BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH CRISIS MAPPING, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND RECOVERY PLANNING IN SUDAN

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ABSTRACT:

Understanding that disasters and conflicts do not occur in a vacuum, but are integrally linked to the broader context in which they take place, building resilience within both state and society structures becomes a crucial tool to speed recovery and lessen the likelihood of recurrence as local and institutional capacities are put in place to respond to, manage and reduce emerging risks. Since, 2008, United Nations Development Programme in Sudan has through its Crisis and Recovery Mapping and Analysis Project been developing a participatory mapping and analysis methodology to enhance crisis responsiveness and evidence-based strategic planning both within the United Nations system and national government. Using innovative technologies and GIS, sensitive issues are contextualized and depoliticized through novel correlations and visualisations, allowing previously contesting state and society actors to jointly identify priorities for intervention and response. The process has fostered an open dialogue, strengthening the capacities of local actors to respond to emerging crises in a timely and appropriate manner. Participatory mapping has thus become a key tool in managing complexities in peacebuilding and recovery in post-crisis settings.

Keywords: conflict, disaster, complex emergencies, fragility, crisis mapping, participatory methodology, weak evidence-base, conflicting priorities, responsiveness, coordination, local ownership, (re)building community, recovery, resilience.

1. INTRODUCTION: The Conflict – Disaster Continuum

'Effective programmes to manage crisis interventions need to reflect conflict – disaster complexities and respond to them in a holistic and integrative manner.' (BCPR/UNDP, 2011, p.7)

Disasters and conflicts damage people's lives, increase their poverty levels and further undermine their coping mechanisms (BCPR/UNDP, 2011). In recent years, there has been a paradigm shift within both conflict and disaster management sectors, a shift which has moved away from viewing conflict and disasters as extreme and outlying events to viewing them as manifestations of unresolved and often multi-faceted problems within society. Academics and practitioners alike are increasingly linking the two fields, realizing that holistic and integrated responses are crucial to tackling any complex emergency, regardless of its man-made or natural causes. Nevertheless, there is still room for considerable cross-fertilization in the processes, methodologies and tools developed within what has emerged as two separate and distinct disciplines in the development world.

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Understanding that disasters and conflicts do not occur in a vacuum, but are integrally linked to the broader context in which they take place, building resilience within both state and society structures becomes a crucial tool to speed recovery and lessen the likelihood of recurrence as local and institutional capacities are put in place to respond to, manage and reduce emerging risks. As in the field of conflict management and prevention, disaster management practices have evolved from largely a top-down relief and response approach to a more inter-sectoral risk management approach (ADPC, 2001). In the aftermath of crisis, the race to fill the information gap is often at the top of the agenda. 'After a large-scale disaster, there is always a massive effort to collect and analyze large volumes of data and distill from the chaos the critical information needed to target humanitarian aid most efficiently' (HHI, 2011, p8). Building on traditional tools of Rapid Rural Appraisals, Conflict Analysis Frameworks, Vulnerability Assessments and Community-Based Risk Assessments, the field of crisis mapping has emerged as a crucial tool in both disaster and conflict related programming. Further, with cloud-, crowd-, and SMS-based technologies, individuals and local communities can now engage in crisis response at an unprecedented level. Professional responders are increasingly struggling to handle a growing amount of data, arriving more quickly than ever before. However, with poorly adapted tools, processes, institutional structures and cultures, responders are often ill-prepared to produce useful knowledge from the flow of information and data (HHI, 2011).

2. PARTICIPATORY CRISIS MAPPING AND ITS VERSATILITY

Harnessing the power of crisis mapping and community engagement two of UNDP Sudan's flagship projects, have been exploring innovative methods for participatory recovery planning and response. These methods use a combination of participatory data collection methods, GIS-based technologies and qualitative analysis to provide an evidence-base generated at the grassroots. Participatory data collection methods help communities share their perceptions on a number of threats and risks to their livelihoods. These community perceptions are then categorized and mapped to enable qualitative analysis and identification of priorities and interventions for recovery and peacebuilding.

