

# Learning Report

Adaptation and innovation: meeting humanitarian needs in fragile and conflict contexts



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Management

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## Acronyms

ADAPT	Analysis, Design and Planning Tool
ARG	Advocacy Response Group (World Vision)
CAR	Central African Republic
CFLS	Child-Friendly Learning Spaces
CFS	Child-Friendly Spaces
CIV-MIL	civil-military
CMAM	community-based management of acute malnutrition
CP	child protection
ECaP	Empowering Children as Peacebuilders
ECD	early childhood development
GAM	global acute malnutrition
GECARR	Good Enough Context Analysis Tool for Rapid Response
IDP	internally displaced person(s)
IPACS	Integrating Peacebuilding and Conflict Sensitivity
KRI	Kurdistan Region of the Republic of Iraq
MOU	memorandum of understanding
MHPSS	mental health and psychosocial support
MSTC	Making Sense of Turbulent Contexts
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OTP	outpatient therapeutic programme
PoC	protection of civilian
RRM	Rapid Response Mechanism
RUSF	ready-to-use supplementary foods
RUTF	ready-to-use therapeutic foods
SPLM	Sudan People's Liberation Movement
UN	United Nations
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
WASH	water, sanitation and hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

## Executive Summary

This report is a compilation of World Vision’s learnings captured through real-time evaluations and case studies carried out in more than 10 fragile and conflict-affected contexts. The report includes examples of how World Vision adapts its programming to meet the needs of children in conflict-affected contexts including South Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR), the Kurdistan Region of the Republic of Iraq (KRI) and Uganda. The report also covers some of the core tools and approaches World Vision uses to ensure that the organisation is grounded in conflict-sensitive and principled operations while being adaptable to the context.

There is no simple roadmap for operating in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. The nature of these contexts requires constant learning, adaptation and revision. And whilst contexts vary considerably, World Vision’s experience across diverse geographies and situations has revealed a number of core lessons:

### Context: Understand the operating context and develop community trust

Building and maintaining trust with fragile and conflict-affected communities is critical for programme effectiveness, staff security, consistent access and outcome sustainability. World Vision has been able to develop deep relationships with the communities it serves thanks to a long-term presence; the leadership of staff who come from the communities in which World Vision works; and intentional relationship building with all stakeholders, including faith actors. Maintaining trust requires that aid groups clarify assessment processes and communicate operational decisions made with both local staff and affected communities throughout the life of a programme. Doing so fosters transparency, participation and accountability.

Conducting continual context and risk assessments at local, national and regional operational levels is a bare minimum requirement for operating in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Context analyses cannot be done in a vacuum. Extra steps should be made to ensure interagency coordination on context monitoring/risk assessments. Where possible, these



assessments should be carried out in an interagency or coordinated manner to avoid analysis gaps, to build a common understanding of the context and to develop common operating principles to support collective outcomes. Special attention should be given to including a diverse range of local community members (particularly children, as safe and appropriate, and faith leaders) in assessments and analysis to ensure response appropriateness and community buy-in.

### Cohesion: Implement a rights-based approach and strengthen social cohesion from the start

Programmes that address the conflict drivers can immediately improve the humanitarian response and dramatically reduce the need for ongoing humanitarian assistance, mitigate protection risks and create conditions under which short-term humanitarian programming can have longer-term impact. Despite this, peacebuilding and social cohesion approaches are often delayed until immediate needs are met. In responding to the immediate rights and needs of conflict-affected populations, the root causes and potential triggers for new conflict must not be

neglected. Protection and social cohesion should operate concurrently, thereby ensuring safe, dignified and meaningful access to immediate humanitarian assistance while at the same time addressing the root causes of conflict and potential triggers.

### **Children: Keep children at the centre**

All conflict-affected communities voice deep concerns about the well-being of their children and youth. Collectively working for the welfare of children can unite divided communities. A child-focused approach to programming can address the needs of the most vulnerable and have generational benefits, given that children caught in conflict are amongst those who will shape the future. However, programmes that humanitarian donors and actors prioritise often fail to reflect the importance of child-focused approaches. Child-specific interventions are chronically under-resourced. Child protection and education in emergencies are consistently two of the least funded sectors in humanitarian action. Adolescents and youth are often mistrusted and neglected when prioritising humanitarian interventions, despite being critical players in the trajectory towards peace or towards further conflict.

### **Culture: Create a flexible, agile organisational culture that equips the right staff for the right job**

Approaches that address the protection, education and psychosocial needs of children in fragile and conflict-affected contexts must underpin and drive operational strategies, not be on the periphery. Fragile and conflict-affected contexts demand higher threshold for risk and exceptional organisational flexibility and agility. These must be built into the design of projects and programmes. Contingency funds must be allocated at the beginning of all programmes, with clear communication to donors regarding rapid

changes in context and humanitarian need. Decision making, supported by clear accountability systems, must be localised as much as possible. Field managers should be empowered to act quickly to ensure the safety of staff members and beneficiaries as well as response appropriateness.

