged approach. The mix with tangible production/income related activities and better services is seen as a way for a conflict affected population to see and feel immediate benefits of local peace initiatives. It is in this vein that the three distinct outputs and the wide range of PaCC programme activities in the ToC should be understood. This broad approach to a project logic and ToC narrative seems on this explanatory background to be both meaningful and practical from an implementation point.

The approach has also been exemplified in the Impact Stories, which according to our reading showcase how PaCC has led to the perceptions that social cohesion has increased among previously conflicted communities in clusters such as Rumbek, Torit, Bor, Aweil, and Bentiu following implementation of shared interdependency initiatives like joint livelihood projects and peace committees and enhanced youth participation. Trust was rebuilt and alternatives to violence was offered, particularly in clusters like Rumbek, Torit, Bor, Aweil, and Bentiu.

The indicators listed by the project (see Table 3) cannot be linked to specific activities and outputs, and one indicator seen in isolation from the others do not indicate whether an output is delivered substantively. In other words, the indicators for Output 1 and 2 should be read together as a “package”. Overall Figure 3 and Table 3 show the difficulties in using a results framework and presenting a Theory of Change in a peacebuilding programme, which do not lend itself to linear processes.

PaCC's assumptions only concern the ability of UNDP as a delivery mechanism to work in a gender and conflict sensitive way. This is peculiar, because usually assumptions relate to the context. Instead the assumptions are cross-cutting and concerned with the programme applying UN standards, methods and instruments in implementation which facilitate the specific activities.

Figure 3. Reconstructed Theory of Change for PaCC

Activities

Activity 1: Capacity building of local peace committees, mediators and traditional leaders to resolve conflicts.
Activity 2: Capacity building of local peace committees, mediators and traditional leaders to address GBV
Activity 3: Mitigate cross-border pastoralist and crop farmers' conflicts.
Activity 4: Implement livelihood activities as incentives for civilian disarmament in selected states
Activity 5: Undertake community interdependency projects
Activity 6: Support youth initiatives to produce positive narratives of SS
Activity 7: Facilitate grassroots peace activities

Activity 8: Support Peace journalism
Activity 9: Undertake conflict analyses and assessment of progress made on reconciliation and social cohesion
Activity 10: Facilitate creation of space for citizen voice, dialogue and agency

Outputs

Output 1.
 Strengthening local and traditional mechanisms for addressing root causes of conflict and insecurity

Output 2.
 Improve the relationships between divided communities through projects that build on common interests

Output 3.
 Policy frameworks and institutional mechanisms enabled for peaceful and inclusive management of emerging and recurring conflicts and tensions

Outcomes

Peace and governance strengthened at national and local level

UN overall goal

The South Sudanese population, particularly the most vulnerable groups, benefit from strengthened peace infrastructures, increased cohesion, reconciliation, trust, and accountable governance at all levels

