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Community Resilience Mapping in Akobo County

Focus Group Discussions (FGD) Analysis Report

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Community Resilience Mapping in Akobo County Focus Group Discussions (FGD) Analysis Report

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Acronyms

CSO	Civil Society Organization
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DO	Development Objective
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IP	Implementing Partner
KII	Key Informants Interview
MRE	Meals Ready to Eat
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NFI	Non-Food Item
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NCYPD	Nuer Christian Youth for Peace and Development
P2R	Pathway to Resilience
PWD	Persons with Disabilities
RFZ	Resilience Focus Zone
RRC	Relief and Rehabilitation Commission
SCI	Save the Children International
WFP	World Food Programme
UN	United Nations
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan

About USAID Policy LINK

In South Sudan, USAID integrates humanitarian and development assistance to promote household and community resilience. USAID’s goal is to strengthen the foundation for a more self-reliant South Sudan.

It does so through four Development Objectives (DOs):

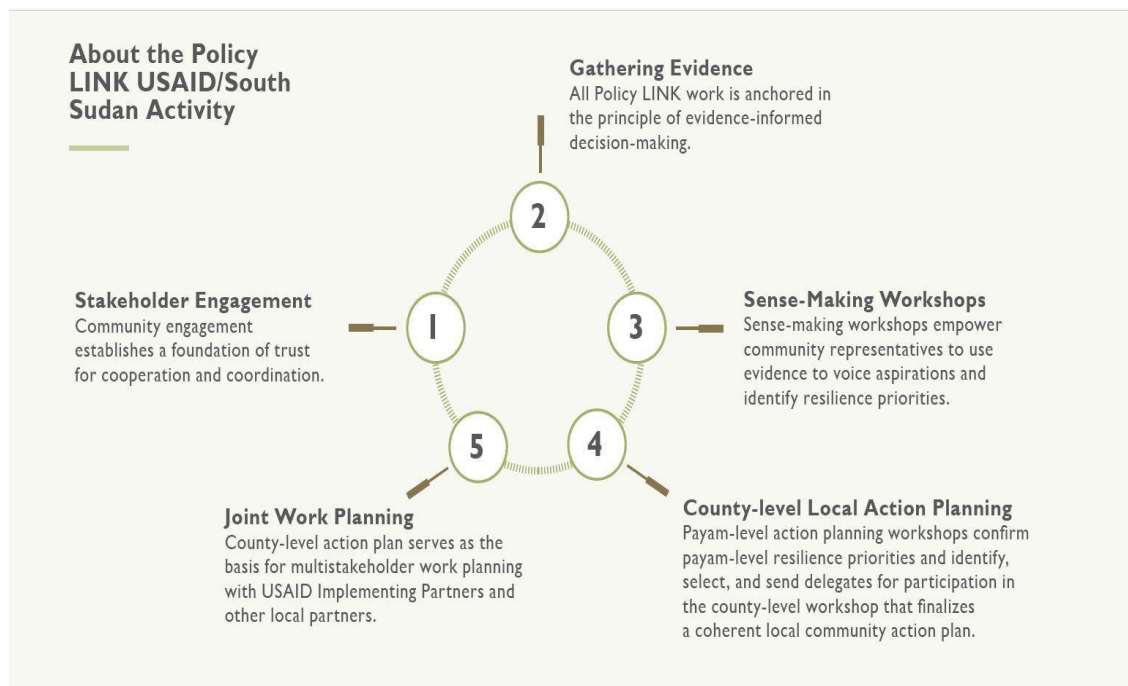
- DO1: Meeting basic needs of communities in crisis, while decreasing aid dependence,
- DO2: Household resilience increased in targeted areas.
- DO3: Improved social cohesion in targeted areas.
- DO4: The Government of South Sudan is more responsive to its citizens.

The USAID Policy LINK Activity supports 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 in five of the 13 counties encompassing the USAID Resilience Focus Zone (RFZ): Akobo, Budi, Jur River, Kapoeta North, and Wau. Policy LINK uses a five-step participatory planning process to help communities identify and implement a community-led resilience agenda.

These five steps are:

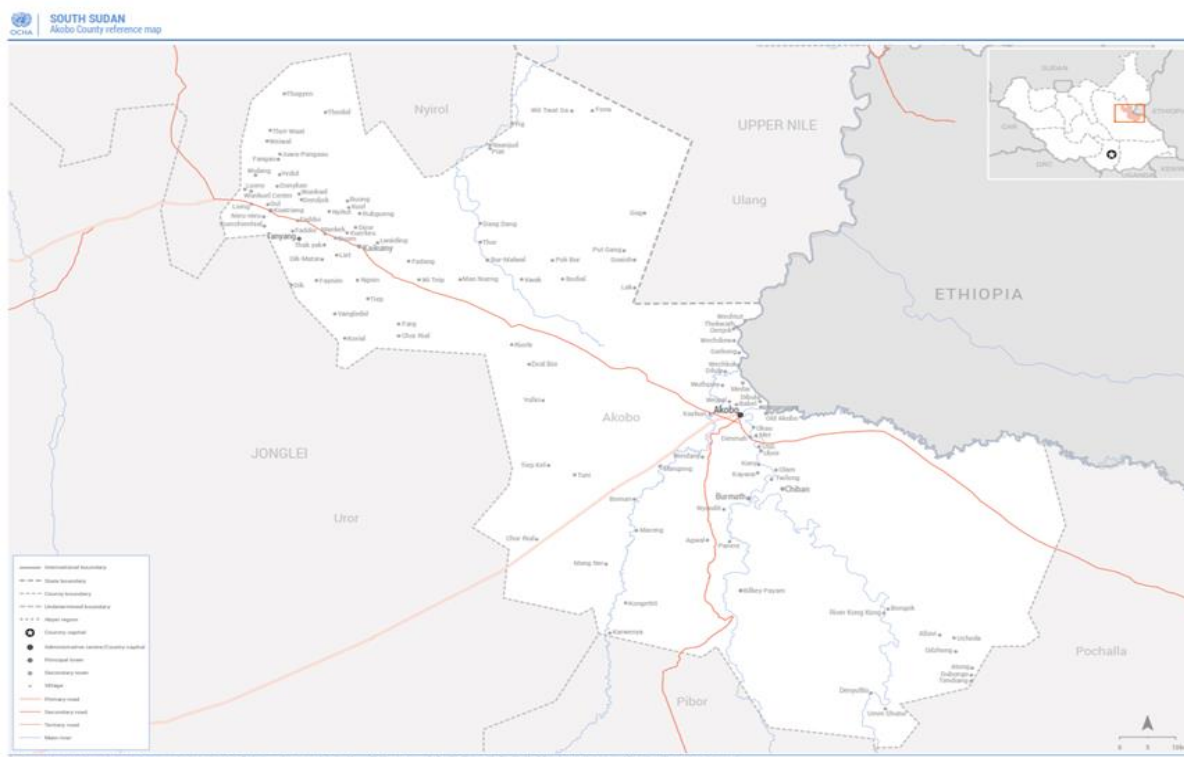
1. Inclusive and participatory community and other stakeholder engagement
2. Evidence gathering for resilience decision-making
3. Sense-making workshops for articulating resilience aspirations and identifying priorities
4. Local action planning for driving the development of a bottom-up community action plan
5. Joint work planning for alignment and better targeting of USAID investments.

