



FEED THE FUTURE

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

SOUTH SUDAN OUTCOME HARVEST FINAL EVALUATION REPORT



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USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



ACRONYMS

ACTED	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development
BHC	Boma Health Committee
CARDO	Community Aid for Relief and Development Organization
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAI	Development Alternatives Incorporated
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PfRR	Partnership for Recovery and Resilience
RASS	Resilience through Agriculture in South Sudan
UN	United Nations
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene



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TERMINOLOGY

Emergent Outcomes: The very beginning signs of an outcome taking place; the outcome is not fully formed, but change is starting to occur, as demonstrated by a verifiable gain in knowledge, attitude change, advocacy for new knowledge, and/or experimentation with a behavior.

Enabling Factors: Forces that better prepare/situate a change to occur in an environment, individual, and/or a collective.

Inhibiting Factors: Forces that impede/challenge a change from occurring in an environment, individual, and/or a collective.

Level of Contribution: The degree to which an intervention or activity (i.e., a change agent) verifiably caused or substantially influenced a change.

Level of Evidence: The quantity and diversity of the data sources and the strength of the data.

Method: Structured processes and/or frameworks that help answer evaluative questions or capture the information needed.

Narrative Analysis: The process evaluators use to identify common themes in the data, specifically the who (change agent), what, change/outcome, when, where, context, contribution, significance, and alternate explanation (as applicable). Evaluators then synthesize these themes into one outcome story that is substantiated by the data.

Outcome: A change in the behavior, relationships, activities, policies, or practices of an individual, group, community, organization, or institution.¹

Outcome Harvesting: An evaluation method that enables evaluators to identify, formulate, verify, and make sense of outcomes. Whether positive or negative, intended or unintended, these outcomes must be verifiably connected to the project or activity under evaluation.

The method entails reviewing documents and interviewing stakeholders, among other means of collecting information, to understand how a given project or activity has contributed to the outcomes.²

Rating: Rating: The strength of the evidence for the outcome. Ratings may be strong, medium, or weak:

Strong Rating: The outcome is confirmed in at least three data sources (triangulated), the supporting data come from direct sources, and details about how the outcome happened show little variance across data sources.

Medium Rating: The outcome is triangulated, and the supporting data come from direct sources.

Weak Rating: The outcome is not triangulated, but the supporting data come from a direct source and/or are backed up by documentation.

Sampling Saturation: The point at which incoming data produce little to no new information.³ There is a wide range of [research](#) on this topic, and most sources agree that at least six interviews with a homogeneous group (as defined by the evaluative effort sampling structure) will produce 70 percent or more of the findings that will emerge from further data collection and 12 interviews will increase the coverage to 92 percent.⁴

Substantiation: The process by which evaluators verify and validate an outcome and its description. Substantiation requires triangulation at a minimum, through more data points provide a better, more detailed description of the outcome and how a change agent contributed.

Triangulation: When three or more data sources confirm that something has occurred; triangulation allows for quality assurance around the rigor of data and findings.

¹ Wilson-Grau, R. and Britt, H., 2012. Outcome Harvesting. Ford Foundation. Available at: <https://outcomeharvesting.net/outcome-harvesting-brief/>

² Ibid.

³ Guest et al., 2006; Guest and MacQueen, 2008.

⁴ Guest et al., 2006.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The signing of the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan led to a decline in violence after five years of intense fighting. This shift created space for the launch of the Partnership for Recovery and Resilience (PfRR). Developed by 14 donors (including the U.S. Agency for International Development [USAID]), 17 United Nations (UN) agencies, and 98 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), PfRR was designed to rebuild trust in people and institutions, restore access to basic services, strengthen productive capacities, and nurture effective partnerships.

Initially, [Policy LINK](#) provided backbone support to USAID for coordination on PfRR. Then, in 2021, USAID asked Policy LINK to engage directly with communities in South Sudan's hardest-hit counties, building trust and laying the foundation for other USAID implementing partners to work in these areas. Policy LINK did so by promoting collaborative governance, facilitative leadership, evidence-based decision-making, and the convergence of community and donor resources for joint work planning.

To support these efforts, Policy LINK developed a five-step participatory planning process⁵ to help communities identify and implement a community-led resilience⁶ agenda. These five steps include:

1. Engage stakeholders – Introduce the five-step process to community members and leaders to establish a foundation of trust for cooperation and coordination.
2. Gather evidence – Conduct a community mapping exercise to understand the institutions, structures, processes, and capacities available for community-led resilience. Explore how communities and institutions organize themselves, recover from and mitigate the impacts of shocks, and protect development gains.

3. Facilitate sense-making workshops – Share the findings of the community mapping exercise with community stakeholders at *payam*-level workshops, promote learning around the evidence, and facilitate stakeholders in developing a list of resilience priorities, needs, and actions and selecting community delegates for subsequent local action planning workshops.
4. Facilitate local action planning workshops – Help delegates translate resilience priorities into *payam*- and county-level plans that instill in communities a sense of agency and contribute to improved collaboration with USAID implementing partners.
5. Support joint work planning – Facilitate workshops in which community delegates, local government officials, and USAID implementing partners produce coherent plans for effective collaboration and mutual accountability between the community and implementing partners.

Through this extensive stakeholder engagement, Policy LINK helped communities change how they think about their roles in development. Specifically, Policy LINK's five-step process was designed to instill in workshop participants a greater sense of agency and self-reliance.

Policy LINK wanted to understand the effectiveness of the five-step participatory planning process and identify lessons learned that could benefit partners in South Sudan, as well as resilience-focused programs and USAID implementing partners in other contexts. Policy LINK decided to evaluate its efforts, using the methods described below, both to understand activity outcomes and document learning so that other implementing partners can replicate and/or adapt the process.

⁵ This report also refers the process as the “five-step process for building community-led resilience” or “the five-step process” for short.

⁶ Community-led resilience means that the community is taking initiative. That is, an inclusive group of community leaders has the capacity and autonomy to identify and set resilience priorities, develop action plans, and communicate, coordinate, and collaborate with local government and development partners to implement those plans.

Evaluation Questions

To understand the effectiveness of its interventions, Policy LINK developed the following evaluation questions:

1. What are the outcomes (both intended and unintended) and promising emergent outcomes of Policy LINK’s five-step process for building community-led resilience in South Sudan?
2. What enabling and inhibiting factors most influence these outcomes?
3. What is Policy LINK’s unique contribution to these outcomes? What other actors are key contributors and how so?

Methods

To answer these questions, Policy LINK selected the outcome harvesting evaluation method. This evaluation method enables evaluators to identify, formulate, verify, and make sense of outcomes—both intended and unintended—resulting from Policy LINK’s work in South Sudan. Moreover, the outcome harvesting method is well suited to allow the voices of community members to come through alongside those of government officials and implementing partners while maintaining evaluation rigor.

Although Policy LINK started the five-step participatory planning process in five USAID target counties—Akobo, Budi, Jur River, Kapoeta North, and Wau—only Jur River and Wau completed all five steps. As such, the evaluation focused on these counties, where stakeholders would be best suited to speak to the effectiveness and efficacy of the five-step process. The evaluation team interviewed a total of 137 participants and

reviewed secondary documents. As a part of the data coding process, the evaluation team identified an initial set of outcomes found across interviews. The team then conducted a narrative analysis of the outcomes with substantial data and evaluated triangulation and substantiation to ensure that each outcome met the minimum criteria for evidence, which allowed the team to determine the outcome’s strength.

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

The team identified 13 positive outcomes that occurred in connection with Policy LINK’s five-step participatory planning process. While other outcomes were mentioned in the interviews, these outcomes had the most substantial evidence for analysis. These outcomes are the ones highlighted in this report. Despite probing the interviewees, evaluators were unable to identify any negative outcomes.

The Outcome Summary Table below summarizes the substantiated outcomes identified through the evaluation. The “expected outcomes” resulted directly from Policy LINK’s five-step process, in that the process was designed to produce these specific outcomes as is clear from the Activity’s theory of change. These changes were also precursors to the other “unexpected” outcomes identified by the evaluators. These outcomes indicate that the enhanced agency communities developed led them to act on community-driven development priorities. Unless otherwise noted, the outcome occurred in both Jur River County and Wau counties. Please see the hyperlinks in the table and the main body of the report for the full details on each outcome.

Outcome Summary Table

Outcome Name	Level of Evidence	Level of Contribution	Brief Overview
Expected Outcomes: Foundations for Other Outcomes			
Communities have an improved understanding of shocks and potential contributions to solutions and experiment with more resilient practices	Strong	Strong	Policy LINK improved communities' collective understanding of shocks and stressors and how to overcome them through their own contributions. Policy LINK also built the capacity of communities to articulate their needs moving forward.
Communities' mindsets shifted to be more self-reliant	Strong	Strong	Engaging in Policy LINK activities led participants to think about themselves differently: they have a greater sense of agency. They can take the initiative to develop their own communities, for example, by addressing shocks with community resources rather than waiting for a donor to fix the issues.
Communities enhance agency through prioritizing and sharing their needs with others	Strong (Wau County) Weak (Jur River County)	Strong	Through Policy LINK activities, community delegates developed the capacity to identify priority shocks affecting them, create action plans that define available and needed resources, and take the lead in implementing action plans.
Theme: Food Security and Livelihood Improvements			
Communities apply improved agricultural practices	Medium (Jur River County) Weak (Wau County)	Medium (Jur River County) Weak (Wau County)	Improved agricultural practices led to increased food production and greater engagement in productive agricultural activities (e.g., moving from household subsistence to more commercialized farming).
Communities increase their farm production	Strong (Jur River County) Weak (Wau County)	Weak	The number of households engaged in agricultural activities increased, as did the number of households involved in micro-business initiatives.
Households diversify income sources to enhance economic security	Strong (Jur River County) Weak (Wau County)	Strong (Jur River County) Weak (Wau County)	Participants in Policy LINK activities developed skills and attitudes that enabled them to diversify income-generating activities and create more sustainable livelihoods, which prepares them to withstand economic shocks. Examples include scaling up farming activities and starting micro-businesses.

Outcome Summary Table

Outcome Name	Level of Evidence	Level of Contribution	Brief Overview
Theme: Locally-Led Development			
Government, Development Partners, and communities improve coordination	Medium	Medium	Development partners have been engaging more closely with local authorities and communities to identify needs and solicit their input on intervention design and implementation.
Women have a larger role in local decision-making and leadership	Medium	Medium	Women were encouraged and empowered to initiate and participate in development activities as well as to take on responsibilities that were formerly reserved for men only. As a result of discussions catalyzed by the Policy LINK activities, changes were even considered for traditional authority designations. For example, two women were appointed to the position of traditional authority/chief in Jur River County.
Enhanced conflict resolution practices lead to peace between Kangi and Udici Payams (Jur River County)	Medium (Jur River County only)	Medium (Jur River County only)	Community delegates mobilized women's groups, youth leaders, and traditional authorities to discuss the impact of the conflict. They decided they needed to conduct peace dialogues between the two conflicting payams. The dialogue resulted in the signing of a peace agreement, and relations between the payams, especially among the youth, are improving.
Theme: Disaster Risk Management			
Communities strengthen flood prevention measures (Jur River County)	Strong (Jur River County only)	Strong (Jur River County only)	Community members raised awareness and mobilized their communities to mitigate the impact of floods.
Communities take action to prevent fires and deforestation (Jur River County)	Weak-Medium (Jur River County only)	Medium (Jur River County only)	Participants in Policy LINK workshops returned to their communities, where they raised awareness of the negative effects of fire, the consequences of deforestation, and the importance of taking preventative measures, including adhering to laws prohibiting deforestation and grass burning.
Theme: Health			
Communities increase use of healthcare systems	Strong	Medium	Policy LINK prepared community members to participate in health planning processes, beginning with identifying community health priorities. Participants also encouraged community members to seek preventative care—and to access care more often—from both public health clinics and traditional medicine providers.
Development partners improve community-tailoring of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programming	Strong (Jur River County) Weak (Wau County)	Strong (Jur River County) Weak (Wau County)	Policy LINK brought together WASH development partners to listen to the communities and understand their needs. Since then, the attitudes and WASH practices of community members have changed. With a greater understanding of the importance of clean drinking water and good personal hygiene, community members are participating in community cleaning campaigns and digging latrines.

***Note: The evaluators determined the sectoral themes after completing the analysis to organize the findings.**

Recommendations

1. Donors and their development partners should consider replicating the five-step participatory planning process when implementing activities designed to enhance resilience and promote locally-led development. This process can elevate community voices, equip community members with the tools to advocate for themselves, instill a sense of agency, build capacities to use more resilient practices, and catalyze collective action (including with development partners). Interviewees emphasized the value of each step in the process, noting how the steps built upon one another in an iterative process. They said these aspects of the process were critical in bringing about many of the outcomes discussed in this report.
2. Development partners should create additional opportunities and spaces for historically marginalized groups such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities to participate in project implementation. Moreover, they should seek diversity within historically marginalized groups. Depending on the social context, creating safe spaces for different groups to engage in project activities may require establishing a separate space for each group, proactively facilitating discussions to manage power dynamics that may prevent members of certain groups from speaking up in mixed groups, and allowing stakeholder groups to choose their own representatives to participate in the process (where feasible and conflict sensitive).
3. Development partners must share data collected from communities (where it can be safely anonymized) and the resulting insights with communities. As demonstrated in the evidence below, communities benefit from the data. They can help interpret the data, as well as use the data to inform the development of adaptive actions they would like to take based on that data.
4. Donors and development partners working to strengthen a country's policy system/[institutional architecture](#)—particularly at the subnational level—should collaborate with partners implementing community-led, participatory planning processes similar to that of Policy LINK. The findings of this evaluation point to strengthened institutional architecture through improved collaboration between key policy stakeholders at the subnational level, enhanced multi-stakeholder dialogue and inclusivity of marginalized groups, and strengthened implementation capacity within stakeholder communities.