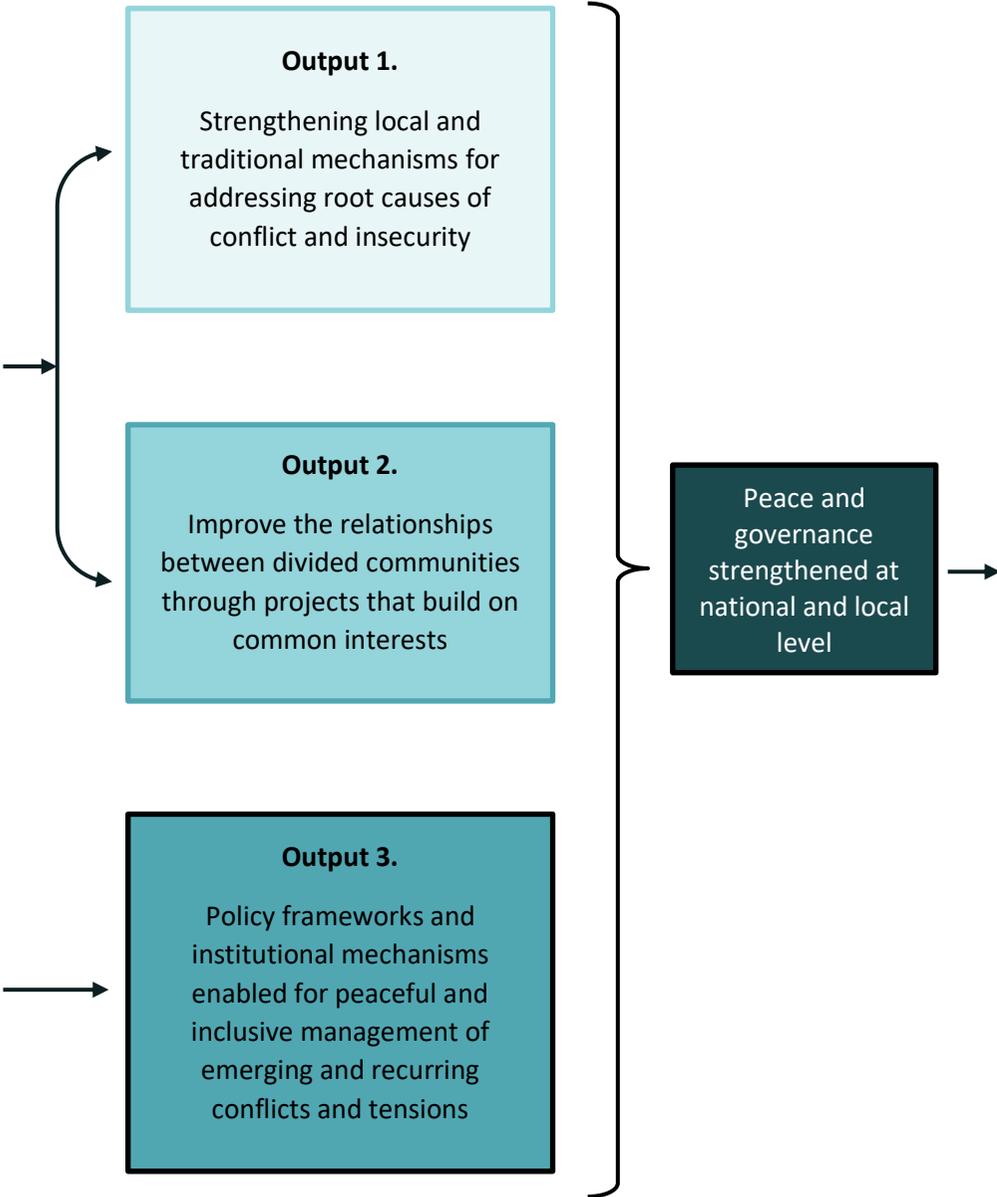


Table 3. Indicators and Assumptions in the Theory of Change

Assumptions – i.e. enablers for delivering the desired outputs

Assumption 1: Common principles for conflict and gender sensitive engagement developed; right technical expertise procured by UNDP; programme objectives understood and shared.

Assumption 2: Programme integrates conflict and gender sensitivity into approaches, implementation and operations; programme team wants to learn from interventions’ practices; resources and expertise from programme deliver conflict mitigation and peace building benefits in targeted areas.

Output indicators

Number of communities with functional dialogue mechanisms for conflicts around water, land, markets and trade routes
Percentage of respondents perceiving decrease in incidences of SGBV in targeted areas
Number of psychosocial support groups formed and successfully supported
Number of local disputes resolved by traditional leaders trained on documenting procedures and women’s representation and voices in dispute resolutions
Number of social and economic initiatives implemented at local levels
Proportion of population perceiving decrease in intercommunity conflict and violence
Number of youth groups formed and involved in social and economic activities
Number of counties where mechanisms for mediation and consensus building show increased capacities to build consensus on contested issues and resolve disputes
Number of national mechanisms for peace and reconciliation in place
Percentage of households with confidence in peace and security in selected clusters
Number of peace committees at local and national levels
Number of conflict risk assessments that are informing development planning and programming in key development sectors

4.2. LINKS TO SIDA'S POVERTY DIMENSIONS

The outcomes and goals in the ToC have clear connections to Sida's poverty dimensions. Although poverty reduction was not stated as a particular priority in Phase 1 of PaCC, it did so indirectly. It addressed the core elements of multidimensions of poverty by reducing the levels of conflict and thereby enabling livelihoods and structures for conflict resolution, which indirectly enable poverty reduction in its multiple forms.

The multiple dimensions of poverty are at the core of the PaCC project with a combination of **human security** and the **resource** dimensions as the basis (most community level conflicts are resource related, and this affects human security and vice versa). Besides the four core poverty dimensions, several subdimensions were also identified as being present in the project. With regard to the dimensions, we rely on the findings of the *Summative Evaluation*, which found that 27.8% of survey respondents indicated that most intercommunal conflicts are a result of competition over natural resources while 44.4% mentioned cattle raiding as the main cause. With regard to human security, the *Summative Evaluation* emphasised that the magnitude of the security and political challenges in the country over the implementation period were quite massive and multifaceted (as discussed in section 2.2.).