Figure 1: About the USAID Policy LINK/South Sudan Activity Technical Approach



Introduction

This report gives an overview of the qualitative analysis of 32 focus group discussions (FGDs) and two key informant interviews (KIIs) that were conducted with community level participants in eight payams of Akobo County: Diror, Boung, Barmach, and Walgak in Akobo West; and Dengjok, Gakdong, Bilkey and Nyandit Payams in Akobo East.



Special emphasis was placed on the inclusion and participation of women and youth as a population disproportionately affected by the recurrent shocks and stressors in the county. These efforts ensure representation of their voices and views in the discussion topics to yield measurable and representative information and data as evidence to facilitate collective discussions, decision-making, and planning for resilience programming in Akobo County. Overall, FGD respondents were drawn from women and youth association leaders, business people, pastoralists, farmers, payam administrators, traditional chiefs, and persons with disabilities (PWDs).

Background

South Sudan falls into the category of extremely fragile states, a country listed fourth from the bottom among the countries that shared “high alert” to “very high alert” on the Fragile States Index (FSI),¹ which ranks countries experiencing combined and cumulative impacts of political destabilization, poverty, shocks, stressors, and a cycle of violence. Recent trends indicate that South Sudan is highly prone and vulnerable to climate-related shocks, which devastate welfare. Since 2011, the country has suffered from severe droughts and floods. The May – November 2021 floods are reportedly the most devastating since the early 1960s, which affected nine out of ten states, impacting around one million people and displacing more than 300,000.

¹ Fund for Peace, Fragile State Index Report (2021)

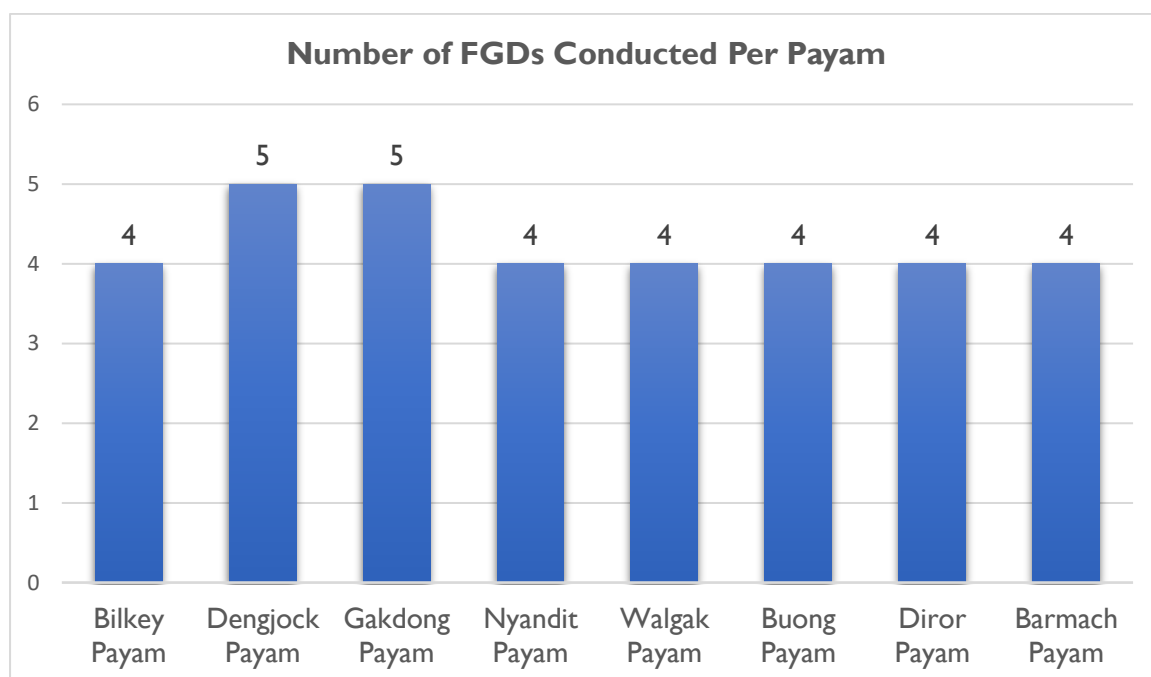
At local levels, South Sudan is characterized by its diversities and complexities. Each state and county has unique dynamics. In this context, the USAID Mission in South Sudan Strategy 2021 – 2024² integrates humanitarian and development assistance to promote household and community resilience in 13 counties encompassing the RFZ.

Community Resilience Mapping in Akobo County

USAID’s goal is to strengthen the foundation for a more resilient South Sudan. This means that communities must be able to utilize resilience efforts to identify and set priorities for preparing for, mitigating against, and recovering from recurrent shocks and stressors. Furthermore, communities must be empowered to produce county-wide resilience action plans that can be tabled for joint integrated planning with USAID and other donor implementing partners.

Between February – May, 2022, Policy LINK conducted a [community resilience measurement study](#) in Akobo County using [FGDs and KIIs](#). The evidence generated through this study can help local communities and implementing partners reach consensus on opportunities for collaboration in support of a community-led resilience agenda.

Figure 2: Akobo County FGDs by Payam



Methodology, Data Collection and Analysis

² USAID Strategic Framework South Sudan.

The study aims to gain a deeper understanding of 1) how a community operates as a system 2) how community institutions organize themselves, cooperate, collaborate and make decisions in response to the various shocks and stressors, and 3) what capacities exist in the communities for responding to shocks and stressors.