INTRODUCTION

After five years of intense fighting, the signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan in 2018 led to a reduction in violence in the country. In response to this opening, 14 donors, 17 United Nations (UN) agencies, and 98 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) launched the Partnership for Recovery and Resilience (PfRR), an initiative to rebuild trust in people and institutions, restore access to basic services, strengthen productive capacities, and nurture effective partnerships.

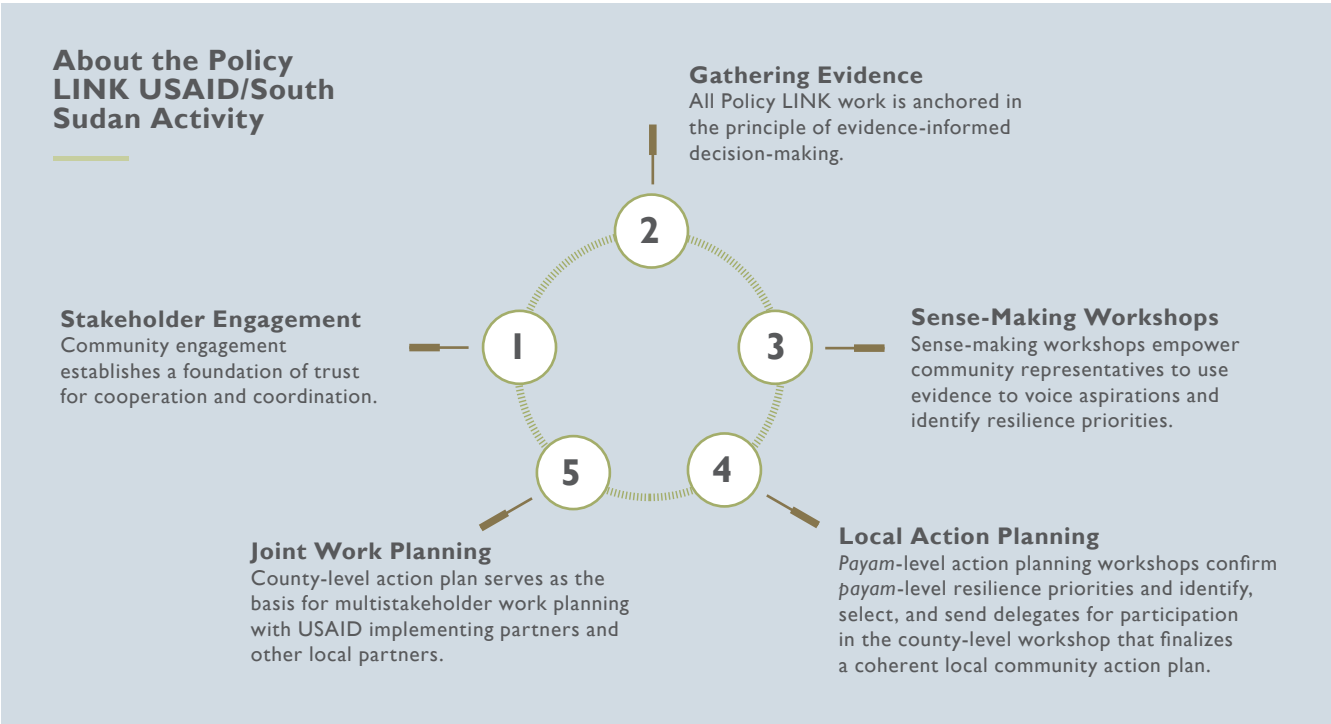
The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) initially engaged [Policy LINK](#) to provide backbone support to USAID for coordination on PfRR. Then, in September 2021, USAID asked Policy LINK to focus on facilitating effective collaboration between USAID implementing partners and local communities in five of the 13 target counties (Akobo, Budi, Jur River, Kapoeta North, and Wau) in coordination with the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Support project.

This shift supported USAID’s efforts to strengthen the foundation for a more self-reliant South Sudan. It does so through four Development Objectives.

- **DO1:** Meeting basic needs of communities in crisis, while decreasing aid dependence,
- **DO2:** Household resilience increased in targeted areas,
- **DO3:** Improved social cohesion in targeted areas, and
- **DO4:** Government of South Sudan more responsive to its citizens.

Policy LINK supported the achievement of these objectives by promoting collaborative governance, facilitative leadership, evidence-based decision-making, and the convergence of community and donor resources for joint work planning. To support these efforts, Policy LINK developed a five-step process to help communities identify and implement community-led resilience⁷ agendas (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Policy LINK’s five-step participatory planning process



⁷ Community-led resilience means the community is taking initiative. An inclusive group of community leaders has the capacity and autonomy to identify and set resilience priorities, develop action plans, and communicate, coordinate, and collaborate with local government and development partners to implement those plans.

These five steps include:

- 1 Engage stakeholders** – Introduce the five-step process to community members and leaders from the four corners of the community—local government, traditional authorities, civil society organizations (CSOs), and the private sector—to establish a foundation of trust for cooperation and coordination.
- 2 Gather evidence** – Conduct a community mapping exercise to understand the institutions, structures, processes, and capacities available for community-led resilience. Explore how communities and institutions organize themselves, recover from and mitigate the impacts of shocks, and protect development gains. In Wau, Policy LINK focused on institutions, while in Jur River County, Policy LINK focused on both households and institutions.
- 3 Facilitate sense-making workshops** – Share the findings of the community mapping exercise with community stakeholders at payam-level workshops, promote learning around the evidence, and facilitate stakeholders in developing a list of resilience priorities, needs, and actions and selecting community delegates for subsequent local action planning workshops.
- 4 Facilitate local action planning workshops** – Help community delegates translate resilience priorities into payam- and county-level plans that instill in communities a sense of agency and contribute to improved collaboration with USAID implementing partners. See Figure 2 for an excerpt of the agenda for the Wau local action planning workshop.
- 5 Support joint work planning** – Facilitate workshops in which payam delegates, county government department heads, state line ministry representatives, and USAID implementing partners produce coherent plans for effective collaboration and mutual accountability between the community and implementing partners.

For details on the timelines of these activities in Jur River and Wau, please see Figure 3 below.

Figure 3. Timelines of Policy LINK activities in Wau County and Jur River County

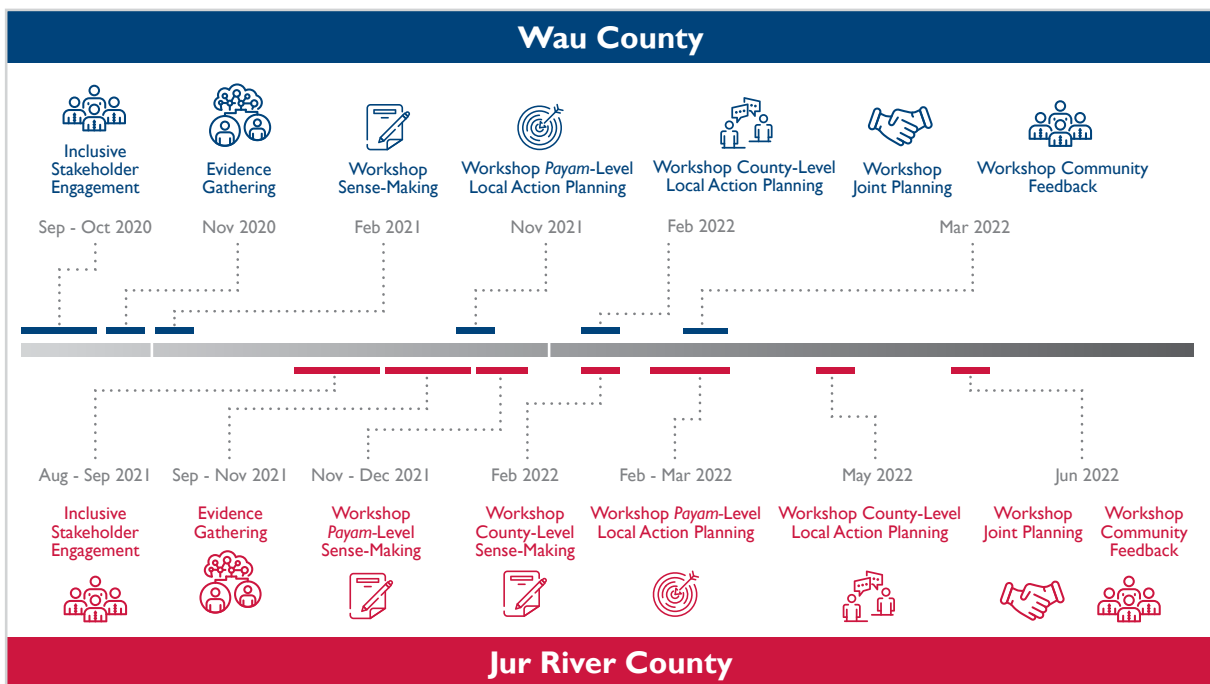


Figure 2. Excerpt of the agenda for a local action planning workshop in Wau



EVALUATION OF POLICY LINK ACTIVITIES

As Policy LINK began winding down its activities in South Sudan, it wanted to understand the effectiveness of its interventions and identify lessons that it could share with partners in South Sudan, as well as development partners and resilience-focused projects in other contexts. This section of the report provides an overview of the evaluation purpose, methodology, and process.

Evaluation Questions

Policy LINK sought to answer the following evaluation questions:

1. What are the outcomes (both intended and unintended) and promising emergent outcomes of Policy LINK’s five-step process for building community-led resilience in South Sudan?
2. What are the enabling and inhibiting factors that most influence these outcomes?
3. What is Policy LINK’s unique contribution to these outcomes? What other actors are key contributors and how so?

Methods Selection: Outcome Harvesting

The evaluation team proposed using an outcome harvesting evaluation approach to identify the outcomes of Policy LINK’s activities.⁸ Outcome harvesting helps uncover both the intended and

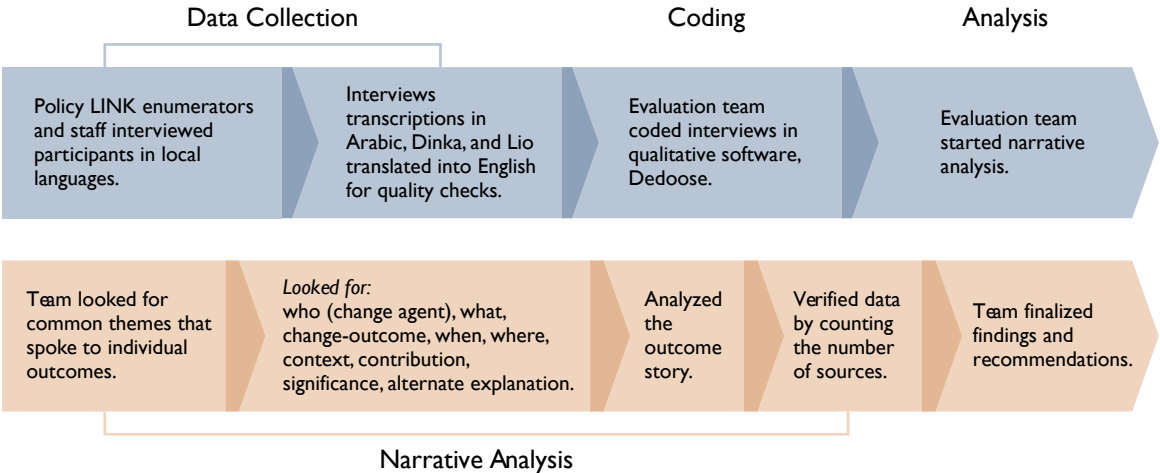
unintended outcomes of an intervention (or set of interventions). In addition, the data collection approaches commonly used for outcome harvesting (e.g., open interview questions) allow community members’ voices and perspectives to come through while maintaining evaluation rigor.

Evaluation Process: An Overview

The figure below provides an overview of the evaluation process. The process began with data collection, which was followed by coding and data analysis. The second row breaks out the steps of the narrative analysis process. This process helps uncover whether outcomes have been achieved, develop the story of the outcome, assess substantiation (i.e. determine whether the outcome can be triangulated), assess the significance of the outcome, evaluate Policy LINK’s level of contribution, and develop recommendations for USAID and implementing partners.

The evaluators used triangulation and substantiation to evaluate the level of validity of the findings. Triangulation generally means that information is grounded in three or more sources. For further rigor, substantiation means information is grounded in sources from three or more stakeholder groups. When multiple sources corroborate the same story/details, evaluators can verify the information’s validity.

Figure 4. Overview of the evaluation process



⁸ See [Headlight Consulting Services Outcome Harvest Methods Memo](#)

Sampling

Although Policy LINK started implementing the five-step process in five USAID target counties (Akobo, Budi, Jur River, Kapoeta North, and Wau), it completed all five steps only in Jur River and Wau. As such, the evaluation team focused on these two counties, as stakeholders there would be best places to speak to the effectiveness and efficacy of the five-step process.