The motivation for this work in UNDP Sudan has been to foster community engagement and state responsiveness for recovery programming in a post-conflict setting. However, the methods and tools developed in these projects are directly applicable to post-disaster settings, as suggested by three parallels between post-disaster and post-conflict settings:

Weak evidence-base: Creating an evidence-base emerges as a key priority for any institution wishing to respond effectively to needs for security, service delivery, recovery and development. In post-conflict situations, the existing evidence-base may be particularly weak as authorities have not had the capacity or possibility to conduct national or sectoral updates, surveys and assessments, periodic censuses, or even rescue historical records from war-torn offices. Similarly, institutional memory may be weak as populations have been displaced, government staff dismissed, or rotated, and government offices periodically closed down. Furthermore, existing records of public facilities may no longer reflect the current reality, as buildings may have been destroyed, supply lines interrupted and the professional cadre scattered. Similarly, in a post-disaster setting, many of these traits are similar, and added to this

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complexity are the urgent immediate needs for response not previously captured in surveys or needs assessments.

Conflicting priorities: A characteristic of many states in fragile situations is that weak governance and continuous internal tensions and conflict become routine. The identification of priorities may be a key source of conflict, making a transparent and evidence-based process all the more important. In a post-disaster setting, a sudden influx of outside resources and a change in the most pressing needs can lead to a similar conflict of interests. Multiple strategic frameworks are often at work with organisations and institutions working along different trajectories. In the absence of strong national authorities able to provide strategic direction and coordination, this can often add grievance to the local populations as gaps in aid delivery go unnoticed and duplications of efforts are not effectively dealt with. By involving the local communities in the process of identifying, defining and prioritizing the problems, international and national institutions alike are able to design interventions that are closely tailored to the end-beneficiaries ensuring a 'do-no-harm' approach. Taking this methodology one step further through the involvement of local communities also in the intervention design stage, the organisation is not only opening the door for local solutions to local problems, but also ensuring an effective response mechanism and empowering the communities to become actively involved in the solutions moving away from the passive identities of victims and beneficiaries to becoming responders and peace-makers.

Importance of (re-)building community: Re-building community ties is key to recovery in a post-conflict setting. The identification of priorities as a community can help foster positive ties, by identifying similar experiences and needs. In a disaster, local communities are often the first responders on the ground. Engaging communities in identifying post-disaster recovery priorities is thus crucial not only to efficient crisis management response, but also to supporting the strong support that communities provide to each other after a disaster. Coupling disaster response priorities with a longer-term capacity development perspective empowers local communities to start re-building their own lives, creating a powerful hope for a better future whilst combating the notion of dependency and powerlessness. It is equally important that the state is included in these processes, as the strength of state-society relations will characterize the context long after the surge of international aid has dissipated. Building responsive institutions will greatly increase their capability to reduce risks in the future, fostering resilience in otherwise fragile settings.

Given these parallels, the participatory methods used to identify community perceptions of threats and risks, defining challenges and prioritizing solutions are crucial tools for actors operating in fragile contexts where conflicting priorities, societal divides and limited local capacities endanger the path towards recovery and resilience.

3. WALKING THE WALK: The case of Sudan

Sudan is faced with a new reality after the secession of South Sudan. External and internal pressures are exacerbating a fragile post-conflict context as the government attempts to secure progress towards sustainable peace and economic growth. With the loss of oil revenues, and continued regional

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instabilities, there is a pressing need for a grounded process of recovery planning. Through collaboration with UNDP's Crisis and Recovery Mapping and Analysis project, State Departments of Planning in Eastern Sudan, Blue Nile, South Kordofan, and Darfur have been able to create an evidence-base using novel technologies and participatory methodologies to engage communities in recovery planning. Building on this work, UNDP's Conflict Reduction Program has supported State Peacebuilding Mechanisms in Blue Nile and South Kordofan in engaging communities to use the evidence-base, identify priorities for peace, and design interventions that would support recovery and reconciliation.