Regarding **opportunities and choice**, the project has, according to the *Summative Evaluation*, Impact Stories and interviews we conducted, shown positive results by enabling women to move beyond subsistence farming into small-scale commercial production in both agricultural and manufacturing sectors. Women were said to be producing not only for household consumption but also for local markets, which enhances both their economic security and the sustainability of these practices. This transition from subsistence to market participation helps protect against vulnerability by creating more stable income streams and expanding economic opportunities.²¹

The multidimensional framework is an appropriate analytical tool in the context of South Sudan and in the PaCC project. An important value of the MDPA is that it highlights that systemic issues (the **power dimension** in particular) are a weak element, i.e. that the government does not take on responsibility in peacebuilding, establishing rule of law institutions, reducing corruption and empowering its citizens, and thereby diminishes the potential long term sustainability of addressing the other dimensions of poverty.

²¹ Summative Evaluation, p 23-24.

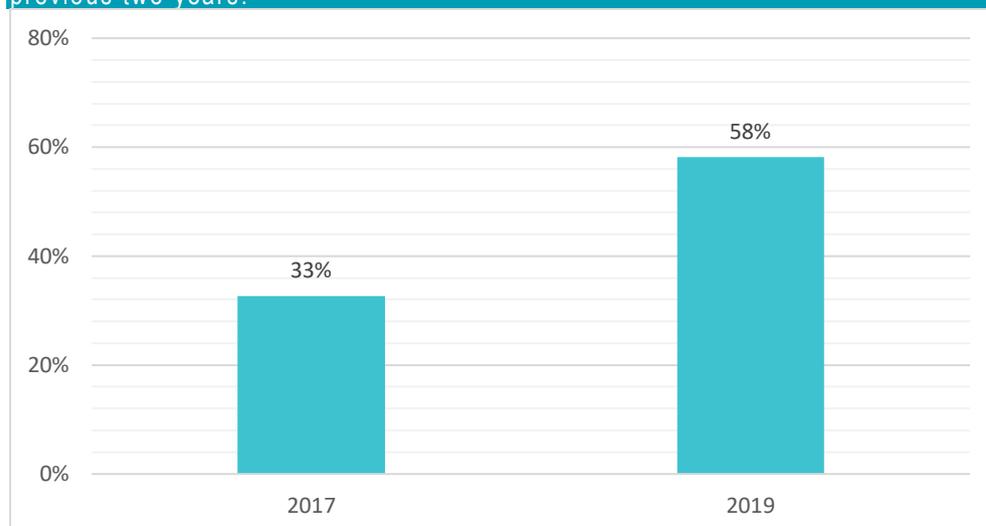
5. Findings on outcomes and trajectories towards Impact

5.1 OVERALL FINDINGS

The outcome of PaCC, phase 1: Peace and governance strengthened at national and local level.

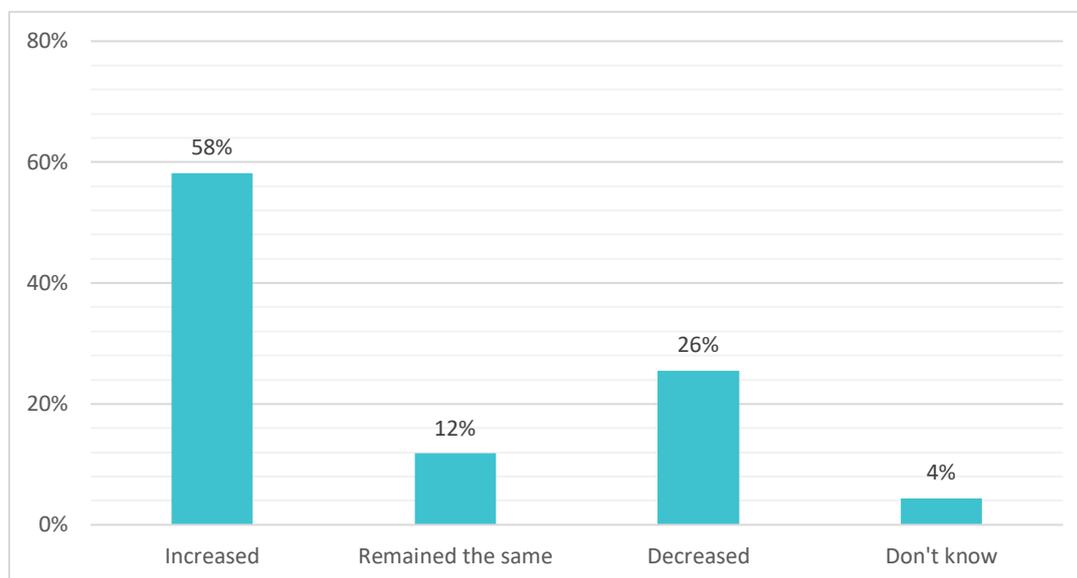
The Summative Evaluation (see Figure 4 and Figure 5) found that even if 58% reported an improved feeling of personal safety, security has remained the same or decreased for a large group of respondents. Women felt less secure than men. The survey showed regional variations due to local outbreaks of insecurity and violence and the security situation in the conflict clusters remain volatile.