When selecting interviews, the evaluation team used purposive sampling, treating the community delegates as “definitive interviewees,” meaning that the team assumed these essential stakeholders had detailed and specific knowledge of the five-step process and would have experienced outcomes as a result of having participated in Policy LINK activities. Policy LINK completed 137 interviews with:

- 25 Wau County community delegates,
- 17 Wau County government representatives,
- 34 Jur River County community delegates,
- Six Jur River County community development committee representatives,
- 14 Jur River County government representatives, and
- 41 other stakeholders, including 18 Western Bahr El Ghazal state government representatives,
- Seven Policy LINK South Sudan staff,
- Seven enumerators who supported Policy LINK activities in both Wau and Jur River,
- Seven representatives of development partners, and
- Two points of contact at USAID.



Limitation(s)

Policy LINK contracted local consultants that had worked with Policy LINK in the targeted communities in the past to serve as enumerators. While this approach benefited the evaluation in that these consultants were familiar with Policy LINK’s approach and had the trust of and access to the communities, it also posed a risk that interviewees would positively bias their responses or be less candid about their experiences than if they were talking to a neutral individual. Interviewees could also have had perception, positive confirmation, and/or [recall bias](#). The evaluation team designed the protocol/interview questions to mitigate these potential biases and explored and triangulated the data on each case to ensure qualitative rigor.



OUTCOME FINDINGS

This section provides in-depth information on the outcome findings from the evaluation of Policy LINK interventions in South Sudan. Each outcome discussion includes details on (a) the data sources that supported the identification and substantiation of the outcome, (b) the verified outcome story, (c) the significance of the outcome, (d) the level of evidence for the outcome, and (e) Policy LINK's contribution to the outcome (and an assessment of the level of contribution).

The “expected outcomes” are a direct result of Policy LINK's activities. That is, the process was designed to produce these specific outcomes as is demonstrated in the Activity's theory of change. As such, these outcomes are likely replicable. Importantly, the “expected outcomes” were foundational precursors to the “unexpected outcomes” identified by the evaluation team. These outcomes indicate that community delegates applied the skills and perspectives identified in joint workplans in both Jur County and Wau County that they developed through Policy LINK activities. That is, they used their enhanced senses of agency and skills to create action plans to address the development problems that were most important to them (i.e., those captured in their joint work plans). Moreover, community delegates shared their learnings and capacities with the broader community. In this way, the foundational “expected outcomes” of Policy LINK's activities (as well as other development projects) catalyzed the “unexpected outcomes” identified by the evaluation team. While these “unexpected outcomes” cannot be exclusively attributed to Policy LINK, community members explicitly recognized Policy LINK's role in contributing to these results.

The graphic on the following page illustrates how the “expected outcomes” acted as foundational

It is important to note that these outcomes are occurring in a context characterized by decades of top-down development and widespread dependency on humanitarian aid. As one participant in Policy LINK activities said, “In South Sudan, there has been a huge dependency syndrome that has been created among the local communities due to ways of how humanitarian workers have approached work in South Sudan. Really focused on helping the people rather than empowering people to help themselves, so I think due to this kind of work, local communities have developed dependency syndromes where they do not see the capacities that exist within themselves.”

This evaluation shows that Policy LINK's five-step process – which enhances both community capacities and collaboration between communities, local government, and development partners – can produce a number of meaningful outcomes related to community-led development.

precursors to the “unexpected outcomes.” This report provides information linking the foundational “expected outcomes” with the “unexpected outcomes”; these linkages are typically discussed in the “Contribution” sections.

One example of an explicit causal link between expected and unexpected outcomes is the “communities mindset shifted to be more self-reliant” outcome, which led to the “communities increase their farm production” outcome. Due to Policy LINK's focus on cultivating self-reliance (see text box), some participants were inspired to shift from growing small gardens to cultivating greater acreage. Participants attended Policy LINK events, and as a result, they increased their farm's sizes to more feddans and highlighted the benefits of doing so to other community members. These outcomes were then advanced when development partners aligned their efforts with the local action plans of communities. Ultimately, these combined efforts enabled the “communities increase their farm production” and “households diversify income sources to enhance economic security” outcomes to come to fruition.

Strategic Outcomes of Policy LINK's South Sudan Activity

Fruit

Theme: Food Security and Livelihood Improvements

- Communities apply improved agricultural practices
- Communities increase their farm production
- Households diversify income sources to enhance economic security

Theme: Locally-Led Development

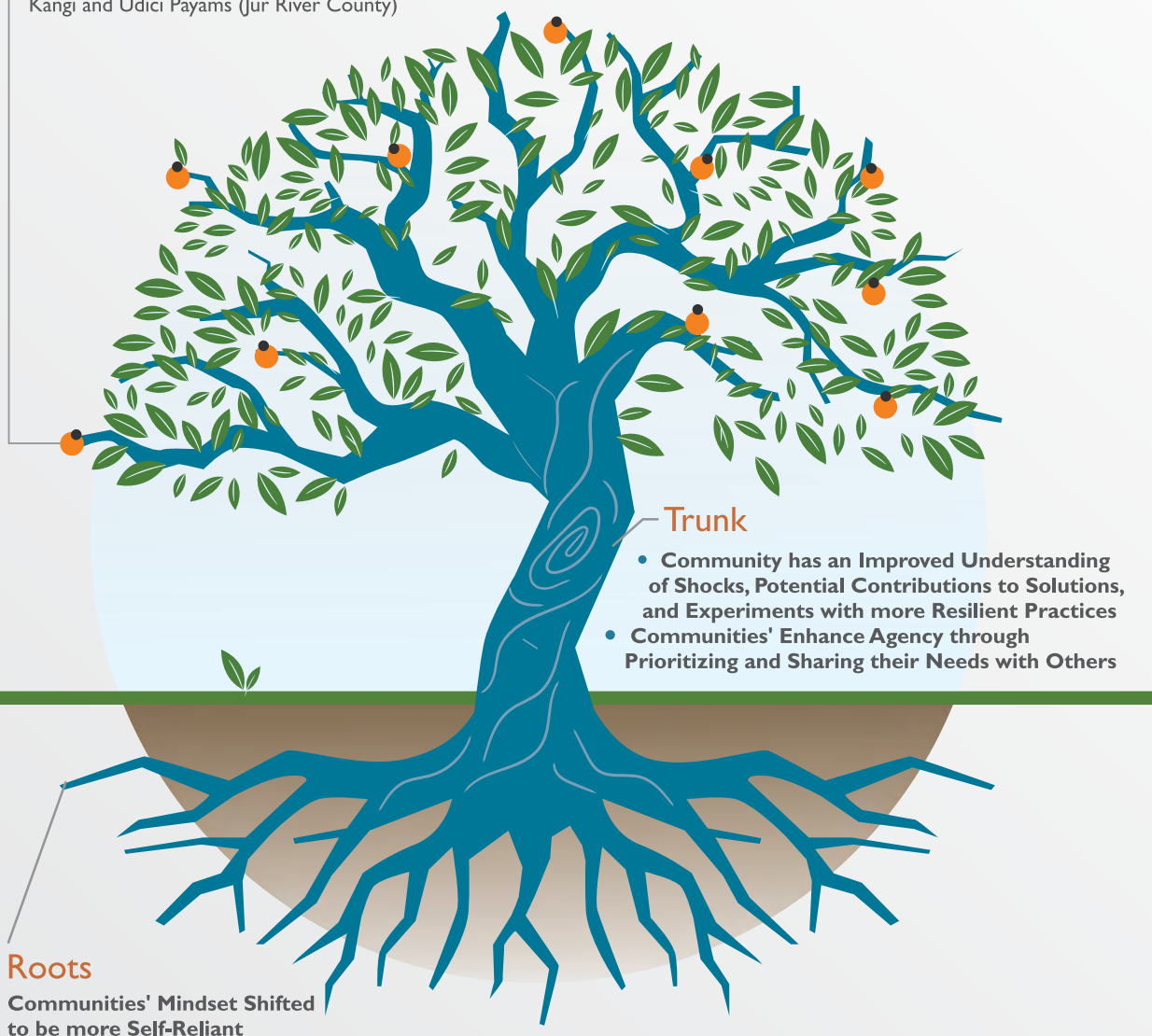
- Government, Development Partners, and communities improve coordination
- Women have a larger role in local decision-making and leadership
- Enhanced conflict resolution practices lead to peace between Kangi and Udici Payams (Jur River County)

Theme: Disaster Risk Management

- Communities strengthen flood prevention measures (Jur River County)
- Communities take action to prevent fires and deforestation (Jur River County)

Theme: Health

- Communities increase use of healthcare systems
- Development Partners improve community-tailoring of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programming



EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Communities have an improved understanding of shocks and potential contributions to solutions and experiment with more resilient practices.

Sources: 14 interviews with Wau County community delegates, nine interviews with other stakeholders, seven interviews with Jur River County community delegates, and four secondary documents from Policy LINK.

Outcome Story

Policy LINK improved communities' collective understanding of shocks and stressors and how to overcome them using community contributions. Policy LINK also improved the capacity of workshop participants to articulate the needs of their communities moving forward. The Policy LINK workshops supporting these outcomes started in Wau County with PfRR support activities in 2020 and continued with various workshops and engagements in 2021 and 2022. Some Wau County respondents highlighted the February 2021 sense-making workshop as a particularly important change milestone.

Policy LINK helped workshop participants articulate community “shocks” and “stressors,” define resilience for themselves, and develop resilience activities they could do in their communities. For example, at the Wau County joint work planning workshops, participants—including *payam* delegates, local government, and development partners—broke out into five groups, each one focused on a shock prioritized by the community based on impact and frequency of occurrence. After discussing the shock, one representative from each group presented a summary of the discussion to the broader group. This summary included a brief description of the shock, five proposed priority actions to address the shock and/or reduce its impact, and the resources available (from the local community) and needed (from government and development partners) to implement these proposed actions. One community delegate reported that this activity helped the community become more aware of its own resources and how they could be used to address priority shocks and stressors.

Communities now report understanding the meaning of resilience and how to be resilient. Communities have also started taking the initiative to address priority issues rather than waiting for external support. Community members across Wau County and Jur River County are applying the concept of resilience in their daily lives, as illustrated by the other outcomes in this report. As one Wau County government representative said:

“Before, we depended on the NGOs who came with ready plans to implement projects in our areas. Communities were passive. But now, we have discovered our roles and responsibilities in community development, as individuals and groups. Our role and responsibility is to help our community to become resilient. There are changes in the behaviors and attitudes of the communities.”⁹

Generally, community members reported that they view themselves as decision-makers now. They understand how to take part in interventions, and they are ready to negotiate, bargain, and share their needs and priorities with others. Respondents said they feel greater ownership of community-developed projects than of “ready-made” projects that did not necessarily meet their needs.

Some factors that inhibited the emergence of this outcome include the unwillingness of some development partners to work in partnership with communities and unstable security conditions.

Significance

This work has changed community mindsets and contributed to a sense of ownership and responsibility. While a decrease in violence stemming from the 2018 Revitalized Agreement created an opening for building community trust in general, Policy LINK's approach was unique in that it centered on putting communities in the driver's seat. Policy LINK's work contributed to the development of an environment where communities are actively involved in pushing for change at the boma, *payam*, and county levels, as evidenced by the other outcomes in this report, which stem from this initial outcome.

⁹ Note that some quotes have been lightly edited to improve clarity and readability.

Level of Evidence: Strong

This outcome was triangulated by community delegates (those who directly participated in the Policy LINK workshops) in both Wau and Jur River independently and substantiated by Policy LINK staff and enumerators, state government representatives, and development partners who participated in the process. Respondents provided enough corroborating detail, including specific examples of behavior change, to lend specificity to the outcome, which is more fully supported through a fairly strong causal mechanism (see Contribution).

Contribution

Policy LINK provided community orientation and sensitized the community to the concept of resilience, carried out resilience training and workshops, and provided a trusted platform for collective action on community needs. In this way, Policy LINK initiated this outcome. With this support, communities developed an understanding that it is possible to be more self-reliant in coping with shocks and stressors through alternative practices and advocating for their needs. This understanding led communities to experiment with addressing and mitigating shocks (e.g., better management of resources and family assets such as grains, livestock, money, etc.) on their own and with others (e.g., development partners and the government). Communities sustained this change by working more proactively with development partners and the local government: They advocated for their needs, provided feedback on development partners' intervention plans, and assumed decision-making roles. For example, people are now voicing what they want (e.g., schools here, hospitals there) and working with development partners and local governments to address problems that affect their communities.

Level of Contribution: Strong

Policy LINK provided a unique platform for communities to learn about both shocks and resilient practices and lead collective

action with development partners and local government to achieve a common goal. This finding was validated by a substantial number of respondents from both Wau County and Jur River counties, state government representatives, Policy LINK enumerators, and other development partners who participated in the process. The causal mechanism for this change, from the workshop content to the actions taken by community members, is clear and aligns with both existing documentation (e.g., action plans developed at the workshops) and community members' recollection of how and why they made behavior changes.