Over the last few years, the State Departments have used a community-level crisis and recovery risk mapping (CRM) process to produce stakeholder-inclusive and multi-sectoral analyses that lay the foundations for conflict-sensitive, evidence-based strategic planning and decision-making. Through this work, positive and reinforcing relations have been fostered between state and society, increasing dialogue, shaping joint visions of the future and building the capacity of the state to respond to the demands made by the diverse communities of Sudan. Creating a culture of knowledge and knowledge management within the state has meant that, even in a context of fragility, it has been possible to build elements of resilience that can assist the country in managing its resources more effectively and thereby overcome some of the factors of instability and tension that have marked much of its recent history.

The wider international community in Sudan also benefits from this work as the UNDP CRMA team routinely collects, consolidates and publishes the CRM data and analysis together with multi-sectoral baseline data collected from UN agencies, government institutions and online portals in a Digital Atlas. The Digital Atlas is produced on a quarterly basis through what is called the UN Information Management Working Group. Ensuring all actors have access to a comprehensive, geo-referenced and up-to-date information base, the international community's ability to analyse their operational context and respond to emerging crises in a timely and coordinated manner has been greatly enhanced.

a. Creating an evidence base: participatory mapping

The main objective of the crisis and recovery risk mapping (CRM) process is to gather information on community perceptions and experiences of risks and challenges related to accessing essential resources like water, land, and basic services; ecological hazards and livelihoods related issues; as well as experiences with personal security issues including small arms proliferation, counterproductive behaviours and rule of law deficits. The process itself and subsequent analysis processes are informed by knowledge of Participatory Rural Appraisals, Participatory Learning Action, Participatory, Post-Conflict Needs Assessment, the Conflict Analysis and Human Security Frameworks.

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CRM workshops are conducted at state and locality levels in collaboration with State Departments of Planning[1] and Locality Administrations. Participants are drawn from a cross-section of society. Reflecting the plurality of Sudanese society, assurances are made that groups such as tribal and religious leaders, nomadic unions, farmers unions, private sector, civil society, youth and women as well as of course local government officials are all represented and given a voice. Each CRM workshop gathers around 25 to 35 participants over the course of two days with exercises ranging from plenary fora, risk mapping exercises, mind mapping and focus groups.

Based on an initial plenary discussion, participants reach a consensus on the ten most critical risks and challenges facing their communities, which in turn provide the order of the day for the participatory mapping exercise. The mapping exercise sees participants record perceptions and experiences through lengthy discussions, both on maps and datasheets. Each input is assigned an indicator and a specific geographic location in order to be incorporated in a GIS-based database designed particularly for this purpose.

Figure 1: List of 10 critical issues, CRM Workshop (North Darfur, 2010)

