Researching livelihoods and
services affected by conflict

Secure Livelihoods
Research Consortium

Summary of key findings from
Phase II (2017–2020)

January 2021

Cover photo: A merchant selling dry fruits in
the Mandave main market in downtown Kabul,
Afghanistan, January 2014.

About us

The **Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC)** is a global research programme exploring basic services and social protection in conflict-affected situations. Funded by UK aid from the UK Government (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, FCDO), with complementary funding from Irish Aid and the European Commission (EC), SLRC was established in 2011 with the aim of strengthening the evidence base and informing policy and practice around livelihoods and services in conflict.

The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) is the lead organisation. SLRC partners include: Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA), Feinstein International Center (FIC, Tufts University), Focus1000, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Wageningen University (WUR), Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research (NCCR), Busara Center for Behavioral Economics, Nepal Institute for Social and Environmental Research (NISER), Narrate, Social Scientists' Association of Sri Lanka (SSA), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Women and Rural Development Network (WORUDET), Claremont Graduate University (CGU), Institute of Development Policy (IOB, University of Antwerp) and the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS, Erasmus University of Rotterdam).

SLRC's research can be separated into two phases. Our first phase of research (2011–2017) was based on three research questions, developed over the course of an intensive one-year inception phase:

- State legitimacy: experiences, perceptions and expectations of the state and local governance in conflict-affected situations
- State capacity: building effective states that deliver services and social protection in conflict-affected situations
- Livelihood trajectories and economic activity under conflict

Guided by our original research questions on state legitimacy, state capacity and livelihoods, the second phase of SLRC research (2017–2019) delves into questions that still remain, organised into three themes of research. In addition to these themes, SLRC II also has a programme component exploring power and everyday politics in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). For more information on our work, visit: www.securelivelihoods.org/what-we-do

Contents

About this summary

This summary captures key findings from Phase II (2017–2020) of the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium. The findings are structured around three key themes – livelihoods, state legitimacy and the mental landscape of post-conflict lives – and include a set of questions or challenges, key messages, a summary of what SLRC research shows, and thematic resources.

Livelihoods

To understand the nature of people's livelihoods in conflict-affected areas requires empirical evidence and contextually grounded analyses. SLRC's research and findings, generated over the course of a decade, present a picture of communities whose livelihood struggles continue long after the official end of a violent conflict. These struggles are exacerbated by having to contend with gender, class, ethnicity, capital, labour and market forces. Across the various countries studied, livelihood options for people who have experienced conflict are limited and shaped by broader political, economic and social factors far beyond their control. In addition, pursuing one livelihood activity can be a coping strategy to make up for shortcomings in another. This creates a never-ending puzzle of livelihood diversification and high-cost coping, often as a last resort.

Post-conflict livelihood activity is clearly constrained, but why exactly? The current livelihood interventions toolkit of development agencies struggles to deliver a decent living to urban or rural poor communities in conflict-affected areas. SLRC's research endeavours to move beyond simple explanations of a phenomenon – such as lack of access to resources – to understanding causalities. Thus, we examined *why* people can no longer sustain their own lives through direct access to means of production or a living wage. This is what SLRC calls the 'paradox of livelihood interventions'; it demonstrates a tension between what is envisaged by a set of well-trodden livelihood interventions and people's actual experiences in securing a living in conflict-affected environments.

The key findings outlined below synthesise the work of numerous studies undertaken in Afghanistan, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Uganda, and offer a general view of our learning about the ongoing volatility of livelihoods. Context-specific findings can be found in the various publications produced under this theme, some of which are listed at the end of the chapter.

Question 1

How can entrepreneurship and self-employment schemes be used to encourage livelihoods recovery in conflict-affected states?

Key message

Entrepreneurship in conflict-affected states is often presented as a viable livelihoods strategy that aids economic recovery, and is supported through start-up loans with limited consideration of risks involved. However, for a person to take on credit to become an entrepreneur often points towards a lack of options and, due to the risks involved, becomes a coping strategy characterised by volatility and uncertainty.

Our research shows

- Many development programmes encourage and support entrepreneurship as a livelihoods strategy in conflict-affected settings, usually through self-employment or small business schemes. However, entrepreneurship is often not an expression of a choice, but a coping mechanism that may increase livelihoods volatility. Drives to boost consumer culture push many people into working several jobs, as well as making them highly indebted, particularly if they have taken up entrepreneur schemes. This is particularly true for women, who often have poor access to markets and encounter obstacles in commercial negotiations due to gender norms.