FGD Participant Selection Criteria

A total of 270 representatives from key community sectors participated in the community resilience mapping exercise. Each focus group discussion consisted of 6–12 participants. In each payam, the discussions included youth, women, traditional authorities, and private sector representatives. The youth group comprised those i) out of school, ii) in school, iii) employed, and iv) unemployed. The women’s group featured women in many walks of life such as i) women who belong to formal groups, ii) women working in the formal sector iii) single mothers, and iv) petty traders. The traditional authority group included i) elders, ii) chiefs, iii) spear masters/spiritual leaders, and iv) members who sit on local or traditional courts. Private sector actors included i) subsistence farmers ii) fishermen iii) restaurant owners/workers iv) open market vendors v) trade union members, v) cattle-keepers, and vi) others, for example those involved in charcoal burning. In each of the four main stakeholder groups, persons with disabilities were integrated as participants.

Each focus group discussion lasted between two and a half to three hours and was recorded before being translated from Nuer into English. Prior to embarking on the FGDs, Policy LINK obtained approval from the National Bureau of Statistics, National Security Services, Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), County Commissioner, payam administrators, and the Paramount Chief as well as the informed consent of the participants for their participation, audio recording, and photos. Participants were also well informed about data privacy and the protection of the information collected during the focus group discussions.

Data Analysis

The analysis was carried out using a combination of simplified matrices. First, a data analysis matrix was developed. This matrix featured the 27 discussion questions as rows in a table and the primary stakeholder groups as the column headings. An example of this table that was created for each of the eight payams is listed below.

Discussion Questions	Women	Youth	Traditional Authority	Private Sector	Local Govt	Findings
Q1						
Q2						

Secondly, a findings matrix was designed to populate a summary of preliminary findings from the analysis. This matrix featured the 27 discussion questions as rows in the table and the summary of findings analyzed from the responses of the primary stakeholders’ groups in each of the eight payams and conclusions as the column headings. See an example of this table below.

Discussion Questions	Bilkey	Dengjock	Gakdong	Nyandit	Walgak	Buong	Diror	Barmach	Conclusions

Q1									
Q2									

Findings: Overview and Summary of Results

This section presents findings in the form of a summary of the diverse perspectives identified in the transcripts.

I. Shocks and Stressors in Akobo County

Shocks

Food and livelihood insecurity, conflict, and floods were consistently identified as the major shocks affecting people across all eight payams of Akobo County. In addition, women and youth feel prolonged dry spells affected their production capacity and resulted in poor harvests, while economic and health related shocks were prevalent across groups and payams. The traditional authority and local government respondents feel banditry leading to social crimes is a secondary shock resulting from other shocks such as food and livelihood insecurity.

When asked, “Which shocks have had the greatest impact on your households and community?” women respondents feel conflict and food and livelihoods insecurity were the most impactful shocks in Akobo in the past 12 months. Private sector actors, youths and the traditional authority respondents reported floods (yearly) and conflict as most impactful shocks, as these further led to other shocks such as food and livelihood insecurity and economic and health related shocks.

Stressors

The main stressors identified across payams include unemployment, cattle raiding, abduction of children and women, dysfunctional markets, food shortages, and poor road and communication infrastructure. Meanwhile, women and youth reported experiencing the impacts of market price spikes daily due to lack of income. Additionally, respondents across the different stakeholder groups interviewed feel the lack of provision of timely basic services was a stressor that has further exposed community members to vulnerability.

The matrix table below profiles a summary of findings on the different types of shock and stressors affecting households and communities in Akobo County and the impact and the coping mechanisms identified by the respondents.

Table 2: Akobo County Shock Profiling

Shock/Stressor	Impact on Community	Coping Mechanism
Food and Livelihoods Insecurity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Youth are unable to buy food from the market because they don't have jobs or other sources of income. The elderly, who cannot perform hard work or provide for themselves, are forced to resort to coping mechanisms in order to survive. ● For women, earning the daily income required to purchase food is difficult ● Hunger, food shortages, and malnutrition are commonly identified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Youth resort to collection of wild fruits, fishing, cutting of poles for sale ● Women sell grasses and wild fruits and spend SSP 2,000 to purchase food from local traders per day. The purchased food is still insufficient to feed their households. ● Community members depend on food aid from partners in the form of general food distribution or cash for assets ● Borrowing and sharing food with relatives and neighbors ● Private sector-minded individuals collect and sell wild fruits such as lallop (thoar), firewood, grasses, poles and fish ● Exchange of livestock (goats, sheep) for food
Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Disrupted normal activities, including farming, fishing, small scale business operation, etc. ● Loss of lives and property and forced internal and external displacement as well as hunger, food shortages and malnutrition ● Cultivated a culture of hate and revenge killing ● Caused a breakdown of social norms and local systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● External conflicts increased internal social bonding (togetherness) ● Sharing existing resources such as food and accommodation for the displaced ● Reliance on food aid ● Local peace dialogues by chiefs and other traditional leaders ● Some community members participate in banditry and cattle-raiding ● Women created psycho-social support groups for other women and girls
Floods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Destroyed farmlands and crops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reliance on food aid to survive

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Crop failures which led to poor harvests every year ● Displacement of people to higher grounds ● Widened vulnerability to health-related shocks ● Damaged road infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use of local materials to construct/renovate local dykes by youths ● Increased social bonding capital; communities remain together and share existing resources
Prolonged Dry Spells	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Crop failures leading to poor or no harvests ● Food shortages ● Hunger and malnutrition among children and mothers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Farming quick-maturing crops such as vegetables along River Pibor ● Fishing and selling of fish ● Food aid ● Sale of livestock to buy food ● Sharing among community members
Economic Shock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hunger ● Increased crimes/negative coping mechanisms such as banditry, road ambushes ● Insecurity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Collection and sale of wild fruits such as lallop (thoar), wild potatoes (leew), firewood, grasses, poles, and fish. ● Dependence on cash for asset programs ● Food aid distribution
Health Shock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Poor health ● Loss of lives ● Increased prevalence of malaria ● Restricted movement of private sector actors during the COVID-19 lockdown which prevented cross-border trading with Ethiopia ● Limited health facilities to meet demand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Traveling long distances to access health services ● Use of wild roots and leaves as medicine ● Reliance on medical aid from NGOs due to lack of government health services

Resilience Mechanisms

Akobo participants cited both absorptive and adaptive resilience capacities that exist at the communal level. For instance, when faced with floods, affected communities applied a combination of local knowledge, coping mechanisms, locally available resources, and sought external support.

When asked how communities respond to shocks and stressors, the majority of the participants cited that youth constructed and renovated local dykes and water channels, identified safety areas (highland), constructed temporary shelters and assisted other community members and livestock to relocate from low land areas to highlands for safety when faced with floods.

In times of conflicts, traditional authority and local government made local consultative meetings with rival communities and pursued peaceful dialogues, including discussion on compensation to reduce the impact of conflict in the community.