Ultimately, the quality of programming in fragile and conflict-affected contexts is dependent on the quality of the personnel carrying it out. While it is true for all emergency responses, recruiting the right staff members and supporting their retention takes on additional importance in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Staff members must be technically proficient, flexible and adaptable, and they must possess uncommon resilience to physical, mental and emotional stress. They must be well trained in personal and organisational safety awareness and be supported with tools and resources to foster their well-being. They should also understand civil-military (CIV-MIL) coordination principles and possess good negotiation skills. Expatriate staff members must, in addition, be culturally sensitive to and familiar with local traditions, structures and political systems.

### **Care: Systematise proactive security**

Developing well-informed, current situational awareness is just the first step. Staff members must receive appropriate orientation and practical security training before being deployed to volatile contexts. Each staff member is ultimately responsible to be vigilant for his or her own security. However, organisations operating in these environments must ensure that appropriate risk mitigation, contingency planning and resources for security maintenance exist and that all staff members are aware of them. Funding for security resources commensurate with the risk level must be appropriately built into operating budgets.

## Introduction

Children do not start wars. Yet when conflict rages, children are disproportionately punished by its brutality. Globally, an estimated 530 million children live in contexts affected by conflicts and disasters, with more than 50 million children forced from their homes.<sup>1</sup> The impact of conflict permeates every facet of a child's life. It robs them of their friends, family and community, removing their sense of well-being. The long-term psychosocial and health impacts of witnessing conflict and enduring either bombardment or relocation can ripple for generations.

World Vision has developed and implemented approaches to meet the specific needs of children and communities affected by conflict. World Vision began

The Sustainable Development Goals/ Agenda 2030, the Agenda for Humanity, and the development of a New Way of Working bring humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors into greater complementarity. They point to a historic opportunity to leverage collective efforts to 'leave no one behind' and 'put the last, first'. As a child-focused, multi-mandated organisation, World Vision will leverage its global humanitarian, development and peacebuilding footprint to champion the rights of the world's most vulnerable children. At the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, World Vision committed to reaching 20 per cent of children in any given emergency – including those in conflict contexts. To achieve this, World Vision will continue to develop approaches that enable it to 'stay and deliver' for children.

More information on World Vision's World Humanitarian Summit commitments can be found on [www.wvi.org](http://www.wvi.org).

caring for orphans at the end of the Korean War in the 1950s. Promoting the well-being of children caught in conflict is in World Vision's DNA. Yet over the past 10 years the scale and duration of conflicts and the increased fragility of states have created unprecedented need and complexity. The disregard for International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law, the intentional targeting and/ or restriction of humanitarian operations, and the increased brutality witnessed in protracted conflicts have exponentially increased the vulnerability of children to the worst forms of violence. Humanitarian actors are challenged to find more adaptive and resilient approaches that can be sustained beyond the traditional parameters of humanitarian response to specifically address vulnerabilities to violence and reduce the impact of conflict on children.

In view of these changing trends, and in line with the Sustainable Development Goals' commitment to 'leave no one behind', World Vision's global strategy is focused on increasing its presence in areas where children face the greatest risk of violence. This requires the organisation to adapt current operational and programming models and to build organisational capacity in order to respond better.

This report is a compilation of World Vision's learnings captured through real-time evaluations and case studies in more than 10 fragile and conflict-affected contexts. The report demonstrates how World Vision adapts its programming to meet the needs of children in conflict zones, including South Sudan, the CAR, the KRI and Uganda. It covers some of the core tools and approaches World Vision uses to ensure that the organisation is grounded in conflict-sensitive and principled operations whilst being adaptable to the context.

The report is structured around five key themes – context, cohesion, children, culture and care – followed by conclusions, recommendations and an annex with five case studies.

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF, press release, 'Nearly a quarter of the world's children live in conflict or disaster-stricken countries: UNICEF', 9 December 2016, [https://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_93863.html](https://www.unicef.org/media/media_93863.html).

## Context: Understand the operating context and develop community trust

### Developing contextual competency

World Vision’s longer-term community-based development programming allows for a deep contextual understanding of both the drivers and the consequences of conflict and fragility. As a multi-mandated organisation, World Vision imbeds individual and community resilience, early warning for early action, disaster preparedness and mitigation programming into its community development models. The organisation has also developed a keen understanding of the root causes underpinning protracted crises, which allows for proactive programming before conflicts begin and helps bridge the humanitarian-development divide post-conflict.

World Vision staff members understand that simply being from a community is not enough to ensure appropriate analysis. They are trained to assess the context regularly, identify potential triggers and design development and humanitarian programmes that build on community capacities for peace.

Utilising conflict-sensitive tools for programme assessments triangulated with security assessments and stakeholder mapping supports conflict-responsive programming. Not doing so from the start and throughout the life of the programme can put staff and operations at risk. Where World Vision continues to be challenged and where it is now focusing its efforts is ensuring that these assessments fully inform the development of iterative strategy development at global and local levels accompanied by flexible programming and operating models for these contexts. Some examples of progress include:

- developing new adaptable programming models for fragile and conflict-affected contexts
- integrating improved context analysis and adapted strategy based on context in the global leadership orientation programme
- improving the tools World Vision provides contexts to assess fragility and better focus programmes in the most fragile areas of a country.