Communities' mindsets shifted to be more self-reliant

Sources: 18 interviews with other stakeholders, 11 interviews with Wau County community delegates, nine interviews with Jur River County community delegates, and five secondary documents from Policy LINK

Outcome Story

Policy LINK workshops and activities helped workshop participants/community delegates think of themselves as change agents rather than passive beneficiaries of humanitarian aid. Policy LINK fostered this shift in mindset through its overall activity design, data collection and sharing process, workshop content and exercises, and its decision to let workshop participants select payam delegates to participate in future workshops.

Participating in Policy LINK's activities helped shift how community delegates saw themselves. They report feeling a greater sense of agency and that they can take responsibility for their own development (e.g., by addressing shocks with community resources rather than waiting on donors to respond). By identifying actions and steps that the community can take in response to shocks, they took ownership and accountability for helping implement the actions they articulated. Respondents reported feeling less dependent on humanitarian aid and more

willing to commit both their human and natural resources to support solutions. When Policy LINK began its workshops, participants would ask “Can you give us this? Can you support us in this?” However, as Policy LINK’s activities progressed, community participants spoke more about what they would do for themselves to address their priorities. They also shared their priorities with development partners in case they wanted to respond to community needs through their initiatives. One respondent stated, “In the workshops, I realized that local communities are at the center of their development—they only need external support to complement the capacity they are lacking.” After the Policy LINK activities, community members were skilled in identifying shocks and applying actionable solutions to address them. They showed a readiness to take on more leadership roles, propose solutions, and participate in and help implement development efforts.

Through the sequencing of Policy LINK events, the participants iteratively built upon work from previous workshops/activities, specifically, their own local action plans, and developed the skills and identified the resources to bring those plans to fruition. It is important to note that the sequence of Policy LINK activities differed between Wau County and Jur River County (see the timeline of events). In general:

1. During the sense-making workshops, local actors engaged with data on shocks and stressors collected through the community-resilience mapping exercise. This process empowered participants to think about community problems, shocks, and stressors,

and how those shocks emerge. Participants shared their ideas for addressing certain shocks and identified areas where they would need support from the government, NGOs, etc. This activity contributed to the mindset shifts in communities by empowering community members to come up with solutions, increasing their self-confidence, shifting their perspectives of their roles in developing their community, and delegating potential responsibilities to various actors to support their plans.

2. A vision-setting activity helped communities envision how they would like to emerge from certain situations and recognize the existing capacities within their communities.
3. An interactive “shifting mindset” session encouraged participants to reflect on how they thought about self-reliance. Participants were asked to agree or disagree with several statements on their responsibility for their community’s development and well-being, either as individuals, in pairs, or as a community. These statements included but were not limited to: “I am responsible for the development of my own community”; “I can remain resilient even without external support”; “I can collaborate with other members of my community to build resilience”; “I am fully involved in making decisions about my community”; and “I am willing to work voluntarily for the development of my community.” More than 95 percent of participants strongly agreed with the phrases.



4. Lastly, local action planning workshops began at the *payam* level. During these workshops, participants reviewed and ranked the shocks and stressors that emerged from the sense-making workshops and proposed *payam*-specific solutions. They also selected *payam* delegates to participate in a county-wide workshop, where *payam* delegates from across the county came together with county government department representatives to examine how the *payam*-specific solutions fit into a coherent county plan.

Participants reported experiencing a shift in mindset at various points in the five-step process and in other Policy LINK-supported activities as well (i.e., the PfRR Annual Learning Forum). For example, during the last PfRR Annual Learning Forum, in April 2021, Wau County community leaders reported feeling a greater sense of agency. Then, through participation in the sense-making workshops, they felt empowered to articulate community issues, describe priority shocks, and propose solutions – all based on the data. In Wau County, community delegates reported experiencing a shift in mindset beginning in November/December 2021, after the *payam*-level local action planning workshops. Other participants reported seeing changes in community behaviors and experimentation with resilience actions following March/April 2022 workshops. The greatest enabler of this outcome was the willingness of communities, civil society, the private sector, traditional authorities, and the local government to participate in these activities.

Significance

Policy LINK’s activities have helped change how community members think about themselves. Workshop participants report feeling a greater sense of agency as well as more ownership of actions to address shocks and stressors. This mindset shift underlies many of the “unintended outcomes” described in this report. For example, among farmers, the number of applicants seeking to join cooperative groups has increased due to a better understanding of how community members can adopt more behaviors that may increase their resiliency to certain shocks. More women report engaging in small business activities, which helps

them generate income to support their families. Community members in Wau County are taking the initiative to clean and maintain public areas to reduce disease. In addition, after receiving Policy LINK training on self-reliance, traditional authorities in two *payams* solved a land dispute between communities using some of the strategies they learned in Policy LINK workshops. Overall, a sense of pride in the community is evident, and community members report a newfound sense of self-reliance and ownership over the development of their communities. Community members are also more conscious of the fact that for change to be sustainable, they needed to be involved in development processes. This outcome serves as a foundation for many of the other outcomes identified in this report, as the shift in mindset directly correlates to community members addressing other shocks.

Level of Evidence: Strong

This outcome was substantiated in every outcome subcomponent and was triangulated by community delegates in both Wau and Jur River independently, various Policy LINK staff and enumerators, state government representatives, and other development partners who participated in the five-step participatory planning process. While details supported this outcome in both counties, the evidence from Wau County is stronger. Disaggregated at the county level, this indicates a weak-medium level of evidence for Jur River County and a strong level of evidence for Wau County.

Contribution

Policy LINK’s support was particularly conducive to community empowerment and capacity building. Each workshop built upon the last, culminating in a change in how community members see their roles and responsibilities in the community. This change can be seen in the behavior of community members (e.g., some have become more involved in their households and community development), as illustrated through the other outcomes highlighted in this evaluation report.

Policy LINK involved the community throughout the entire five-step process. Interviewees said this community engagement—through the initial community resilience mapping, validation of findings, the inclusion of additional community input, and the multi-step workshops—and the accompanying focus on self-reliance and capacity building helped build trust in the activities and encourage community members to participate. By participating in these activities, community members began to view themselves as project owners rather than aid recipients. In addition, a carefully planned “shifting mindset” session was designed to help cultivate a sense of agency in participants and help them think about how communities can come together to identify and solve issues.

Workshop participants played a significant role in the change by actively participating in Policy LINK’s activities, being willing to change their attitudes and lifestyles, and disseminating what they had learned to the broader community, which helped catalyze more widespread change. In one instance, participants from Wau County disseminated information on what they learned from the workshops on resiliency with the larger community by speaking about community-led resilience on the radio station Voice of Hope.

Level of Contribution: Strong

Policy LINK’s bottom-up approach enabled this outcome and the robust community engagement that served as a foundation for many of the other outcomes substantiated by this evaluation. The Policy LINK workshops provided a unique opportunity for community members to build their capacities over several sessions and interact with development and government officials. The causal mechanism for this change is evident throughout the five-step process and beyond, from the targeted sessions challenging participants to think differently about their roles and responsibilities in development to the implementation of local action plans (which led to the other outcomes identified in this evaluation).

Communities enhance agency through prioritizing and sharing their needs with others

Sources: 19 interviews with other stakeholders, 12 interviews with Wau County community delegates, eight secondary documents from Policy LINK, and two interviews with Jur River County community delegates

Outcome Story

During the Wau County payam-level local action planning workshops, 175 community delegates began developing the capacity to identify the priority shocks affecting them, create action plans that outline available and needed resources, and determine the next steps for implementing the action plans. In addition, workshop participants/community delegates presented their ideas and articulated their issues, needs, and priorities to developing partners and government stakeholders, identifying specific ways these external actors could support the development of their communities alongside them. One participant said, “These workshops organized by Policy LINK have also helped me realize my potential and apply approaches to make positive changes both in my life and community. In essence, these workshops have built my capacity to champion resilience actions and adopt a new way of active living and devoting efforts in my community.” Policy LINK facilitated this change using an inclusive, transparent process that made the presentations relevant and accessible to communities and brought together various actors to increase transparency, collaboration, and the community-centeredness of development efforts.

In October 2020, Policy LINK organized a three-day Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement Workshop in Wau County. Participants worked to understand the roles of the community, the government, and implementing partners. Once this understanding was built, they identified the most impactful shocks and created an action plan to address them. One interviewee who participated in the Wau County local action planning workshop on February 21–24, 2022, offers insight into the format of a capacity-building activity:

“During the third session, the participants were divided into six groups made up of payam delegates, representatives of state line ministries and directorates, and the County Departmental Directors. Each group was asked to develop a S.M.A.R.T. vision, mission, and set of objectives for its assigned shock. The purpose was to help community delegates create a roadmap for transforming negative shocks. They did so by setting out a clear vision and mission for themselves and developing the objectives that would enable them to achieve that vision. The delegates discussed in groups for 40 minutes after which each group presented to the wider group.”

The joint work planning sessions in Wau County (March 2022) and Jur River County (June 2022) created a platform for communication between community members, government actors (i.e., county commissioners, local authorities, ministerial authorities, etc.), and development partners (e.g., Integrity Global, the Resilience through Agriculture in South Sudan [RASS] project, CARE International, the Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], the Shejeh Salam project, Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development [ACTED], Norwegian Refugee Council [NRC], Danish Refugee Council [DRC]). The platform allowed participants to discuss, communicate, and negotiate the interventions captured in action plans developed in earlier workshops that were part of Policy LINK’s five-step process. A subsequent community feedback workshop brought together NGOs, government officials, and community members to reflect on the action plans and activities and provide feedback that would inform current (existing interventions planned by development partners) and future programming.

Community members have continued to sustain the relationships¹⁰ they built with the government and development partners. They also report continuing to apply the skills they developed through the five-step process. Specifically, they report raising issues on their own, prioritizing them using a ranking process, and discussing action steps. For example in Mboro, community members learned to ask questions like: “If schools

are built, then what? Do we have teachers? If roads are connected, if we have clean drinking water, if our roads are clean, is it easier now for us to transport our produce to the town to sell them?” At the time of data collection, community members were continuing to problem-solve and carry out resilience-building activities independently.

Significance

There is now more open communication between development partners, the government, and community members, wherein communities regularly share their needs. Specifically, they are presenting their action plans, which outline what they can do to address an issue as a community and where there are gaps that could be filled with external support. This approach increases collaboration and coordination between various actors on projects in the area.

Level of Evidence: Strong (Wau County); Weak (Jur River County)

This outcome was substantiated across all major outcome subcomponents for Wau County. There are significant data to report on this outcome, predominantly from direct community interviews. As such, the evidence rating for Wau County is strong. The data supporting this outcome are sparser for Jur River County. Only two community delegates and four other stakeholders mentioned this outcome; it also appeared in secondary documents. As such, the evidence rating for Jur River County is weak.

Contribution

Policy LINK created the opportunity and space for development partners to recognize that communities’ voices matter and that communities own their development. In addition, as a result of Policy LINK’s capacity-building activities, communities’ confidence in their abilities increased. Moreover, their mindsets shifted: they believe they are capable of resiliency/development and know how to set priorities for their future and coordinate

¹⁰ At the time of the data collection interviews.

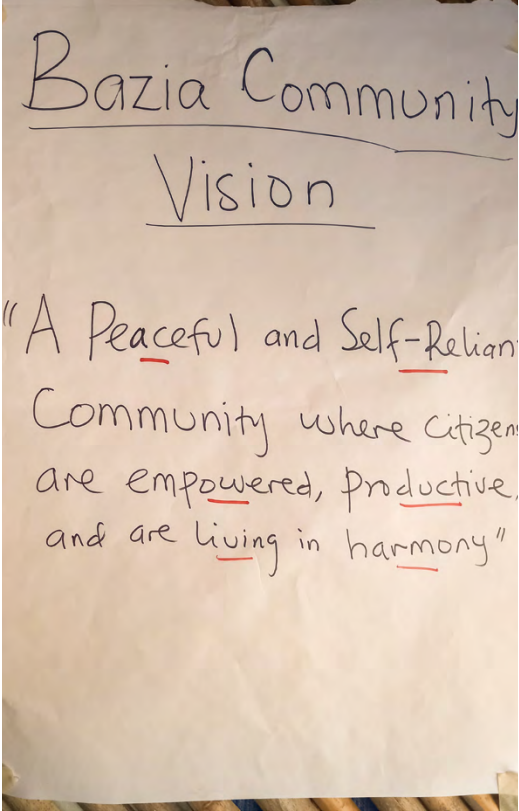
with development partners. The joint work planning sessions—where community members presented their action plans—demonstrated how development partners and communities can work together, as well as created transparency and accountability from the development partners to the community. *Payams* not previously considered for project support can now voice their wants and needs to the relevant development partners and government officials.

Involving development partners in the workshops also allowed communities to learn which organizations are involved in which projects/sectors and who to contact to share their priorities. Now, communities can approach organizations/projects with their project plans and ask for support if needed. An example of this outcome is that now, community members are bringing requests to the county director’s office, who in turn passes them along to development partners operating in their communities. This bottom-up approach was important to bring visibility to communities’ needs, as well as to show

communities the importance of their roles in disseminating messages and making change.

Level of Contribution: Strong

Policy LINK identified stakeholders and funded, designed, and facilitated the strategic, community-centered five-step process to enhance community agency. The steps in the process were designed to build the capacity of community participants to identify and rank their priorities, create action plans, and share their needs with development partners and the government. This outcome validates that the capacity building occurred as intended. The causal mechanism is clear in that this outcome would not have occurred without the Policy LINK intervention, specifically using a bottom-up approach to train and build the skills of all participants and opening lines of communication between community members, development partners, and government officials.



UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES

THEME: FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOOD IMPROVEMENTS

Communities apply improved agricultural practices

Sources: 20 interviews with Jur River County community delegates, four interviews with Wau County community delegates, two interviews with other stakeholders, and two secondary documents

Outcome Description

Policy LINK enabled communities, government, and development partners to work together to identify and create action-oriented solutions to problems related to agriculture and food scarcity. Workshop participants identified solutions such as modernizing farming equipment, distributing seeds to diversify crops, distributing tools, creating farming cooperatives, learning to control crop diseases and pests, and providing training on various agricultural practices (e.g., poultry farming, horticulture, and lulu oil processing/marketing) to produce cash crops to consume and to sell. During one workshop, community members created an action plan that outlined:

- **Priority Action:** Support households to diversify livelihood sources by offering training in diverse skills such as poultry farming, horticulture, and lulu oil processing and marketing.
- **Objective:**
 - Improve the nutritional condition of households through increased availability and consumption of diverse food items in Jur River County
 - Increase household income from agricultural products through investing in value chain addition and training farmers
 - Reduce the impact of flooding on crops and other agricultural produce by promoting early cultivation to mitigate the effects of flooding
- **Resources Required:** Technical personnel, tools and equipment, seed varieties, logistics/mobility.”

The participants noted that the community would need support from development partners or the government to implement this action. Subsequent workshops helped communities understand the roles of development partners in their community, enabling them to channel their requests for support to the right points of contact (while still initiating action plans on their own).

Interviewees reported that they started improving agricultural practices around March/April 2022. These improved practices enabled some interviews to shift from household subsistence farming to more commercial agriculture production (e.g., selling surplus crops at the market) (see “communities increase their farm production,” which is connected to this outcome). One interviewee mentioned the Policy LINK intervention contributed to, “More agriculture system change from subsistence farming in which crops are cultivated for household consumption to commercialized farming in which community involve in farming for business/commercialize purpose.” In addition, after participating in Policy LINK workshops, community delegates shared messages about resiliency with other community members and, in some cases, held meetings at the payam level to make sure community members were pursuing individual growth, especially regarding agricultural activities (around April 2022 in Jur River County).

Later, after some community members formed agricultural cooperatives, some development partners intervened by distributing agricultural inputs. The available data does not clarify which development partners’ agricultural interventions were already underway or how they might have adapted or created new interventions in response to the Policy LINK workshops; however, the Policy LINK activities increased community members’ awareness of different agricultural interventions available to them from development partners.

In February 2022, NGOs provided training on modern farming techniques and distributed supplies (like seeds) and tools (like ox plows) in Jur River County. They introduced farming techniques, including how to use crop spacing to increase yields, cultivate early and plant flood-resistant crops to increase resilience to floods, mitigate

crop pests, and use animal traction technology with ox plows. In Wau Bai Payam (in Jur River County) in May 2022, FAO and ACTED reportedly supported 30 individuals by training them on kitchen gardens and distributing seeds and ox plows.

In addition, farmers organized production groups or cooperatives. These groups are applying modern agriculture methods to increase production. They are doing so with the support of FAO, World Concern, RASS, NRC, and ACTED, among others, which provided seeds and tools. As a result, one participant shares, “Now farmers are organized in production groups or cooperatives. They are applying modern methods of productions, planting of specific plants, planting in lines with specific spacing, using of improved seeds, using of biological fertilizers, introducing irrigated farming and producing especially in areas close to river sites.” Similarly, in Wau County, community delegates helped form three agricultural cooperatives that are working together to achieve success through mutual support. Participants learned in workshops that cooperation is a tool for resilience.

At the same time, development partners were rethinking their approach to food aid. This change – which incentivizes farming rather than the direct distribution of food aid – helped create an enabling environment for this outcome. A county government representative from Jur River County adds, “In 2022, many humanitarian agencies that were providing food aid to the communities have scaled down the food distribution activities, and instead these NGOs are providing incentives to the people to engage in farming activities. This new approach combined with the awareness and sensitization efforts carried out by the Policy LINK Activity helped people to engage in self-improvement initiatives such as farming, small business activities, etc.”

Significance

By using improved agricultural practices, communities have increased crop production, which, in turn, enables people to avoid dependency on aid, increases the food available

in households, and results in crop surpluses that can be sold at the market, which both generates incomes for farmers and makes food more affordable (by offering alternatives to more expensive imported foods). As such, this more immediate outcome catalyzes the next identified outcome in this report, “communities increase their farm production.” In addition, some community members were inspired to start agricultural endeavors. For example, as a result of the workshops, the six community delegates who participated from Roc Roc Dong Payam of Jur River County reportedly all have household gardens now. The modernization of cultivation tools has also created more inclusive spaces for women. “The provision of farming tools and equipment benefits women in particular, especially single mothers who don’t have husbands to do farming activities that require physical strength. With the machines, these women can produce sufficient [crop yields] on a par with men and they are able to take care of their children.” It is important to note, however, that reports of theft in the community have increased due to the increased availability of food. Generally, though, individuals reported that they are more able to depend on themselves and mitigate shocks themselves.

Level of Evidence: Medium (Jur River County)¹¹; Weak (Wau County)

This outcome meets substantiation in several outcome components and meets triangulation with significant volume in Jur River County in every component. The data support this outcome in Wau County as well, however, the number of sources is much fewer and, thus, there is less evidence, which translates to a weak level of evidence.

Contribution

Community agricultural practices improved through the Policy LINK intervention, which catalyzed community efforts to improve agricultural practices (with development partner support). Some solutions that came out of the action planning were collaborating on community

¹¹ Note that the level of evidence rating differs here from the “South Sudan Outcome Harvest Findings Briefer” due to further review. This final report provides the most accurate ratings for all the outcomes.

development efforts in the area and adopting new farming methods to diversify and produce more crops. The community identified that they needed external support (e.g., seeds and tools). In response, development partners provided training on modern agricultural practices. “Food has become enough now through the participation of all the local community in agriculture this year through the capacity building of Development Alternatives International (DAI) in which they provided knowledge about the importance of participating in the agriculture in the community.” After the workshops, delegates went to their communities and shared what they learned in churches, social gatherings, etc. As a result of the Policy LINK activities and its capacity building, community members increased engagement in agricultural improvement interventions.

Level of Contribution: Medium (Jur River County); Weak (Wau County)

There is a clear causal mechanism in that Policy LINK inspired workshop participants to act as change agents and to take development into their own hands via agricultural improvements; however, the degree to which that causal mechanism affected the outcome is less clear. Although there are specific agricultural practice improvements detailed in the action plans created in the Policy LINK workshops, it is clear that this outcome was possible thanks to the interventions of development partners that provided training and agricultural supplies to communities. It is unclear how much Policy LINK’s activities affected development partners; nor is it clear what agricultural interventions were underway when Policy LINK’s workshops took place or whether development partners adapted their interventions as a result of participating in Policy LINK’s workshops. Wau County’s level of contribution rating is lower than Jur River’s because it had fewer sources and, therefore, less information to validate. This outcome is also an input for two outcomes discussed below (increased farm production and diversified income sources).

Communities increase their farm production

Sources: 18 interviews with Jur River County participants, eight interviews with other stakeholders, six interviews with Wau County participants, and four secondary documents

Outcome Story

In Jur River County and Wau County, farming activities have increased, as demonstrated in the previous outcome, “communities apply improved agricultural practices.” The application of improved agricultural practices led to increased food production as a secondary outcome. In addition, in Jur River County, increased safety due to recent community peace dialogues enabled farmers to cultivate their crops without fear of attacks. Before Policy LINK’s activities, many reported depending on food aid from NGOs; now, respondents report that more individuals are going farther into the countryside to farm (and feel safe doing so), and farm production has increased.

During the workshops, some participants identified economic constraints, as well as food insecurity, as shocks, and participants created action plans based on these prioritized shocks. After attending the Policy LINK workshops, community delegates shared what they had learned, as well as the action plans, with their communities. They also encouraged individuals to engage in large-scale farming.

Interviewees mentioned their own increased engagement in agricultural activities and micro- and small-business initiatives. Participants attributed this change in part to having gained a sense of self-reliance that inspired them to engage in or scale up farming to be more food secure. A participant said the farm sizes had increased as a result of Policy LINK’s activities, noting, “They [community members] have increased their farm size from 1-2 to 3-5 *feddans* per individual or household this year [2022].” Interviewees reported that due to Policy LINK, they further engaged the implementing partners (ACTED, Hope Agency for Relief and Development, World Vision, Volunteer for Children and Development

Organization, Dorcas, RASS, NRC, etc.) who participated in the joint work planning session and responded to community members' needs by providing agricultural support to farmers/households.

One respondent from Jur River County describes the increased cultivation, "This is clearly seen in this rainy season that you can see varieties of agricultural products in the markets from the same community that was suffering from shocks and stresses. People have what they can rely on for their house consumption, and other social activities have been organized." Another example of this outcome in action is that the markets used to be filled with expensive imported foods from Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, etc. Now, respondents say the markets in Wau and Kuajiena have more affordable, locally-produced foods.

It is important to note the factors that inhibited and enabled the success of this outcome. First, several environmental factors, including late rains and heavy flooding, negatively affected crop yields. Floods were especially problematic in Manyang, Acongcong, Alelthony, Marial-Bai, etc., in Jur River County. In Marial-Bai *Payam*, for example, "The other problem was the delay in the rain this year, which meant people started cultivation in July and the floods came in August. Though we were trained to cultivate early, the fluctuation in climatic conditions has made utilization of this knowledge difficult for farmers in Marial-bai *Payam*." On the enabling side, government actors (community leaders) allocated land, adopted policies to encourage increased farming (*payam* authorities), and offered technical support (the State Ministry of Agriculture).

Significance

Farmers have increased crop yields for their consumption, and some have generated income by selling crop surpluses. Farmers have used their income to pay school fees, medical bills, etc. By selling their crops at local markets, farmers are contributing to food security more broadly by making affordable food more widely available. In addition, the community has come together

to assist each other; "the farming community also has increased its production due to what we call "nefiel" in the local language, like people coming together and doing farming for one particular person. The next day they moved to another place."

Level of Evidence: Strong (Jur River County); Weak (Wau County)

While this outcome was substantiated in five of the major narrative analysis categories (what, change, contribution, significance, and who) for both counties, Jur River County had more data sources than Wau County. Moreover, in Jur River County, most of the categories had substantiation and triangulation, with multiple stakeholder groups describing the outcome. In addition, all Jur River County delegates mentioned this outcome. In Wau County, on the other hand, the outcome was triangulated only in the change-outcome section. As such, the level of evidence in Jur River County is strong, while in Wau County it is weak.

Contribution

As a result of Policy LINK's focus on self-reliance in the workshops, some participants were inspired to scale up their farming efforts. Participants attended Policy LINK events, and, as a result, they increased the size of their farms and told others about the benefits of doing so. One participant highlighted this change, "So, the change began when the community leaders participated or engaged in the training on community-led resilience facilitated by Policy Link, South Sudan. People took the idea and applied it this year, in particular during May 2022 (the cultivation period), and they increased their farms' land size to more *feddans* than usual." In addition, Policy LINK created a platform that facilitated collaboration between development partners, government, and community members. This platform enabled communities to ask for and receive support/resources to increase their agricultural activities (as discussed in the outcome above, "communities apply improved agricultural practices").

Policy LINK's efforts also supported an ongoing shift in how donors provide food aid. Rather than giving away food, they are assisting individuals with farming their own food or providing food for work. "In the last two years, Policy LINK reinforced these efforts that were already being supported by agencies like FAO and the World Food Programme by developing key messages and using community delegates to disseminate these messages to the communities. The communities now want to be given farming tools and equipment and support to be able to produce their own food rather than being given ready food. With the growing market for food commodities, people see opportunities for earning incomes from the sale of food items in the agriculture sector and this is an additional motivation why people are now willing to undertake farming activities."

Level of Contribution: Weak

The contribution was generally substantiated, was triangulated for Jur River community delegate interviews as well as interviews with other stakeholders, and had two secondary sources contributing to the data. However, Policy LINK's role in the outcome is unclear, as is the strength of the causal mechanism. Most sources agree that Policy LINK was instrumental in changing the mindsets of the participants, bringing actors together to collaborate, and building capacities. However, the change likely could not have happened without the resources and support of development partners. Some interviewees said that Policy LINK clearly catalyzed the involvement of development partners through joint action planning workshops; other interviewees felt that the outcome was made possible because development partners listened to communities and adapted their plans to meet the communities' agricultural needs.

Households diversify income sources to enhance economic security

Sources: 14 interviews with Jur River County participants, five interviews with Wau County participants, and four interviews with other stakeholders

Outcome Story

Environmental challenges such as flooding and delayed rainfall led community delegates to conclude that individuals cannot rely on crops alone for economic security. Community delegates formulated priority actions around this conclusion during the *payam*-level local action planning workshops. Subsequent sensitization activities and community feedback meetings encouraged community members to diversify their income sources at the individual and household levels to prevent economic shocks (e.g., if they lose one source of income). Some ideas for diversifying income sources included keeping bees, starting small businesses, and laying bricks (in addition to existing activities such as farming and keeping livestock). One community delegate spoke of their own resulting business endeavors, for example, "I started a business because of Policy LINK's activities which built community capacity on livelihood diversification. Now, I have a shop operating. I started on 20 August 2022 in Marial Bai Payam's main market." Another interviewee said, "... personally, I established a small garden at home, and I also have one motorcycle on the road doing some business (*Boda Boda*). This is now helping my family members. We don't rely only on the salary." These activities helped participants look for alternatives to support their families rather than depending on aid. One interviewee noted, "This change in attitude has enhanced the coping capacities of people in the face of economic hardships. For example, individuals are more likely to engage in farming in addition to doing one or two other economic activities to augment what they get from the main economic activity."

