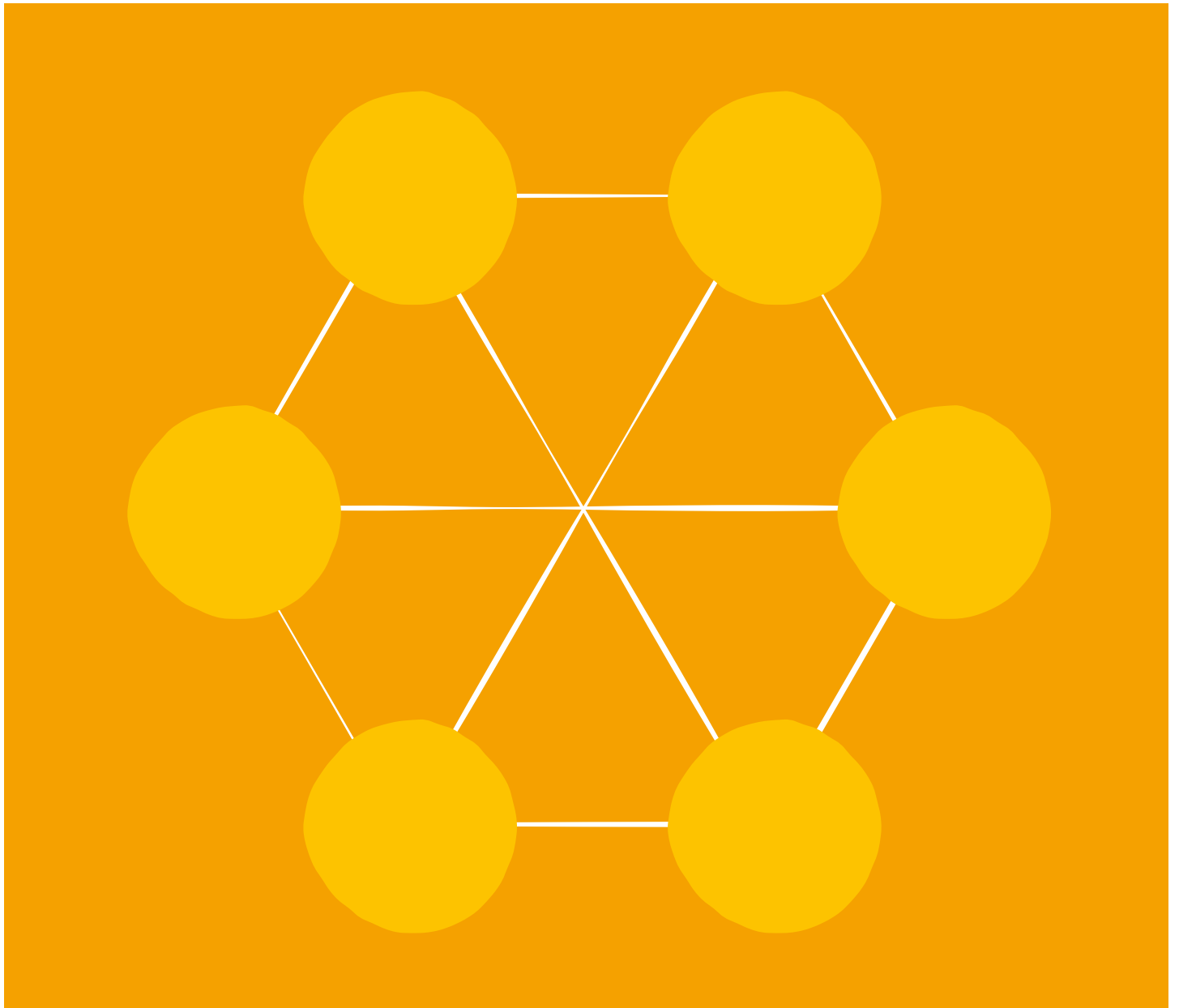




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Conflict sensitivity hubs:

A comparative perspective of
six Conflict Sensitivity hubs



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Conflict sensitivity hubs:

A comparative perspective of six Conflict Sensitivity hubs

A study commissioned by International Alert

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Abbreviations and acronyms

APC	Action pour la Paix et la Concorde
CDA	Collaborative Development Assistance
CRIO	Comité Régional Inter-Organisation (Inter-organisational Regional Committee)
CS	Conflict Sensitivity
CSF	Conflict Sensitivity Forum
CSRf	Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility
DFID	Department for International Development
DNH	Do No Harm
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EU	European Union
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
GIZ	Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit / German International Cooperation
HoP	House of Peace
IAAG	Inter-Agency Staff Advisory Group
(I)NGO	(International) Non-Governmental Organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LIS	Local Insights Services
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
PCI	Peace Change Initiative
PSF	Paung Sie Facility
PCU	Project Coordination Unit
RAFT	Respect Accountability Fairness and Transparency
RMO	Risk Management Office
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SSU	Stabilisation Support Unit
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UK	United Kingdom
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WACSN	West Africa Conflict Sensitivity Network
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive summary

As part of the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO)-funded project aimed at piloting a Conflict Sensitivity (CS) hub in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), International Alert commissioned a study to review existing CS hubs in six countries. The objective was to identify key lessons and to inform thinking and discussion on CS support needs and responses in the DRC. The CS hubs reviewed are located in South Sudan, Sudan, Libya, Lebanon, Myanmar and Yemen. The study focused on five thematic areas that form the basis of all CS hubs—mandate, size, implementers, activities and impact measurement methods—to understand constants and variables between hubs, and to inform thinking on a possible DRC CS hub. Semi-structured interviews were held with 52 individuals, ranging from donor representatives (17), CS hub implementers (15), experts in CS (11), INGOs or implementing agencies (7) and local NGOs (2). Information was also gathered from the hubs' respective websites. The Table below contains a comparative overview of the six hubs and the five thematic topics covered.

Hub	Need/mandate	Size/budget/donors	Implementing agency	Activities	Impact measurement method
CSRF South Sudan	Lack of understanding of context by donors	Large institutional multi-donor funding (£1.65 million)	Peacebuilding NGO, limited physical presence	Works with humanitarian actors , on research, training and convening/lobbying	Outcome harvesting (supported by a Theory of Change (ToC))
CSF Sudan	Support the aid sector to be more conflict sensitive. Aims at improving aid in Sudan.	Small, single donor (£600,000)	Peacebuilding NGO, limited physical presence	Provides analysis, convenes discussions, shares learning, and provides support capacity for the aid sector .	Outcome harvesting
Yemen CS Platform	Lack of understanding of the context; Strategic-level interaction aiming at a shift in aid	Medium single donor (£1 million)	Peacebuilding NGO, academic institution	Capacity support for aid actors individually and for the aid sector ; lessons sharing and learning	Logframe (combined with a ToC to understand pathways for change)
CS Forum Libya	Lack of understanding of the context	Medium, Multi-donor US\$ 200,000	Peacebuilding NGO, limited physical presence	Provides international humanitarian actors with updated conflict analysis. Organises workshops and research activities	Survey measuring change to activity by participant (as part of a ToC)
RAFT Myanmar	Respond to the complexity of the conflict context	Large, paid services (no institutional donor funding)	Local NGO, large physical presence	Provides paid research, facilitation and training services to all actors involved in the country	n/a
CS Forum Lebanon	Local NGOs' lack of awareness of CS in their work; also triggered by the Syrian refugee crisis	Small, local funding	Local peacebuilding NGO, with a physical presence	Provides support for mostly local humanitarian actors by training and convening	n/a

CS hub background and target audiences

The study found **most hubs were initially donor funded and devised** (with the exception of Lebanon). The primary reason for their creation was the identification of risks resulting from international community responses that lacked sufficient **understanding of the context**, together with donor appetite and interest **to better coordinate assistance, particularly humanitarian and development assistance**. Hubs differ in size and in staffing. Some are quite large, with multi-year donor funding; for example CSRF South Sudan. Others are quite small and 'organically' grown (Lebanon). Most hubs have had a primary focus on humanitarian actors, with the exception of Myanmar, which worked with all actors involved in the aid sector, including development and peacebuilding agencies. International organisations, including INGOs, UN agencies, and donors, were the primary initial target group of most hubs, with the exception of Lebanon, which clearly focussed on local actors from the start, and Myanmar. Some hubs also gradually included local actors as services recipients, mostly in relation to capacity building. Most hubs are run by a consortium of implementing agencies, typically peacebuilding and conflict resolution INGOs and research institutions (Yemen, South Sudan), or by a single NGO (Libya and Lebanon).

Key services and functions of CS hubs

CS hubs typically undertake a combination of the following activities: a) **research, analysis**; b) **training - capacity building** and c) **convening/lobbying**. Research and analysis are considered 'core' hub activities. In the majority of cases, these products have been targeted towards donors, as these often lacked contextual information to inform their programmes and policies. Research outputs have often also been disseminated to the wider aid sector. Concerning **capacity building**, all CS hubs offered training to implementers, mostly INGOs, usually in a demand-driven context rather than at an institutional level. Most training offers were generic. There were few examples of directing hub resources to tailored trainings for aid implementers – for example to directly respond to their respective mandate or capacity level. Training for donors was typically focussed on informing new staff on contextual analysis. Hubs did not systematically review or provide recommendations on donor policies and practices.

Some CS facilities also **convene strategic sector/cluster meetings**, mostly around thematic issues. During these meetings, CS facilities present CS issues and/or offer options for joint action and synergy between aid actors. Examples of successful applications of CS principles at 'cluster' level are the development of a Humanitarian Response Plan, including a CS lens, in South Sudan, and joint scenario planning exercises in Libya. In Libya, bi-monthly meetings are organised during which INGOs and donors are briefed on the changing context and potential implications for the aid community.

Lessons on impact of CS hubs

Evidence varies in relation to measuring the impact of CS hubs. In some cases, indicators were not clearly defined at the hub inception stage, highlighting the need for donors and implementers to invest more time in agreeing parameters and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems at the outset. Indicators for measuring behaviour change in relation to CS are relatively new and good practice is evolving. Nevertheless, several key lessons were highlighted in this study:

1. **Additional support and guidance is required to support uptake of research findings and implementation of recommendations by implementers and donors.** This could take the form of guidance notes or hands-on accompaniment and mentoring, both of which are resource-intensive. Resourcing for this would need to come from within hubs or from the target actors themselves.
2. **Most CS facilities are able to convene various actors** involved in the aid sector to discuss CS, **but the meetings do not systematically translate into the adoption of joint CS approaches**, joint analysis, joint programming or joint strategies. There is a need to be clear about what impact/changes can be expected from a hub and its potential limitations—for example, a reliance on “buy in” and take-up of its recommendations.
3. **Efforts to lobby donors to become more conflict sensitive, individually and collectively, were made by a few CS hubs**, notably in Libya and South Sudan. In other countries there were obstacles such as lack of priority on the part of donors, and/or conflicting foreign policy agendas.
4. **CS facilities—especially in the context of the DRC—need to maintain their independence from INGOs and from donors to gain credibility and carry out their missions effectively.** This requires multi-donor funding when possible, and independent identification and branding, i.e. own logo and email address.
5. **A clear, realistic mandate is essential for an emerging hub**, i.e. WHAT a hub is going to do, for WHOM, and WHERE. While the ambition *can* be to work at all levels in the long run, a clear mandate with clear objectives in the early phase is crucial. Working at all levels through offering many different types of services, including capacity building/technical support; information/analysis provision, coordination/alignment/political presents too many challenges in the inception phase.
6. It is equally important to **build trust and to ensure commitment from the beneficiary community**, i.e., clearly define who the main beneficiaries are, e.g. donors, INGOs, local implementing partners, as their needs and demands may be different.
7. It is important to **balance engagement between international and national actors**. While CS hubs are often donor driven, local actors’ buy-in is essential as the services offered concern ALL actors in the aid chain in conflict areas.
8. Specifically for the DRC, **engage local actors from the beginning**, as they have demonstrated a clear interest in benefiting from the services of a hub. Local actors have shown enthusiasm for CS as an approach that can improve the effectiveness of their programmes and enhance the effectiveness of the whole sector through improved collaboration.
9. **There is a gap between knowing what CS is, its underlying principles, and how to incorporate it within programmes** and within an institution as a whole. Often the missing links are a) **a lack of appropriate tailor-made tools**, and b) **a focus on CS at programme level** without looking at institutional obstacles such as management buy-in and lack of conducive procedures/environment.
10. Most CS hubs **struggle to provide adequate recommendations around what the donor community can do with the information they provide**, both collectively—how/when to coordinate—and individually—how to integrate CS in their own strategies and policies.
11. Overall, most actors consulted for this study suggested that **CS is becoming more prominent on the agenda of cluster group meetings**, and **CS is gradually being adopted in programme design and set-up** by most

actors they engage. For instance, CSRF in South Sudan has assisted many organisations to integrate CS ideas and approaches into their programme proposals. Evidence of impact has mostly been achieved at programme level; less so at organisational and sectoral levels.