Following are foundational approaches which World Vision has found useful in developing programmes in accordance with context dynamics.

### Making Sense of Turbulent Contexts (MSTC)

MSTC provides a macro-level analysis of a national or regional context and generates recommendations for aid actors. MSTC workshops bring together a diverse range of 25 local participants for a four-day analysis. The participatory exercise creates a shared understanding of the context, including key historical turning points, influential actors, root causes and a forecast of trends in turbulence. Expert facilitators then write a report that includes recommendations on how aid actors can mitigate the effects of conflict on vulnerable people. MSTC is increasingly being used by international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and engages national civil society groups.





## Good Enough Context Analysis Tool for Rapid Response (GECARR)

GECARR provides a snapshot macro-level analysis of a country or a specific region in anticipation of or during a crisis. It can be used flexibly by multiple aid organisations. GECARR facilitators build an analysis through focus group discussions and key informant

interviews with internal and external stakeholders, including local communities. The analysis is validated through a three-hour scenario-planning workshop, with recommendations for NGOs involved in humanitarian response. GECARR teams can be deployed quickly, requiring approximately 10 days of work.

### Using the GECARR in Burundi

In April 2015, World Vision and Action Aid undertook an interagency analysis using the GECARR in Burundi as requested by the Start Network. It was conducted amidst growing tensions prior to legislative and presidential elections in May and July, respectively.

Over a week a GECARR facilitation team and national staff members interviewed 175 people in five provinces (Bubanza, Bujumbura, Gitega, Makamba and Kirundo). The team identified three key likely scenarios, which did occur during the following months.

The Burundi GECARR report was useful for numerous reasons:

- It recommended increasing coordination and preparedness, resulting in a timelier interagency response.
- Its focus on improving communications with affected Burundians resulted in the establishment of an accountability hotline project.
- World Vision Burundi activated its crisis management strategy.
- All new programmes and projects were designed as per GECARR outcomes (including the accountability hotline, two food grants and a malnutrition-prevention project).
- The report was used to inform advocacy and communication, including an advocacy briefing paper.

The inter-agency component of the GECARR also:

- improved the analysis quality
- provided further validation
- enabled access to a wider range of geographic areas
- ensured a more even/manageable division of labour and provided more contacts for interviews
- set expectations (including stressing the flexibility of the process and the short period of time) and debriefing, which was crucial to the interagency relationship.

Scenario planning with other NGOs established a clear NGO platform of understanding. Donor involvement in the analysis and sharing of findings ensured credibility, visibility, better information sharing and stronger relationships for future collaboration.



### Integrating Peacebuilding and Conflict Sensitivity (IPACS)

IPACS provides a community-level analysis of a context, with a specific focus on how projects and programmes interact with local tensions. It generates recommendations for how a project can minimise negative impacts and maximise positive ones. IPACS analysis takes place over several days through key informant interviews and focus group discussions with community members as well as with aid staff. Trained IPACS assessors analyse and validate the data and write a report with applications for the aid project. A published IPACS variant – ‘Emergency Response’ – allows aid workers to apply IPACS principles in humanitarian contexts.

### Supporting principled humanitarian decision making

Even with a firm understanding of the context and culture, making operational decisions in complex conflict contexts is rarely straightforward. The need to maintain a principled approach to humanitarian assistance<sup>2</sup> is not simply a matter of ideals. It is critical to negotiating and maintaining access and supporting the safety of staff, beneficiaries and the wider community. Principles and policies developed at headquarters can and should provide guidance on non-negotiable parameters within which humanitarian operations must be conducted. However, field staff

need to be equipped with tools to facilitate decision making in the grey areas.

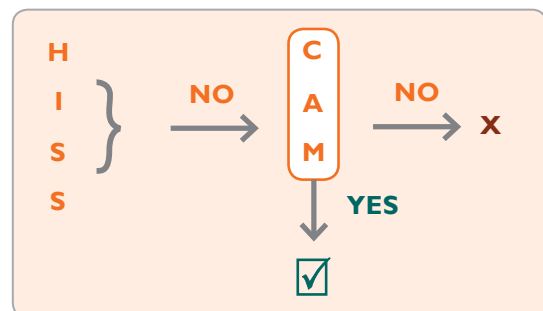
To assist field leadership, World Vision developed the HISS-CAM tool. When used by trained staff, the tool facilitates a systematic decision-making process. It helps determine appropriate interaction with armed actors in areas where military engagement in a traditionally humanitarian activity seems necessary to save lives and alleviate suffering. It can also be used when the environment obliges interaction with armed groups, which may jeopardise staff security or lead to negative public perceptions of the organisation.

The HISS-CAM tool can also help document why certain field-level decisions are made. This is critical to both horizontal and vertical transparency and reassessment as the context changes.