In addition, interviewees reported that the number of vendors in markets has increased

as a result of Policy LINK's activities. Additional impacts of learning to be more economically resilient identified in the evaluation included: increased confidence that communities and individuals can move away from aid dependence, an increased number of village savings and loan associations established to make loans for starting businesses more accessible, and more women selling products in the market. In addition, youth in Marial Bai Payam (Jur River County) started a grain mill business with the community's assistance in July 2022, and some individuals started keeping livestock for future profits. Nutrition has reportedly improved due to the increased variety of crops available and the growth of livestock rearing.

Significance

More people are busy with agricultural activities than before, and, as a result, more food is available in markets, reducing the price of basic commodities. Households are more economically resilient, enabling families to withstand shocks that affect their crops or livestock since they have other sources of income, can pursue other sources if needed, and can effectively manage their resources. Individuals have a better understanding of how to be economically resilient against the impacts of climate change and understand that traditional livelihood assets, like relying on crops alone, are not fully sustainable.

Level of Evidence: Strong (Jur River County); Weak (Wau County)

This outcome was triangulated by Jur River County participants. There is clear evidence this outcome occurred there. As such, the level of evidence in Jur River County is strong. In Wau County, the evidence indicates this outcome likely occurred, but because fewer interviewees highlighted the outcome, the level of evidence is weak (Wau County interviewees, however, did often speak of related outcomes, notably "communities increased their farm production" and "communities apply improved agricultural practices").

Contribution

The design of the Policy LINK intervention enabled participants to think critically about shocks they face (in this case, economic instability) and brainstorm solutions. Ultimately, participants were inspired to engage in economically self-sustaining initiatives such as farming and small business endeavors. Policy LINK taught participants that having multiple sources of income would make them more economically resilient and less vulnerable to uncontrollable shocks and stressors such as climate events. Regarding food security and livelihood a Wau County community delegate adds, "As a result of participating in Policy LINK activities, youth and women are engaged in vegetable and other gardening activities. The production of tomato, eggplant, okra, and other types of vegetables is happening in the other part of my garden to sustain their food security and livelihood to build their capacity to become more resilient." Overall, in the past individuals were vulnerable to economic shocks in part because they tended to rely on one source of income and that source was often vulnerable to environmental impacts (e.g., floods or disease outbreaks in livestock). After Policy LINK's activities, individuals diversified their incomes by keeping bees, starting new farming activities, starting small businesses, and creating or joining village savings and loan associations. They also communicated their needs for support (e.g., agricultural inputs) to development partners. Some development partners supported communities after Policy LINK's interventions, assisted communities in adopting new income-generating activities, or responded to resource needs.

Level of Contribution: Strong (Jur River County); Weak (Wau County)

The causal links between Policy LINK's activities and this outcome are well-defined for Jur River County participants. Each outcome component was triangulated by Jur River County participants, and it is clear that the outcome was a result of having participated in Policy LINK workshops. The data show workshop participants feel a greater sense of self-reliance. The data also indicate that the guidance on diversifying income sources, coupled with the mindset shift, led participants to diversify their income sources. In Wau County, the evidence for the level of contribution was not as strong.

THEME: LOCALLY-LED DEVELOPMENT

Government, development partners, and communities improve coordination

Sources: Six interviews with other stakeholders, five interviews with Jur River County community delegates, two interviews with Wau County community delegates, two secondary documents

Outcome Description

Before Policy LINK's activities began, communities were not fully aware of the projects underway in their area. Moreover, development partners tended to duplicate interventions due to poor coordination and poor communication. The Policy LINK workshops provided a platform for stakeholders to define and agree on principles of collaboration, as well as outline specific roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder, making engagement easier. It was a collective impact approach, inclusive of marginalized populations, whereby Policy LINK brought together the four corners of the community, i.e., the traditional authorities (paramount and boma chiefs), local government, civil society, and the private sector. The communities shared their priorities and action plans, and development partners shared the activities they had planned to address specific shocks and stressors. The local action planning and joint work planning workshops were designed with a participatory approach that brought all the stakeholders together to understand the gaps and the support needed in the community. This shared understanding then served as a guide for the implementation of activities. This coordination allowed development partners and the government to align their activities with community priorities and agendas and identify where they could collaborate on addressing the identified gaps. The county-level action planning brought together *payam* delegates and, as such, facilitated learning across the different *payams*.

Since the various Policy LINK workshops, development partners have been engaging communities and local government and are more open to their input and ideas. For example, development partners have been sharing plans

and budgets with local authorities. As a result, governments can more easily track activities, including by type, location, and partner. The Policy LINK workshops also allowed development partners and the government to find opportunities to collaborate. One government representative from Jur River said, "We feel empowered and valued when NGOs involve us in the planning and implementation of their interventions because we can provide some inputs that will add value to their work due to our local knowledge and expertise." In the past, coordination between stakeholders did not occur to this degree; however, now there is a structured and proven model for communities to guide and provide feedback on development partners' interventions. Both local authorities and communities have been more involved in the decision-making process. They are committed to working together toward a common goal, with the community at the center of all development assistance and the role of each stakeholder well defined.

The Policy LINK dialogues also brought to light the role of local government in creating an enabling environment for improved coordination and potential opportunities for collaboration with local communities and development actors. Local governments (chiefs, paramount chiefs, *payam* administrators, boma administrators, county commissioners, and governors) have been open to collaborating with both communities and development partners. They could play a greater role in ensuring development partners address community priorities. They have also demonstrated a willingness to contribute material or human resources to support joint activities with development partners that benefit the community. There is already a model for this kind of collaboration at the county level, where development partners have a thematic cluster system that is accessible to the actors representing different government institutions and local CSOs. As a result, the government and CSOs are more involved in rolling out the interventions, which benefit communities. This increased transparency and accountability has also helped build trust and respect between the community, government, and implementing partners.

Significance

There are some indications that implementation has improved, becoming more effective, efficient, and relevant, due to closer cooperation and collaboration between local government, development partners, and communities and greater input from communities and local government. Since the Policy LINK workshops, more development partners have engaged local chiefs with the support of the county governments. Whereas in the past, coordination was lacking and interventions were often duplicative, now there is a proven model for participatory joint work planning that can help address these issues. Closer collaboration has facilitated openness, a shared sense of ownership of successes and failures, and joint learning that can improve interventions. As a result of the coordination, development partners are identifying areas and building the capacity and confidence of local government officials to improve service delivery on a more sustainable basis. The Policy LINK workshops were a unique and important opportunity for the community, local government, and development partners to come together to agree on the needs and identify and plan activities to address community needs.

Level of Evidence: Medium

This outcome was substantiated in four of the major categories (who, what, significance, and contribution), though Jur River County had more sources than Wau County. Several other sources (non-community delegates) and two secondary documents supported the outcome. The triangulation of different outcome subcomponents indicates this outcome was slightly stronger in Jur River County. It might have been perceived to be more of an impactful outcome that Jur River County participants chose to highlight.

Contribution

Policy LINK brought communities, government, and development partners together through county-level local action planning, joint work planning, and community feedback workshops. The workshops provided a platform for all stakeholders to agree on collaboration principles and outline each stakeholder’s roles and responsibilities. It also provided the opportunity for transparency and accountability. Communities and local government shared their input on priority areas and development partners shared their activities and how they could address community priorities. The discussions allowed the different implementing partners to share plans, avoid duplication of efforts, and determine areas where the local government could help with implementation. Implementation is now more community-centered, resulting in more effective, efficient, and relevant programming.

Level of Contribution: Medium

The contribution was generally substantiated. Most sources said the coordination between implementing partners, the government, and communities definitely could not have happened without Policy LINK creating the space for open dialogue and productive collaboration. The data suggest that the Policy LINK workshops directly contributed to this outcome; however, the level of contribution is deemed medium due to the limited number of data sources.

Women have a larger role in local decision-making and leadership

Sources: Nine interviews with Wau County community delegates, eight interviews with Jur River County community delegates, five interviews with other stakeholders, one secondary document from Policy LINK

Outcome Story

In June 2022, Policy LINK held a local action planning workshop in Wau Bai Payam, in Jur River County. The workshop featured a session on shifting mindsets, designed to help participants view themselves not as passive recipients of aid but as leaders responsible for—and capable of—developing their own activities. To disseminate key messages to their broader communities, community delegates conducted meetings that allowed small groups of women to discuss, develop key messages, and later share those messages regarding resilient and participatory development with the community. After engaging in women-only safe spaces, the women joined the other delegates/participants in sharing these messages in churches, schools, and the chief's court.

After the June 2022 workshop, in Marial Bai payam (Jur River) female leaders and the chiefs agreed to jointly advocate restructuring the court to *payam* and county authorities. As part of this restructuring, the local government and the traditional authority agreed to appoint at least two women¹² to the position of chief in the local chief's court/customary law court. The meeting to elect women to local authority/chief in local courts took place on June 29, 2022, and the two women that were selected started work on July 1, 2022. Participants thought this change would benefit women. They said that before, women had little chance of getting a fair hearing because of the culturally reinforced prejudices and beliefs that were strictly upheld by predominantly male courts in the community.

Furthermore, in July 2022, the community held discussions on the roles and responsibilities of women. The discussion also covered the

importance of women and girls participating in community development initiatives designed to overcome shocks and stressors. In addition, women were encouraged and empowered to initiate and participate in development activities as well as to take on responsibilities that were formerly reserved for men. For example, in Wau County, 15 girls are participating in apprenticeships or vocational training in the fields of mechanical, electrical, construction, plumbing, and tailoring work. Before, these types of jobs were considered to be men's jobs. Another example of this impact is that the Sudan Red Cross Society organized first-aid training. Women from Wau North Payam participated in massive numbers compared to men in the community. Through these outcomes, women are speaking up more often and ultimately taking on more decision-making roles at the local level.

Significance

For context, some respondents shared that previously men did not want to involve women in income-generating activities. They also noted some people resisted changes in women's role in the community, saying it was not culturally acceptable. However, the shocks of internal conflict and COVID-19 made it harder for men to raise enough money to support their children, and women started contributing to supporting their families by doing small business activities like growing vegetables, making tea, etc. Due to this contextual change and Policy LINK's interventions, women have felt more empowered and become more involved in community and leadership activities despite traditional gender norms. For example, women are now participating in marriage and dowry discussions within their households. Women have united and formed various groups, such as village savings and loan associations in Tharkueng and Mabior Abiem Bomas, which have empowered and united women. A group of 40 women and girls and three men established a vegetable garden with support from NRC, which provided training, seed, and tools. These members have been producing vegetables to sell at the markets, feed their families, and create a source of income. Women and girls have changed their

¹² While the majority of interviewees identified two women appointed to the law courts, a couple mentioned that three women were appointed to the law courts.

self-perceptions. They no longer view themselves as aid recipients but as individuals capable of taking the initiative to make changes in their communities. Through these outcomes, women are speaking up more often and, ultimately, playing a larger role in decision-making at the local level.

Level of Evidence: Medium

This outcome was triangulated by community delegates in Wau County and Jur River County independently, as well as by Policy LINK enumerators. Respondents provided enough specificity to verify that this outcome had taken place (especially the more immediate actions) but slightly less detail regarding the extent to which this change has influenced those who did not participate in the activities (who may be inhibitors) and social norms. No outcome was also not highlighted by many external stakeholders. These factors collectively mean this outcome receives a medium evidence rating.

Contribution

Government officials, development partners, and community members came together at Policy LINK workshops to discuss women's roles in the community. Women who participated in the workshops left feeling empowered to take on responsibilities that were formerly reserved for men. Jur River County's chief participated in the county-level local action planning and the joint work planning workshops, which helped him understand the importance of collaboration and inclusive development approaches, wherein women and men work together to enact meaningful change in the community. During and after the activities, participants identified shocks and created plans to address those shocks, including by putting women in decision-making

positions. In addition, women who participated in the Policy LINK activities disseminated messages in their respective communities, encouraging women to take more initiative in their development. Participants encouraged female leadership due to their involvement in the Policy LINK activities, which helped shift the community mindset around women's roles and contributed to at least two women being elected to leadership positions. In addition, through the Policy LINK workshops, people's perceptions started to change. Relationships between women improved, and now there is reportedly more collaboration, cooperation, and solidarity among women, as seen through the organization of women's groups (e.g., village savings and loan associations). Some respondents mentioned that October/November 2021 was when changes began in women's perception of each other.

Level of Contribution: Medium

Policy LINK's activities catalyzed women's increased participation in local decision-making - including taking on formal leadership roles - in Wau County and Jur River County. However, prior contextual changes (e.g., the 2018 peace agreement, women's increased engagement in small business ventures in response to decreased household income due to COVID-19, etc.) created an enabling environment for Policy LINK's activities to be well-received and feasible. Chiefs and *payam* administrators also played an important role. Notably, their receptivity, collaborative leadership, and support in disseminating key messages helped make the vision for restructuring the local court in Martial Bai Payam a reality. The importance of these other contributing factors means Policy LINK's specific contribution to this outcome is at a medium level.