1. Access to institutions, communication and information
2. Basic services (water/ health/ education/ veterinary services)
3. Security
4. Gender/ vulnerable groups and lack of livelihoods opportunities
5. Food insecurity
6. Market access and export opportunities
7. Migration routes
8. Land/ pasture and natural resource management
9. Unemployment/ lack of diversified livelihoods opportunities
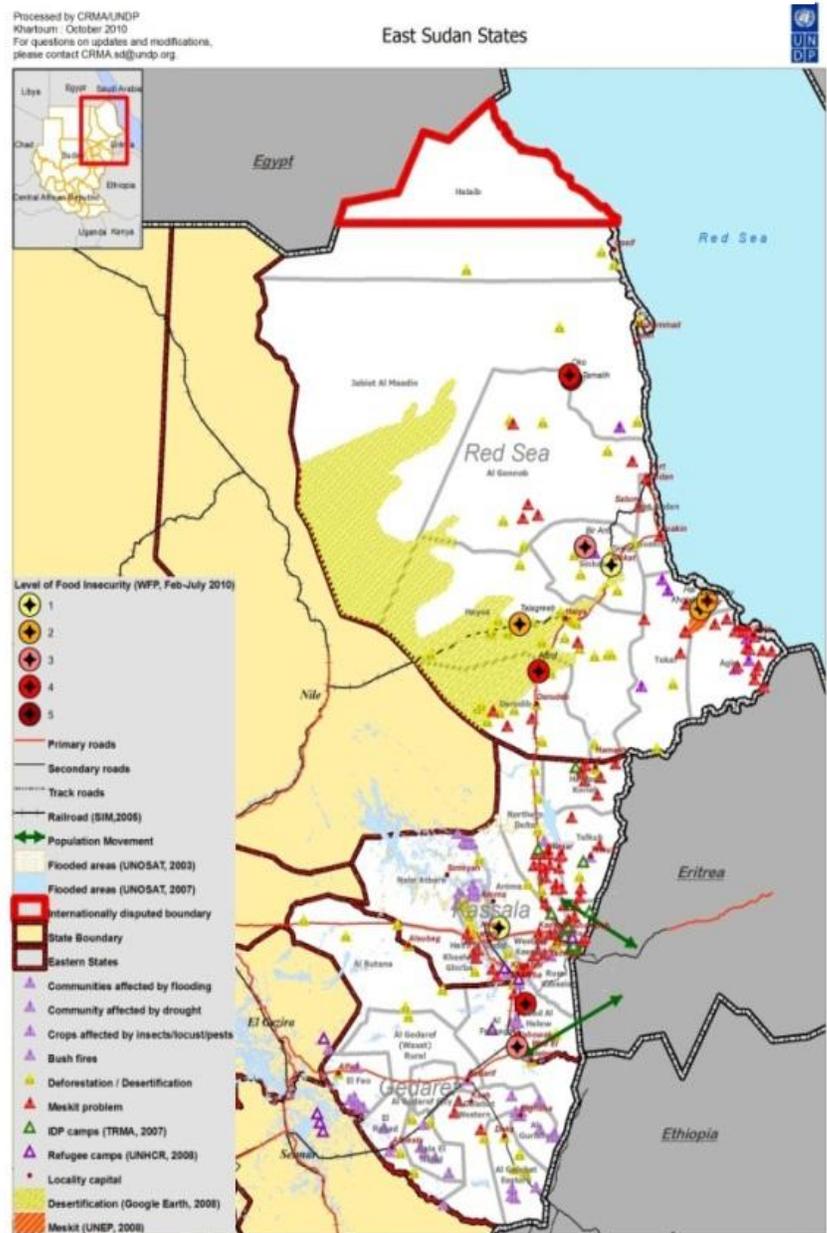10. Environment (lack of rains/ desertification etc)

Information from the CRM process is also recorded through workshop reports in which facilitators are given the chance to reflect on the participation, discussions and dynamics that emerged over the two days, particularly when dealing with sensitive issues that do not easily lend themselves to plenary discussions. There are cases when sensitive and conflictive issues are silenced by participants who enjoy a certain amount of leverage and power in the communities. In order to overcome such challenges, facilitators have made available an 'issue box' into which participants can slip notes or comments that they would like to communicate but not discuss. These issues are duly recorded and addressed through the analysis process.

b. Supporting planning in fragile settings: identifying priorities

When analysing the data collected in order to identify emerging risks and priorities, partners in Sudan have taken an 'inductive' approach. Emerging themes are grounded in the data itself rather than developed from a pre-existing framework. The aim of this approach is to explain the data by identifying key characteristics, relationships and processes involved. Mirroring the methodology of the CRM process, the participatory analysis of the data collected ensures a mixed-methods approach with representatives from a cross-section of society. Led by local stakeholders, the analysis process follows four key principles: mixed-methods; participatory and consultative; conflict-responsive, and; evidence-based. Each analysis process may take on speficic characteristics depending on the core issues and priorities, geographic and thematic, that emerge from the data.

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[1] These departments fall under the State Ministries of Finance, and the Federal Ministry of Finance and National Economy.

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The participatory analysis of community perceptions of risks serves two main purposes. First, it can help to identify priority areas for intervention in all the sectors covered by the risk indicators. For example, where an actor is interested in areas that are prone to conflict and have a lack of water services, CRM data can identify locations where communities report tensions between groups and problems with access to water. Second, since all inputs are geo-located at the village level, it can provide contextual information about a specific location of interest to actors that is more detailed than most situation analyses. Additionally, it can provide a way to check how the objective situation on the ground compares to the subjective perceptions of communities. Where these two differ, there may be interesting policy implications.