The HISS-CAM tool guides staff through systematic reflection on whether a course of action would impinge on the ability to maintain the core principles of **H**umanitarian imperative, the principles of **I**mpartiality and **I**ndependence, the imperative of staff **S**ecurity and beneficiary protection, and the importance of **S**ustainability.

If it is determined that a course of action risks impinging on a core principle, justification for the action must be filtered through three key questions: Is the action in pursuit of a legitimate or **C**ompelling aim? Is it **A**ppropriate, **A**dapted and **A**dequately informed to that aim? And is there **M**inimal negative impact on the fundamental principles guiding CIV-MIL interactions, and have all other means been exhausted in attempting to achieve the aim? (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1. HISS-CAM process



<sup>2</sup> Principled humanitarian assistance refers not only to how organisations programme, but from whom they accept funding, with whom they partner, and how they interact with groups associated with the conflict.

## **Weighing the use of armed escorts to deliver aid in South Sudan's complex emergency**

Violent internal conflict broke out in the Republic of South Sudan in December 2013. Longstanding tensions within the country's ruling party, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), boiled over into armed conflict. The violence spread rapidly amongst security forces in the capital, Juba. It engulfed whole neighbourhoods, and hundreds of civilians died within days. Attacks on hospitals, churches, mosques and United Nations bases were commonplace. The SPLM fractured into two groups and during the conflict the actions of both groups violated international human rights and humanitarian law. These included extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, rape and other acts of sexual violence, and arbitrary arrests and detention.

Working in the country since 1989, World Vision responded with emergency relief. By February 2014, the situation worsened. Large numbers of displaced people were trapped between warring parties in the remote Unity State and Upper Nile State without food, water or shelter. Efforts to reach them had resulted in several major injuries and two reported deaths within the humanitarian community.

World Vision could not respond to humanitarian needs due to the volatile security situation. The organisation had to consider using military assets – in this case, United Nations Mission in South Sudan's (UNMISS) aircraft and an UNMISS armed escort – in order to deliver lifesaving aid. Leadership used the HISS-CAM tool and analysis process to inform its decision making.

Considering the HISS aspect, the humanitarian imperative was obvious. The humanitarian community had to respond, and World Vision was one of the few organisations on the ground with the capacity and capability. Impartiality and independence might be affected if military support were used. In terms of impartiality, humanitarian assistance would be based on needs, in line with assessments conducted by humanitarian actors. There was concern that some factions might perceive World Vision as being aligned with a particular armed actor. For this reason, UNMISS aircraft were determined to be the only suitable armed actors. World Vision would have to respond in both government-controlled and opposition-controlled areas. By relying on military assets and armed protection, World Vision would give up some independence in terms of freedom of movement, at least for a limited time while conducting combined operations.

Because humanitarians and beneficiaries were coming under attack at distribution sites, armed protection was seen as a deterrence strategy to protect staff and beneficiaries. It was further determined that coordination with UNMISS would be sustained for a limited time and reassessed continuously.

The HISS analysis showed that elements impinged on core principles, so the CAM portion of the HISS-CAM tool had to be addressed. World Vision's desire to serve the most vulnerable drove the compelling aim. When considering how 'Appropriate, Adapted and Adequately' informed the aim, the team considered all factors. It was appropriate given the volatile security situation, adapted to the specific context for a limited duration and adequately informed based on evidence and assessments. And there was 'Minimal' negative impact on the fundamental principles guiding CIV-MIL interactions. Last, and most important, all other means had been exhausted in attempting to reach the affected populations.

## Cohesion: Implement a rights-based approach and strengthen social cohesion from the start

Ongoing conflict targets community structures and interdependent social systems. As they are weakened or destroyed completely, communities become fractured and tension rises. When immediate hostilities cease, communities' fragility and vulnerability can worsen if these structures are not addressed.

### Reinforcing social cohesion<sup>3</sup> – the foundation principle

World Vision has increased its emphasis on building social cohesion in fragile and conflict-affected contexts to support communities to reclaim, rebuild and reinforce ruptured social structures.

In Lebanon, World Vision has made social cohesion programming central to its long-term strategy to ensure better cohesion amongst heterogeneous communities and between Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities. World Vision ensured that local partners fostered community members' equitable participation in all aspects and stages of aid project cycles. It successfully brought communities together that likely would not have cooperated otherwise.

### Adopting a peace-first approach

The traditional approach to social cohesion has been to implement programmes only after urgent humanitarian and protection needs are met. World Vision has learned that addressing both immediate and longer-term needs are crucial to prevent recidivism. Embedding a 'peace-first' approach can result in strengthened programme outputs.

World Vision implemented the Empowering Children as Peacebuilders (ECaP) project model in the CAR and Uganda. This project model puts children at the centre of conflict prevention. It empowers them as agents of change, healing and peace amongst their

peers and in their communities. In general, the project model trains children to become group leaders and facilitators.