Enhanced conflict resolution practices lead to peace between Kangi and Udici Payams (Jur River County)

Sources: Nine interviews with Jur River County community delegates, two interviews with other stakeholders

Outcome Story

During the Policy LINK workshops, community delegates explored conflict as a key shock and developed plans to address conflict in their communities. After the workshops, delegates returned to their communities, where they raised awareness of how conflict and violence increase poverty and vulnerability, discussed the root causes of conflict, and mobilized women's groups, youth leaders, and traditional authorities to address conflict.

Udici Payam and Kangi Payam, in particular, were in conflict because both claimed the bordering land as their own. Community delegates called on the chiefs for support. The chiefs mobilized the communities, provided leadership to achieve reconciliation, and showed the power of coming together and speaking in a unified voice. These actions demonstrated to the communities that the chiefs were not in favor of or a part of the conflict that was going on. The traditional authorities from both sides also discussed peaceful cohesion and harmony among the youth. In addition, along with the payam administrators, they wrote to the county commissioner for assistance in addressing their problems with the conflict and with youth. The county government reacted positively, mobilizing funds in collaboration with United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the USAID Shejeh Salam project to assist in facilitating peace dialogues; they also provided security and transportation for the dialogue events.

The peace dialogue events created space to discuss community disagreements and achieve reconciliation between the two conflicting payams. Seventy-two residents of both payams, including chiefs, youth leaders, women, and local CSOs, attended the events. During the events, the chiefs addressed the issue of the militia leader Piel Ajak,

advising the youth to stop supporting him and to chase him out of the Kangi area. During the reconciliation dialogue, the local authorities from Udici and Kangi also agreed to request another dialogue if problems arose again.

As a result of the dialogues, the communities signed a peace document, and youth from the two *payams* are reportedly now at peace with each other. Freedom of movement between the *payams* has increased, and members of both communities can now go to market days without fear. This outcome has positively affected youth, in particular. Previously, youth could not move freely between villages without fear of violence; now, youth leaders are bringing together youth from all bomas to play football (using balls provided by the chiefs), creating a sense of cohesiveness. Furthermore, women's groups encouraged the youth to stay out of conflict through community meetings and initiated income-generating activities among the youth to create crafts to sell. As one county delegate explained:

"I want to discuss the issue of peace because, without it, nothing else can work. I am happy because now people go to their farms and the market without fear. This was not possible before we participated in the Policy LINK engagement activities. At the county local action planning workshop, we were given key messages on resilience, peace, and conflict resolution which we disseminated to the community. This led to a reduction of violence during market days."

Significance

Thanks to the peace agreement between Kangi Payam and Udici Payam, people can move between communities without fear of being attacked or discriminated against based on where they come from. This freedom of movement has positive socio-economic effects, as people can now farm and travel to markets without fear. Some residents have diversified their livelihoods through agriculture, which promotes food security and reduced the poverty rate in the community (and, subsequently, reduced crime rates).

Generally, social cohesion and harmony are being promoted through sports such as football, especially among the youth. In addition, the peace has also facilitated joint action such as the road construction project.

Level of Evidence: Medium (Jur River County only)

This outcome is specific to peace dialogues that occurred in *payams* within Jur River County. As such, the interviewees who spoke about this outcome are all from Jur River County. Every outcome subcomponent was triangulated within Jur River County. This level of triangulation and its consistency make clear that this outcome occurred in the *payams* of Udici and Kangi.

Contribution

This outcome was catalyzed by Policy LINK’s intervention and continued thanks to community delegates acting as change agents. During the February 2022¹³ workshops, the group that had identified “conflict” as a key shock came together and discussed the root problem and how best to address the conflict. When they returned to their communities, they disseminated critical messages to other community members. One delegate said, “The good ideas that we got from Policy LINK’s workshops enabled us to engage the community and influence them to accept reconciliation and abandon violence which was ruining our lives.” Another delegate noted, “Most of the delegates who attended from Udici and Kangi played a big role in the resolution of the conflict between youth in Kangi and Udici.” The delegates mobilized traditional authorities, women’s groups, and youth leaders to discuss addressing the shock, which ultimately led to peace dialogues. These community delegates understood the importance of having good facilitators for the dialogue and, as such, through the chiefs, payam administrators, and county commissioners requested facilitation support from UNMISS and the USAID Shejeh Salam project. The dialogues resulted in the signing of a peace agreement.

Level of Contribution: Medium (Jur River County only)

Policy LINK is the clear catalyst for this outcome—peace between the Udici Payam and Kangi Payam—in Jur River County. Policy LINK built the capacity of the community delegates who identified and prioritized conflict between Kangi and Udici as a shock during the Policy LINK workshops. Participants then learned to discuss and create action plans, implement those plans, collaborate with and request the support of development partners and the government for peace dialogues, and disseminate solutions and resolution tactics to the broader community. The causal mechanism from the outcome back to Policy LINK is explicit, noting essential contributions from the community delegates who took the work forward and the development partners—UNMISS and the USAID Shejeh Salam project—that supported the peace dialogues. As such, the level of contribution is rated medium.



¹³ In February 2022, Policy LINK facilitated county-level sense-making workshops in Jur River County. These workshops, held over three days, brought together the county government, state government, and USAID implementing partners.

THEME: DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT

Communities strengthen flood prevention measures (Jur River County)

Sources: 18 interviews with Jur River County community delegates, four interviews with other stakeholders, and two secondary documents

Outcome Story

Communities in Jur River County improved their ability to adapt and respond to floods as a result of the ideas formulated during the Policy LINK workshops. The change started to form during the payam-level sense-making workshops, which took place in November and December 2021. This change was reinforced with county officials in February 2022, at the county-level sense-making workshop, where participants presented the most impactful shocks their communities face and proposed solutions to address, mitigate, or prevent those shocks. They also presented their need for external support (e.g., tools to dig waterways).

Workshop participants showed commitment to addressing the shocks, for example by forming a committee to raise awareness in the community and mobilize resources, organizing community meetings, and helping those in need relocate to higher lands before flooding. Proposed flood mitigation measures included:

- Community members should dig dikes/ waterways around their houses to curb water flow, protect their homes, and reduce the impact of waterborne diseases
- Individuals should be incentivized to move from low land to higher ground so that they do not fall victim to floods.

Informants reported that communities began to apply these mitigation measures between June and August 2022. The community participants formed the ideas, then requested support from development partners. ACTED, for example, provided tools to assist in digging waterways, while Community Aid for Relief and Development

Organization (CARDO) helped to facilitate community dialogues on floods and related issues. One community member states, “The flood adaptation measures implemented by the communities in Jur River have also minimized the impact of floods on families. The flood used to submerge homes, displacing a high number of people every year; however, due to water channels the households dug around their homes, many people have managed to keep the flood water out of their compounds though they haven’t managed to protect their farmlands. This is a significant improvement which can be built upon to ensure people adapt quickly and learn how to live with floods.”

Thanks to the waterways dug by households to divert water flow, the impact of ensuing floods was reportedly lessened. In addition, in August 2022, communities in Manyang Boma in Marial Bai Payam supported each other by providing shelter and resources to victims of the floods.

Significance

Community members can educate others, especially those still living in flood-prone areas, on how to adapt and mitigate the impacts of floods. By mitigating the negative impacts of flooding, individuals can save money and protect their assets since they do not need to spend as much to recover. In addition, community members are supporting each other to address this issue and report having an improved sense of social cohesion as a result.

Level of Evidence: Strong (Jur River County only)

This outcome was triangulated in every category by Jur River County community delegates; the outcome was also substantiated by other stakeholders and secondary documents. As such, there is evidence this outcome occurred in Jur River County. In Wau County, however, only a few interviewees highlighted this outcome, which was substantiated in only two key analysis categories, what and contribution. This indicates that flooding was not a priority shock in these communities.

Contribution

Communities have improved their ability to mitigate the impacts of floods as a result of participating in the Policy LINK workshops. Specifically, they have done so by implementing the action plans developed at those workshops. After the local action planning workshops, community delegates presented the action plans – which entailed encouraging at-risk residents to move to higher ground, digging water channels around houses, and establishing an early warning system – to the communities. They also partnered with the Community Management of Disaster and Risk group to raise awareness of these proposed actions. The community delegates took the lead in implementing awareness campaigns, disseminating messages in churches, markets, community meetings, and during traditional events. When it came time to implement the actions, community delegates tapped into relationships with development partners and the government established during the workshop. Development partners, for example, provided the tools with which to dig the water channels. These interventions protected homes and decreased the number of people displaced compared to previous floods (unfortunately, crops were still destroyed).

Level of Contribution: Strong (Jur River County only)

The causal links between Policy LINK activities and the outcome are clear and well-defined for Jur River County participants. Jur River County community delegates triangulated the outcome component, and it is clear that the outcome resulted from the training and workshops that participants attended. The data show a clear shift in mindset toward greater self-reliance. The data also show that communities implemented the action plans developed during the workshops, digging waterways and encouraging individuals to move to higher land to reduce the impacts of floods. In addition, community delegates who attended the workshops created a group to share what they had learned and raise awareness of flood risks to reduce the negative impacts of flooding in their communities.

Communities take action to prevent fires and deforestation (Jur River County)

Sources: Five interviews with Jur River County community delegates, four secondary documents, and one other stakeholder

Outcome Story

In general, after Policy LINK interventions, communities have adopted improved fire control measures, and, as a result, the number of preventable fires in Jur River has decreased. Fire was a shock identified in the community resilience mapping exercise and validated by communities in the sense-making workshops. During a Policy LINK workshop in Jur River County, one group developed actions to prevent and control fires. During the joint work planning workshop, this group shared their ideas with development partners and the government. After the workshops, in April 2022, community delegates began addressing the threat of fire in their communities. They raised awareness of fire risks among community members and asked civil defense officers to train the community on how to control fires and ask for help. Because fire reportedly disproportionately affects women and children, one community delegate from Jur River County created an innovative solution to address this shock:

“A majority of households in Jur River County said they cook indoors and do not have a separate kitchen area, significantly increasing the likelihood of fire. Maria Ator, a community-selected delegate from the *payam*-level local action planning workshop, was inspired to take action and collaborated with another female leader to invent a stove designed to reduce the risk of fire from home cooking. The stove prevents embers from escaping and igniting household effects or burning children, who are often by their mother’s side. The stove is made from locally sourced materials and uses both charcoal and firewood for cooking. Ms. Ator conducts a 90-day training targeting woman- and child-headed families and people with disabilities and chronic diseases [on the use of this new stove design]. She has trained 75 people so far.”

In addition, community participants raised awareness of the negative impacts of fires and how to implement preventative measures (these efforts complemented those of the government, the community development committee, and community leaders). The community is now more aware of the laws prohibiting deforestation and grass burning, the importance of trees, and the negative impacts of deforestation. For example, as a result of these campaigns, the community has stopped sending their children to chop firewood from neighboring areas due to the impacts of the shock. The community can now respond to fires (within their capacity). In addition, the number of homes that have burned down as a result of preventable fires has reportedly decreased as well.

Significance

As a result of the Policy LINK interventions, communities, government officials, and some development partners worked to address fires in Jur River County. Reportedly, cutting down trees for charcoal has decreased because of awareness-raising campaigns that reached the broader community. In addition, children are sent to retrieve wood from the forests less often. The invention of a stove that keeps embers from spreading (described above) has also helped decrease the risks of fires from cooking in homes. Finally, community members are now cleaning up flammable materials in the areas surrounding their homes to avoid fires destroying property.

Level of Evidence: Weak-Medium (Jur River County only)

This outcome was triangulated by Jur River County community delegates across all key narrative components; however, it was not sufficiently substantiated by other stakeholders. Still, while relatively few sources cited this outcome, the evidence they provided is strong. Together, these factors amount to a weak-medium level of evidence.

Contribution

Through Policy LINK’s workshops, community delegates developed ideas for preventing fires and mitigating their impacts. Afterward, they shared their ideas and what they had learned with their communities. “The change was possible because of joint work planning and the local action planning in which all six *payams*’ delegates deliberated on issues related to fire and cutting down [trees]. They came out with a resolution to stop illegal logging or illegal cutting down of trees.” With the support of local authorities, workshop participants raised awareness of fire protection and control measures, which include adhering to environmental protection laws banning deforestation and grass burning, both of which increase the risk of fires.

Level of Contribution: Medium (Jur River County only)

There is a clear causal mechanism between the Policy LINK workshops, which focused on capacity building and action planning, and workshop participants returning to their communities to raise awareness of fire and deforestation prevention measures. The contribution was both substantiated generally and triangulated in Jur River County; however, the number of data sources was relatively low, and the data to strengthen the contribution story were limited, resulting in a medium contribution rating for this outcome.



THEME: HEALTH

Communities increase the use of healthcare systems

Sources: Eight interviews with Wau County community delegates, eight interviews with Jur River County community delegates, five secondary documents (three Jur River County and two Wau County), and one interview with another stakeholder.