- The entrepreneurial model succeeds only when an entrepreneur takes a calculated risk, and believes in the business idea. However, in Sri Lanka, where entrepreneurship is encouraged, its reality, and need for longer time frames, are often ill-suited to the livelihoods of the poor. Many people become entrepreneurs to survive day to day, rather than as a long-term pursuit of a strong business idea or with the ambition to accumulate material wealth.

- The willingness or ability to take a calculated risk is influenced by the experience of conflict. Although many development programmes promote entrepreneurial schemes as a means of securing livelihoods, they fail to account for the emerging findings about the risk-averse nature of populations who have lived through conflict (see Question 2).

- Although credit can help to smooth household consumption, it often results in people becoming permanently indebted. In Pakistan and Afghanistan, for example, debt is passed on from generation to generation. Debts can further increase exposure to what is often referred to as 'bad jobs' or by SLRC as 'bad work', particularly if debtors need to take on other jobs to repay a loan. Bad work is characterised by precarity, exploitation, uncertainty and social stigma; engaging in bad work contributes to being caught in a volatile livelihood reality.

- Debts make people more vulnerable to shocks, fuelling a cycle of livelihood improvement and reversal, also known in the literature as 'churning'. Although standard-of-living indicators may trend upwards on average, the lived experience of an individual household is often much more volatile. Development interventions that offer access to credit need to take such livelihood churning into account.

- Existing credit mechanisms are also a social mechanism: they build relationships of reciprocity between households, which are then broken via the introduction of external credit providers. Offering access to credit is thus a social, rather than a purely economic, intervention and needs to be assessed as such in evaluating unintended consequences.

Question 2

How do people who have experienced a conflict manage risk in livelihoods and investment choices?

Key message

The experience of a conflict seems to make people more risk averse.

Our research shows

- Post-conflict economic development programming is often premised on people needing to take economic risks, such as starting a new business, taking on a loan, investing in education or diversifying their livelihood strategy. However, people in a post-conflict setting might be risk averse, and they may in fact be less likely to want to invest money or start a new business.

In northern Uganda, our behavioural research shows that people are overwhelmingly risk averse: research participants were inclined to postpone decision-making into the future, rather than to take actions today. What might be perceived as idleness typifies a logical choice in a post-conflict environment. Individuals often perceive investing in their future – through, for example, accepting a microfinance loan or shouldering the financial and opportunity cost of education – as representing an unacceptable level of risk. The dilemma people face is that investment in an uncertain future is risky and creates further instability in the present. To address that dilemma, waiting and doing nothing might be a logical choice.

In a post-conflict environment, it can be difficult to improve one's situation without risk-taking and initiative. Yet, programming often assumes some risk appetite within a population, or even an increased willingness to take on risky opportunities in an effort to secure livelihoods. The behavioural patterns related to risk (which are likely to be context-specific) need to be recognised in development programmes.

Communities and individuals who have experienced conflict require an increased level of support to feel that the economic risks associated with livelihood opportunities on offer are manageable. Therefore, policy-makers and programmers need to better understand and deploy culturally and contextually appropriate conceptualisations of risk that support post-conflict livelihood reconstruction.

Question 3

Is migration beneficial to women's empowerment in conflict-affected states?

Key message

Migration is not the game-changer or positive disruptor it is often expected to be. This is particularly the case for women whose husbands migrate. Instead, migration often amplifies and worsens existing gender, family, economic and social relations.

Our research shows

Migration has long been viewed as a tool for empowerment, for both those migrating and those staying behind. However, women's experience of their husbands' migration is not universally positive. Although receiving remittances can make women's lives easier in a variety of ways, the challenges associated with additional responsibilities – including parenting, additional work in agriculture and caring for elderly relatives – are often underestimated, as is the case in Nepal. Furthermore, the ever-increasing cost of migration (due to tighter laws and restrictions in receiving countries) increases the length of time it takes for the investment of migration to pay off. The working conditions for migrants are also important. Households back home benefit very little from a migrant engaged in precarious, dangerous or exploitative work.

Policy-makers and practitioners need to be cognisant of the impact of migration beyond its potential for remittances. A household that loses an adult member loses a worker; and women often bear the brunt of this shift in household dynamics. The impact of migration on women's work depends on the structure of the household and whether or not a loan was taken out to pay for the migration. Migration can also amplify existing broader social structures for those female household members left behind. For example, women's participation in paid work is primarily the result of social norms according to their ethnicity, class and gender relations. This has little to do with the migration of men; however, the cost of a husband's migration can exacerbate the need for paid work that the wife cannot access due to those social norms.