Recommendations for a CS hub in the DRC

Based on the review of CS hubs, and analysis of the DRC context, this study identifies a gap in CS support in the DRC that could usefully be filled through the creation of a facility. There is demand and need from donors, humanitarian and development actors in the DRC for more support on CS. At the moment, such support is provided ad hoc by some donors. There is no centralised offer.

Recommendations for actors wanting to support improved CS in the DRC are:

Scope and mandate:

- A CS hub should have a general objective and primary mandate to act as a CS expertise centre for the whole aid community.
- UN agencies are also critical actors which do not currently have access to CS support. A facility providing CS advice and support to the UN Country Team is critical for the DRC, given the scale of UN activities and approaching United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the DR Congo (MONUSCO) transition. Further scoping is recommended to define how the CS advice and support may be best provided. This study recommends as most effective an independent CS hub, housed outside of the UN and providing services for UN and non-UN actors.
- Priority geographic focus should be eastern DRC (North Kivu, South Kivu, Tanganyika and Ituri) and the Greater Kasai provinces, including Kasai and Kasai Central.
- The CS hub should start small, take a flexible and adaptive design approach, grow gradually, and generate demand for its services in an incremental fashion.

Public/audience

- The CS hub should focus on the international community initially, namely donors and (I)NGOs – mostly those involved in the humanitarian sector, though not excluding development and peacebuilding actors. Ideally a CS hub would also support the UN as well as International Finance Institutions (IFIs), including the World Bank, The African Development Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
- A secondary priority would be to target government officials. Further reflection would be required on government engagement in the DRC context based on lessons from other hubs. The CS hub should have a well-crafted engagement strategy with the government, given the sensitivities of collaborating, or being perceived as collaborating, with a party in the conflict.

Governance and implementation modalities

- The CS hub should be implemented by a consortium of specialist national and international implementers, to ensure credibility, increase buy-in, and support maximal perception of neutrality.
- As was highlighted in a recent CSRF review,¹ and confirmed by most interviewees, there is a difference in knowledge uptake between working **for** a stakeholder (conducting a conflict analysis **for** an INGO for instance) and working **with** a stakeholder (providing tools, guidance and accompaniment for the stakeholder to design its own conflict analysis and assess the impact of the context on the conflict and vice versa).

- The CS hub should identify proportionate and inclusive governance modalities. A supervisory/strategic steering board should be comprised of key donors as well as representation from the UN and IFIs. An executive/technical board made up of implementers and one or two members of the supervisory board is recommended to oversee the day-to-day running of the hub. Additional structures for donor ‘sign off’ on programmatic spend might be required contractually but should be minimised as much as possible.
- The CS hub will need to demonstrate independence from donors and existing actors. It could be hosted within a peacebuilding NGO with an existing operational footprint; however, the hub should have its own branding and identity, including name, website, logo, email.

Coordination with existing structures and support to the UN Country Team

- The CS hub should take into account what other actors are doing in the DRC, including the UN Stabilisation Support Unit (SSU) in MONUSCO, which has a coordination mandate on stabilisation programming. Other convening actors include the INGO Forum, the International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO), and the *Comités Régionaux Inter-Organisations* (CRIO), among others. We recommend that the SSU could perform complementary functions to a CS hub, for example by sharing information with the CS hub (e.g. its conflict analysis and International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy (ISSSS) guidance, and by helping disseminate analysis/research and guidance conducted by the CS hub.
- In its capacity-building activities, the CS hub should also make use of existing work undertaken, in particular the Conflict Sensitivity thematic guidance materials developed by Transition International in 2021 and supported by GIZ and the German Development Ministry.

Priority activities to be undertaken by the hub

- The CS hub should start with a focus on generating, consolidating and supporting dissemination of **analysis**, and conducting **training** activities, particularly to the international community. These are relatively low-cost and high-return activities that would immediately fill a gap. A carefully developed open-access context analysis which is updated regularly would be a good starting point to engage external parties, acquire brand awareness, and generate further demand for services.
- Tailored capacity building and accompaniment for strategic humanitarian and development actors would add unique value to a CS facility and would further support buy-in from a cross-section of UN and non-UN actors.
- The CS hub should engage in convening activities with all actors in the aid sector—to reflect on good practice regarding CS, discuss challenges and strategies to overcome them—once it has built an excellent track record and it is recognised as an institution adding value.

Concerning the research/analysis offer, the hub should:

- Share regular up-to-date information such as briefings on the conflict context with the whole aid community, per province, territory, and possibly *groupement*.
- Synthesise existing research, reports and analysis on the conflict context, per programme type and per province/territory.
- Write guidance notes on a regular basis on what this research means for programmes and policies, for donors and programme implementers.
- Conduct outreach activities to disseminate the guidance notes, to ensure proper uptake. Alternative media, infographics, social media channels may be used.

Concerning the capacity building offer, the hub should:

- Offer training to new donor/(I)NGO/UN staff on the conflict context of the DRC, and on basic CS principles.
- Develop a training offer for implementing agencies and donors on CS principles and practice.

- Offer support to donors to review programmes and projects on their adherence to CS principles and standards.
- Accompany donors and implementing agencies in the process of integrating CS principles in their programmes/organisations on a regular basis, through the development and execution of Action Plans.

Resourcing

- An estimated budget for a DRC CS hub is US\$ 600,000 in year one. This would cover four permanent national staff, including two analysts and two trainers, and one senior international advisor, as well as operational costs, including website design/maintenance and travel.
- To ensure its sustainability, neutrality and maximal buy-in, the CS hub should ideally have multi-donor support as well as inclusive governance. As actors become more familiar with the work and added value of the hub, it could charge for some services, e.g. training, and explore some paid service provision to donors, large INGOs and the private sector.

Staffing

- Ensure staff includes a sound mix of researchers/academics with significant experience working with implementers, or with a background within an implementing agency, as they will make operational recommendations and will need to have credibility with actors in the field.
- Ensure staff stay politically objective, given the sensitivities. CS principles of inclusivity, transparency, accountability and representativity in terms of gender, ethnic and linguistic background should be applied in the recruitment process.
- Create a pool of researchers and a pool of CS experts to choose from. A list of existing research institutions (Congo Research Group, Ghent university, Kivu Security Tracker, to name a few) and of reliable local researchers should be drafted in order to provide rapid support if needed.
- Ensure those researchers have an impeccable reputation and excellent academic and analytical skills, and are able to write synthesis materials and update them on a regular basis.
- Ensure the researchers hired for analyses are a good mix of international and national actors; international academics can bring impartiality while national researchers can bring their local knowledge and networks.

Introduction

General introduction

As part of the FCDO-funded project aimed at piloting a CS hub in the DRC, International Alert has commissioned a study to review existing CS hubs in other countries to collect relevant lessons learned. While CS is not a new concept, donors and practitioners in various contexts may practice it differently. Humanitarian, development and peacebuilding organisations operating in the DRC, and some of their donors and stakeholders, have recognised the need for their efforts to be better coordinated and represented to increase their effectiveness on the ground and on the strategic and advocacy levels.

Within this context, this study aims to review the experiences of a number of CS initiatives that have sprung up over the past decade in order to draw on learning, build on good practices, and inform thinking on institutionalising CS support in the DRC. The CS entities reviewed are based mainly in Asia and Africa and vary in duration from between some ten years (Libya) to only a few months (Sudan). The principle objective of this study is to provide a comparative analysis of several existing CS support mechanisms with a view to inform International Alert and the FCDO, as well as strategic donors and international partners in the DRC, on possible pitfalls and opportunities when a new CS entity is being set up. The review compared the various CS facilities across the following themes:

- a. Background, scope and mandate
- b. Size, budget/funding, structure and sustainability
- c. Implementation modalities
- d. Type of services and activities
- e. Impact and M&E

Each section starts with key take-away points or recommendations. The CS entities studied are the CS Resource Facility (CSRF) based in Juba, South Sudan, the recently set up CS Facility in Khartoum, Sudan; the CS Forum initiated in 2014 in Libya; the Yemen CS Platform; RAFT, the CS facility in Myanmar; and the Lebanon CS Forum. For an overview of each CS hub reviewed independently, see Annex A: Overview of CS hubs. Annex B provides the names of interviewees. Annex C presents three other types of units/structures that cannot be labelled CS facilities as such, but that provide some CS-related analysis and/or services. These are the Project Coordination Unit (PCU) in Nepal and the Local Insight Services (LIS) in Myanmar, both of which function as in-house facilities for a single donor, the FCDO, as well as the recently set up West Africa Conflict Sensitivity Network.

Table 1: CS entities reviewed (and other CS units) plus implementing agency

Name	Country	Implementing agency
Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility	South Sudan	Saferworld, Swisspeace
Conflict Sensitivity Facility	Sudan	Saferworld
Yemen Conflict Sensitivity Platform	Yemen	Search for Common Ground, Seton Hall University
Conflict Sensitivity Forum	Libya	PCI (Peace Change Initiative)
RAFT (Respect Accountability Fairness and Transparency)	Myanmar	RAFT
Conflict Sensitivity Forum	Lebanon	House of Peace
West Africa Conflict Sensitivity Network	West Africa	n/a
Project Coordination Unit	Nepal	In-house facility, FCDO
Local Insights Services	Myanmar	In-house facility, FCDO

Methodology

In total, semi-structured interviews were held with 52 individuals, ranging from donor representatives (17), implementers of the CS hubs (15), experts in CS (11, mostly located in countries where the hubs are operational), INGOs or implementing agencies (7) and local NGOs (2), of which both were based in the DRC. Purposive sampling was applied to ensure the reliability and competence of the interviewees. A list of interviewees was drafted by International Alert and enriched by the FCDO. An introductory email was sent by either International Alert or the FCDO, after which the researchers set up interviews.

Table 2: summary of interview list

Stakeholder type	Numbers
Donors	17
CS hub implementers	15
Experts	11
INGOs	7
Local NGOs	2
Total	52

Further information was obtained from various websites that the CS hubs studied have set up. Finally, some internal documents were consulted—primarily regarding the CSRF in South Sudan—such as a report on lessons learned, an annual review, and a strategic review to identify future operating models. In addition, around 30 actors from the DRC (donors, INGOs, UN and local NGOs) were engaged during one of the researcher’s field trips to the DRC in August and September 2021 so as to discuss preliminary findings and assess CS needs. Their views have enriched the report.

Limitations and omissions

This review only concerns a limited number of CS entities. Some CS entities are in their infancy and it is premature to make ‘hard’ conclusions about how they function or about their impact. In the cases of Lebanon and Sudan, but also concerning Libya, only one interview was conducted, which precludes the possibility of cross-reference verification, and statements were taken at face value. However, for Myanmar, Yemen and South Sudan a number

of people were interviewed and hence it was possible to construct a more pronounced and informed review of those facilities.