Figure 4 Percent of respondents that perceived that security and safety improved over the previous two years.



Source: *Summative Evaluation of the UNDP South Sudan Peace and Community Cohesion (PaCC) Project*. The 2017 data originate from the baseline survey from that year. The 2019 data is from the perception survey from that year.

Figure 5. Percent of respondents in 2019 that perceived that security and safety changed in different directions over the previous two years.



Source: *Summative Evaluation of the UNDP South Sudan Peace and Community Cohesion (PaCC) Project* n = 450²²

Achievements at output level.

Achievements were mainly felt at local level, but the high expectations related to peace building show quite differentiated responses. According to the *Summative Evaluation*, the number of resolved resource-related conflicts far exceeded the target.

The *Summative Evaluation* also reported a positive development for Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) cases,²³ for which the perception of decline was quite remarkable. On a similar positive note did the relationships between divided communities improved considerably through joint activities.

Meanwhile, it has been difficult for the project to establish policy frameworks and systemic change (i.e. outcome 3). Other donor-supported programmes face similar challenges (see, for example, the HPF and UNFPA case studies of this evaluation).

²² With regard to Figure 4 and 5, Figure 4 seems to have retrospective data from the baseline survey, compared with retrospective data from the 2019 survey. The *Summative Evaluation* only presents the disaggregated data in Figure 5.

²³ There is a distinction between domestic violence (which was not part of the survey) and SGBV cases. Domestic violence: Abuse (physical, sexual, psychological, economic) that occurs within a household or intimate relationship and/or involving current or former partners or family members. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in conflict is violence targeting individuals because of their gender, occurring in armed conflict or humanitarian crises, and including rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage, and other abuses — often used as a weapon of war or a means of intimidation and control.

Our interviews with stakeholders indicated a **weak political commitment** in linking local good practices to national-level peace institutions. Consequently, Phase 2 of PaCC gave more emphasis to the local level institutions to operate in their own right and did less to try and establish linkages to the national level (see also below).

The most remarkable achievement reported by the *Summative Evaluation* at output level is the **number of conflicts being resolved** by local and traditional leaders who had been trained by PaCC. The project aimed to resolve 100 local conflicts but reported to have resolved as many as 215. This achievement also speaks to the increase in the number of communities with local level dialogue mechanisms which were established around shared resources (from 31 to 76).

There was reportedly a positive outcome regarding **the incidence of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV)**, as mentioned above. At baseline, only 19.2% of respondents perceived a recent decrease in SGBV, compared to 58.2% at the time of the *Summative Evaluation*. The indicator for support systems to SGBV was expected to double from 59 groups to 120 groups but fell slightly short with 105 groups being established.

Relationships reportedly improved between divided communities through initiatives that build on common interests. A key feature of the PaCC has been to promote peace in inter-community conflicts through joint social and economic activities. This output registered considerable overachievement in the progress reporting and confirmed in the *Summative Evaluation*. Activities increased threefold both for women and youth groups. These achievements were way above target but is also a reflection of project resources being available. It is of more interest that the proportion of communities who felt a de-escalation of inter community conflicts increased from 22% to 66%. Finally, so-called migration conferences were organised, which reportedly led to an increase in the number of agreements between pastoral communities from 6 to 17.

PaCC worked to establish institutional infrastructure for peace both at local and national levels. However, **the establishment of national mechanisms for peace and reconciliations underachieved**, because of the difficulties in making breakthroughs and get political buy-in and incentives at national level. The percentage of households in the conflict clusters with confidence in peace and security regressed slightly. Moreover, PaCC did not manage to establish indicators for peace and reconciliation.