In northern Uganda, we see the importance of social networks and connections, especially in relation to women migrants. In the absence of social and economic capital, women migrants are likely to miss out on services and opportunities that might be available to others. A lack of social networks and capacity can have a significant impact on the outcomes of programmes that rely on migration as a fundamental positive shift in livelihoods development.

Resources

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Gunasekara, V. (2020) 'Paradoxes in livelihood interventions: a synthesis of evidence from selected conflict-affected areas in Africa and Asia'. SLRC Synthesis Paper. London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (https://securelivelihoods.org/publication/paradoxes-in-livelihood-interventions-a-synthesis-of-evidence-from-selected-conflict-affected-areas-in-africa-and-asia/).

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Ranawana, A. and Senn, A. (2019) '"We do what we have to do": cultures of indebtedness among women entrepreneurs in the east of Sri Lanka'. SLRC Working Paper. London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium https://securelivelihoods.org/publication/we-do-what-we-have-to-do-cultures-of-indebtedness-among-women-entrepreneurs-in-the-east-of-sri-lanka/).

Shaw, T. and Ghafoori, I. (2019) 'On borrowed time: the limits of informal credit for livelihood strategy in Herat, Afghanistan'. SLRC Working Paper. London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (https://securelivelihoods.org/publication/on-borrowed-time-the-limits-of-informal-credit-for-livelihood-security-in-herat-afghanistan/).

Stites, E., Atim, T. and Ayee, T.F. (2019) '"She told me that life here is so easy": urban migration of Acholi youth, Uganda'. SLRC Working Paper. London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (https://securelivelihoods.org/publication/she-told-me-that-life-here-is-so-easy-urban-migration-of-acholi-youth-uganda-2/).

State legitimacy

SLRC has been researching the relationship between basic services and state legitimacy for almost a decade. At the start of this journey, the dominant thinking on state-building in international development was that legitimacy deficits were a driver of fragility. Thus, building state legitimacy became a priority in order to move away from fragility. The view was that two basic functions of the state were critical in order to support legitimacy and to mend state–society relations: 1) creating conditions for economic growth and 2) ensuring the delivery of services by the state. The proposition that service delivery strengthens state legitimacy has been an attractive one to donors and programme implementers. Consequently, for many years, service delivery was a staple of aid agencies with the programmatic arguments that aid invested in public services was contributing to state-building and peace-building.

Yet, SLRC findings fundamentally – and perhaps unexpectedly – question this assumption. Evidence on the relationship between services and state legitimacy is mixed. In countries unaffected by conflict, some literature suggests that a failure to deliver services erodes people's willingness to be taxed (as they do not see the benefit of such taxation) and undermines trust in government. However, this connection between services, taxation and trust in government does not seem to exist in the same way in conflict-affected contexts. The findings on the relationship between improved quality of services and increased state legitimacy are also mixed: better services do not necessarily result in improved perceptions of government. SLRC also could not find a significant relationship between increased access to services and perceptions of central and local government.

The key findings below unpack this overall revelation, and are mostly a synthesis of studies conducted in Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Question 4

Can service delivery by a state increase legitimacy of that state?

Key message

State legitimacy is not transactional. It cannot be achieved in a straightforward exchange for the delivery of services, or even through improved satisfaction with those services. Rather, state legitimacy is co-created through a negotiated process by state and citizen.

Our research shows

- State legitimacy is not transactional, and therefore cannot be achieved through the better delivery of services. In short, services cannot buy legitimacy. Although addressing people's needs through service delivery is important, services can contribute to state legitimacy only if their delivery addresses a particular issue that, firstly, people consider important and, secondly, that is within the remit of what those people expect from their state. State legitimacy occurs when power is exerted by the state in ways that align with people's beliefs and perceptions on how power *should* be exerted. This *can* occur through service delivery, but it may not. It will occur only when the state directly accounts for issues and/or services that have particular salience for the communities in question.

- Through our research in Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, we found that processes of state legitimation are more co-constructed between citizens and state agents than previously imagined. Contrary to the dominant idea that state legitimacy is dictated by state performance, state legitimacy is in fact based on a dynamic between people's beliefs about how state power should be exerted, and by people's actual experience of the state. The beliefs about what state power should look like are co-constructed by both the individual and the state, in part based on people's own perceptions of group membership and legitimation narratives produced by the state. This process of co-construction is highly context-specific.