Furthermore, no national beneficiaries of the various CS hubs were interviewed. This is problematic with regard to being able to sound out how such entities are viewed from within the context of a specific country. As regards impact, it was not possible to ascertain to what degree local national partners benefitted from capacity building and training on CS ideas, and to what extent those trained partners actually embraced and incorporated CS at programme and institutional level.

In addition, this study was conducted in parallel to a global study commissioned by the Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, which focused on lessons learnt from three CS hubs, namely the CSRF in South Sudan, the CS Forum in Libya and the CS Platform in Yemen. Both research teams had a couple of conversations to ensure complementarity and reduce risk of duplication. They also exchanged notes and information during one conversation. Nevertheless, despite efforts made to reduce the burden on interviewees, some participants in the study were engaged twice during a reduced timeframe, which may have resulted in interview fatigue.

The findings combine the opinions expressed by stakeholders engaged during the study and the views of stakeholders engaged in the DRC.

Findings

Section A: Background – scope, mandate – localisation

- Most hubs were donor conceived and funded, given donors' challenges to fully understand conflict contexts and their need to strengthen their capacities to anticipate and adapt to changes in the context.
- CS hubs' mandates varied, but most were tasked with engaging international humanitarian actors through the provision of various services, among which were information provision/analysis, capacity building and convening/lobbying/coordinating.
 - A number of questions need to be explored once a hub is operational, including who "owns" the products produced by the hub, how the hub logo is used, in what ways the hub could recycle information produced to protect sources that are not comfortable being very visible in sharing this information, and how to verify sources of information.
- A clear initial mandate (WHAT a hub is going to do, for WHOM, and WHERE) is crucial in the inception phase, in order to avoid expectations not being met.
- In the DRC context, both international and local actors are interested in CS services, mainly relating to information provision/analysis and capacity building.

Background

Interviews revealed that most hubs were **donor-conceived and funded**, with the exception of Lebanon. As can be seen in more detail in Annex A, individual donors such as the United Kingdom (UK) (initially DFID and later the FCD0), the Swiss government and/or the European Union (EU) were at the forefront of initiating CS facilities in South Sudan, Yemen, Sudan, Afghanistan² and Libya. The main reason accounting for the hubs' existence was humanitarian and development actors' **lack of foresight and understanding of the context**, as well as donors' **desire to coordinate assistance**. For instance, the idea behind the CSRF in South Sudan, one of the oldest and best functioning CS hubs, can be traced back to the attempted coup of December 2013, when most donors were caught by surprise. This led donors to question their analytical and reaction capabilities, two major components of CS. The awareness that donors lacked a sufficiently in-depth understanding of the conflict context, which could hamper the effectiveness of their strategic and programmatic decision-making, was also a major reason for the hubs to be initiated in Yemen and Libya, two countries with protracted crises.

Mandate

The CS entities reviewed in this study have different mandates, but most have been tasked to engage with mostly humanitarian actors operating in a given conflict context (Libya, Yemen, South Sudan and Sudan) through different activities (capacity building, research/intelligence gathering on conflict analysis, or convening). RAFT, in Myanmar, is the only facility with the clear mandate of engaging with **all** aid actors, including development and peacebuilding INGOs. CS hubs' mandates and concomitant services vary from **information provision** to international aid actors about CS risks (Libya and Yemen) and/or **training** (international and national) aid actors (RAFT in Myanmar, CSRF in South Sudan) or **convening meetings, lobbying, and facilitating alignment** among actors (Libya and Yemen).

A few interviewees were of the opinion that a mixed mandate (i.e., a technical/capacity building mandate AND a more 'political' convening/coordinating mandate) is challenging to combine, while others insisted that offering capacity building (technical assistance) could precisely provide CS hubs with the legitimacy (track record and expertise) to facilitate their convening role (coordination of aid, lobby role). Whether it is feasible, and desirable, to work at ALL these levels or a few needs further research. It is however crucial to have clarity on the main role and mandate of the hub. While CS hubs' mandates can evolve over time, a clear initial mandate (WHAT the hub is going to, for WHOM, and WHERE) is crucial in the inception phase in order to avoid expectations not being met. When the research team discussed the CS needs of local and international actors alike in the DRC, information provision and capacity building were the aspects most mentioned.

Localisation/ local vs international?

Generally speaking, there seems to be an inherent tension between international actors and local actors' views and perspectives on who 'CS primary beneficiaries are' (some interviewees referred to the localisation issue). Many CS facilities aspire to work with international and local actors alike, but in many cases, the main audience of CS facilities was international actors (South Sudan, Sudan and Yemen being cases in point). Over time these entities have engaged local actors, notably regarding capacity building on CS issues and how to apply CS approaches in their work. For example, this has led to the setting up of a national NGO mentorship programme in South Sudan which in the near future will be duplicated in Sudan. Nevertheless, it must be made clear that the CSRF in South Sudan, as is the case with most other CS hubs with the exception of Lebanon, is not driven by demands from local actors.

The main argument for focussing on the international aid actors has been that the bulk of aid is funded and distributed by the international aid system, and less so by local national actors. In Libya, however, PCI, the implementing partner, has decided not to engage with local actors, many of whom are heavily politicised, raising questions as to who should be invited and who should be kept outside a CS process. In the end, PCI decided to keep the CS approach international and simply to invite Libyan expertise and perspectives to provide better context information. In the context of the DRC, our discussions in Goma and Bukavu revealed a real interest from local organisations to access a hub and benefit from its services.

Recommendations on localisation and mandate

- A **clear, realistic mandate** is essential for an emerging hub. While the ambition *can* be to work at all levels in the long run, a clear mandate with clear objectives in the early phase is crucial. Working at all levels through offering many different types of services (capacity building/technical; information/analysis provision, coordinating-alignment/political) presents too many challenges in the inception phase.
- It is equally important to **build trust and to ensure commitment from the beneficiary community**, i.e., clearly define who the main beneficiaries are (donors, INGOs, local implementing partners) as their needs and demands may be different.
- It is important to **balance engagement between international and national actors**. While CS hubs are often donor driven, local actors' buy-in is essential as the services offered concern ALL actors in the aid chain in conflict areas.
- Specifically for the DRC, engage local actors **from the beginning**, as they have demonstrated a clear interest in benefiting from the services of a hub; more generally, local actors have shown enthusiasm in CS as an approach that can improve the effectiveness of their programmes and enhance the effectiveness of the whole sector through improved collaboration.

Section B: Size, budget/funding, structure and sustainability of CS hubs

- Most CS hubs vary in staff numbers (1.5 in Lebanon to 25 in Myanmar) and budget (US \$100,000 per year in Lebanon, to £1.65 million per year in South Sudan).
- CS hubs have different funding strategies and sustainability prospects. A multi-donor funding base provides greater sustainability and independence.
- Some CS hubs have more than one office (Myanmar), others work primarily online (Yemen) or hire venues for trainings or convening purposes (South Sudan). Engaging local actors through training or convening requires a physical presence and would be our recommendation for the DRC (possibly Goma).
- The recruitment of knowledgeable local staff is crucial for the process of embedding a CS entity in the local context. A combination of international staff with knowledge of CS tools and a good understanding of the context can complement the knowledge brought by local actors so as to ensure some kind of 'impartiality'. This is why in the current DRC pilot project, local experts are being trained to deliver CS support.

Staff and budget

As illustrated in Annex A, the various entities vary widely in size and budget. In Myanmar, the team consists of 25 staff with an estimated budget of around US\$ 1.2 million yearly, whereas in Lebanon the CS Forum has one and a half full-time staff and a minimal budget of less than US\$ 100,000 a year. In Sudan the newly set up CS facility is composed of few staff (two at the time of writing) and some back-up from the implementing agency, with a pilot funding of £800,000 for one year. In Libya the CS Forum has three staff members with a yearly budget of around £200,000. In Yemen the eight staff members had a yearly budget of around £1 million and in South Sudan the seven full-time staff commanded a £1.6 million budget. Hence there are rather large differences between the CS entities in this study.

Table 3: CS hub, budget, timeline and donors

CS entity	# of staff	Yearly budget	Timeline	Donor(s)
Lebanon CS Forum	1.5	US\$ 100,000	No time horizon	Local funding
Libya CS Forum	2.5	US\$ 200,000	Until March 2022	Swiss gvt– EU
Myanmar RAFT ³	25	US\$ 1.2 million	Self-supporting entity	Own funds (paid services)
South Sudan CS Resource Facility	7	£1.65 million	Until 2023	Multi-donor fund (UK, Swiss, Canada, NL)
Sudan CS Facility ⁴	2 > 4	£600,000	Until October 2021	UK-FCDO
Yemen CS Platform	8	£1 million	Contract ended May 2021, restart possibly in August 2021	UK-FCDO

Funding and donors

Funding has been largely provided by either one or multiple donors. In Yemen and Sudan, only one donor is involved: the FCDO. In Libya two donors provide funding: the Swiss government and the EU. In South Sudan the donors are the UK, Switzerland, Canada and the Netherlands. In Myanmar the initial donors were the UK, Sweden and Australia (PSF facility). Since then the RAFT CS facility has evolved into an independent service provider that almost entirely caters for its own budget through paid service provision, for which it is unique among the hubs

studied. Lebanon also stands out because it is not directly funded by any major donor and at present remains an almost integral component of a local NGO (House of Peace – (HoP)). Staff salaries are provided through the regular HoP budget and concern small amounts of money.

CS hubs have different funding strategies and sustainability prospects. A multi-donor funding mechanism was hailed by most interviewees as the best model because it helps ensure some kind of sustainability. In the case of the CS Forum in Lebanon, HoP operates with funding from a variety of small funders and aims not to become dependent solely on one large funding agency. This strategy enables it to remain autonomous and to make its own decisions on how to implement programmes. HoP was also of the opinion that CS hubs/entities should be grown organically by locally embedded actors, in order to safeguard independence and ownership at the national level, and so that the hub is seen as a local resource rather than as an extension of international actors. In Myanmar, the locally embedded CS facility has quickly seized the momentum and become an important actor providing paid services for highly specialised analysis and services. In South Sudan the CSRF has gradually become a similar player. The enormous scale of aid operations and the presence of multiple aid actors in South Sudan more or less guarantees funding security for the mid-term (five to ten years). In Yemen, the donor ended the contract with the Yemen CS Platform in May 2021, because of a lack of documented results. The new CS Facility in Sudan had a very limited time horizon (until August 2021) and was working to acquire new donors. Finally, the Libya CS Forum is small and has very committed donors that are there for the long haul.

The type of funding and financial resources hubs obtain can impact sustainability and the type of work carried out. When engaged in 'consultancy paid' type of services, one can question whether the knowledge/analysis/skills provided will be embedded and embraced in the recipient's institution or programme. As was highlighted in a recent CSRF review,⁵ and confirmed by most interviewees, there is a difference in knowledge uptake between working **for** a stakeholder (conducting a conflict analysis **for** an INGO for instance) and working with a stakeholder (providing tools, guidance and accompaniment for the stakeholder to design its own conflict analysis and assess the impact of the context on the conflict and vice versa). Indeed, when, for instance, a CS hub is contracted to conduct a conflict analysis for a client, there is often a disconnect between the analysis and the final programme design. The whole philosophy underlying CS is to conduct a robust analysis to inform all aspects of the programme cycle.