In locations where a local peace agreement has just been signed, the Conflict Reduction Programme has adapted the CRM methodology to take communities through a participatory intervention design process. This is an additional step, after common threats and risks, emerging themes and priorities have been identified by a group that brings together participants from either side of the conflict divide. Mixed groups of participants from all sides of the conflict use a variety of tools to brainstorm specific interventions (with beneficiaries and geographic locations identified) that would address the risks they have agreed affect the entire community and are at the root of the conflict. This ensures not only participatory recovery planning, but also a conflict-sensitive design.

The area of food security is one that often straddles across the conflict – disaster continuum. In Eastern Sudan, CRMA helped international actors analyse the food security situation in the region where a peace agreement has been signed, but where recovery and stability are persisting challenges. Combining the CRM data collected at state and locality levels across the region, with information and datasets from multiple sources in the Digital Atlas, CRMA was able to support implementing actors identify

Map 1: Food Security in Eastern Sudan (CRMA 2011)

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critical areas of interest, and target locations for food security related interventions. The analysis showed that the movement of IDPs and cross-border refugees created further pressure on food security in communities already struggling with ecological hazards such as Mesquite infestation, desertification and seasonal floods. Looking at the map from a conflict lens it is also possible to see that IDP movements are driven not only by direct conflict but also by ecological hazards as an indirect result of conflict. Previously fertile farm lands along the border with Eritrea, have been left unattended due to insecurities allowing the advancement of Mesquite and desertification. With this destruction of livelihoods and the lack of prioritization of and investment in the war-affected communities, populations are forced to uproot in search of food and livelihoods opportunities further away from the border and along the main road from Gedaref via Kassala to Port Sudan. The visualization of a variety of information from multiple sources together in a single map (see Map 1 above) enabled international and national actors to identify critical areas of interest, and target locations for food security related interventions, looking also at the root causes of the emerging situation. As a result of the CRMA process and close partnership with state authorities, recovery of war-affected communities has now become a key priority for the government's 5-year strategic plans in these states.

c. Building community

Beyond collecting grass-roots information of community perceptions, the community mapping and analysis processes provide an important opportunity for diverse communities to come together in the aftermath of crisis to discuss challenges, differing perceptions of the situation and joint priorities for the future. The process fosters an open dialogue in a secure setting where opinions are heard and valued rather than silenced and criticized. This is especially true of the adapted CRM methodology taken on by the Conflict Reduction Programme, where the process of bringing a community together across conflict divides after a peace agreement is as important as the outputs of the data collection and intervention design workshop. It builds trust and confidence amongst the participant groups and fosters a sense of purpose. Giving the community the tools to manage the challenges they are faced with is an empowering experience that enables local ownership and gives everybody a stake in the success of the intervention they have themselves identified and designed.

4. CONCLUSION: Harnessing the power of crisis mapping and community engagement for building resilience in fragile settings

Accompanying state governments through a data collection and analysis process, employing novel technologies and participatory methodologies, UNDP Sudan has had the opportunity to strengthen recovery planning and foster new relationships between state and society. This process has created a platform for resilience in a context of fragility, with an up-to-date evidence base and direct engagement of communities in processes of strategic prioritization of public resources and government decision making. Enabling communities to articulate and prioritise demands and assisting governments turning data into actionable knowledge, previously troubled relations between state and society have turned constructive and reinforcing. Through a participatory approach and close collaboration with state authorities and local communities, UNDP Sudan has gained the trust of its counterparts and opened doors to topics of discussion hitherto silenced or delegitimized.

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Using innovative technologies and GIS, sensitive issues are contextualized and depoliticized through novel correlations and visualisations, allowing previously contesting actors to jointly identify priorities for intervention and response. Participatory mapping has become a key tool in managing complexities in peacebuilding and recovery in post-conflict settings. Similarly, in disaster settings the relationship among communities and between the affected population and donors would greatly benefit from a grassroots process that provides a safe space for grievances to be aired.

Where a weak evidence-base, conflicting priorities and the need to engage communities are crucial to recovery planning, the CRM methodology has a strong contribution to make. With a strong focus on methodology and process from the start, UNDP Sudan's work in participatory crisis and recovery risk mapping and analysis has been designed to be flexible, partner-driven and responsive to context-dependent demands.   Disaster management practitioners could adapt this methodology to their response context for better, more efficient post-disaster recovery planning.

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