In the CAR, World Vision successfully worked with children and youth affected by civil conflict, implementing a holistic, peace-first approach to child-focused programmes. This strengthened programme outputs, reduced social tension and safeguarded youth from further exploitation. In Uganda, the ECaP model enhanced peacebuilding, participation and the psychosocial well-being of children. This resulted in reduced levels of fighting amongst children from different refugee communities and between children from refugee and host communities. It also helped address negative behaviours in World Vision-managed Child-Friendly Spaces (CFS).<sup>4</sup>

### Faith Identity

Nearly two-thirds of all conflict in 2013 had religious components.<sup>5</sup> Religion can and has been manipulated to divide communities, yet it can also be a force that brings diverse stakeholders together and foster peace and reconciliation.



<sup>3</sup> While there is no single definition for 'social cohesion', the working use of the term refers to 'the belief held by citizens of a given nation-state that they share a moral community, which enables them to trust each other'. (<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/egms/docs/2014/LarsenDevelopmentinsocialcohesion.pdf>)

<sup>4</sup> A case study on how World Vision used this approach in Uganda can be found at [www.wvi.org/disaster-management](http://www.wvi.org/disaster-management).

<sup>5</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace, 'Five Key Questions Answered on the Link between Peace and Religion' (2014), 2.

## The role of faith leaders

The value of faith literacy and connecting with local faith actors is exemplified in World Vision's engagement in the CAR since 2013. While turbulence in the CAR has been fuelled by multiple factors, the practice of faith identity for political purposes resulted in shocking levels of violence in 2013. Christians and Muslims who had lived together in relative peace rapidly turned against each other as armed groups organised along religious affiliation and tore communities apart.

As a Christian humanitarian organisation new to the CAR, World Vision was acutely aware of the sensitivities in places where faith had been used to divide communities. World Vision leadership engaged with local imams, pastors and priests, bringing all actors together to design assessment strategies and ensure that programmes appropriately targeted the most vulnerable populations. These leaders helped World Vision in its Communication with Communities approaches, including appropriate communication methods, locations and critical groups for consultation. The leaders also supported the programme's startup in new areas.

Engagement with faith leaders at all stages had a multiplying effect on the impact of World Vision's programmes in the CAR. For example:

- After assuming camp management of an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp in Yaloke, World Vision staff and local religious leaders facilitated a conversation to reduce hostility between the predominately Christian host community and Muslim IDPs. Within a month, IDPs who had previously been confined within the camp boundaries were able to access local markets and public service centres.
- These same faith leaders encouraged World Vision to rethink the design of two Child-Friendly Spaces – one for the Muslim IDP children and one for the Christian host-community children – and establish a common CFS for both. The CFS was built in the IDP camp and made available to both groups, bringing these once separate communities into a common space and creating bonds between them.

The goodwill fostered through this inclusive, interfaith dialogue has carried over in all World Vision projects and all its project locations in the country.

The vast majority of people make sense of the world through a belief system or a conceptual framework.<sup>6</sup> Recognising and understanding that spiritual well-being is often as important to people as material well-being, World Vision has seen how engaging with faith leaders<sup>7</sup> has been critical to accessing communities and mobilising networks that are often closed to secular actors.

Faith leaders have an extensive view of their communities and therefore a unique perspective and understanding of a community's:

- rhythms and patterns
- pre-existing coping mechanisms
- self-protection activities
- critical cultural traditions.

<sup>6</sup> Pew Research Center, *The Global Religious Landscape: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Major Religious Groups as of 2010* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2012), 9.

<sup>7</sup> Faith actors play a central role in the traditions that mark the most important milestones in many community members' lives and are often well trusted and widely networked. Furthermore, their presence in many communities far outlasts that of governments, political parties and international actors.

Because faith leaders often are so deeply woven into the fabric of the community, engaging and partnering with local faith actors in humanitarian responses can generate local ownership, ensure responses are appropriate to their context and strengthen accountability to local populations. This is especially crucial during conflict as faith leaders and religious frameworks play a critical role in conflict mitigation and resolution.

World Vision is working to ensure that all its programmes identify and acknowledge the role of faith leaders and their capacities as peacebuilders. World Vision is incorporating interfaith awareness training in employee orientation and capacity-building efforts. The aim is to enhance multi-faith dialogue and partnerships with faith actors at global and local levels and to adapt current programming models to various faith contexts.

### World Vision’s position on faith in humanitarian action

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender. World Vision operates in accordance with humanitarian principles, based on International Humanitarian Law, driven by humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence in the context of humanitarian emergencies.

World Vision’s Christian identity and humanitarian principles underpin and drive all of World Vision’s work. The theological framework for responding to emergencies is fourfold:

- All of humanity is created in the image of God, and as such, has inherent value and dignity.
- Our ultimate motivation is derived from what we have experienced in Jesus Christ.
- Selfless love is the ultimate criterion for our humanitarian action.
- Our work and efforts are witness to our experience of a loving and caring God.

World Vision’s faith identity, like other faith-based humanitarian agencies, provides a unique perspective on the power of faith to drive humanitarian action.