Structure and operational footprint of the CS entities

The RAFT facility is based in Myanmar and has two offices, the Yangon HQ and a Rakhine State office. The CSRF (South Sudan) is based in Juba but has no visitor facilities and works primarily online or through events and trainings it organises during face-to-face meetings at the Saferworld office. The CS facility in Sudan follows the model of the CSRF – the main advisor to CSF Khartoum has been the head of the CSRF for some years. This online and event-based structure also applies to the Libya CS Forum and to the Yemen CS Platform, although the latter two also have small offices respectively in Tunis and in Aden. Again, Lebanon is a separate case as the CS Forum is run by the HoP, which implements a number of other programmes and has a physical presence in Beirut. All CS facilities host websites of varying quality and size. The nature of the structures reflects to some extent the main target groups they cater for. If one focusses on national actors, an office representation is indispensable, while for an international audience outreach doesn't necessitate a permanent infrastructure.

The CSRF South Sudan, the CSF Sudan and the Libya CS Forum to date largely focus on international aid actors and hence do not need a large physical presence at field level to execute their mandate. Sharing research results can be organised online, while, when needed, venues can be hired locally for convening or training purposes. For RAFT Myanmar, it is quite the opposite as the Rakhine State office was set up to assist local actors providing assistance to the Rohingya, but also more broadly to support national aid workers employed by INGOs. In Yemen

some local NGOs received technical assistance, mainly online, and in Lebanon the emerging platform provides ad hoc services to local organisations. As the Lebanon CS Forum focusses on domestic actors, a local physical structure to interact with their target group is required.

In terms of staffing, many CS entities work with international CS experts and analysts. However, it was emphasised by many interviewees that the recruitment of knowledgeable local staff is crucial for the process of embedding a CS entity in the local context. It was also mentioned that a combination of international staff with knowledge of CS tools and a good understanding of the context can complement the knowledge brought by local actors in order to ensure some kind of 'impartiality'. However, most interviewees suggested that the recruitment of highly qualified staff is challenging. In Sudan it took almost half a year to recruit the first local CS expert for the new CS hub. The highly divisive nature of conflict contexts is an additional challenge as it is important to screen candidates on their political affiliation and involvement. In view of the high degree of competition for scarce local expertise among international agencies and organisations, it was emphasized that retaining such staff for a longer period of time is crucial.

Recommendations on size, budget and funding structure

On staffing:

- Recruit skilled national staff and try to retain them for a long period of time;
- Ensure an adequate combination of international staff who can bring analytical tools and some kind of perspective and national staff who have extensive knowledge of the conflict context;
- National staff are a valued resource, but they are part of the context, i.e. can be partisan. If the facility is perceived as being politically active this may jeopardise the security of local national staff; and
- Invest in or recruit multiple staff with multiple skills, depending on the mandate and activity type of hub to be erected (purely TA type of tasks, or research skills, or convening and lobbying skills).

On funding

- In the short-medium term, a multi-donor fund model is preferable for sustainability purposes.
- With an eye on sustainability in the longer run, it is wise to consider which income generation model is most suitable; solely based on external donor funding or a more commercial model with paid service delivery, or a combination of both. There are potential pitfalls with both options (donor dependency in the long run on the one hand vs commercial – consultancy type work with 'potentially' limited incorporation/integration of CS principles into the beneficiary organisations on the other hand). One example of this would be to have a fee-paying membership model or a model where the hub charges a small fee for specific services.

On Structure

- Start with a simple website to share analysis, host papers, and disseminate resources, as a complicated set-up requires constant updating and involves substantial time and resources.
- A physical presence in an office is beneficial when reaching out to local actors and helps increase visibility and accessibility, but such a presence is not required when reaching out only to international actors.

Section C: Implementers of CS facilities

- It is important that implementing agencies, for example peacebuilding INGOs and NGO, have relevant expertise, management capacity, receptiveness to feedback and open communication with partners and donors.
- Implementers of CS facilities need to **have a strong track record of delivering conflict analysis and advice** and have **developed a network of partners in-country**.
- The CS facility in the DRC should be implemented by a carefully constituted consortium of implementers, both national and international, to ensure wide buy-in and lend a certain degree of neutrality/credibility.

A variety of implementing agencies, mostly peacebuilding and conflict resolution INGOs, run CS facilities. Saferworld, together with Swiss Peace, run both the CSRF South Sudan as well as the CSF Sudan. In the case of Yemen, the CS Platform was operated by Search for Common Ground in collaboration with Seton Hall University. In Libya the INGO PCI runs the facility. Finally, in Lebanon the local NGO House of Peace runs the CS facility, and in Myanmar RAFT runs the CS facility.

The main ingredients or requirements to be a 'successful' implementing agency are having **relevant expertise, management capacity, receptiveness to feedback, and open communication** with partners and donors. In all cases it appeared that the implementing agencies and organisations had sufficient relevant insights into conflict analysis and context assessment to identify the main CS issues. The potentially contentious real issues are often **timeliness** of delivery and **quality** of the advice or analysis provided. **One of the main purposes of most CS facilities is knowledge creation / information dissemination / conflict analysis to cater for the needs of international actors to fully grasp the conflict context.** In certain contexts, verifiable news is hard to come by, so CS analysts and researchers struggle to find reliable sources to vet certain findings and have to rely on few sources. The evidence from interviews suggests that field presence is a definite plus, notably when a given implementer has a well-developed local network of partners. In such cases, facts about local dynamics can be verified within their own network. If researchers work from outside a conflict context, such as with Yemen, this may prove to be challenging.

Management capacity is also crucial to be able to run (semi) autonomous hubs. Saferworld has had long experience in running local offices involved in implementing all types of peacebuilding programmes, and is well equipped to manage a CS facility. PCI also has extensive experience locally inside Libya with the implementation of peacebuilding activities and this is reflected in how it deals with the Libya CS Forum. Managing the communication with direct donor(s) is crucial for the success and survival of CS entities. In South Sudan the CSRF has invested a lot of time in direct engagement with its funding agencies. It convenes regular management committee meetings in which donors can discuss action points or specific items of analysis, as well as the main thrust of the facility, in an open manner. Both the Lebanon and the Libya Forums have a larger degree of autonomy from donors; in Libya there have been direct links with ambassadors and heads of mission which has ensured a degree of autonomy to establish its own priorities and has facilitated its lobby work.

Overall, in order to be or become an effective (co)-implementer for a CS facility an organisation has to 1) **be well versed in the realm of conflict analysis** and 2) have **developed a network of partners in a local conflict context** through implementing peacebuilding or related programmes. A number of interviewees also mentioned the importance of having one or a few credible national partners in order to ensure legitimacy and embedding in the local context. Being a consortium of implementers is also useful because a consortium is better equipped to

deal with various work dimensions, including management of CS activities, lobbying and advocacy, CS training, and analysis of the conflict setting. In a given consortium, ideally several partners cover different dimensions of the CS work.

Recommendations on implementers

- It is recommended to form a consortium comprised of national and international actors to ensure **diversity, local embedding** and **neutrality** of the facility.
- It is crucial to develop a local network to be able to provide information and analysis grounded in verifiable facts.
- CS hubs need to communicate clearly at all times with the donors that fund the entity in order to inform them on constraints.
- It is crucial for CS hubs to manage expectations from 'clients' and to jointly define what type of analysis or information is expected.
- In the context of the DRC, it may be wise to link a hub with the INSO, OCHA and other agencies capturing accurate and up-to-date security and context information, including Kivu Security Tracker and Congo Research Group, among others, in order to have a wider access to reliable information and to enable triangulation.

Section D: Activities and services

- Most CS entities have developed a track record in **research, analysis, and trainings on CS**.
- CS facilities also **convene strategic sector/cluster meetings**, mostly around thematic issues.
- Efforts to **lobby donors** to become more conflict sensitive—through more and better coordination, and a thorough application of CS principles at all levels—have not always been successful.
- It is recommended that the DRC facility focusses, in its inception phase, on research/analysis and on capacity building.

The main activities that CS facilities are involved in are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: type of activities implemented by CS hubs

CS hub	Type of activity	For whom
CSRF South Sudan	Research, Capacity building Convening, Outreach, Lobbying	Donor (research), (I)NGOs and diplomats (capacity building), aid sector plus foreign policy (outreach and lobbying)
CSF Sudan	Research, Capacity building Convening, Outreach	Donors (research, outreach), (I)NGOs/practitioners (capacity building)
RAFT Myanmar	Research, Capacity building Convening, Lobbying	Donors (research), (I)NGOs (capacity building), aid sector (lobbying)
CSF Lebanon	Convening, Capacity building	Local actors/NGOs
CSF Libya	Research, Capacity building Convening, Lobbying, Joint scenario exercise	Donors (through briefings/research) (I)NGOs-diplomats (capacity building), aid sector plus foreign policy (lobbying)
Yemen CS Platform	Research, Capacity building Convening / lobbying	Donors (through briefings /research), aid sector-agencies (capacity building, lobbying)

Research and analysis (for mostly donors, and international actors, although this could benefit all actors).

This is the most common denominator among all CS initiatives. CS research conducted by some facilities focussed on specific issues linked to the aid context, for example on how a refugee camp is organised and how aid may reinforce certain tendencies within such camps, such as actor-based appropriation and ethnically biased distribution. Within this activity type, **briefings** (on latest developments in the conflict context) were mostly geared towards international actors (mostly donors, such as in Libya and Yemen) while **overall research and analysis**, and the provision of tools to conduct such analysis, were open to all actors in the aid chain, including local and international implementers **and** donors. Actual recipients of such research/analysis services were typically international actors. CSRF in South Sudan wrote a newsletter as a means to disseminate research and analysis for all aid actors. In a few cases, the convening role of the CS hub was also used to present the findings of a study, an analysis or a report linked to CS.

Concerning the DRC, engagement with donors and INGOs revealed that while there is abundant research and analysis conducted by NGOs, think tanks and academic institutions on the DRC conflict context, proper uptake and integration of findings in policy and programmes was lacking. The need was felt to summarise all research findings, and operationalise them, in order to facilitate their translation into programming.

Capacity building activities (mostly for international NGOs and to a lesser extent UN, donors/diplomats and local NGOs).

All the entities reviewed mentioned training as a crucial component of their work, geared towards **individuals** (new staff of donors) or **programmes** (mostly for INGOs/aid implementers as well as for UN agencies). As there is a high turnover of international staff in conflict countries, there is a constant need to update newcomers on the local context and help familiarise them with CS issues. With the exception of Lebanon, and CSRF in South Sudan, as well as RAFT to a lesser extent, all entities provided most of their trainings to **international NGOs**. A major issue raised by most interviewees was the difficulty to systematically operationalise CS within organisations. There is a gap between knowing what CS is and its underlying principles, and how to incorporate it within programmes and within an institution as a whole. Often the missing links are a) **lack of appropriate tailor-made tools**, and b) **a focus on CS at programme level** without looking at institutional obstacles such as, for example, management buy-in, or lack of conducive procedures/environment. Only a few CS facilities (South Sudan and Libya) provide very practical tools based on insights from best practice. PCI (Libya) has developed a risk matrix for implementers where they can monitor the risk level of specific activities.

Regarding the DRC, conversations revealed that many actors—local and international, donors and NGOs alike—felt the need to strengthen and centralise CS capacity-building services in order to foster consistency and coherence. Many donors emphasise the importance for recipients of their funding to work in a conflict sensitive manner, yet they may not have the same understanding of CS or use different methodologies and tools to impart knowledge to partners. Furthermore, all local DRC NGOs engaged expressed the need to have their CS knowledge and practice strengthened.

Convening meetings, outreach, lobbying around CS issues.