One obvious reason for the underachievement is that the targets were heavily dependent on external political factors beyond PaCC as well as UNDP's control, as noted in the Sida Completion report (2020). This underscores the major and general challenge for projects to achieve lasting results (impact and sustainability) in contexts of ongoing conflicts like South Sudan. In this respect, the Sida reporting noted that in spite of relevant and good results within the portfolio of peacebuilding:²⁴ “the political

²⁴ The Portfolio includes two UN projects: RSRTF, PaCC, and three NGO projects: Civil Rights Defenders, NGO Forum and civil society facility.

polarisation, the ongoing conflicts, capacity deficits, lack of responsibility and human rights, has not improved to any significant degree in spite of the international efforts.”²⁵

This statement underscores that sustainability of development cooperation is subject to the political situation and a conducive environment not least in situations of fragility and conflict like in South Sudan. Impact and sustainability cannot be assumed, but may be piecemeal, and such achievements call for deep understanding of a local situation, flexibility in approaches and political will and incentives by power holders at national level.

This is in line with a key lesson from the PaCC results, as we interpret the findings of the *Summative Evaluation*. The achievements were found to be most evident at local level and in less politicised areas, such as addressing local level resource conflicts (Output 1) and support livelihoods (Output 2). PaCC’s conflict analysis, which focused on understanding the unique situation in each conflict cluster enabled PaCC to deliver relevant support and achieve good results at local level. In response to the difficulties in working with peace institutions at national level and linking the local institutional infrastructure for peace with the national level, Phase 2 actually shifted towards more direct engagement in community level peacebuilding activities and institutions and being less engagement at the national level (see also section 5.3.).

Outcomes and trajectory towards impact for specific target groups. Sida, in its assessment of Phase 1, noted regarding “poor people’s perspectives” that

“PaCC will target communities that have suffered violent inter- and intra-communal conflicts to enhance peace and foster peaceful coexistence within and between communities. Beneficiaries, such as displaced communities, women survivors of GBV and cattle herding youth in conflict clusters, will directly benefit from the interventions. These target groups, also including women and children in female headed households, girls in child marriages, people with disabilities and child soldiers, have all been identified as poor and vulnerable in Sida's MDPA for South Sudan, conducted in 2019. These groups are identified as multi-dimensionally poor, i.e. in terms of resources, human security, opportunities and choice as well as power and voice.”²⁶

In other words, PaCC is recognised by Sida as a programme which makes a positive change in difficult locations for poor and vulnerable groups.

The *Summative Evaluation* reported that the project directly reached 335,000 people and indirectly 1,6 million people, out of a population of 3 million in the five targeted conflict clusters. The *Summative Evaluation* also reported that the project established 76 peace committees, with a total of 1,078 members (28% female), in the five conflict clusters. When it comes to the needs of vulnerable persons, a total of 105 SGBV and

²⁵ Sida, (2021), p. 10. Team translation from Swedish to English.

²⁶ Sida (2020), Sida: Appraisal of Phase II 2020-06-16.

psychosocial support groups were reportedly established, supported, and actively engaged in preventing SGBV in their communities.

This information was repeated in the Sida documentation. However, we have not been able to collect sufficient information to verify this information, and we cannot see that Sida has questioned the information in the *Summative Evaluation*. It is unknown to what extent the PaCC team has verified the findings from the *Summative Evaluation*.

5.2 SCALE OF OUTCOMES

The scale of outcomes and trajectories towards impact on the overall level of peace in the South Sudanese society is difficult to ascertain. The assessment of the *Summative Evaluation* was that the strategy and approaches could be scaled up and replicated. This would increase local-level social cohesion as more communities would then establish peace committees and in this way institutionalise inter-communal conflict resolution processes and local migration conferences, aimed at bringing together parties in conflict and resolve their disputes.

PaCC project staff, beneficiaries and Sida staff that we interviewed felt that the PaCC approach had potential for scale up and replicability. The general positive assessment of PaCC's achievements, which led Sida and other donors to scale up their support to PaCC, stands in contrast to most analysis on the impact of donor support to peacebuilding in South Sudan (this is discussed in the next section).

5.3 OUTCOMES, IMPACT TRAJECTORIES AND SUSTAINABILITY

With the data currently available, it is not possible to draw strong conclusions about impact trajectories and sustainability. The assessment of the *Summative Evaluation* is that the programme has achieved sustainable results at community level (outputs and outcomes). These include:

- Capacity building and working at community level were important achievements that could potentially lead to sustainability of the project interventions. Involving local partners in the implementation of project activities was also seen as promoting sustainability.
- Small infrastructure projects have been handed over to communities. Water management committees had established cost recovery schemes to maintain water points. However, spare parts for repair and maintenance, and technical capacity were the Achilles heel. So even with community ownership the sustainability of the investments was not secured.
- Social and economic empowerment activities such as shoemakers, blacksmiths, meat markets, peanut butter production and small-scale business created employment and sustainable livelihoods for the locals.