2. Conflict and its Drivers

Types of conflicts

The majority of voices from the focus groups indicated that inter- and intra-communal conflicts, revenge killings, and social crimes related to theft and banditry are common types of conflicts in the community. Meanwhile, some voices mentioned conflicts that are related to domestic and gender-based violence.

"There are many types of conflicts that happen here in Diror Payam; one of them is social violence related to marital issues, like if your sister or daughter is eloped or impregnated by someone who refused to marry her, you will take your stick and beat them as punishment and disciplinary procedure." – Diror Payam Participant

- In Bilkey Payam, common types of conflicts experienced include inter-communal conflict between the Murle and Luo Nuer communities; revenge killing; intra-communal conflicts between clans; and resource-based conflicts such as cattle raiding. Whereas, in Gakdong Payam, intra-communal conflicts, for example in Wechboth and Cie-Longor villages, were reported to be prevalent.
- In Nyandit Payam, revenge killings, intra-communal and inter-communal fighting with neighboring Murle tribesmen were identified as the main types frequently experienced by the community members. However, the women respondents felt that like any other place in South Sudan, households and community in Nyandit have also experienced the brunt of political conflicts between the SPLA In-Government and In-Opposition.
- In Buong Payam, Murle attacks and cattle rustling, revenge killings, and social violence related to theft and banditry were perceived as the most common types of conflicts experienced by households and communities. Generally, some respondents felt that these conflicts are due to the absence of rule of law and law enforcement institutions in the payam.
- In Barmach Payam, respondents from both the women and youth focus groups discussed and identified South Sudan political conflict, intra- and inter-communal conflicts, and revenge killing as the major types of conflict experienced by households, and communities. Most respondents also reported other types of conflicts such as social crimes and communal violence like theft, and banditry. However, respondents felt that they were minor conflicts because they had less impact on the community as compared to conflicts with Murle, revenge killings, and civil war in the country.

Drivers of conflict

- Livestock was identified as the main driver of internal conflicts within the community and externally with the neighboring Murle community by majority of the respondents. The respondents also viewed women and girls as drivers of conflict especially related to revenge killing as women and girls are sources of wealth just like cattle.
- Meanwhile, respondents in the youth group indicated that social crimes such as banditry and armed robbery are caused by youth due to high levels of consumption of alcohol and abuse of drugs within the community.
- Some respondents in the women's group indicated water resources as drivers of communal violence, especially during dry spells. Some participants mentioned other drivers including theft, adultery, alcohol, and drug abuse, especially by the youth. Many respondents expressed feelings that communal violence and revenge killings caused perceptions of girls as sources of wealth by the community.

Effects of the conflict on the community

- The effects of the conflicts on the community are overly negative. Respondents reported trauma, loss of livelihoods, and broken social norms due to internal divisions as the major impacts of the conflicts. Most respondents feel the conflicts further increased their vulnerability, as they now depend mainly on humanitarian assistance as a major source of food and livelihood.
- The respondents in the youth groups feel that conflicts among families, clans, and communities have eroded the trust and social cohesion among themselves, caused mass displacement, and limited their ability to work and produce food for themselves.
- While some respondents feel that the traditional authorities have played a major role in the resolution of internal conflicts through dialogues and compensations, the traditional authority groups feel that conflicts have affected their ability to mobilize people to work together for the common benefit of the community.
- Some women indicated that conflicts, especially with Murle, have caused the loss of their relatives and husbands, abduction of children, and loss of properties. They reported a sense of helplessness, fear, and psychological trauma among them.
- Private sector respondents indicated that conflict has eroded their main sources of livelihoods and exposed them to vulnerability. It was evident that the community relied mainly on household coping mechanisms to reduce the impact of conflicts.

Institutions involved in conflict resolution efforts

- When asked which institutions in the community were involved in conflict resolution efforts, the youth groups mentioned traditional authorities at the payam level and county government as the most active institutions that are involved in conflict resolution.
- For example, yearly peace dialogues with the Murle community have been initiated by community leaders from both sides in an attempt to resolve the long conflict between the two communities. In addition, local and international NGOs, including Nonviolent Peace Force, DT Global – Shejeh Salam and UNMISS were viewed as major partners that facilitated conflict resolution efforts through different peace activities in collaboration with key community institutions such as youth and women associations, and the traditional authorities.
- At the household level, some respondents emphasize the role of the family as an institution that is deeply involved in conflict resolution. The respondents feel that families have played

an important role in resolving social crimes and violence such as theft and conflicts related to alcohol and drug abuse.

- However, respondents feel changing the mindset of the youths would be significant in ensuring social cohesion as youths were perceived as perpetrators and victims of their own actions in conflict.

Conflict Resolution and Mitigation Measures: Voices from the community

- Overall, respondents across payams suggested peace and dialogue initiatives to find solutions to conflicting families, clans, or communities. Some respondents feel that training and educating youth on vocational and basic skills and engaging them in life-skills activities such as business can promote sustainable sources of livelihoods and reduce conflicts related to cattle theft and rustling. They indicate most of the internal conflicts are caused by idle youth who are looking for resources and cattle to marry and start families. Meanwhile, some respondents suggested the establishment of payam-level legal institutions by the government to restore rule of law and the creation of buffer-zones by cattle raiding patrol units between Murle and Nuer communities.
- At a household level, the majority of the respondents feel that local social initiatives such as promoting inter- and intra-marriages among communities could help promote social cohesion and peaceful coexistence between communities. Traditional authority respondents feel that supporting communities to initiate local peace dialogues and conferences with full community participation could help mend the broken social bonds and reduce inter- and intra-communal conflicts, including devising locally acceptable mechanisms for compensation.
- Private sector respondents feel that improving service delivery by government (including security) and engaging youth in productive activities such as entrepreneurship could improve welfare and shift people's mindsets. The private sector also proposed the collection of arms from youth as means to bring conflicts in the communities to an end.
- The youth groups proposed that youths should be engaged in conflict resolution workshops to build their capacities to trigger a change in mindsets. Further, the group suggested that the local community policing committee should be adopted to curb crimes and conflicts in the community.
- The women respondents recommended that recreational activities such as large-scale community projects can help bring together the youth and men from different clans and payams to peacefully co-exist and promote peace. The women also suggested capacity building for women as ambassadors of peace in their respective families, clans and communities.

