

Social Cohesion & Community Based Protection

Can Certain Community Groups “Make or Break” Effective
Child Protection?

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by

Hany Besada
Wendy Wheaton
Ben O’Bright
Evren Tok

Key Questions and Objectives

How do groups at the community level protect women, youth, and children while promoting social cohesion, resilience and general human security? Do informal or formal groups influence communities differently? What group characteristics, functions, processes, and mechanisms actively support or erode social cohesion in conflict and post-conflict settings?

These critical questions, among others, are being explored in a two-year collaborative action research on the role of community-based groups in building social cohesion to enhance protection and educational outcomes for women, youth and children in

Chad and Burundi. It aims to enhance our understanding of the role both formal and informal community-based groups and organizations play in facilitating

relationships, conflict prevention and mitigation, promotion of natural resource management, and the establishment of lasting social cohesion – particularly in multi-ethnic, localized environments that impact some of the most vulnerable populations children, youth and women. It is hypothesized that these community based protection mechanisms in Chad, which include child protection committees, self-formed girls groups against early marriage, and vibrant local associative life, among others, can enhance local and national protection systems if brought to scale with greater attention and long-term sustainability in mind.



Body Mapping with children aged 6-12 years drawing what their eyes “see” in the community around them. (Feb, 2014)

Research Problem: Presently, within UNICEF, there is limited and weak evidence on the role community based groups play in a conflict setting and their role in promoting social cohesion.

Overall Research Goal: To develop a renewed, locally-informed baseline of knowledge about the way community groups support the achievement of social cohesion in Burundi and Chad.

Specific Research Goals:

- 1) Improving our understanding of the drivers of conflict at the community, regional and national levels in case study states, particularly defining those drivers which "activate" community group response for affected children and youth;
- 2) Improving the definitions of social cohesion, peace and harmony, as well as their constituent components, by collecting and synthesizing local knowledge, attitudes and perspectives;
- 3) Derived from Goal One, improving our understanding of how peacebuilding, and associated generation of social cohesion, has been attempted by communities and community groups in the past, and how it can be improved for today.
- 4) Translated generated knowledge into several tools for future use by practitioners, communities and governments alike, including as capacity building plans, a robust indicator set, and a system map of community groups.

Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion

In Chad, understanding whether social cohesion exists in a community, as well as the particular forms in which it manifests itself is hypothesized as critically important for practically supporting resilience and peace building through programs for children, youth, women and vulnerable populations. While there is no agreed understanding of social cohesion, current definitions focus on intangible notions of (1) *Belonging*, or Shared values and identity, (2) *Acceptance and Rejections*, or legitimacy, experience of discrimination, attitudes towards minorities and newcomers, (3) *Worth*, or life, satisfaction and happiness, future expectation, (4) *Social Justice and Equity*, or evaluation of national policies, and (5) *Participation*, or voluntary work, political and cooperative, involvement. In parallel, it is recognized that peace building, as an integrated approach, has a number of related components: one must understand the causes and dynamics of conflict and fragility; there should be inclusive political settlements and peace processes; there should be a strengthening of remaining, after conflict, community and state capacities; and, there should be the preservation and growth of core state functions necessary for non-violent conflict resolutions which mirror public expectations of such. Immediately, several parallels can be drawn between the above definition of social cohesion and peace building. First, each seek to denote a sense of belonging, acceptance and justice by pursuing inclusive processes which reflect public consensus on the needs and wants of a community. Second, both focus on a key role for state and community leadership in developing social cohesion and peace. Third, there is a need for legitimizing any peace building processes so as to ensure their active engagement by the public. It is thus proposed that for the latter peace building to function, there should be a focus within those functions on the development of social cohesion within a targeted group, community, region or country. While we have offered an initial definition of social cohesion, this project seeks to explore the regional differentials associated with this idea, so as to provide the firmest of bases upon which peace building can and continue occur.

Methodology

Two international researchers from the NSI were coupled with a national researcher who speaks the local language. They proceeded to administer qualitative research techniques, including surveys, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) on critical events, body mapping exercises, and individual key informant interviews. A systematic effort has been made to include those people affected by current and past conflicts, those who live on the margins of the community and are exceptionally poor, as well as both adults, who often comprise the existing child protection mechanisms, and children, who are agents of their own protection. Between December 2013 and March 2014, data was collected from community members resident in Moyen Chari, Mondoul and Longone Oriental regions to aid in the project goal of establishing a baseline of knowledge: of what community groups exist; their functions and abilities to establish a sense of belonging for community members; attitudes towards community groups' efficacy and legitimacy; the scope of protective and conflict resolution practices that are underway (both positive and negative); and, what impact they have (had) on the overall protective environment for women, children and youth in Chad. The project has made use of a non-probability, purposeful or convenience sampling method, whereby the selection of respondents is conducted according to the thematic needs of the project, rather than according to interests of statistical representation. While random sampling methods are traditionally preferred for quantitative measurements of change from a baseline, the lack of information infrastructure and the informal nature of social relations in Chad necessitates an alternative approach. Equally, we have adopted a Cascading Progression methodology (also termed Snowball Sampling), the project has thus far used local networks of informants, derived principally from partner organizations, to help identify proceeding respondent targets.