- The process of legitimising a state rarely depends on a set of transactions or services provided at a certain level of quality. Rather, beliefs matter much more. Thus, any policy or programme seeking to affect the relationship between state and citizen needs to first analyse and unpack the beliefs and perceptions apparent within the population.

Question 5

If service delivery is not the way to shape state legitimacy, what is?

Key message

In different populations and contexts, some issues are more salient than others when it comes to the construction of legitimacy. The saliency of a particular issue depends on what groups of people expect from the state (based on their experience of historical inequalities and identities) and so which issue is more likely to be the conduit for legitimacy. In trying to impact state legitimacy, practitioners first need to understand what these salient issues are in the particular targeted community.

Our research shows

- The relationship between satisfaction in service provision and perceptions of state legitimacy is complex. Addressing people's needs through the delivery of high-quality services is important but may not contribute to increased state legitimacy. Instead, addressing issues that people consider important (or salient) and within the remit of the state may have a greater impact on legitimacy. Box 1 provides some examples.

- The degree to which a state function may influence people's perception of state legitimacy depends on whether that state function (re)produces contested distribution arrangements in a given context. If a service even inadvertently emphasises inequalities, then it will fail to support the construction of state legitimacy. In Pakistan – where healthcare is a salient issue that impacts the construction of state legitimacy – the health system reproduces contested distribution arrangements. Lower-class communities report feeling disrespected when accessing health services, compared with higher-class communities who report receiving preferential access to doctors and treatments.

Box 1: The salient issue in practice

In our research in Swat, Pakistan, higher satisfaction with health services was associated with improved perceptions of state legitimacy. However, does this mean that, in the specific case of Pakistan, healthcare is the key to achieving legitimacy? Not necessarily, as the salient issue in a context can change over time. For example, before 1970, free medicine was provided to the population in Swat, yet the salient issue in the negotiation of legitimacy was land ownership. However, our survey data from 2018 indicates that the provision of health services is now the issue with most salience in the construction of state legitimacy. Therefore, the role of a service in shaping state legitimacy may change over time. This represents a challenge for donors when identifying which service carries most weight in supporting state legitimacy.

In Nepal, where the state was both reimagined and renegotiated following the Maoist uprising, the issue of citizenship features prominently in the negotiation of state legitimacy. Thus, service delivery (particularly healthcare) has little salience for achieving state legitimacy. Although more than half of the population in the Terai region are forced to use private health clinics due to the low quality of government-run clinics, this poor service provision does not affect their perception of state legitimacy. Instead, access to birth certificates is the conduit service through which state legitimacy is negotiated. The Nepali state has reproduced inequality in access to citizenship by denying citizens the right to a birth certificate, an issue that has become contested since the Maoist uprising.

■ In order to affect state legitimacy, donors and practitioners need first to understand which issues matter at the local level, which state functions correspond to those issues, and whether legitimacy is negotiated along these lines. How those state functions and services are delivered then needs to align with what is expected by the local population, taking into account historical grievances and contested distribution agreements. It is important not to assume that what local communities identify as the primary issue through which their relationship with the state is negotiated automatically corresponds to the priorities identified by a development needs assessment. If the delivery of a service is to be successful in improving state–society relations, it is critical to take seriously how salient a particular issue is to people just as much as the findings of a needs assessment by an external actor.

Resources

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McCullough, A. and Toru, S. with Syed, R. and Ahmed, S. (2019) 'Why services won't always buy legitimacy: everyday experiences of the state in Swat, Pakistan'. SLRC Working Paper. London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (https://securelivelihoods.org/publication/why-services-wont-always-buy-legitimacy-everyday-experiences-of-the-state-in-swat-pakistan/).

The mental landscape of post-conflict lives

The extent to which people experience recovery after a violent conflict is tightly connected to their perceptions and lived experience of their personal journey, environment and community. There are a range of perspectives and opinions among communities that have experienced violent conflict about how long it takes to rebuild lives and society, and if a return to normality is even possible (as normality might never have existed in the first place). Development programmes tend to perceive recovery as a broadly linear process with milestones that mark visible improvements. Yet, the experience of such improvements might be individualised rather than communal (with individuals experiencing acutely the volatility of post-conflict livelihoods). In addition, measurable milestones of improvement, such as better physical security, might not be perceived as improvement or result in noticeably different post-conflict behaviour by those living in that environment.