This type of activity has quite a large scope as it concerns convening ad hoc or regular meetings, mostly to discuss CS in small groups or within the whole sector, and/or to conduct lobbying/outreach. Such meetings can be cluster or working group meetings (as in South Sudan, Libya, Yemen and Myanmar), at which **CS facilities can present CS issues and/or offer options for joint action and synergy** between aid actors. For instance, *the CSRF* has developed CS criteria to use in the cluster-level Humanitarian Response Plan. In Yemen, cluster group meetings revolved around providing information and analysis on CS issues, involving a certain level of overlap between research/analysis and convening/lobbying, for instance to discuss implications of a recently conducted analysis. The *Yemen CS Platform* (YCSP) presented analysis, studies, and recommendations, and also **provided guidance and advice** to the working group members. In Libya, PCI organised bi-monthly meetings during which international INGOs and donors were

briefed on the changing context, and what that meant for the aid community. Recently, these meetings turned into joint scenario exercises, which made them more interactive and provided PCI with insights into motives and ideas that existed among external donors and INGOs. In a few cases, concerns were raised that the meetings led to theoretical discussions on CS with too little attention paid to practical applicability. Most CS facilities are able to convene various actors to discuss CS, but the meetings do not systematically translate into the adoption of joint CS approaches, joint analysis, joint programming or joint strategies. There is a need to be clear about what impact/changes can be expected from the hub and its limitations—for example, hubs rely on “buy in” and take-up of recommendations by implementing agencies and donors.

At the level of **lobbying and outreach** (mostly to donors), the Libya CS Forum and the CSRF in South Sudan have the strongest track records. Both **engage donors** on a regular basis, either as part of their own management committee or through donor leadership fora. Interestingly, they also attempt to engage high-level foreign diplomats in the conversations to better coordinate aid to make it more coherent as well as conflict sensitive. In Libya the leadership forum was successful in getting influential people together, including diplomats and division directors, to have an open debate about approaches to CS issues. Similarly, *CSRF* engaged the Swiss government successfully to assist with the development of its five-year planning for South Sudan while incorporating a conflict lens. It must be stressed that in a few cases only were donors (the Swiss and the Dutch in South Sudan, thanks to the efforts made by *CSRF*) ‘willing’ to have their strategies, procedures and policies reviewed for their CS. Beyond these few successes, mostly in Libya and South Sudan, interviewees indicated that ‘lobbying’ donors on how to adjust their strategies and programmes remains challenging if HQ is not involved, as the aid sector is a part of a larger foreign policy. In addition, as mentioned previously, most CS hubs struggle to provide adequate recommendations around what the donor community can do, both collectively (how/when to coordinate) and individually (how to integrate CS in their own strategies and policies). A few interviewees also alluded to the fact that donors may not be willing to incorporate CS in their policies and strategies because they assume they are already conflict sensitive or they consider CS mostly relevant for implementing partners.

Concerning the DRC, different organisations or mechanisms exist, including INSO, CRIO, OCHA, clusters, and thematic Working Groups, which convene various actors to discuss contextual changes. Yet discussions revealed that very few make the link between understanding the context and conducting programme adjustments. In addition, while coordination mechanisms exist (OCHA, for instance), it was felt that those mechanisms were more geared towards exchanging information—who does what, where—rather than aligning donors’ and (I)NGO programmes to create synergy. In addition, some structures such as INGO Forums exist to carry out lobbying activities, yet CS is often not a lobbying priority.

As a provisional conclusion of the activities section; most CS entities have developed a track record in **research, analysis and trainings on CS**. These can be considered ‘traditional’ hub activities. Some facilities also **convene strategic sector/cluster meetings**, mostly around thematic issues. Efforts to **lobby donors** so as to become more conflict sensitive through more and better coordination, and a thorough application of CS principles at all levels, show a mixed picture.

Recommendations for the DRC on activities and services

- Concerning **research**: engage in joint context analysis together with a consortium of local and international NGOs.
- Play an active role in making sense of all the information available, synthesising all research available. Provide clear suggestions to donors and INGOs about what the research/analysis means for programmes to be funded in the particular context in which they are operating. This is very relevant in the DRC context.
- Concerning **training**: make sure to simplify any CS approach and make it tailor-made and hands-on for end users so they can adapt it and apply it easily.

- Ensure that donors encouraging their partners to work in a CS manner share the same CS vision and methodology.
- Cover programmatic as well as organisational issues related to CS, including human resources, purchasing policies, management.
- Mainstreaming CS across programming and operations requires a long-term investment of time and resources as well as a clear strategic commitment from the leadership of organisations in order to be fully realised. Accompaniment is crucial. Stand-alone training sessions are not sufficient.
- Concerning **convening and lobbying**, when engaging at the higher levels of decision-making, it is crucial to provide clear recommendations and action points based on sound research and analysis.
- Lobbying is more likely to be successful when high-level officials/diplomats are also involved as the aid sector is often linked to foreign policies.
- When engaging donors and decision-makers, make sure to create a safe and discreet environment to meet. This could be along the lines of what PCI is organising, i.e., a more or less informal setting under Chatham House rules where decision-makers can speak out and collective actions can take root.
- Engage/lobby donors to have their procedures/strategies be reviewed against CS.

Section E: Impact and M&E of CS facilities

- The impact of CS hubs is difficult to capture, yet most hubs indicated that CS was becoming more prominent on the agenda of cluster group meetings, and CS was being adopted in programme design and set-up by most actors they engage with.
- CSRF uses the outcome harvesting method which seems very promising and enables it to monitor changes in attitudes, behaviours, relationships and policies of aid actors, donors and policy-makers.

Measuring impacts of CS work is challenging for two main reasons. First, it is highly qualitative and requires a specific methodology most CS hubs don't have (besides CSRF). Second, impact measurement is not always clearly defined during hub inception, which can lead to frictions between donors and CS hub implementers. According to CS staff interviewees, impact is felt at two main levels, namely **CS becoming more prominent on the agenda of cluster group meetings**, and **CS being slowly adopted in programme design and set-up** by most actors they engage with. For instance, CSRF in South Sudan has assisted many organisations to integrate CS ideas and approaches into their programme proposals. In addition, donors increasingly follow CSRF's advice. Concerning Libya, PCI efforts resulted in CS being more on the agenda of the international agencies. According to interviewees from the CS platform in Yemen, CS seems to be better integrated into programme design, joint actions and some policy changes. Concerning the Lebanon CS Forum and the CS Facility in Sudan, both are still in their initial stages, so assessing the impact of their operations at programme-, organisation-, or aid sector-levels is premature.

In addition, few CS hubs have developed specific methodologies that would enable them to capture results of their work, with the exception of CSRF in South Sudan. CSRF uses an outcome harvesting process developed by Saferworld to monitor changes in attitudes, behaviours, relationships and policies of aid actors, donors and policy makers to assess impact. The method hinges on three related steps: 1) - Who did what differently (a factual account of a specific actor applying something different); 2) - How significant is that change (description of its relevance in relation to the prevailing context and conflict issues) and 3) - What contribution was made by the actor/programme to this change (register and store communications messages, lobbying efforts, meetings, trainings that have facilitated a change in actors' behaviour, actions, policies, etc.). The Outcome Harvesting Methodology traces impact backward from an objectively observable change in a given conflict context. Finally, a few interviewees working for CS hubs regretted that impact is too often measured at the level of implementers

(i.e. programme) and less at the level of the donors themselves, i.e. how CS has helped change the way in which donors reach decisions about conflict contexts or how CS is embedded in donor policies and strategies.

Recommendations on Impact and M&E

- The impact of CS activities and interventions is by nature qualitative and hence CS implementers should invest in developing appropriate methodologies, such as Outcome Harvesting.
- There is often a discrepancy between the perception of implementers and donors as regards impact and so it is crucial that measuring impact becomes a joint endeavour of implementers, CS facilities and donors.
- Before setting up a facility, clearly specify where the impact is supposed to be measured: programme level, sector level or donor level, and define realistic and objectively verifiable indicators.
- Impact assessment should also measure changes in donor policies, strategies and procedures as well as their (collaborative) efforts to align their aid in a CS manner.
- CS facilities should apply 'hybrid' impact measuring tools, combining so-called 'traditional' M&E based indicator measurements with qualitative approaches.

Main conclusions

In a nutshell, most CS hubs were donor conceived and funded—with the exception of Lebanon—and most had a dual/triple function of working on capacity building/training, analysis/research and convening/dialogue-fostering. Hubs differ in size and in staffing, some being quite large with institutional donor funding (CSRF South Sudan), others being quite small and 'organically' grown (Lebanon). RAFT in Myanmar became an independent autonomous actor that managed to survive on paid service provision.

Research and analysis activities were mostly geared towards donors and international actors, although this type of activity can also be of use for the whole aid sector. Not all research was tailor-made to the needs of the aid implementers and some concerns were raised as to the applicability of research findings/analysis for programmes and strategies given the absence, in some cases, of guidance notes. Concerning **capacity building**, all CS hubs under scrutiny train aid implementers, mostly INGOs, at programme levels. Voices were raised that the institutional/organisational aspect was often missing in the trainings. Training for donors is typically focussed on training new staff.

The **outreach** and **lobbying** strategies set in motion by some CS hubs to impact on donor aid strategies and/or on sector/donor alignment of policies and strategies have not been very successful. Some individual donors adopted a CS lens while developing their programmes, including the Swiss government and the Netherlands MoFA in South Sudan, but in other contexts donors were reluctant to commit to a CS analysis of their own approaches. Nevertheless, a number of CS facilities under review (CSRF South Sudan, CS Forum in Libya and to some extent the Yemen CS Platform) have been successful in organising sector-wide regular consultation meetings in order to better understand the conflict context and to improve coordination and alignment. However, such processes, despite having functioned as platforms to exchange information and analysis on the conflict context, have not ensured multi-actor compliance with a common CS approach to respond to the specific conflict issues.

Besides CSRF in South Sudan, and to a lesser extent the facilities in Libya and Myanmar, **the impact of the CS facilities** remains challenging to capture. The outcome harvesting methodology developed by Saferworld seems the most appropriate to monitor and report on CS results.

Recommendations for the DRC

Scope and mandate:

- A CS hub in the DRC should have as a general objective, and primary mandate, to act as a CS expertise centre for the whole aid community.
- A facility providing conflict sensitivity advice and support to the UN Country Team is critical given the scale of UN activities and approaching MONUCSO transition. Further scoping is recommended to define how this would be best provided. This study recommends that an independent CS hub, housed outside of the UN and providing services for UN and non-UN actors, would be most effective.
- Priority geographic focus should be eastern DRC (North Kivu, South Kivu, Tanganyika and Ituri) and the Greater Kasai provinces, including Kasai and Kasai Central.
- The CS hub should **start small, take a flexible and adaptive design approach, grow gradually, and generate demand for its services in an incremental fashion.**

Public/audience

The CS hub should focus on the international community initially, namely donors and (I)NGOs. The focus should also be mostly on those involved in the humanitarian sector, though not excluding development and peacebuilding actors. UN agencies are a critical sector who do not currently have access to CS support. Ideally a CS hub in the DRC would support UN and IFIs, including the World Bank, The African Development Bank and the IMF.

A secondary priority would be to target government officials. Further reflection would be required on government engagement in the DRC context, based on lessons from other hubs. The CS hub should have a well-crafted engagement strategy with the government given the sensitivities of collaborating—or being perceived as collaborating—with a party in the conflict.

Governance and implementation modalities

- The CS hub should be implemented by a consortium of specialist national and international implementers, to ensure credibility, increase buy-in, and support maximal perception of neutrality.
- As was highlighted in a recent CSRF review, and confirmed by most interviewees, there is a difference in knowledge uptake between working **for** a stakeholder (conducting a conflict analysis **for** an INGO for instance) and working **with** a stakeholder (providing tools, guidance and accompaniment for the stakeholder to design its own conflict analysis and assess the impact of the context on the conflict and vice versa).
- The CS hub should identify proportionate and inclusive governance modalities. A supervisory/strategic steering board should be comprised of key donors as well as representation from UN agencies and IFIs. An executive/technical board made up of implementers and one or two members of the supervisory board is recommended to oversee the day-to-day running of the hub. Additional structures for donor 'sign off' on programmatic spend might be required contractually, but should be minimised as much as possible.
- The CS hub will need to demonstrate independence from donors and existing actors. It could be hosted within a peacebuilding NGO with existing operational footprint; however, the hub should have its own branding and identity, including name, website, logo, email.