3. Food Security and Livelihoods Diversification

Sources of food and income

- Generally, the major sources of food across all payams include: food aid from WFP and partners in the form of general food distribution or cash for assets, fishing, and small scale farming. Participants across the different stakeholder groups reported that fishing was the only main source of both food and income in the face of shocks and stressors.
- While the majority of the respondents feel they have lost their major livelihood sources due to conflict, floods, and cattle raiding, some of the respondents reported reliance on the sale of fish, livestock, charcoal, firewood and grass as some of their sources of income. Smaller proportion of the respondents meanwhile, indicated that they relied on wild fruits such as "lallops" and "lallop leaves."

- Women participants mentioned farming short-maturing crops such as vegetables (okra, amaranthus/kudra) as their alternative for household food and income security, especially during prolonged dry spells.

Actions taken by households when faced with lack of food

- When asked what households do when faced with lack of food, women groups mentioned that they travel long distances to gather wild food such as lallop fruits and leaves, and fish when general food distribution from WFP is delayed.
- The youth groups stressed that some of them resort to the sale of their assets such as livestock to buy food, or borrowing food from local traders, relatives and friends in order to survive. Some of them who couldn't provide for themselves were forced into refugee camps in Ethiopia.

"If there is no food, women go to the forests to collect wild fruits and plant leaves to feed their children while the men do hunting of wild animals, youth make charcoal, harvest honey, and go fishing in the swampy areas until we survive" – Youth participant, Buong Payam

- In the absence of food aid, the youth adopted coping mechanisms such as hunting wild animals, collecting wild fruits and water lilies, burning charcoal, and collection of firewood from the forest in order to survive. However, all the respondents expressed concerns of insecurity posed especially by Murle as a major setback to food security and livelihood activities in the area.

Institutions that households look to when faced with lack of food

- Community-based institutions such as local traders and religious institutions play critical roles in assisting people with food. Traditional authorities, local government, and the RRC, meanwhile, are critical in coordinating the delivery of food assistance with implementing partners in the area.

4. Youths and Unemployment

Addressing unemployment

- Unemployment is a big challenge among the youth across peri-urban and rural payams in Akobo County. While it was evident that employment disparities exist in rural and peri-urban payams, the lack of youth- and women-friendly services, including lack of training opportunities and limited institutions that offer job opportunities in the area is a major concern.
- As the private sector is poorly developed, youths and women feel they lack basic business skills and start-up kits for initiating small scale businesses in the area. Respondents representing women and traditional authorities feel current job opportunities are only offered by NGOs to educated youths but are still insufficient.

"After gaining the business skills, youths from each payam can be selected and be given money to start their own businesses where they can generate income, and this will create permanent jobs" – A youth (f) from Barmach payam

- When asked how unemployment can be addressed, youths reported that initiating income generating activities by NGOs and government, training on agribusiness and hands-on skills such as carpentry, tailoring, and bakery for youths and women could help reduce the dependence on NGO-provided jobs.

- The youths feel the private sector would be a viable option for job creation; however, it is weak due to insecurity, poor infrastructure and lack of support. A combination of training and provision of start-up kits or business grants would help create jobs for youth and women outside the NGO workforce.
- Local government participants feel strengthening the capacity of local traders and helping them to expand their businesses can help to create more employment opportunities for the other community members.
- Youths feel the government and organizations have neglected the rural payams and duplicated services in the payam located at the county headquarters.

Challenges of youths out of school

- The lack of some functional primary and secondary schools and alternative forms of education across the payams was identified as a main challenge for school dropouts to resume their studies. In many instances, nearly all stakeholder groups feel that children who drop out of school risk missing out the chance to rejoin completely due to the persistent insecurity along roads and child abduction in the area, as children must walk long distances to access existing schools.
- In addition, women respondents feel children born because of sexual and gender-based violence could miss out on school completely due to stigma and lack of support from the family. In Gakdong Payam for example, children drop out of school mainly due to lack of family support for basic learning materials, because of limited sources of income.
- Furthermore, the lack of trained teachers in existing schools continues to hinder the normal operation of schools. Additionally, some teachers do not receive their salaries and incentives for meeting their basic needs in a timely manner and are therefore less motivated to teach.
- Alternative opportunities to support children with basic life skills so they can live a decent life are non-existent. Women respondents, for instance, feel parents can no longer afford to send their children to study in neighboring countries such as Ethiopia because it is very expensive.
- When asked what could be done to help the youth who missed school or dropped out of school to go back to school, responses across the different stakeholder groups suggested the following:
 - Re-open basic primary and secondary schools in the payam to help the early-age school dropouts to continue their studies
 - Establish alternative education centers for girls and youths
 - Provide life-skills training opportunities such as fishing and modern farming, and agricultural tools, seeds, and fishing kits which can help enable youth to generate money and go back to school to further their studies.
 - Re-introduce a school meals program to motivate school going children to return and continue with their education
 - Provide scholarship schemes to children of parents with low income and survivors of gender-based violence so they can have chances to study

5. Resilience Capacities

5.1 Absorptive Capacity

Sources of cooperation in shock response

- Generally, community-initiated shock response activities such as digging of drainage channels or local dykes during floods, communal farming during farming season, and traditional recreational activities (sports and cultural events) were viewed as common sources of cooperation across payams. Some respondents feel increased social bonding is realized when communities are faced with shocks and stressors because of the mutual benefits it offers to every member of the community.
- While youths across payams stressed that shocks such as conflicts/insecurity (mainly from external communities) and floods tend to bring internally affected communities together in preparedness or joint response, community structures such as churches, agricultural farms, markets, fishing sites, boma, payam and county headquarters were used to organize and bring communities together to discuss mutual approaches to responding to shocks and stressors. Additionally, community meetings organized by chiefs, especially during external conflicts and potential seasonal cattle migration during the long dry spell bring households and community members to plan and work together.

"There are many things that bring us together as a community of Nyandit Payam and Akobo County. Specifically, communal activities such as the construction of dykes. As we speak now, we are digging water drainage channels along the main road with support from CRS-P2R to create water passage during the rainy season. This has brought all the clans of Nyandit Payam together" – Youth participant

- Furthermore, participants across payams noted that implementing partners facilitated activities such as peace dialogues and community meetings have provided community members the opportunity to come together to deliberate on conflict resolution mechanisms, including compensation in the case of revenge killings.
- In times of conflict, the youth meet with the traditional authority to plan and decide on the best response mechanisms, including constituting local community police and patrol units that provide security to the community in case of any alert of insecurity. Some women stressed that they normally come together to provide psychosocial support to girls and other women in the community in times of hunger, death, sickness, and abduction of children or women by the Murle. Some traditional authority participants indicated that they mobilize community members at the boma or payam headquarters for meetings where they collectively plan and decide on the best response mechanisms to any outbreak of the crisis.