SLRC used experimental behavioural research to develop the pioneering concept of the 'mental landscape' of conflict-affected lives to capture the mechanisms that connect perceptions, decisions and behaviour. Mixed-methods research in northern Uganda, where the conflict between the government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) officially ended well over a decade ago, sought to fill a research and policy gap in understanding the mental landscape as it relates to situations of violent conflict. Post-conflict programming often seeks to support inclusion, community-building and investment in the future primarily. However, how to define and achieve these three elements in a post-conflict environment continues to be under-researched and under-operationalised, with the SLRC making a significant contribution to including behavioural insights in conflict contexts to support more effective and sustainable policy and programming strategies.

The following insights are taken primarily from SLRC's behavioural work in Uganda. Our five-part, multi-method study explores how people perceive, interpret and experience their circumstances today, how they behave in their communities, perceive fairness or make decisions about their future, and how these behaviours and perceptions may be shaped by memories and experiences of the war.

Question 6

How does the memory of conflict affect people's ability to collaborate?

Key message

People think that conflict has made their communities selfish; yet individuals tend to act more collaboratively when recalling a conflict, pointing towards greater community cohesion than is assumed.

Our research shows

- Recalling the experience of conflict influences behaviour. It is often thought (including by affected communities) that a conflict makes people less collaborative and inclined to protect their own interests. In northern Uganda, those who lived through the LRA conflict felt that the violence had a lasting impact on people's behaviour and that, as a result, people were now more selfish, partly due to the region's lack of recovery. Yet, in our research, we found that perception and reality diverged: those who recalled memories from the time of conflict demonstrated behaviour that was more collaborative than those who recalled a memory unrelated to the conflict.

- Our finding that, contrary to expectation, people do not behave more selfishly when they are reminded of conflict, highlights how challenging it is for people to perceive and experience positive changes in their environment. If a person's mind perceives their social environment as characterised by selfish behaviour and people unwilling to support one another, the person may struggle to experience their environment as positive, and may perceive any improvements in their lives as impossible.

- Programme designers need to be aware of this incongruity between perceptions of behaviour versus actual behaviour. Baseline perception surveys may not capture the pro-social and collaborative behaviours apparent within post-conflict communities; yet these behaviours represent opportunities for recovery and rebuilding. Although people behave more collaboratively during a conflict, the alienating perception about how other people behave is an important aspect of a post-conflict context that needs to be factored into programming. Implementers need to consider what it is about

the context that makes this perception particularly believable, and its impact on programmes that rely on people perceiving their surroundings in a particular way. In addition, it will be useful to know if people are behaving contrary to perceptions, so that programme efforts can be tailored accordingly.

Question 7

How do people who have experienced a conflict view and experience fairness?

Key message

Recalling the experience of a conflict can raise people's expectations of fairness, with a willingness to enforce those standards, even if it is to their own detriment.

Our research shows

- Fairness is recognised as an important component of good development programming. The concept is commonly operationalised by distributing resources equally or based on greatest need, by communicating decisions transparently, and by upholding accountability to affected populations. However, how programme constituents actually experience fairness has been rarely questioned. Standards of what is considered fair are often set by implementers, with feedback mechanisms focusing on transparency of procedure rather than contextually grounded definitions of fairness.

- Our behavioural research shows that people who have just recalled a memory from a time of conflict – those in what we call the 'conflict mindset' – have a different standard for what they consider to be fair, versus those who spoke of a memory that was not related to the conflict. People in the conflict mindset consistently offered to share more money with their fellow players in the SLRC behavioural game. The offers they accepted in return, meaning those they considered high enough to be *fair*, were also higher. The conflict mindset is thus linked to higher standards of what people consider fair to give and fair to receive – and they are willing to end up empty-handed, rather than accept an offer they consider unfair.

- These findings have implications for programming. If people's standards of fairness are higher when reminded of their experience of conflict,

programmes that are specifically labelled as related to the conflict (or as post-conflict recovery) may run into challenges in designing a process that people can experience as fair.

- Even during times of hardship and recovery, standards of what is fair are upheld. In a similar vein to their negative perception of unfair cash offers in the behavioural game, people who have experienced conflict may reject a development intervention if they perceive it to be unfair. Programmes are shaped by the interests of those implementing, rather than by those receiving. But for programmes to be perceived as fair and thus to be effective, it is vital to understand context-specific preferences and standards of fairness. Programmes that fail to pay sufficient attention to standards of fairness are likely to under-deliver (as people might simply not engage if programmes are perceived as unfair) and break promises. This cycle of promising and under-delivering may, in turn, result in standards of fairness increasing further, making it more and more difficult to ensure future policies and programmes are both appropriate and effective.