Coordination with existing structures and support to the UN Country Team

- The CS hub should take into account what other actors are doing, such as the UN SSU in MONUSCO which has a coordination mandate on stabilisation programming. Other convening actors include the INGO Forum, INSO, and CRIO; we recommend that SSU could perform complementary functions to a CS hub, for example by sharing information such as their conflict analyses and ISSSS guidance with the CS hub, and helping disseminate analysis/research and guidance conducted or shared by the CS facility.
- In its capacity-building activities, the CS hub should also make use of existing work undertaken, in particular the CS thematic guidance notes/materials developed by Transition International in 2021 and supported by GIZ and the German Development Ministry.

Priority activities to be undertaken by the hub

- The CS hub should start with a focus on generating, consolidating and supporting dissemination of **analysis** and **training** activities, particularly to the international community. These relatively low-cost and high-return activities would immediately fill a gap. A carefully developed open-access context analysis which is updated regularly is a good starting point to engage external parties, acquire brand awareness and generate demand for additional services.
- Tailored capacity building and accompaniment for strategic humanitarian and development actors would add unique value to a CS facility and would further support buy-in from a cross-section of UN and non-UN actors.
- The CS hub should engage in convening activities with all actors engaged in the aid sector—to reflect on good practice regarding CS, discuss challenges and strategies to overcome them—once it has built an excellent track record and it is recognised as an institution adding value.

Concerning the research / analysis offer, the hub should:

- Share regular up-to-date information such as briefings and contextual notes on the conflict context with the whole aid community per province, territory, and possibly *groupement*.
- Synthesise existing research, reports and analysis on the conflict context, per programme type and per province/territory.
- Write guidance notes on what this research means for programmes and policies, for donors and programme implementers, on a regular basis.
- Conduct outreach activities to disseminate the guidance notes in order to ensure proper uptake. Alternative media, infographics, social media channels may be used.

Concerning the capacity building offer, the hub should:

- Offer training to new donor/(I)NGO/UN staff on the conflict context, and on basic principles of CS.
- Develop a training offer for implementing agencies such as UN, INGO and local partners and donors on CS principles and practice.
- Offer support to donors to review programmes and projects on their adherence to CS principles and standards.
- Accompany donors and implementing agencies in the process of integrating CS principles in their programmes/organisations on a regular basis, through the development and execution of Action Plans.

Resourcing

- An estimated budget for a DRC CS hub is US\$ 600,000 in year one. This would cover four permanent national staff, including two analysts and two trainers, and one senior international adviser, as well as operational costs including website design/maintenance and travel.
- To ensure its sustainability, neutrality and maximal buy-in, the CS hub should ideally have multi-donor support as well as inclusive governance. As actors become more familiar with the work and added value

of the hub, it could charge for some services such as training, and explore some paid service provision to donors, large INGOs and the private sector.

Staffing

- Ensure staff includes a sound mix of researchers/academics with significant experience working with implementers, or with a background within an implementing agency, as they will make operational recommendations and will need to have credibility with actors in the field.
- Ensure staff stay politically objective, given the sensitivities. CS principles of inclusivity, transparency, accountability and representativity in terms of gender, ethnic and linguistic background will be applied in recruitment.
- Create a pool of researchers and a pool of CS experts to choose from. A list of existing research institutions (Congo Research Group, Ghent university, Kivu Security Tracker to name a few) and of reliable local researchers will be drafted so as to provide rapid support if needed.
- Ensure those researchers have impeccable reputations and excellent, academic and analytical skills, and are able to write syntheses and update them on a regular basis.
- Ensure the researchers 'hired' for analyses are a good mix of international and national actors; international academics can bring impartiality while national researchers can bring their local knowledge and networks.

Annex A: Overview of CS hubs

A- Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility in South Sudan, (CSRF)

Also known as Conflict Sensitivity Risk Facility. The United Kingdom (UK) contributed towards the establishment of a multi-donor Better Aid in Conflict programme in South Sudan from 2018 – 2023. The programme took the lead in establishing a Conflict Risk Facility. The CSRF is funded by the UK, Switzerland, Canada and the Netherlands.

Implementers: Saferworld, Swisspeace and REACH

Background and rationale

The principles underlying the hub are geared towards stimulating institutional change processes following CS principles. The real value of the CSRF is that it is a standing mechanism to support internal change, within donors, UN agencies and INGOS. The aim is to ensure that the broader aid community has a better understanding of the local conflict context in relation to aid delivery. The basic underlying assumption is that when donors and aid organisations have a better understanding of CS and relevant conflict issues than the aid will be distributed without causing additional frictions or exacerbating existing conflicts. The deliverables are debated within the steering committee and then 'filled-in' by the facility and its staff.

The target group consists basically of the entire aid community in South Sudan, i.e. UN agencies, donors, and national and international NGOs. The CSRF does not engage with the government. The idea is that donors and aid agencies are better placed to consider aid in relation to the local conflict context and they are not politicised. The CSRF doesn't do conflict analysis as such and steers clear of perceived involvement in political research.

Goal: provide high-quality **advice and support** to donors and aid implementers and support discussion and reflection on issues related to aid and conflict.

The main activities of the CSRF are:

- 1) Targeted support through research and analysis. The CSRF makes in-depth assessments of organisations with regard to their capacity and understanding of CS. It carries out an institutional assessment of organisations' CS practices and understanding, develops action plans, and provides implementation support. The CSRF also helps raise awareness about CS. It has a national NGO mentorship programme, in which a group of representative local NGOs are enabled to benefit from a CS assessment. In view of national, regional and local differences, national NGOs are often reluctant to collaborate, and the CSRF can promote synergy among them.
- 2) The CSRF produces short, concise (15-20 pages) knowledge products, mainly analysis and research, geared towards the practice of aid. The criteria for researching a rising topic include that it should be applicable to more than one organisation.
- 3) The CSRF facility is also involved in convening meetings and organising outreach activities such as discussions among key aid actors.

Staff and structure

The centre is a facility and does not have a physical structure which beneficiaries can visit. The facility consists of seven operational staff, supported by Saferworld. The CSRF does not hire human resources and support staff as these tasks are conducted by Saferworld.

The centre has technical staff members around the main activity fields: research, analysis, awareness raising, outreach and sensitisation. It has no field staff. Consultants are hired for specific tasks.

There is also a management committee in which the main funders are represented.

Funding and sustainability

The CSRF is relatively big as it has an £8.2 million budget for five years. It is halfway through that period.

In the early years the CSRF had to prove to donors that it could deliver tangible results at short notice. The underlying idea was that over time the unit would be seen as a trusted partner rather than as a group of consultants. The CSRF worked solely with International aid actors during the first phase, as a deliberate choice. Presently, there is a tendency to include more and more local actors and the CSRF has organised a national NGO forum to help build CS capacity among local organisations. The multiple donor funding provides CSRF with a solid base. The Netherlands joined the Swiss and the Canadians and the UK came in at a later stage. The facility has become an important actor for the aid community in South Sudan. Prospects for the longer term are good and sustainability for the mid-term assured.

B- Conflict Sensitivity Facility (CSF) in Sudan

initiator/funding: FCDO

Main implementer/principal agent; Hosted by Saferworld, established in 2021

Background and rationale

The rationale is to support the aid sector in Sudan to be more conflict sensitive. The CSF provides analysis, convenes discussions, shares learning, and supports capacity building focused on priority issues. It aims at building a movement for better aid in Sudan.

The facility is primarily aimed at providing information, insights and analysis on CS issues for the UN family, the donor community, INGOs, and national NGOs. A second mandate is to help improve the analysis of specific agencies, notably UN agencies, provided they are open and willing to engage with the CS hub. Thirdly, the hub is meant to improve alignment and promote collaboration between aid actors, as there are many inconsistencies in the way aid is being provided and many actors do not get along very well. Also, the CS facility functions as an interface between practitioners and academics/researchers.

The CSF has a website that shares resources, analysis, and is a connecting space for the aid sector. The site's goal is to build collective understanding of the context, and support the effectiveness, relevance, and conflict sensitivity of aid.

Main activities

- 1) Analysis and knowledge development. The CSF commissions studies and has to date commanded a study into the political economy of food aid, and a study into the effects of climate change in Sudan. The CSF has funding to engage in two additional studies during the pilot phase.
- 2) Convening and Outreach activities; The CSF has been organising courses for aid community practitioners on the concept of CS. It is starting up a national NGO mentorship programme (in line with what the CSRF facility is doing in South Sudan).

Staff and structure of the facility

The CSF Sudan is hosted by Saferworld in its Khartoum Office. It consists of one conflict analyst at Saferworld London HQ and a 50 percent communications officer, a senior adviser, a director, and, to date, one senior Sudanese researcher who started working in June 2021. There is scope for hiring two additional local staff members.

The centre operates independently from the national Saferworld office and reports directly to Saferworld London in order to avoid conflict of interest, as the CSF and the national office of Saferworld work with the same donors. Most activities are online and virtual (with a website in Arabic). The facility aims to be super flexible and responsive to needs expressed by the Sudanese aid community.

Funding and sustainability

The facility has received funding for a pilot phase of twelve months from the FCDO. The pilot started in November 2020 and was due to run up to around September 2021. The total grant amount is US\$ 600,000 for this period.

As the funding horizon is short, the CSF staff and Saferworld were actively engaged in funds acquisition and they hoped to secure funding from additional donors in a timely fashion.

C- CS hub Myanmar, Paung Sie Facility and RAFT

Initiator: The Paung Sie Facility (PSF), formerly known as the Peace Support Fund, was established in 2014 as a flexible, responsive and demand-driven multi-donor fund.

Implementer: Located at the Nordic International Support Foundation.⁶

The Paung Sie Facility is a funding mechanism whereby civil society organisations (CSOs) are being financed, mostly in the field of promotion of inter-communal harmony and social cohesion. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the PSF has had to adapt constantly. With the current political crisis following a military coup on 1 February, 2021, this has become even more challenging. The main question is: under the current circumstances what are realistic objectives in the field of promoting inter-communal harmony? The PSF is screening CSOs in order to assess their ongoing relevance and what they need in terms of support. It manages funds from the UK's DFID, Australia's DFAT and Sweden's SIDA. Currently, it funds 30+ grantee projects, with coverage of most states and regions across the country. The PSF also produces series of papers, mostly linked to the role of civil society, women, youth, and leaders in peace processes.

Main activities

The PSF is a financial funding mechanism and not a CS implementing organisation as such. However, it supports a wide range of civil society actors in order to maintain the civic space in Myanmar, including in the wake of the current military coup.

The PSF has supported a range of national and subnational civil society groups and initiatives related to social cohesion and peacebuilding and acknowledges their ongoing contributions and potential. The PSF's current donors have detailed commitments to support civil society as a key pillar of their development and peacebuilding programmes.

Since 2015, the PSF has focused funding increasingly towards support for inter-communal harmony and social cohesion. Programmes are largely demand-driven, small-scale and tailored initiatives. In late 2016 the PSF established its 'Gender, Peace and Security window', a funding stream aimed at increasing the substantive participation of women in building social cohesion and providing support to emerging sub-national organisations working on gender, peace and security.

RAFT is an implementing partner of the PSF in the field of CS, and has been contracted to ensure CS support for all the PSF's civil society partners.

Respect, Accountability, Transparency And Fairness – RAFT Myanmar

Background and rationale

RAFT is the successor to the Collaborative Development Assistance (CDA) Myanmar programme, which was invited to contribute by donors after the Rakhine State crisis materialised and some UN agencies were attacked by local communities because they were perceived as partisan to the conflict. CDA was tasked with spreading knowledge of methodologies such as Do no Harm. It received large grants and was not dependent on generating its own funds. It pulled out in 2018 and a transitional process started which enabled RAFT to set up operations independently as a local entity.