## Children: Keep children at the centre

### Prioritising the voice of children

Children are disproportionately affected by conflict. Their needs should be central to humanitarian assistance in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. World Vision programmes ensure that assistance targets children by integrating child well-being outcomes into monitoring and evaluation frameworks and by mainstreaming child protection across all sectors. Putting child well-being at the forefront of programme design can also serve to bring communities together, support multisectoral integration, and gain

community acceptance and ownership. More on how World Vision applied this child-centred approach in Uganda can be found at [www.wvi.org](http://www.wvi.org).

World Vision makes certain that children are not seen merely as passive recipients of aid but as active participants in the development, monitoring and delivery of its humanitarian programmes. World Vision has learned that empowering adolescents and youth in fragile and conflict-affected contexts enhances other programmes. Approaches that increase access to education and vocational learning strengthen their capacity to improve their livelihoods and be change agents in their communities.<sup>8</sup> For example, in the CAR many children and youth involved in the

<sup>8</sup> The ADAPT (Analysis, Design, and Planning Tool) for child protection (CP) has been specifically designed to help with the identification, prioritisation and root-cause analysis of child protection issues. It also helps with the identification and mapping of the systems that are in place to protect children. CP ADAPT is currently being modified for fragile and humanitarian contexts (CP ADAPT ‘lite’), recognising the need for content around children’s issues across different contexts.

Peace Club programme come from resource-poor homes. Without alternative livelihood opportunities, youth remained at risk of entering into dangerous and exploitative situations. World Vision consulted and worked with these youth to develop appropriate solutions, resulting in holistic improvement in personal and community well-being. A similar community-led programme in the KRI developed successful education and child-protection interventions. More on the KRI example can be found on [www.wvi.org](http://www.wvi.org).

In addition, in recent conflict contexts both children – including youth – and caregivers have asked for ‘mental rest and support as a road to peace’. Evidence has shown that mental health and psychosocial problems worsen in humanitarian situations and that children with parents experiencing mental disorder are two to three times more likely to experience mental disorder themselves. Further, 50 per cent of lifetime experiences of mental illness have onset before 14 years of age; thus, it is critical to integrate mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) approaches from the very beginning of a project cycle to (a) address the most pressing needs of children affected by conflict in the immediate response; (b) support children in the context of families where mental disorder is prevalent; and (c) protect children’s mental health and well-being in the long term, including, where necessary, reducing relapse and/or severity of symptoms. Therefore, MHPSS approaches should be integrated from the very beginning of the

project cycle to address the most pressing needs of children affected by conflict and some of their long-term MHPSS needs which can persist over time. Although World Vision has integrated MHPSS in its programming and conflict areas, it has not been consistent across the board, and little funding and staffing has been invested in MHPSS.

### Advocating for child rights

In fragile and conflict-affected environments advocacy is a heightened priority. The goal of humanitarian advocacy in such contexts is to monitor, influence and lobby for the fulfilment of the rights of crisis-affected children and communities where duty bearers are not meeting their obligations. World Vision advocates for an end to the conflict and for the development and maintenance of conditions that make humanitarian-aid delivery possible.

This requires dedicated capacity to identify and analyse system gaps in humanitarian-aid and protection-assistance delivery, and to propose field-informed solutions. It also requires public and private engagement with relevant parties at local and global levels (e.g. governments, the UN, other NGOs, the public and media) to resolve challenges.

However, in many fragile and conflict-affected contexts, direct in-country advocacy is not always possible. It can put staff or beneficiaries in harm’s way.



It can also threaten operational viability and prevent extremely vulnerable populations from receiving the assistance they need. In these cases, World Vision leverages its global network of advocates<sup>9</sup> and partners with coalitions to make children's voices heard at every level and provides duty bearers with field-driven evidence and analysis to inform decisions.



## Culture: Create a flexible, agile organisational culture that equips the right staff for the right job

### Institutionalising flexibility

The nature of fragile and conflict-affected contexts demands a higher threshold for risk and exceptional organisational flexibility and agility. When humanitarian programme scale up is necessary, World Vision can protect development gains while meeting emergency needs. World Vision does this by building on existing programmes, relationships and systems to quickly implement lifesaving activities. World Vision is continually improving to align current internal systems and policies related to finance, staffing and procurement with the needs of fragile-context programmes. In doing so, the organisation is developing a flexible, agile organisational culture that

can respond rapidly across all operational areas. This culture has helped World Vision pilot new approaches, like the multisectoral Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) developed in South Sudan which helped teams overcome shifting access constraints to meet critical needs of displaced populations. More information on World Vision's adaptive approach in South Sudan can be found at [www.wvi.org](http://www.wvi.org).

### Adapting funding models

To systematise conflict-appropriate flexibility, World Vision has developed crisis modifiers in its programme funding. National affiliate offices maintain a National Emergency and Preparedness Response Fund that can be quickly released to scale up humanitarian programming. Regional and global emergency reserves are also maintained. Additionally, at the discretion of the national leadership, up to 20 per cent of development funding can be reallocated to humanitarian programmes.