Our research in December 2013 denoted that local communities, as in Burundi, traditionally see those actors involved in the creation and maintenance of social cohesion as divided into two distinct camps: informal groups, which have been identified to include women’s groups, child protection committees, peace building associations, NGO programs, youth groups, traditional leaders and elders, religious leaders/groups; and, formal groups, which include government, health systems, the Sultan (Northern Chad) justice representatives, courts, and the police. While interviews thus far suggest that in Chad, as in Burundi, informal groups are more heavily relied upon by local communities than formal groups for the development of social cohesion, this project’s sampling has generally followed a 50-50 split of respondents from both sides.

Action Summary

December 2013 – 9 NGO and Action Group Interviews: In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with non-governmental organizations, international representatives, and local actors (termed informal groups by local community members) to inform the researchers on the knowledge, attitudes and practices currently in place regarding social cohesion.

December 2013 & February 2014 – Phase 1 System Mapping: A mapping system was conducted of existing groups at the community-level, their functioning, perceptions of legitimacy, and their connectedness to larger national protective systems by using a rapid-enquiry approach and grounded learning orientation. *Approximately 60 groups* have been mapped thus far with the active partnership of local NGOs.

February 2014 – CARE International-Led Capacity Building Training Session: In the town of Sahr, CARE, with support from our research team, organized a parallel two-day training on non violence, peace building, child protection and conflict management delivered to a range of 22 associations working on issues of child protection, education and peace building efforts in Chad. The participants travelled to Sahr from all three of NSI’s target: Logone Oriental, Mondoul, and Moyen Chari. The training was designed to build the participants’ capacity to provide a protective environment for children through enhanced social cohesion and education-based socialization. Out of the total 22 associations, nearly 30% were female representatives. As noted, of these training participants, 7 were purposefully selected to come with NSI and UNICEF to take part in child-focused activities, including body mapping, in the nearby Doyoba transit centre.

February 2014 – 8 Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions with 10

Participants: The town of Sarh acted as the principal site for key informant interviews, semi structured interviews and a focus group discussion. Participants – primarily derived from local child protection organizations situated within our three identified regions and representatives from partner agencies – were asked to engage in in-depth interviews using pre-formulated questions for between 30-45 minutes each. The Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) consisted of a similar composition of participants and lasted 60 minutes, allowing time for open discussion around more generalized, key questions. Each aided the collection of new knowledge on the meaning and actualization of social cohesion by community groups in Chad.

In particular, it was learned that local **knowledge**, across participating community group members, of and meanings of social cohesion are ‘living in harmony, getting along, helping out when someone is sick, celebrating births/marriage, giving gifts, & the absence of war.’ The community **attitudes** toward child protection in Chad were expressed by describing incidents, events and conditions that children live in. Types of issues faced include child marriage, dropping out of school due to lack of funds/food, abuse in communities, exploitation through dangerous labor and general neglect. Common **practices to support** children and social cohesion include community based child protection committees, families (often), local leaders (sometimes) and justice systems (rarely), and levels of use depend on the type of incident.

February 2014 – Survey Exercises with 55 Participants: At the Doyoba Transit Centre in Southern Chad, survey exercises (body mapping) were conducted with unaccompanied and separated youth from the Central African Republic. The 55 child respondents provided unique insights into the meaning of social cohesion, peace and belonging, which in turn were derived from their recent interactions with a conflict environment.

For Further Information on Continuing Research:

Lead Research Institution	Research Team	Advisory Board Members
The North-South Institute, 100 Argyle Ave #200, Ottawa, ON K2P 1B6, Canada	<i>Lead Researcher</i> - Hany Besada at hbesada@nsi-ins.ca <i>Youth Engagement Researcher and Consultant</i> - Ben O’Bright at benobright@gmail.com	Dr. Tim Shaw; Dr. Jacqueline Mosselson; Mark Canavera; Dr. Evren Tok; Dr. Alvin Curling and, input/feedback from members of the Child Protection Network (CPC)

Collaborating Agencies

UNICEF, CARE Chad, Local Peace and Child Protection Associations, Inter-agency group (IRC, Africare, Acord International, World Vision, SOS Children’s Village, International Rescue Committee, Mennonite Central Committee, Oxfam International, ACCOR)