Main activities

RAFT is involved in three main activity areas: facilitation, training, and research and analysis. These activities are implemented either as a result of donor demand or on demand by Myanmar national actors. RAFT is not donor driven and conditions for activities are negotiable.

In the field of facilitation and in response to the backlash towards Muslims following the Rakhine State crises, RAFT set up an Inter-Agency Staff Advisory Group (IAAG) in which national staff could freely and safely express themselves in their own language about the constraints they faced while executing their work. RAFT also engaged in a constructive manner to address misconceptions about UN agencies and the aid community working in Rakhine State among the broader general audience in Myanmar.

As regards training, RAFT engages each organisation in a collaborative manner. It realises that each organisation has its own identity and wants to adapt CS in its own unique way. Such an approach ensures buy-in from local organisations and reinforces their taking ownership. RAFT teaches local organisations to do CS analysis themselves. The result is more sustainable as local organisations begin to reflect on positive and possible negative effects of their activities within the local context (interaction indicators, in CS terms).

RAFT is engaged in tailor-made research and analysis at the request of donors. It has helped to guide donors with formulating ToRs. It provides very concrete recommendations based on very specific information. RAFT is confident that it can find enough niches to continue conducting its own applied analysis work. The uptake of what it produces is guaranteed because donors are interested and order specific analyses.

Staff and structure

RAFT is flexible and adaptive. It acts as an interface between international donors and agencies and national agencies and actors. It is based in Myanmar. In contrast to CDA, it needs to sustain itself through service provision to third parties. It is involved in short term consultancies for various clients.

RAFT has around 25 staff and two offices: the headquarters in Yangon and a branch office in Rakhine State. The team consists of a few expatriate experts and a group of local professionals. It has a number of local researchers in various states in Myanmar.

Funding and sustainability

The PSF was useful for RAFT during the transitional phase as it provided RAFT with intermediary funding and support. Other income stems from output-based contracts where RAFT has to deliver according to pre-established ToR. Although exact figures have not been provided it is reasonable to assume that the annual budget could be around US\$ 1 million to US\$ 1.5 million per year.

The sustainability of RAFT depends on its capacity to retain donor support for specific tasks as well as to provide tailor-made services for INGOs. The complexity of Myanmar with its multi-ethnic make-up and internal conflict dynamics requires in-depth knowledge and analysis which RAFT seems well positioned to provide.

D- Conflict Sensitivity Forum (CSF) Lebanon

Enhancing conflict sensitive project implementation (2018 – 2020)

Implementers: House of Peace (HoP). The HoP partners with the Forum ZFD (Forum Civil Peace Service) Lebanon to sound out CS needs.

Background and rationale

The overall goal is that local organisations understand, support and apply CS in their activities. There are many national and international organisations operating inside Lebanon, but many have a limited understanding of CS. Many organisations still lack the awareness of potential unintended consequences of their work. There is a growing interest among local organisations in developing their skills and knowledge on how to incorporate CS within their projects.

The Forum has grown in an organic manner on the initiative of a locally based organisation, HoP. Many topics are dealt with in an ad hoc manner, largely following important events in the local context. To give a few examples; the forum has led consortium member discussions on the 'revolution' which materialised after the government imposed a tax on WhatsApp, in conjunction with the economic crisis, inflation and the lack of access of civilians to their own private bank accounts. A second issue was the development of a CS tips list developed by the Forum in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Forum also developed a tips list for a volunteering wave that followed a harbour blast disaster, as many spontaneous volunteers had no idea about humanitarian aid principles.

Main activities

The core activity is CS training for different levels of practitioners; the Forum offers a so-called level zero course for volunteers—a one-day training course on CS principles—and a first- and second- level course for humanitarian aid workers and higher echelon staff respectively. The latter courses last three days online and deal with the main

CS concepts and approaches. The Forum teaches staff how to apply CS to planning and implementation of its programme activities. The HoP has also been approached by UNDP to help develop guidelines for cross-cutting issues.

Staff and form of the facility

The Forum is not an established entity in and by itself. It is an activity operated by the HoP and is housed in the HoP premises. Two HoP staff are working on CS issues and on Forum activities. The Forum does not have a large budget and there are modest budget lines for it within the HoP budget.

Funding and sustainability

The Forum has not yet become institutionalised and is actively engaging its Lebanese partners to reflect on the best way to set up a more permanent structure. The idea is that the Forum should have proven itself, and that Forum partners know what the value added of CS is for them, and express a need for some of the services. The HoP wants the Forum to be locally led and owned so there will be no far-reaching influence from a donor or an outside actor. To date, the only information from the Forum members is a list of visions to which these partners subscribe.

As the Forum continues to explore its future, a first step is to determine what the value added of CS is for local organisations. Prospective members should indicate what they are willing to do in exchange for CS support (membership fee, collaboration in kind etc.)

E- CSA – Conflict Sensitive Assistance Forum, Libya, Since 2012. (Lead, PCI)

Initiator/funder: Swiss government and the EU

Implementer: Peaceful Change Initiative (PCI)

Background and rationale

At the start of the Libyan conflict many actors came to the country to provide aid, with some failing to take potential negative fall-out into account. A number of expatriates had little knowledge of how the Libyan context had evolved. PCI wanted to help improve how the aid community functioned. The main audience was other donors, international implementers, and the UN family; in short, the international peace and development sector.

Meanwhile, the international aid community has grown enormously over the past five years. There continues to be a need to coordinate, inform, train and provide appropriate analysis.

Main activities

PCI maintains an updated, online, national-level peace and conflict analysis accessible on its website to international assistance providers. It also organises and commissions workshops and research activities that develop operational approaches to the practical CS demands of project delivery, i.e. so-called toolkit development.

In addition, PCI convenes bi-monthly Conflict Sensitive Assistance Forum meetings in Tunis, during which international actors are briefed on the changing context, based on an updated conflict analysis of Libya. Meanwhile, the international community has grown from a manageable around 30-40 people to the current thousands of aid workers, most of whom are with organisations based outside Libya.

From 2016 a so-called leadership forum was initiated, in which ambassadors and heads of missions of UN organisations and INGOs came together to discuss CS-related issues, at which PCI would bring in key issues that were discussed in a safe setting. The Swiss government provided seed money without any strings attached. The leadership forum functioned well until 2019; during the COVID-19 pandemic it became difficult to convene people.

PCI also offers a so-called 'coffee service' whereby people come to PCI at the Tunis level or municipality levels (where it implements traditional dialogue peacebuilding) and discuss in all openness and safety the problems they face. PCI then tries to provide tailor-made advice.

Staff and structure

The CS facility consists of three staff, two of whom are based in Tunis. One staff is engaged 50 percent of his time and one was appointed only recently. A large portion of the work has been about convening and hosting meetings, and a lot of travel. PCI believes that a small but committed number of staff, in addition to a flexible set of activities, is the most appropriate way to operate and ensure gradual CS adoption and application by aid agencies and donors. The CS facility doesn't have a fixed office.

Funding and sustainability

The budget is around €200,000 annually and the contract runs until April 2022. The Swiss government and the EU are the only donors. PCI is able to implement its own ideas and vision and has done so consistently without pressure from the donors. Most of the budget was spent on salaries, travel, venues and meetings, but these activities have been downsized since COVID-19.

As the international community in Libya has grown exponentially, the UN system has positioned itself in the CS landscape and has tried to more or less monopolise coordination of CS activities and initiatives. It may be that in a few years' time PCI, the entity that introduced CS to Libya, will be pushed out by the UN.

In terms of sustainability, there is scope for a continuation of the Libya CS Forum as, according to PCI, small amounts of funding, mainly for salaries and logistics, are the most effective way to operate on CS issues. Large, costly, CS entities rely more heavily on donor funding and hence tend to be under closer donor scrutiny and control, whereas CS activities should be free of such external influences.

F- Yemen Conflict Sensitivity Platform (YCSP), 2019–2021

Initiator, Implementer & management: Search for Common Ground (SCG), Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies MENA region, based at the Seton Hall University - New Jersey, USA.

Background and rationale

From the start, the YCSP focussed on two different levels

1. Capacity support hub for aid actors, either individually or at a higher level
2. Strategic-level advice and interaction, aiming at a shift in the direction of aid among donors

The basic underlying idea was that aid agencies in Yemen had a limited understanding of the conflict context. It was also felt that it was not enough to focus only on the humanitarian aid actors; change at the strategic level would have more impact.

At the programme level, YCSP advice is technical in nature. The Platform provides ad hoc free CS support to review, adapt and revise programmes. At a higher level the Platform is involved in more politically-oriented activities at the sectoral level and at the higher strategic level (Technical working group with 18 INGOs and the Donor Advisory Group). At present most donors provide funding to Aid in Yemen which is being distributed as if there was one legitimate government actor only, whereas in reality two factions are fighting one another (Houthi versus the internationally-recognised government).

Main activity fields:

The YCSP is involved in:

- a) Analytical and research work
- b) Engagement - Sectoral approach in Technical Working Group with conflict advisers and programme managers from INGOs; Donor Advisory Group - interaction at higher echelon level - heads of mission, ambassadors; engagement with regional government actors
- c) Capacity building among aid organisations

The YCSP aims to enhance the capacity of aid agencies to be conflict sensitive, to encourage the adoption of sector-wide alignment of aid distribution, and to influence and advise donors and foreign affairs decision-makers on aid strategies for Yemen.

Staff and form of the Platform

The Platform is hosted and run by Search for Common Ground. Nevertheless, the YCSP has its own logo and its own website and is profiling itself as an independent entity. There are eight staff: two researchers, two capacity building staff, two engagement team staff and two advisers. Most staff members are based outside Yemen and provide online external support and services.

Funding and sustainability

The facility is coming to the end of its two-year pilot phase with a funding of £2 million from the FCDO. The relationship with the donor became problematic over the course of implementation. According to the FCDO, the Platform was unable to secure a satisfactory output performance level on various agreed work streams. After an external review and a lengthy trajectory to try and convince the Platform to adopt a different approach and improve communication and reporting, funding was prematurely ended on 16 May 2021. The key issue was a perceived lack of receptiveness to external criticism, notably regarding adequate reporting, management and M&E capacities.

During the first phase of the programme which ended in May 2021 the YCSP was not directly engaged with local organisations. It concentrated on COVID-19 and on the aid community/structure in Yemen. Covid-19 provided an entry point, but also turned out to be a challenge as the YCSP became increasingly associated with the pandemic and less with CS.

The bridging phase was due to last until August 2021 when the second phase of the programme was due to be initiated, subject to funding being provided. Search for Common Ground and Seton Hall University were looking for additional funding from other donors to continue the YCSP.

The second phase was due to focus on direct engagement with local organisations as well as continue and expand context monitoring. In Yemen, the context is strongly dominated by humanitarian aid, so the scope for in-depth change based on the application of CS principles is more limited than if the country had the full scope of humanitarian and development actors.