The *Summative Evaluation* does not discuss the “elephant in the room,” which concerns the lack of political will of the elite to promote sustainable peace nationally (as discussed above), which affects the overall potential for lasting impact and sustainability. Nevertheless, the *Summative Evaluation* shares an observation formulated in technically worded language, and noted that national and local government structures lacked proper planning and resources to upscale and ensure sustainability of some of the project initiatives realised especially facilitating and sustaining peace dialogue mechanisms.

The lack of political will leading to shortcomings in institutionalisation and sustainability of the peace infrastructure promoted by PaCC came up in our interviews. Although considerable efforts had been made by donors, the National Peace Commission seemed to be an almost empty shell, stripped of its original power and resources by the Government that established the body. The same can be said about the Ministry of Peace Building. These institutions were set up as part of the Peace Agreement in effect from 2019, but they seemed to be mainly “window dressing”, as the Government did not allocate resources for the institutions.

We interviewed the National Peace Commission, which had a few donor resources, but their activities and power was curtailed, not least signalled by their premises. They were in a delapidated house with no facilities and services (no electricity and water) at the outskirts of Juba. Considering the above, PaCC’s focus on local level conflict resolution and economic opportunities seem to be a relevant choice of approach and emphasis on community level.

Regarding trajectories of impact and sustainability, assessments paint a bleak picture of the achievements of development cooperation provided in South Sudan.

A recent CSRF meta-analysis²⁷ asks the pertinent question *Why have the billions of dollars spent on South Sudan from 2005 onwards produced so few lasting results?* The CSRF conclusion is that the outbreaks of civil war (peaks in 2013 and 2016) have necessitated a shift back to humanitarian assistance and away from development and statebuilding objectives. Although the peace agreement from 2019 holds to the present, conflict and violence persist, and national level political and military tensions escalate at the sub-national level, causing death, displacement and food insecurity in many areas of the country. “These circumstances, coupled with the distrust in government authorities, make it difficult for donor agencies to have an impact beyond emergency response and to move from treating symptoms to addressing root causes of crisis.”²⁸

A Synthesis Review of twelve evaluations of projects aimed at contributing to stability in South Sudan overall, found that these evaluations did not provide evidence that the interventions achieved significant or immediate impacts on stabilising the region. Similarly to PaCC, the projects included in that review were interventions to prevent or reduce community conflicts, strengthen livelihoods, promote peace, build mediation

²⁷ CSRF, (2023), p. 2-3

²⁸ Ibid.

capacity for civil society organizations, and support the reintegration of former combatants, which also largely cover the activities of PaCC and therefore provides a good perspective on PaCC. Projects focusing on peacebuilding, such as establishing peace clubs, were found to increase community structures and perceptions of collaboration but lacked objective evidence of reducing violence or achieving behavioural changes.²⁹

Other interventions, including projects to increase access to public services and a large disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) project, also failed to provide evidence of increased stability. The DDR project particularly failed due to the South Sudan government's lack of political will.³⁰

These rather bleak conclusions of other evaluations can be interpreted in two ways; either that PaCC has found viable pathways to deliver outcomes and trajectories towards impact at local level, or that the documentation available for PaCC is simply too limited to give a more in depth, thorough and independent view on PaCC's achievements.

It was not possible for us to visit any sites of implementation during the field mission to South Sudan, and we can therefore only add that the general view on PaCC and its conflict cluster approach and outcomes/impact is positively viewed by observers on the ground, but also that achieving lasting impact and not least sustainability going beyond achievements at project/programme level has been challenging.

²⁹ Zuercher, C. *et al.*, 2020, Effects of Development Aid to South Sudan 2008 – 2021 Part I: Summary Paper.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

6 Sida's Use of Evidence

Reporting to Sida was annual and there appears to have been communication at regular intervals in South Sudan, although the degree could not be verified during the field mission to Juba. The staff from Sida rotates quite frequently because Juba is a non-family station, so the institutional memory lies primarily with the Stockholm based team. The PaCC team did also change staff members, although less frequent than Sida (and other international donors).

We looked into some aspects of the reporting to Sida to the extent that this could be established. This is summarised below:

Conclusions on Performance by Sida is available for 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021. These reports are generally positive and with limited detail. The Sida reporting is seemingly uncritical and repeats the PaCC reporting. The data sources and reliability are not questioned by Sida. The lack of access to some of the locations and the staff turnovers in Juba is most likely an explanatory factor which has influenced the limited feedback on the reporting to Sida, and Sida's own reporting.