Outcome Story

During Policy LINK workshops, community delegates in both Jur River County and Wau County identified human and animal health issues as a priority shock. Policy LINK empowered community members to participate in the planning process for and identification of health priorities. In subsequent workshops, they created joint action plans with the government and development partners. These plans called for collaboration and coordination between stakeholders, active community participation in general cleaning campaigns, the participation of local youth in community health initiatives, and campaigns to encourage community members to use health services earlier and more frequently (with the ultimate goal of reducing the number of malaria cases of malaria and rates of malnutrition). Through the implementation of joint action plans that community delegates created during Policy LINK workshops, the community, development partners, and government were able to achieve good results in promoting health interventions by coordinating needs and capacities.

Health service providers said that in the past many South Sudanese favored traditional medicine over modern health services, often turning to health clinics only as a last resort. As a result, many people died of treatable diseases. After the Policy LINK workshops in both Jur River County and Wau County, workshop participants returned to their communities, where they organized meetings encouraging community members to

use modern medicine and treatments and to take part in health sector decision-making, planning, monitoring, implementation, and evaluation. As a result of these awareness-raising efforts, the behavior of community members shifted, and people began accessing health services earlier and more often than before. Some interviewees noticed this behavior change starting in February 2022, when community delegates started urging community members to take advantage of free quality health services at local facilities and improve their diets (e.g., by diversifying their diets and starting kitchen gardens). One interviewee noted that, “There has been increased awareness among community members on their right to health services and the importance of modern medicine in treating all kinds of illnesses. This has increased community involvement and demand for health services.”

Significance

Now that community members are more aware of their right to access health services, they are taking control of their own health and making better decisions about their family’s medical needs. Furthermore, people are becoming more accepting of modern medicine. At the same time, the availability of resources has increased, as some health centers have been able to reopen thanks to the willingness of communities to provide accommodation to health personnel assigned to their areas.

This outcome is an accumulation of many more minor results and improvements in how the community engages the health systems. For example, lactating and pregnant women are eating healthier foods to improve their nutrition, more children and women are vaccinated, improved maternal and pre-natal health is reducing morbidity rates, improved animal husbandry practices (including vaccination) is reducing livestock disease, etc. All of these positive changes are supported by the health initiatives of various development partners.

Level of Evidence: Strong

The level of evidence for this outcome is strong. This outcome was triangulated across subcomponents in both Jur River County and Wau County. In addition, most stakeholder groups cited this outcome in both counties, and it appeared in secondary documents as well. Moreover, there was consensus across the groups on the story of how the change occurred--and that Policy LINK's activities directly contributed to the outcome.

Contribution

Before Policy LINK's activities began, the Ministry of Health had established Boma Health Committees (BHCs) to help improve community health. Committee members received training in raising awareness of the importance of modern medicine/treatment methods and using available health services. After the Policy LINK activities and after community delegates disseminated information to communities, the BHC members noticed a shift in demand for health services as more individuals sought early treatment. One health facility employee concurred that since the Policy LINK engagement, requests for health services have increased due to the delegates' meetings urging community members to use

available health resources. The employee said visits to the health facility had tripled and drug consumption rates have increased. They also reported that chiefs became more involved in making decisions regarding health facilities under their control.

Level of Contribution: Medium

The causal link that the Policy LINK intervention played in the outcome is consistent and clear across both Jur River County and Wau County. Poor human (and animal) health was a priority shock identified by some community delegates during Policy LINK workshops, and they made action plans that they implemented upon returning to their communities. It is clear that because of the Policy LINK activities, community delegates returned to their communities to raise awareness of the importance of using health resources which, in turn, encouraged individuals to access available health services available and accept modern medical practices. In addition, community members shared their needs with development partners and the government. While Policy LINK's activities clearly contributed to this outcome, the level of contribution is medium given the significant number of ongoing health activities in these communities.



Development partners improve community-tailoring of WASH programming

Sources: 16 interviews with Jur River County community delegates, eight interviews with other stakeholders, four interviews with Wau County community delegates, and two secondary documents

Outcome Story

The Policy LINK workshops brought together WASH implementing partners to listen to the needs of communities, which include improved WASH practices and infrastructure. They also facilitated coordination among development partners as well as with community leaders and with local government to more effectively address communities' WASH needs. Previously, WASH activities were not coordinated in the communities. Policy LINK's approach and coordination strengthening through the workshops changed things, drawing positive responses from development partners such as the implementer for the USAID Afia WASH project and CARDO, and increasing community commitment. WASH implementing partners, for example, said they used what they learned in the workshops to inform the design of interventions that could fill gaps and align with community action. For example, the implementing partners mapped communities and identified where new water and sanitation facilities were needed or existing infrastructure could be rehabilitated. In addition, the various implementing partners coordinated to fill gaps based on available financial resources. The interventions began in the priority areas, with the continued involvement of the local government through follow-up meetings. In addition, the chiefs mobilized their communities to provide workers, and, in some cases, water management committees were established, trained, and took over the work.

The attitudes and WASH practices of community members have also changed as a result of the WASH interventions that resulted

from the Policy LINK workshops. In Wau County, hygiene promotion began in 2020, and changes were seen starting in November 2020. In Jur River County, WASH activities began May-August 2022. Hygiene is now reportedly improving; for example, more households have latrines than before, community members are participating in hygiene promotion campaigns and digging latrines, and they understand the importance of clean drinking water and good personal hygiene. Community members conducted hygiene promotion campaigns to help communities improve their WASH practices. For example, a committee of women went door-to-door, counseling families on how good hygiene and safe drinking water prevent diseases. As a result, some people reported that they had stopped drinking from standing water; others reported having dug their own latrines.

Significance

The WASH interventions catalyzed by Policy LINK's workshops helped improve water and sanitation services; they also encouraged communities to improve WASH practices, including building and using latrines, boiling water before drinking, and keeping the community clean. As a result, communities have seen their health improve—notably, the number of cases of cholera and other waterborne and diarrheal diseases has reportedly been reduced. At a health cluster meeting held recently, Wau County was mentioned as the county with the most improved health in Western Bahr el Ghazal. Healthier populations will be able to work and produce food to feed their families. Improved access to water, specifically, has reduced conflict and improved social cohesion between and among communities because people no longer have to compete over scarce water sources and wait in long lines at limited boreholes. Water sources available in the community also mean that livestock owners do not have to travel long distances. As a result, incidences of cattle theft/loss have decreased.

Level of Evidence: Strong (Jur River County); Weak (Wau County)

This outcome was substantiated and triangulated in Jur River County in all categories. There was a consensus on the outcome story/process of how the change occurred and that it occurred as a result of the Policy LINK activities. Thus, there is clear evidence that this outcome occurred in Jur River County. The outcome likely happened in Wau County as well, though fewer respondents spoke of it as a priority outcome.

Contribution

Communities improved WASH because they implemented tailored interventions agreed on in Policy LINK workshops. Policy LINK's participatory approach enabled communities to express their concerns directly to other stakeholders in a safe environment (sometimes for the first time). The joint work planning workshops facilitated by Policy LINK brought together WASH partners and communities to identify challenges and gaps. Through these workshops, communities were able to discuss their issues, and implementing partners were able to coordinate and effectively address the needs identified by the communities. They were able to develop work plans to rehabilitate, construct, and maintain boreholes and latrines with community input and

support from the local government; in some cases, community water management committees were also established. Hygiene promotion campaigns also reportedly resulted from the workshops and helped communities understand the importance of good WASH practices. Communities gained a sense of ownership and responsibility for working together to protect themselves from WASH-related diseases.

Level of Contribution: Strong (Jur River County); Weak (Wau County)

The causal link from the Policy LINK intervention is extremely clear and well-defined in Jur River County participants. Each outcome component was triangulated by Jur River County participants, and it is clear that the outcome was a result of the workshops, which provided an opportunity for communities to share their priorities and for WASH implementing partners to coordinate and plan interventions based on community input. There was also a clear pathway linking WASH interventions to improved access to WASH facilities and improved WASH practices in the community. While Wau County sources corroborated information, fewer interviewees contributed information for this outcome. Due to the limited number of sources, the contribution level for Wau County is weak.



OVERARCHING CONCLUSIONS

1

Communities have the desire and capacity to engage with data, information, and evidence—especially when the data are collected from their own communities and when shared in an appropriate, community-based manner. Community members reported that they were strongly bought into Policy LINK activities, in part, because Policy LINK returned to the communities after the mapping exercises to share the data and findings with them—and help them figure out how to act on the data. When sense-making is a clear element of programming it helps communities connect shocks to their own behaviors and possible actions.

2

A sense of agency can be reinforced in part by creating safe spaces for communities to communicate and collaborate with the government and development partners. Policy LINK’s workshops, as well as the PfRR Annual Learning Forum that Policy LINK facilitated in 2021, placed community members in positions of power. Through the workshops, in particular, Policy LINK helped community members not only develop plans of their own but also share those plans with development partners and others already working in their communities. By helping workshop participants develop a greater sense of agency and self-reliance then supporting them to act on those beliefs – Policy LINK established a strong foundation for continued joint work on community action plans.

3

Community delegates played a key role in catalyzing behavior change and championing action among community members. They disseminated key messages and influenced the behaviors of community members across issue areas. These community delegates, who were selected by their communities, play a critical role in motivating individuals to adopt new practices, challenging thinking patterns, and questioning social norms. The examples of community delegates catalyzing outcomes were particularly explicit for: “women have a larger role in local decision-making and leadership,” “enhanced conflict resolution practices lead to peace between Kangi and Udici Payams,” “communities strengthen flood prevention measures,” and “communities take action to prevent fires and deforestation.” By carrying information from Policy LINK workshops and conveying a sense of urgency, community delegates motivated communities to take greater responsibility for securing their own well-being through collective, locally-owned action.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations stem directly from the evidence of this evaluation:

1. Donors and development partners should consider replicating the five-step participatory planning process in activities focused on working to enhance resilience and emphasize locally-led development. This process can elevate community voices, equip community members with the tools to advocate for themselves, shift mindsets and build capacities to use more resilient practices, and improve collective action (including with implementing partners). Interviewees emphasized the value of each step in the process, noting how the steps built upon one another and the importance of the iterative nature of the process. They said these aspects of the process were critical in bringing about many of the outcomes discussed in this report. No specific step stood out in the evidence as more important than another; rather, the overall process improved trust, instilled in participants an understanding of their capacities to address shocks, and provided a platform for community delegates, development partners, and government officials to engage and learn from each other. Creating a space for communities to establish priorities and plan and take action on those priorities was essential to the outcomes substantiated above. This approach is likely to be useful for enhancing locally-led development efforts, building resilience capacities, and facilitating collective action in similar contexts. Even where implementing the full five-step process is not possible, donors should integrate other locally-led approaches into implementing partners' contracts and workplans and hold them accountable for these commitments. This could be done by creating custom indicators that capture data around community-driven actions and/or evaluative efforts that primarily focus on community experience. Where donors are interested in transitioning from food aid to providing economic or livelihood activities, it is particularly important they also include investments in community engagement activities that include sense-making activities, mindset and visioning exercises, and participatory planning, implementation, and monitoring.
2. Development partners should create additional opportunities and spaces for historically marginalized groups such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities to participate in project implementation. Moreover, they should seek diversity within historically marginalized groups for change to be inclusive of a diverse set of needs. Depending on the social context, creating safe spaces for different groups to engage in project activities may require establishing a separate space for each group, proactively facilitating discussions to manage power dynamics that may prevent members of certain groups from speaking up in mixed groups, and allowing stakeholder groups to choose their own representatives to participate in the process (where feasible and conflict sensitive). In the counties where Policy LINK worked, it was important to create dedicated spaces for female delegates to voice their priorities and opinions early in the process before joining the larger group.
3. Development partners must share the data collected from communities (where it can be safely anonymized) and the resulting insights with communities. Donors and development partners are continuously extracting rich data from communities for monitoring, research, and evaluation purposes that predominantly serve as accountability mechanisms for donors and inform learning packaged for external audiences. As demonstrated in the evidence above, communities stand to benefit greatly from the data. They can help interpret the data, as well as use the data to inform the development of adaptive actions. Moreover, facilitated data-sharing processes can build communities' trust in the project, deepening engagement and facilitating the use of more locally-led development approaches. In addition, development partners should ensure they are incorporating community data and feedback into the project design and implementation processes alongside communities throughout the project.
4. Donors and development partners working to strengthen a country's policy system/[institutional architecture](#)—particularly the subnational level—should collaborate with partners implementing community-led, participatory planning processes similar to that of Policy LINK. The findings of this evaluation point to strengthened institutional architecture through stronger collaboration between key policy stakeholders at the subnational level, improved multi-stakeholder dialogue and inclusivity of marginalized groups, and enhanced implementation capacity within stakeholder communities. While not a specific finding or outcome, the success of the approach demonstrates communities' desire and ability to engage with data, information, and evidence—which is key to engaging in evidence-based policymaking.

Institutional Architecture Policy Element	Findings/outcomes aligned with improved institutional architecture
Policy Element 2: Policy Development and Coordination	Government, development partners, and communities improve coordination (page 27)
Policy Element 3: Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement	Women have a larger role in local decision-making and leadership (page 29)
Policy Element 4: Evidence Informed Policy Making	Community willingness and ability to engage with data, information, and evidence (overall conclusion)
Policy Element 5: Policy Implementation	Communities enhanced agency through prioritizing and sharing their need with others (page 25)

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For further information on Policy LINK's activities in South Sudan, click [here](#).



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