"We always meet here when there is a need for the community to come together and discuss the challenges that are facing them, and in particular, we the traditional chiefs, we have a meeting point where we discuss community affairs and other issues". – Traditional Leader

- In contrast, some respondents reported that community members normally come together during social events such as marriage ceremonies and religious events, where community members collectively contribute money and in-kind. For instance, if a community member is severely sick, such support is used to book flights that transport the sick person to Juba for treatment.

Community early warning systems

- Akobo County is one of the counties that are prone to shocks such as conflict, floods, and prolonged dry spells, with floods being experienced annually. Participants indicated that nearly all payams and bomas were identified as flood prone. In addition, participants feel they face risk of conflict, cattle raiding, abduction of children and women, and prolonged dry spells.
- However, community members rely mainly on traditional early warning systems such as the seasonal calendar, historic timeline, reading wind patterns from January (blowing Southern side and Northern side to indicate potential disease outbreak) etc. In addition, the

traditional prophets and rainmakers are other sources, and sometimes study the weather and wind patterns to predict the likelihood of long dry spells and floods.

- While some of the respondents indicated that they receive information including on warnings about potential shocks through local radio, health facilities, markets, social media and humanitarian organizations in the area, there is lack of information and communication infrastructure in the area, hence a more robust flood early warning system is necessary.

“In case of sickness, we know it by reading wind patterns in January blowing from the Southern side to the North side. This brings diseases. When it rains, it washes away all the sicknesses, so sickness is brought by changes of wind.” – Traditional authority participant

5.2 Adaptive Capacity

Groups/associations existing in community

- In the face of shocks and stressors, communities in Akobo County reportedly organized themselves into groups in order to remain active and responsive to shocks and stressors. Respondents identified the following active social groups within the community: youth and women’s associations, trade unions and unions of persons with disabilities, traditional authorities, and faith-based institutions.
- Respondents feel these community-based institutions are interlinked and they work together to address community issues, especially during a crisis. For instance, the traditional authority is active, mainly addressing issues on crimes, gender-based violence, and blood compensation. Women’s groups work hand-in-hand with gender-based institutions and the Nuer Christian Youth for Peace and Development (NCYPD) in promoting peace.

Assistance received from government, or non-governmental organizations

- When asked, “Which type of assistance have you received from government, or non-governmental organizations in the past twelve months?” the majority of respondents feel NGOs provided nearly all forms of support to the community as compared to government agencies. Participants indicated that they received food aid, cash assistance in form of cash grants, agricultural tools and seeds, fishing kits including canoes for fishing and river transport, and non-food items (NFIs) such as blankets, plastic sheets, and mosquito nets.
- In addition, some organizations rehabilitated hand pumps for safe and clean water and distributed drugs and Meals Ready to Eat (MREs) such as plummy nuts to malnourished children in the area. Other forms of assistance provided include training in peacebuilding, facilitation of inter-communal dialogues, mothers-to-mothers support group training, health services, education, and protection support to children and women.

5.3 Transformative Capacity

- In Akobo County, there are no formal credit facilities where community members can borrow money in case of emergencies. Local traders (private sector institutions) and informal institutions such as women's savings groups and churches were identified as the major sources of borrowing in times of emergencies.
- However, some women and youth participants indicated that the youth and women associations in some of the payams have organized themselves into Village Savings and Loan Associations, where members collectively save monthly contributions and borrow money from it and pay with agreed interest when one is faced with a crisis. On other hand, the majority of the participants across payams identified “in-kind borrowing” in the form of food items, cows, and goats from friends, families, and relatives during difficult times.
- When asked why people borrow money in the community, the majority of the respondents reported that borrowing is mainly to meet basic household needs such as food, medical,

clothing, etc. Some respondents indicated that they borrow money to start small-scale businesses and to meet the school fees of their children. The women borrow money during difficult times to meet household food and medical needs. In addition, some women who have lost their husbands borrow money to hire labor to build dykes during floods as part of their contribution to the community. For the youth, they borrow to start small-scale businesses to generate income for their families.

Shock response networks

- In Akobo County, many shock response networks exist, depending on the type and impact of the shock or stressor. For example, community members depend on each other, including family members for food and safety mainly by sharing and borrowing in the face of conflicts. The majority of participants from other stakeholder groups mentioned that they rely on their youth for protection when faced with conflict. Other participants indicated that they relied on relatives, friends, neighbors, religious institutions and community leaders during conflict and other shocks.
- In times of conflict, respondents indicated that they look to institutions such as the private sector, NGOs, and UN agencies as they provide food and NFIs to community members. Some respondents pointed out that they first look to their chiefs, payam administrators, and sometimes to RRC when they are faced with a crisis. Respondents feel traditional authorities and the local government at the payam level have the responsibility of sourcing external assistance for households and communities when they are hit by a crisis.
- When asked where community members get NFIs in the community, some women indicated that they rely on locally made NFIs such as cooking pots, milk containers and clay water containers. In addition, livestock products such as hides are used to make mats and beds.
- However, respondents stressed that they received some form of NFI support from humanitarian organizations, including plastic sheets, sleeping mats, blankets, utensils, and mosquito nets in the past few years. They noted that NFIs such as bedsheets, mattresses and clothes were only found in the local markets for individuals who could afford them.
- While it was evident that community members largely depend on NFIs provided by humanitarian organizations operating in the area, some community members feel they are forced to sacrifice some of their assets and use the money to buy basic NFIs in times of crisis.

"In the absence of the support we receive from NGOs, if you have either a goat or a cow, you can sell it in the market and use the money to buy sleeping mats, blankets, cooking pots or plates for the family. If you don't have a cow or goat and you need those items, you go to the forest to make charcoal or cut poles to sell in the market and use the money to buy those items that you need." – Youth Participant

Access to livestock assistance

- Generally, livestock (cattle, goats, sheep) represent one of the major community assets in Akobo County. The loss of livestock in the past few years is largely due to persistent cattle raiding by the neighboring communities, conflicts, floods, and diseases. In the case of loss of livestock, the respondents feel that people in the community get assistance from their fellow community members through marriages (bride price/dowry), borrowing from relatives, and barter trade involving food and livestock.
- The majority of the respondents from the women's group acknowledged that they have received some form of assistance from humanitarian organizations working in the area in the form of livestock. Some women indicated they buy cows and goats from the market. Participants reported that they would buy from the market with the incomes they get either from small-scale businesses or fishing activities, while others would buy from the market with the money resulting from the sale of their harvests during surplus times. The

respondents feel they are socially connected and would help themselves when a crisis breakout.