We mentioned earlier in this report that PaCC did not use the term impact in the programme logic. The PaCC team prepared a Final Project Report for Sweden (October 2020).³¹ The outcome of PaCC phase 1 was reported as “positive” by both UNDP and by Sida.³² The evidence was sourced from the findings and conclusions of the *Summative Evaluation*. In the Report to Sida the analysis of outcomes of the *Summative Evaluation* were relabelled as “impact”, possibly because Sida asked about impact to be included in the reporting. However, we do not see this as a major issue as the outcome wording in the PaCC results logic, such as “strengthened peace” could very well be considered as a trajectory towards impact in other donor projects/programmes.

³¹ UNDP (2020), Peace and Community Cohesion Project, Project Number: 00102663

Agreement/donor reference number: Final Project Report. Prepared for: Sweden October 2020.

³² Sida (2020), Sida: Appraisal of Phase II 2020-06-16, p. 5, Interview with UNDP, PaCC staff and Sida staff. Not least was there a recognition that the challenging operational context chosen by PaCC was a merit in its own right.

With regard to the reporting to Sida, it is worth repeating the limitations of the underlying data in the *Summative Evaluation*, e.g. a heavy reliance on sources with a stake in the project and the lack of any systematic attempts to establish causality. These shortcomings typically imply that we sometimes have *an absence of evidence*, i.e. the data are insufficient for drawing clear conclusions in any direction (which is different from *evidence of absence*, which we typically do not have). Sida's documentation does not include such considerations but take all information "at face value".

The general positive assessment of PaCC's achievements, which led Sida and other donors to scale up their support to PaCC, is more positive than the assessment of donor support to *peacebuilding* in South Sudan generally as discussed section 5.3. Other assessments hold a more critical view and state concern of the lack of sustainability of results of peacebuilding initiatives due to the predominance of short-term, humanitarian-style interventions and not least weak national institutional capacities.³³

However, there is time dimension to be considered. Looking at Sida's Strategy for South Sudan 2018-2022, Sida notes that "the armed conflict is the biggest obstacle to sustainable development in South Sudan", but Sida at that point took an optimistic view about development cooperation being able to deliver results and make meaningful contribute *peaceful societies*, which was the overall goal of the strategy.³⁴ The optimism should be seen in light of the peace agreement negotiations progressing well and being close to signing in 2019 (discussed above in chapter 2).

³³ The EBA (Expert Group for Aid Studies) — *Practicing Peacebuilding Principles* (2021), finds South Sudan had the least coherence among Sweden's cases; highlights a disconnect between humanitarian and development work, and notes very low staffing, and ownership challenges—all of which is said to undermine sustainability. Likewise, the EBA — *Fit for Fragility* (2019), notes that in contexts including South Sudan, donors often default to direct service delivery and humanitarian channels that make a minimal contribution to strengthening government systems—a core sustainability concern. The Sida evaluation — *Evaluation of Country Programme Support to UNFPA, UNICEF & UN Women* (2022) found in the case of South Sudan that there are risks to sustaining gains and ownership, plus financing gaps and high operational costs—all factors that threaten sustainability of outcomes.

³⁴ Sida (2018) *Strategy for Sweden's Development Cooperation for South Sudan 2018-2022*, p 4-5

7 Conclusions

As found above, the PaCC Phase 1 has largely achieved its outputs and made strides in relation to outcomes and trajectories towards impact. The shortcomings relate to sustained peace efforts and overall reduction of conflicts in the country. The ToC has an overoptimistic expectation in this regard. The population targeted have been positively affected, and although impact is not in the project logic, proxies (outputs, outcome and sustainability) indicate that there has been impact although it cannot be said to be sustainable given the volatile context.

The *Summative Evaluation* did not discuss the “elephant in the room,” which concerns the lack of political will of the elite to promote sustainable peace nationally (as discussed above), which affects the overall potential for lasting impact and sustainability. A case in point underscoring this point was the lack of sustainability of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission and the Ministry of Peace Building. We witnessed the shortcomings in institutionalisation and sustainability of the peace infrastructure promoted by PaCC, which was evident in interviews. Although considerable efforts have been made by donors, the National Peace Commission seems to be an almost empty shell, stripped of its original power and resources by the Government that established the body. The same can be said about the ministry.

Leaving that aside. The main factors supporting the apparent success of the PaCC were formulated by the UNDP staff during the field mission. It was emphasised that based on experience peace building projects must have tangible socio-economic types of support to families (“people cannot eat peace”), so poverty reduction through socio-economic activities go hand in hand with peacebuilding. Not only UNDP but seemingly most projects supporting peace building in South Sudan balance and mix peacebuilding activities with tangible socio-economic interventions, noting that the real incentives are for people to improve their livelihoods, whether such achievements can be impactful over the longer term and be sustained cannot be concluded.