Annex B: Interview list

Hub – programme name	Name of person	Name of org.	Type	
South Sudan CS Research Facility	Audrey Bottjen	CSRF	Implementer	
	Leslye Rost van Tonningen	CSRF	Implementer	
	Roland Dittli	Swiss Peace	Implementer / Supporting NGO	
	Tim Midgley	Saferworld	Implementer / Supporting NGO	
	Joseph ObalePalato	DFID	Donor	*
	Joanna Burton	FCDO	Donor	*
	Anita Ernstofer	Consultant	Expert	
	Joanna Holliger	Swiss government	Donor	*
	Christian Scherer	Swiss Government	Donor	*
Yemen CS platform	Shoqi Al-Makhtary	CS Platform Yemen	Implementer	
	David Wood	Sutton Hall University	Implementer / initiator	
	Hussein Ibrahim	Sutton Hall University	Implementer	
	Hannah Woodley	FCDO	Donor	*
	Victoria Brereton	FCDO	Donor	*
Libya CS forum	Tim Molesworth	Pci	Implementer	
CS Facility Sudan Khartoum	Dorette Besser	CSF Sudan	implementer	
Lebanon CS Forum	Elias Sadkni	House of Peace	Implementer	
	Layal Assad	Alert	Expert	
Myanmar CS entities RAFT-LIS	Patrick Sweeting	RAFT Myanmar	Implementer	*
	Rory Mc Laughlin	RAFT Myanmar	Implementer	*
	Kim Sibulan	RAFT Rakhine	Implementer	*
	Dim Sian Nem	FCDO	Donor	
	Shona Kirkwood	Local Insight Services	Implementer	
Nepal	Sudip Pokharel	PCU	Implementer	
	Rabina Shrestha	Alert Nepal	Expert	
General / Experts	Cornelia Puerschel	PCI	Expert	
	Heloise Heyer	PeaceNexus	Expert	
	Alessandro Totoro	Alert	Expert	
	Jana Naujoks	Alert	Expert	
	NkasiWodu	Alert	Expert	
	Summer Brown	Alert	Expert	
	Isioma Kemakolam	Alert	Expert	
	Hesta Groenewald	PeaceNexus	Expert	

Hub – programme name	Name of person	Name of org.	Type	
DRC aid community	Chris White	USAID	Donor	
	Mona Luisa Niebuhr	World Bank	Donor	
	Jean Francois Dubuisson	UN-SSU	Donor	
	Emily Vonck	Mercy Corps	NGO	
	Alexander Otto	GiZ	Donor	*
	Benjamin Scheffzik	GiZ	Donor	*
	Sven Richters	GiZ	Donor	*
	Sarah Weber	GiZ	Donor	*
	Kerstin Karlström	SIDA	Donor	
	Jan van Renselaar	MoFA Netherlands	Donor	
	Abubacar Guindo	WFP	Donor/implementing agency	*
	Bautista Logioco	WFP	Donor/implementing agency	*
	Rebecca Richards	WFP	Donor/implementing agency	*
	George Steijger	WFP	Donor/implementing agency	*
	Peter Musoko	WFP	Donor/implementing agency	*
	Innocent Nsengimana	APDIK	Local NGO	
	Deo Buuma	APC	Local NGO	
	Sophie Aloe	UN PBF	Donor	
FlavieBertouille	LPI	NGO		
* Interviews combined				

Annex C

Other types of structures / initiatives concerning CS: Local Insight Services Myanmar, the Project Coordination Unit in Nepal, and the West Africa Conflict Sensitivity Network

Local Insight Services Myanmar

Local Insights Services was set up by the Governance, Peace and Society Unit of the FCDO and has been operating for some 2.5 years. FCDO is the only donor. The funding runs until March 2022, after which the situation will be reviewed. The first year of operations did not yield many results, but after Vanessa Johanson, the current director, joined in January 2020 the dynamic changed. First, LIS had to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic. In February 2021 the military coup changed everything again. Consequently, LIS is currently an information gathering and analytical entity that reports solely to its funding agency. It does not engage with the aid sector or the donor community at large and is not actively engaged in propagating CS principles or providing CS assistance to aid actors and donors.

In the period between July 2020 and February 2021, LIS was able to become operational and work with a strong team of local experts in the ethnic states in the north and east of Myanmar (Kachin, Shan, Kayin, Kayah and Mon States). It produced a set of so-called township reports that contained very precise local analyses of the conflict actors, power holders and conflict dynamics. These reports are a potential cornerstone for intervening agencies who want to apply a CS lens or a Do No Harm policy.

After the coup, LIS became involved in producing situation reports based on as much intelligence as it could gather given the current circumstances. Conducting interviews is highly risky so most are carried out online. Most of the source networks have been disrupted by the coup, which has had a very profound impact on the entire aid community, including LIS field staff researchers. Apart from one individual, all local researchers moved to other locations for security reasons.

Practically all programmes in Myanmar have come to a halt or been downsized. Donors have put a great deal of funding on hold as there is little scope for implementation. Most ongoing work is purely humanitarian and even that is not functioning properly because of the distrust by the military. Situation reports are now the main output, but of course these are of temporary value only.

Uptake by donors of the information is a problem as there are many analytical organisations and much intelligence is being gathered and distributed in Myanmar. There is a massive amount of data, so people are struggling to process it. LIS has a very good uptake from the 'mother' unit within FCDO. It tries to tailor its products as best it can. LIS also engages in thematic reporting; it has commissioned a study by an external consultant on education. Additional thematic knowledge is required to bridge conflict research and thematic issues.

It is very difficult to work in a CS manner in Myanmar. However, there has been some uptake of the concept of CS among the donor community—the FCDO and World Bank being cases in point—and of course most INGOs have invested in making their programming more conflict sensitive. Still, the aid industry as such is not yet 'there' in regard to CS, in Myanmar.

Project Coordination Unit, Nepal

Initially PCU stood for Provincial Coherence Unit, but this was politically sensitive as the government didn't accept the term. PCU functions to promote coordination among FCDO-funded programmes in three newly established provinces. These are 'Province 2' (it has no official name yet), 'Province 5' – Lumbini; and 'Province 6' - Karnali. Provinces 2 and 6 are the poorest areas in Nepal, while Province 5 has potential for economic growth. PCU provides technical assistance to the administrations of the new provinces.

History of PCU and its predecessors:

Around 2006 the operational space for international development and aid organisations in Nepal was extremely limited. So, the Basic Operating Guidelines (BOG) were elaborated to ensure that INGOs and NGOs could operate in a safe space. These BOGs specified not giving any donation to groups in conflict areas – the Maoist movement by then was very active. Neutrality was all-important for external development actors. UNOPS was in charge of developing the BOGs and still continues to do so. Do No Harm principles have also been applied in Nepal.

Around 2010 the Risk Management Office (RMO) was established, funded by DFID and GIZ, as there were still many potential conflict issues on the ground and any trigger could ignite violent conflict. The RMO ended in 2018 and was succeeded by PCU.

About the PCU

PCU does not have a delivery mandate and it has no standard output requirements. It functions as an in-house advisory, analysis and training unit, and its staff are Embassy staff. Main activities are:

- 1) Support to the Embassy through bi-weekly updates which provide critical and informed analysis on the three focus provinces. The information is provided to the UK Embassy but also to some degree to the Swiss Embassy, as the Swiss co-fund the PCU. The PCU provides quarterly presentations on the evolving situation in provinces 2, 5 and 6.
- 2) PCU promotes coordination among UK implementing partners and acts as a liaison between UK implementers and provincial authorities in the three focus provinces. It creates a stakeholder analysis per province and then monitors implementation trajectories (Who does what, where and how).
- 3) Risk Management Office – it provides situation reports and has gradually become more political in its focus.
- 4) PCU provides a number of trainings to UK programme implementing agencies and its downstream partners, including Safe and Effective Development Training and personal security in the workplace trainings (i.e. reputational damage-oriented training addressing sexual harassment in the workplace).
- 5) On an ad-hoc basis, PCU engages in specific issues such as elections.

Governance structure

PCU is semi-independent in the sense that the programme managers can determine which analysis PCU will conduct and which issues are to be addressed. However, there needs to be some degree of buy-in from team leaders.

PCU is an in-house consultancy mainly geared towards demand from the UK Embassy, and it also helps implement programmes on behalf of the Embassy. PCU has been commissioned to guide UNOPS, which has been subcontracted by the FCDO with regard to programme orientation and implementing strategies. PU does not engage with other external actors.

PCU's budget of around £2.4 million for a three-year period was due to come to an end in September 2021. There was a feeling that budget cuts were likely to affect the unit and PCU was looking for a strategy to ensure its future. The idea was that other donors, like the Swiss, could provide some support and benefit from PCU's cost-effective advisory, analytical and training services. Eventually it could become a kind of information and analysis hub for a broader range of actors.

PCU has evolved from a process whereby initially the focus was on UK implementers and safety issues for development actors (our 'own' space and safety) to a risk assessment unit providing insights into conflict dynamics inside Nepal from a broader perspective. It also has a range of activities and provides analysis and support for a specific geographical target area (provinces 2,5,6).

On CS in Nepal

There is a widespread feeling among the international community in the country that the main conflicts are over, and the country is entering a post-conflict, post-monarchy and post-pandemic reconstruction phase. "When discussing CS, many donors express doubt, because conflicts have ended; so what could be its use."⁷

PCU thinks that the current focus on federalisation and the ongoing process of power devolution, including decentralisation of governance structures and economic opportunities, although difficult and complex, need to be supported by the entire donor community as this is the only way out of the conflict history of Nepal. "We cannot afford federalism to fail."⁸ The last political crises in Nepal—the constitutional crises in 2007 and the promulgation of the new constitution crisis in 2015—demonstrate the fragility of peace and stability in the country. If the issue of devolution of power is not well managed, new conflicts are likely to emerge. In 2015 one province bordering India blocked all commercial traffic for a month in opposition to the new constitution, with the blockade supported by India. Hence, there is a need for CS, but it must be framed in such a way that it suits the needs of the transformation process that Nepal is involved in at present. Meanwhile, major institutional donors such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank need to be convinced that federalism is the only way forward.

West African Conflict Sensitivity Network (WACSN)

Origin/Initiator: The unstable and volatile context in the Sahel region represents a huge challenge for agencies. No single agency/NGO can fully grasp the conflict dynamics in which jihadism, climate change, desertification and poor state governance interact with humanitarian aid, including peace and development actors. For that reason, PeaceNexus, Islamic Relief, World Vision and Oxfam, which work in the region, decided to meet regularly to discuss CS issues linked to their programmes under the WACSN, which is connected to the Global Conflict Sensitivity Community Hub.

Goal: Exchange ideas and information on concrete issues linked to CS, to inform each other's programmes.

Impact: Information shared results in some kind of a common analysis of problems and how they affect certain types of programmes (pastoralists, youth unemployment, etc.). The practical aspect was highly appreciated.

Structure/staffing: Organic structure (no physical structure). Participants meet on an ad hoc basis. PeaceNexus offers staff-time to send invitations and prepare events. It is thus a very light 'structure' aimed at promoting knowledge exchange. Starting slow, light and small in an organic way was crucial;- it was important not to have too much of an ambitious agenda.

Lessons learned: the platform meets an enormous need of the four INGOs to exchange information on major issues linked to CS, as well as peace and conflict issues in general. It is not about 'training' on generic/theoretical aspects of CS; the platform helps its members make sense of the context and learn about each other's experiences. It was also mentioned not to put too much stress on the coordination, and not to have overarching goals. Harmonisation is not the main goal, though the four INGOs discuss programme issues to ensure they do not duplicate efforts.

Endnotes

- 1 CSRF, April 2021, Learning Note: Lessons from CSRF's support to conflict sensitivity analysis.
- 2 An Afghanistan CS hub is also in the process of being set up. It was not added to the list of CS hubs to review for the following reasons: 1) the study had started when the research team found out about this particular hub; 2) the hub is in its infancy.
- 3 For RAFT, no budget details have been provided and so this amount is a modest estimate of yearly turnover.
- 4 Sudan CS Facility received funding from the FCDO for a one-year pilot and is in the process of acquisition for additional funding.
- 5 CSRF, April 2021, Learning Note: Lessons from CSRF's support to conflict sensitivity analysis.
- 6 NIS works to support social cohesion and the peace process at local, regional and national level through three separate funding platforms: the Paung Sie Facility (PSF); the Joint Peace Fund (JPF); and the Women's Voice and Leadership (WVL) project.
- 7 Interview with Senior Responsible Officer of PCU 6-7-2021.
- 8 Ibid, interview SRO Nepal PCU 6-7-2021.

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