Key disaster response actors and programmes

- The RRC is the lead institution that coordinates the implementation of emergency preparedness and response programs in the county. In addition, humanitarian actors such as ICRC, SCI, CRS, Nile Hope, Oxfam, Polish Humanitarian Action, NRC and UN Agencies are largely involved in responding to disasters in the area. However, respondents feel that early warning and preparedness activities are always led by the local community-based institutions such as traditional authority, youth associations, faith-based associations, and humanitarian organizations.
- When asked which actors provide services in Akobo County, basic services including education, WASH, health care, nutrition, food and NFIs are carried out by humanitarian NGOs operating in the area. In the absence of humanitarian aid, respondents feel the private sector has been critical in providing access to essential markets by bringing goods and services closer to the local community even during shocks. Implementing partners, local government, and communities usually collaborate to improve road accessibility, especially during the rainy season.

Access challenges and constraints

- Insecurity was identified as the major factor limiting the local population from accessing the existing basic services across payams in Akobo County. Respondents feel safer to resort to coping mechanisms than risk traveling long distances to access basic services such as health care and nutrition, education, markets, and other services.
- In addition, poor road and communication infrastructure, long distances to basic service points such as Primary Health Care Units and Centers, schools, and markets tend to be a limiting factor too. This has particularly left women and children more vulnerable. Some women participants feel their risks to abduction, armed robbery, and banditry along the roads have limited their access to information and movement to access basic services.
- Some youth also reported that poor roads and potential revenge killings along the roads when accessing basic services have exposed them to vulnerability, as they cannot access their farmlands or humanitarian services provided by NGOs. Participants noted that existing capacity of markets, lack of public transport services, and insecurity along rivers have also limited sections of the local communities from accessing basic services.

Conclusions

Shocks and Stressors

- The impact of shocks and stressors on social groups and local systems vary and require a multi-sectoral approach. Food and livelihood insecurity, conflict, and floods were reportedly identified as the most impactful shocks affecting the different community groups. Prolonged dry spells affected the production capacity of farmers and led to poor harvests, while economic and health-related shocks impacted all groups across payams.
- In addition, there is evidence of strong social bonding capital which galvanized community members to care for one another during times of crisis. For instance, community members collectively worked together through their chiefs, women and youth leaders on community-led initiatives such as the construction of dykes to control floods, mediating peace dialogue meetings, and compensation as mechanisms for conflict resolutions and peace-building.

- It is worth mentioning the role of the youth in providing protection and security to the community in event of violent attacks and cattle migration during long dry spells, transportation of sick people to hospitals, digging of dykes and assisting vulnerable persons to relocate to higher grounds in times of floods. Community members and partners can leverage these youth contributions by building their capacities through training and start-up kits to improve their opportunities.

Conflict and its Drivers

- The effects of the conflicts on the community of Akobo County are several and overly negative. These range from conflict-related trauma, loss of livelihoods, and broken social norms due to internal divisions, increased vulnerability, and eroded trust and social cohesion among community members. Women and children particularly feel helpless because of the conflict.
- To a large extent, inter- and intra-communal conflicts across all payams are mainly driven by conflict over livestock, women, and girls because women and girls are considered sources of wealth like livestock. To lesser extent, conflict is driven by access to resources, such as water during long dry spells. Social violence and crimes such as theft, armed robbery, and banditry are mainly caused by drug abuse and the presence of firearms in communities.
- In addition, gender roles and expectations play a role in perpetrating conflicts, especially regarding expectations for boys around marriage and wealth. In situations, or families where resources (cows) are available, boys can earn bride price by leveraging existing household resources. However, in resource-constrained families, boys resort to measures such as cattle raiding to get married. Girls eloping and boys failing to pay the bride price in the form of cows were cited as a root cause for revenge killings in all payams.
- Furthermore, conflict is gendered, for example, respondents across all payams reported how violent conflicts have resulted in increased cases of sexual and gender-based violence such as rape, and revenge killings for the abduction of women and girls. The resulting loss of life further causes loss of livelihoods assets, mass displacement of people, and to a large extent destroys the social capital that exists within communities to respond and cope with other shocks and stressors.
- Notably, community-level institutions such as Bench Courts, traditional authorities (chiefs, headmen, elders), local government (county commissioner, payam administrator), religious, women, and youth associations play a crucial role in conflict management and resolution, and peace-building in partnership with local and international NGOs.
- Supporting community-led initiatives such as conflict and peace dialogues and conferences with full community participation, especially youth involved in perpetrating conflict, can help yield sustainable solutions to conflict resolutions. Furthermore, promoting recreational activities such as large-scale community projects can help bring together conflicting families, clans, and communities and strengthen social bonds for peaceful co-existence. In addition, building the capacity of women as ambassadors of peace can promote peace at family and community levels.

Food Security and Livelihoods Diversification

- It is evident across all payams that humanitarian food aid is the main source of food among households and communities. While the food insecurity situation remains precarious, high dependence on food aid widened the vulnerability of a previously food-secure community. The implication is that the population is forced to abandon pursuance of self-reliance in favor

of short-term coping mechanisms to survive, thereby compromising their potential to become resilient.

- It is worth noting that in the face of food insecurity, households and communities across all payams have diverse coping mechanisms which include 1) borrowing from relatives and local traders, 2) fishing, hunting and honey harvesting from forest, 3) wild fruit (lallop) and vegetable (leew) gathering, and 4) selling wild fruits, firewood, grasses, poles, fish, and livestock to buy food. This implies that there is a high potential for the individuals and households towards self-reliance when adequately supported.
- Furthermore, involvement of youth and women in the private sector, especially at a micro-enterprise level in peri-urban payams such as Bilkey and Walgak would provide an alternative source of food and income security for the local population. However, prospects of private sector incentives remain low due to the lack of employment opportunities, income, and support for women and youth across the payams. Their potential for self-reliance and increased resilience is therefore compromised. Boosting the capacities of local traders can enhance trade and build a trade corridor between Akobo County and Gambella, Ethiopia.