There is lack of systemic sustainability, meaning that the good results achieved at the level of communities in the conflict clusters often are jeopardised by the continued power struggles and instigation of political violence, where communities are used as the medium by rivalling elites. Such situations mean that individual households and whole communities may see their own efforts to improve their situation being eroded again and again. The conflict drivers (see section 2 above) are powerful and multifaceted and also challenging.

It was consistently pointed out during the field mission that because Sida did not earmark its funding and thereby accepted adaptive management and flexibility, the funding could be spent across all components of the PaCC, giving the implementers the possibility to address issues as these would arise and change approaches along with changing conflict patterns and opportunities for socio-economic development.

Overall, the findings and conclusions of the impact of PaCC in this case study are based on a narrow set of data collected by staff. The data collection appears to have been done systematically and timely, but the *Summative Evaluation* is the only independent source during Phase 1 and Phase 2. Sida seems to be uncritical of the reporting from PaCC/UNDP and although there are positive outcomes, the data supporting such conclusions need to be viewed through a critical lens, which affects the overall reliability of the very positive view carried forward by PaCC/UNDP and Sida.

8 Annex 1 – List of documents

Checchi, F. *et al.* (2018), “Estimates of crisis attributable mortality in South Sudan, December 2013 April 2018 - A statistical analysis.”

CSRF (2023), “CSRF Meta-Analysis: International Engagement in South Sudan.”

de Waal, A. (March 28, 2019), “Security Arrangements in South Sudan’s Peace Deal: Do No Harm,” *Conflict and Civiness Research Blog*, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/crp/2019/03/28/security-arrangements-in-south-sudans-peace-deal/>, accessed January 7, 2025.

OECD-DAC CRS database: CRS: Creditor Reporting System (flows) [cloud replica], <https://data-explorer.oecd.org>

Schreiber, D. *et al.* (2020), “Fit for Fragility,” *Fit For Fragility: Practice To Policy*,

Sida (2021), “Strategirapport för Sveriges utvecklingssamarbete med Sydsudan 2018-2022.”

Sida (2020), “Appraisal of Phase II 2020-06-16.”

Sida (2020), “Decision on Contribution, South Sudan Peace and Community Cohesion Project, 2020-2024 undated (Sida ref: 13340).”

UNDP (2024), “South Sudan RSRTF,” *South Sudan RSRTF*, <https://mptfportal.uat.undp.org/fund/ssr00>, accessed January 7, 2025.

UNDP (2020), “Peace and Community Cohesion Project Project Number: 00102663 Agreement/donor reference number: Final Project Report. Prepared for: Sweden October 2020.”

UNDP (2018), “Reconciling Communities: Impact stories from the PaCC project in South Sudan.”

UNDP (2017), “PaCC, Project Document, Revised May 2017.”

UNDP and DGSU (2018), “Endline Study on Peace, Security and SGBV in South Sudan.”

UNDP *et al.* (2020), “UNDP, PaCC Summative Evaluation.”

World Bank Group (2024), "Overview," *World Bank*,
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/southsudan/overview>, accessed April 5, 2024.

Zuercher, C. *et al.* (2020), "Effects of Development Aid to South Sudan 2008 – 2021
Part I: Summary Paper," *IOB*.

Impact study of the UNDP South Sudan, Peace and Community Cohesion project

The **UNDP South Sudan, Peace and Community Cohesion project (PaCC)**, Phase 1 (2017 to 2020), aimed to improve security by strengthening relations between divided communities through joint projects. It also helped to set up institutional peace institutions at both local and national level.

Main method: Review of documentation and monitoring data, complemented with interviews.

Positives: Beneficiaries reported improvements in a range of areas, including perceived security. However, the data does not permit us to clearly attribute these improvements to the project. Sida's non-earmarked funding enabled adaptive management and flexibility, allowing funds to be spent across activities as needed, which was perceived as important for achieving positive results.

Potential shortcomings: The security situation in the project areas remain volatile, and gains are fragile due to recurring crises. The project did not successfully address the weak or absent institutions. Local achievements were not scaled up to the national level, highlighting the difficulties of achieving sustainable impact in a fragile, and conflict-affected context with limited political will. Sida's reporting is based exclusively on the project data available, which result in limitations of rigidity. These limitations have not been reflected in Sida's reporting.

SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY

Visiting address: Rissneleden 110, 174 57 Sundbyberg
Postal address: Box 2025, SE-174 02 Sundbyberg, Sweden
Telephone: +46 (0)8-698 50 00. Telefax: +46 (0)8-20 88 64
E-mail: sida@sida.se Web: sida.se/en