Question 8

How can development actors best work locally?

Key message

At the heart of locally owned development programmes are the relationships and connections that bind local actors together; these relationships are what local capacity is built on. Implementers need to prioritise working with those relationships by adopting a relational, locally led approach to programming and put relationships at the centre of all thinking about legitimacy, capacity and inclusion.

Our research shows

- The most salient way to understand what makes something locally owned is through relationships. Programmers need to invest resources in analysis that unpacks what networks exist, which relationships connect local government actors to national government, how relationships shape the local economy, and which relationships local communities experience as constructive or corrosive. Using relationships as an interpretative tool can help

to explain context. For example, in Afghanistan, relationships inform how village leaders, elites and households interact with each other, their responsibilities and how they are held accountable. Understanding local networks of connections helps implementers better understand the context in which they work and, for example, why one village offers a life to its inhabitants that is very different from that offered by the next settlement.

- The power of relationships and connectivity plays out in many ways and at many levels. In Uganda, it drives rural–urban migration to locations where people have a connection that may facilitate the finding of work and accommodation. Relationships not only allow people to function, but determine how they invest. Relationships therefore are the foundation for people's livelihood trajectories, acting as a conduit for future learning, investment and economic decisions that have significant consequences for livelihoods.

- Relationships ultimately determine inclusion within a political settlement, and with that the capacity to build a better life with more access to state resources. With stronger relationships among local actors comes the capacity to link to elites – a link that may provide more stability than externally delivered livelihood support programmes. Thus, a better way of thinking about recovery, legitimacy, capacity and inclusion is to focus not on associated processes but on the role of personal relationships of actors involved. More so than structures, relationships and the capacity they bring regulate the experience of recovering from conflict, as well as being and – crucially – feeling included.

- Relationships represent adaptive capacity: strong relationships with implementing agencies and communities mean that programmes can more easily be adapted to changing needs or circumstances. The process of learning, changing and adjusting is always centred around human interaction. A relational approach is capable of changing dynamics between state actors and citizens in crucial ways; it can develop capacity for collaboration, shift narratives and through these processes improve state–society relationships.

- SLRC insights on relationships reinforce the argument that development is not transactional. However, relationships and networks come at a price. Both require investment, proof of loyalty and an understanding of what the local salient issue

is (through which legitimacy can be negotiated). Programmers attempting to unpack and define 'local knowledge' and 'locally appropriate' within a given context may be assisted by understanding existing local relationships and the various functions they fulfil. Crucially, to use relationships to implement programmes that are locally owned requires a transfer of power from programme implementers to their local constituents.

Question 9

How can development programmes make people feel more included?

Key message

The development sector often relies on categorising people into target populations to implement programmes. However, such categories fail to recognise the nuances of what beneficiaries consider the essence of their identity and how this identity shapes how they experience the world. A relational perspective – centred on the importance of identity and relationships – takes into account both structural forces that influence identity and the individualised context of people's lives and networks. This allows constituents to feel included within local and context-appropriate programmes suitable for how they experience their place in the world.

Our research shows

- Implementers often dilute the nuances of how people in conflict-affected areas experience their worlds by using broad-brush identity categories. Much post-conflict development is driven by an assumption that shared human experiences have broadly the same effect and that people see themselves somehow represented in broad and static categories.

- Having easily categorisable beneficiaries trumps acknowledging that individuals have shifting identities, which may be shaped by both relationships and the experience of violent conflict. The perspective of static identities is limiting, but a slight shift towards nuance and a dynamic understanding of identity offers pathways towards context specificity and sustainable development programmes. The relationships that people forge on the basis of often multiple and concurrently held identities offer opportunities for locally owned and context-appropriate development.

Resources

Amanela, S., Ayee, T.F., Buell, S., Escande, A., Quinlan, T., Rigterink, A.S., Schomerus, M. Sharp, S. and Swanson, S. (2020) 'The mental landscape of post-conflict life in northern Uganda: executive summary'. SLRC Working Paper. London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (https://securelivelihoods.org/publication/the-mental-landscape-of-post-conflict-life-in-northern-uganda-executive-summary/).

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