Youths and Unemployment

- Unemployment presents a major challenge among the youth across peri-urban and rural payams in Akobo County. While it was evident that employment disparities exist in rural and peri-urban payams, the lack of youth- and women-friendly services, including lack of training opportunities, and limited institutions that offer job opportunities is a major concern.
- Youth engagement in the private sector is crucial in diversifying their livelihood options. Encouraging entrepreneurship is widely seen as a potential solution. Offering a wide range of training opportunities in market-led skills such as business management and bookkeeping, provision of business grants, start-up kits, and technical and vocational training courses in modern agriculture, fishing, tailoring and designs, and carpentry could help to diversify employment opportunities for youth which would reduce their dependence on limited NGO jobs.
- Moreover, building the absorptive capacities of the private sector (traders) through training, and offering business grants, or linking them with credit facilities could help to expand the private sector space for youth employment.
- In addition, alternative opportunities to support school dropouts with basic life skills so they can live a decent life are needed. Women respondents, for instance, feel parents can no longer afford to send their children to study in neighboring countries such as Ethiopia to acquire life skills because it is very expensive.

Absorptive Capacity

- While the impact of shocks and stressors are largely negative on the affected communities, social capital tends to increase as communities come together to jointly embrace community-led shock response activities, such as digging of drainage channels or local dykes during floods, communal farming during farming season, and traditional recreational activities like sports and cultural events. From the consultations with different stakeholder groups, it was evident that some shocks, such as conflict with external communities and floods, can be both sources of cooperation and sources of conflict. Understanding the local dynamics and carrying out flood or conflict analysis is critical.

- Community-based institutions such as churches, youth and women groups, traditional authorities and the private sector play a critical role in leading community-based shock response. Assessing and building existing capacities through a coherent, inclusive and participatory process would not only increase a sense of agency, but also improve better planning and shock responsiveness.
- Although existing community capacities require reinforcement, implementing partners are needed to help facilitate targeted support for strengthening community-led resilience efforts. Strengthening community early warning systems, conflict resolution efforts and locally led shock preparedness and response plans would help change community mindsets, moving from dependence on humanitarian assistance towards self-reliance.

Adaptive Capacity

- Community adaptive capacities exist but require reinforcement. Communities must mobilize and organize themselves into groups to remain active in response to shocks and stressors.
- The role of community-based institutions such as youth and women associations, trade unions, unions of persons with disabilities, traditional authorities, and faith-based institutions is interlinked, presenting an existing capacity. For instance, the traditional authority can work hand-in-hand with youth and local government to address the impact of shocks and stressors, including issues on crimes, gender-based violence, and blood compensations. Women groups can work with gender-based institutions and implementing partners to address gender-specific responses.
- While communities noted that access to humanitarian assistance played a critical role during and after shocks, other forms of assistance including training, improving livelihood diversification, and bridging social capital could be offered.

Transformative Capacity

- The capacity of private sector actors in Akobo County is limited and underdeveloped, hampered by the shocks and stressors in the past few years and exacerbated by the lack of formal credit facilities where community members can borrow money in case of emergencies. Strengthening the capacities of local traders and other private sector institutions, including informal institutions such as women's savings groups, village savings and loan associations, and religious institutions, and expanding access to credit facilities can be reliable mechanisms to boost the resilience of women and youth.
- There are different “organic” networks of institutions working together to mitigate and respond to shocks and stressors. Engaging a breadth of private, public sector, and civil society institutions as a group of actors connected with shared interest in shock preparedness and response would catalyze collective action towards achieving a community-led resilience agenda.
- Livestock, one of the major community assets in Akobo County, is viewed as a source of livelihood and cooperation, but also as a source of conflict. While the majority of community members own or keep livestock even during times of shocks, the availability of, and access to livestock services remains a challenge as a result of insecurity and poor road and communication infrastructure. Scaling up access and introducing livestock value addition and market services will not only incentivize the commercialization of livestock, but also offer improved livelihood alternatives for farmers and other members of the community.
- IP's operational presence is critical in providing timely formal safety nets, including food-based and cash for asset programs, and basic services such as health, protection, and

education. While provision of food aid is intended to save lives, strengthening the local agricultural production capacity of farmers would be more sustainable and impactful. Community members cited several challenges and constraints in accessing existing basic services. These challenges must be addressed and prioritized to make humanitarian assistance more effective and impactful.

Recommendations

Theme	Recommendation
Shocks and Stressors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage communities to implement an inclusive, coherent, and participatory local action planning process that results in a community-led resilience agenda
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the community-led resilience agenda as a basis for joint integrated planning that includes local government, community representatives, and implementing partners working in Akobo
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen existing local strategies that increase social cohesion within Luo Nuer communities and with neighboring communities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support traditional early warning systems, shock preparedness, and response plans using scenario-based planning
Conflict and its Drivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support inclusive community-led initiatives such as conflict and peace dialogues, conferences, and training with inclusive participation especially among youth, women and traditional authority
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforce capacity of community institutions such as B-Courts, traditional authority (chiefs, headmen, elders), local government (county commissioner, payam administrator), religious, women, and youth associations in conflict management and resolution through participatory planning, training, and facilitation support in order to improve on their ability to effectively manage local conflict resolution efforts
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct sensitization campaigns on the role of gender in communal conflicts targeting women, girls, youth, and elders to address negative coping mechanisms and social crimes such as sexual and gender-based violence, cattle raiding, and revenge attacks
Food Security and Livelihoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support crop diversification through provision of irrigation support to farmers using water from the Pibor river to aid local production of short-term maturing crops such as vegetables, especially in the face of prolonged dry spells and floods
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote and support agricultural cooperatives and producer groups with improved access to credit facilities, especially for women and youth
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen private sector initiatives to become more sustainable and create jobs for other community members
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforce current coping mechanisms through provision of agricultural tools and seeds and equipment for fishing
Youth and Unemployment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support livelihood diversification through entrepreneurship and vocational training to empower and create employment opportunities for youth and reduce dependence on NGO or government jobs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve access to affordable quality education and blended life-skills training

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Incentivize a shift from subsistence farming to market-oriented farming and value-added production targeting youth groups
Resilience Capacities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Leverage humanitarian assistance such as food aid and cash for assets to support the transition of households and institutions towards sustainable development and increased community resilience
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide material support and facilitation of local action planning in defining a community-led resilience agenda will enhance the confidence to adapt and provide a greater sense of agency for households and institutions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Scale up access to and adoption of improved agricultural practices, including livestock value addition services in order to incentivize the livestock as a sector
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strengthen women's groups with training and other resources to provide psychosocial counseling and support for women and girls affected by trauma
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Map and support initiatives that create improved livelihood alternatives for youth and women through training and market-oriented production
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strengthen social and human capital linkages through access and exposure to information and learning of resilience practices from other South Sudan communities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish community-managed disaster risk reduction groups to reinforce current coping strategies
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sensitize and train community leaders to create space for gender equitable decision-making opportunities for women and youth within community-based institutions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create awareness and support trauma healing programs to restore social cohesion among communities