Despite these measures, challenges remain in securing long-term stable funding for these contexts given short-term grant timelines. This makes it difficult to maintain critical staff between grants cycles and provide sustained support for short-term projects. Implementing new donor commitments made within the 'Grand Bargain'<sup>10</sup> to deliver multi-year funding has the potential to improve significantly the capability of agencies like World Vision to maintain their work within fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

### Investing in capacity building

Funding alone cannot address resource gaps in conflict contexts. The built-in funding facilities detailed above work in concert with national, regional and global staff who have developed proven capacity to shift from development to humanitarian operations. World Vision leverages a 'whole-of-organisation' approach to deliver effective programming in conflict contexts. It builds the capacity and expertise of national affiliate development staff through their participation in national and regional disaster management teams.

<sup>9</sup> World Vision's Advocacy Response Group (ARG) is activated for all major emergencies and prioritised fragile contexts and brings together Emergency Response, Advocacy and Communications staff into a coordinated working group to strengthen both operational and advocacy work at the global, regional and national levels. The goal of the ARG is to address structural, institutional and rights-based issues which impede the delivery of life-saving assistance. World Vision's primary concern is to ensure that assistance is carried out in accordance with humanitarian principles and in line with its Child Well-being Outcomes, International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law.

<sup>10</sup> 'The 'Grand Bargain' is an agreement between more than 30 of the biggest donors and aid providers that aims to get more means into the hands of people in need. It is essentially a 'Grand Bargain on efficiency' between donors and humanitarian organisations to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action. For more information see <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain-hosted-iasc>.



Through these teams, members engage in targeted capacity building to equip them with practical, role-specific humanitarian expertise. In most cases trained national and regional staff can quickly transition from development to humanitarian programmes as needed. This internal configuration further strengthens local capacity and better ensures continuity amongst humanitarian, development and peacebuilding programmes. For example, in South Sudan, World Vision could respond quickly to recent conflict due to the prepositioned development of its Rapid Response Mechanism, the leadership of experienced staff and flexible funding negotiated with donors during programme development.

Despite these mechanisms it remains a challenge to staff global responses in conflict contexts in a timely manner, both in terms of surge capacity and recruitment of longer-term staff. This manifests in various ways, such as extended and unfilled vacancies, lack of technical expertise, shortages of staff available for deployment, high turnover, and so on. To progress in this area, adjustments must be made to create incentives and attract top talent, maintain prepositioned rosters, and grant further authority to sector leads for hiring decisions.

Further, supporting staff flexibility requires that appropriate, efficient and timely systems are in place. These systems include finance, logistics/supply chain management, administration, human resources, internal communications and field monitoring and evaluation.

## Utilising flexible operational modalities

Remote management, also known as remote control management, enables aid agencies to continue to address the needs of conflict-affected or hard-to-reach populations, even when physical presence is not possible. While not without its challenges, World Vision finds that this approach is a viable last-resort option for providing urgent humanitarian assistance in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

However, remote management is heavily reliant on the availability of staff with both managerial and field-level expertise, as well as excellent partners that must be invested in consistently and treated as one team.

Remote management takes on many forms, and each context has unique operational opportunities and challenges. For example, World Vision Somalia's remote management succeeded by forming a partnership with a third-party organisation. For its humanitarian response in Syria, however, World Vision's remote management worked through locally hired staff, Syrian civil society and community-based groups. Lessons learned from each approach are summarised below.

### Remote management: Working through partners

During the 2011 famine World Vision Somalia expanded its work through remotely managed partnerships in order to provide emergency assistance to people affected in inaccessible areas. The famine was a product of drought, worsened by the conflict between rival groups. The target location had recently been taken over by Al Shabab, and World Vision Somalia's work was only possible through a partnering model. Important considerations in implementing this particular programme included developing an appropriate duty of care framework, ensuring robust and redundant monitoring mechanisms and closely monitoring community perceptions.

### Remote management: Working directly

When World Vision first established a cross-border programme from Turkey into Northern Syria in April 2013, staff members were able to work on site in Syria. Although the security situation eventually deteriorated, the need for humanitarian assistance increased. The office modified programmes to operate under a remote management system that empowered Syrian staff to implement humanitarian programmes on site with remote support by staff in Southern Turkey. Some of the challenges faced during this period contributed to World Vision's understanding of the importance of contextual financing, physical presence and staffing.

Whether implementing through partners or working directly, when using remote management approaches in fragile and conflict-affected contexts World Vision has learned the following:

- Selecting local partners with whom mutually transparent relationships can be developed is critical.
  - ▶ Superior recruitment is necessary to find experienced management staff. Background checks (from other international NGOs, security sources, and so forth) are paramount, as applicants may not be eligible for employment due to affiliations with parties to the conflict.
  - ▶ Implementing partners and staff must feel that their safety, needs, perspective and expertise are taken as organisational priorities and must be free to speak out when they fear they are not.
  - ▶ Remote managers must be able to use multi-layered monitoring and accountability systems to ensure programme quality and appropriate monitoring and evaluation. This is especially important for due diligence in start-up and scale-up phases.
  - ▶ Remote managers must develop relationships with staff, systematically meeting face to face or using text, voice, video and other means to keep communication lines open and information flowing.
  - ▶ Developing partnerships with reliable, accountable, field-based recipients is crucial to transferring funds across borders.
- Cultivating and monitoring community perceptions and acceptance requires dedicated capacity and strong accountability mechanisms.
  - ▶ Informing communities about aid activity is only the first step. Agencies must engage with multiple stakeholders to build trust, manage rumours and ensure community needs are adequately met. This is crucial for implementing quality programme and minimising risk for staff and assets.
- Training and capacity building must be built into programme implementation schedules.
  - ▶ Implementing partners and staff may have limited technical or administrative capacity to meet the strict donor requirements for conflict contexts. Remote managers must prioritise staff training and capacity building to orient partners sufficiently to industry technical standards, reporting requirements and organisational culture.

Developing transformational partnerships (see next page) must be the end goal when implementing programmes directly or through partners. Agencies must make exceptional efforts to develop the capacity of local staff and communities who will stay and rebuild long after the conflict has ended. This begins with viewing partnerships as mutually transformational, not merely transactional. It requires intentional emphasis on mission alignment, complementary capacity and the ability to grow humanitarian operations together.



## Developing transformational partnerships

World Vision's partnerships with local NGOs are about sharing skills, advocacy, innovation, learning and research, and complementary actions. By leveraging each other's investments and work, reach, coverage and impact are extended and partnerships move from transactional in nature to mutually transformational.

Responding to the needs of Syrian refugees in Turkey and internally displaced communities within Syria required a comprehensive and effective approach to local partnering. World Vision identified that for local partnering to be successful it had to ensure it was perceived by both parties as a legitimate and equal partnership, not as a subcontract for implementation. This prompted World Vision to design a partnering model that ensured mission alignment, complementary capacity and the ability to grow humanitarian operations together.

### *Selection phase*

- Partnership mapping – Coordinating with clusters, United Nations (UN) and NGO forums to identify potential local NGO partners
- Long-list initial due diligence – Local NGOs complete a pre-award assessment and the World Vision partnership committee conducts comparative analysis and identifies a short list of potential local NGO partners.
- Go or no-go decision – Based on a specialised scoring system, the Partnership committee decides whether to work with a potential partner.
- Reference check – Contact international NGOs and/or UN agencies with which the local NGO worked.
- Blocked party screening – Conduct screening via Watchdog Pro.<sup>11</sup>
- Capacity assessment – Conduct capacity assessment in three different areas (finance, procurement and human resources).
- Call for proposal or concept note – Request a proposal and budget from the proposed partner; these are sent to the representative listed in the long-list vetting.
- Partnership selection and secondary due diligence meeting – Score selected partners using specialised scoring tools conducted by review team (by consensus; if consensus is not possible, individually complete, score and submit through email to programmes); compile or rank short-list local NGOs; select top score.

### *Implementation and monitoring phase*

- Sub-grant agreement or memorandum of understanding (MOU) – Finalise and agree on the implementation agreement or MOU.
- Capacity-building plan – Conduct annual capacity-building assessment and develop a plan.
- Partner monthly reporting – Develop monthly narrative and financial report against project objectives.

### *Close out and evaluation phase*

- Grant close-out check list – All grant requirements completed and reported.
- Partner performance evaluation – World Vision conducts a review of the local NGO partnership within 30 days of project completion.
- Lessons learned – To be completed by every partner within 30 days of project ending.
- Go or no-go decision for continuation of the partnership – Decision to be taken after filling close-out checklist.

<sup>11</sup> WatchDOG® Pro enables users to verify your client base against subscribed watch lists, including OFAC, BIS, FBI, Interpol, and many others: [https://watchdogpro.attuswebsolutions.com/Help/WatchDOG%20Pro%207\\_0%20Release%20Notes.pdf](https://watchdogpro.attuswebsolutions.com/Help/WatchDOG%20Pro%207_0%20Release%20Notes.pdf)



## Integrating cash-based programming

Cash transfers can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian response. Cash transfers can be used to transcend the humanitarian-development divide by reinforcing national and local systems with shock-responsive safety nets. They can also support individual and community resilience by stimulating the local economy and helping it recover. Most important, cash transfers enable beneficiaries to make decisions about their own welfare in ways that in-kind assistance cannot.

Cash programming can be modified appropriately for use in conflict contexts. World Vision uses cash transfers where goods are locally available, accessible markets function, beneficiaries express the desire for cash over goods and cash delivery is safe. For example, in South Sudan, World Vision learned that cash programming is a valuable tool to diversify diets and improve child nutrition in IDP and civilian protection camps where local traders have links with outside markets. It is not a viable option outside these camps where markets do not function. More on World Vision's cash transfer adaptation approach in South Sudan can be found at [www.wvi.org](http://www.wvi.org).

World Vision continues to learn from its experiences in cash-based programming in fragile and conflict-affected contexts and will continue to research and build evidence to understand the important role cash-based programming can play in the lives of children and affected communities – even in the most challenging operational environments.

## Care: Systematise proactive security postures

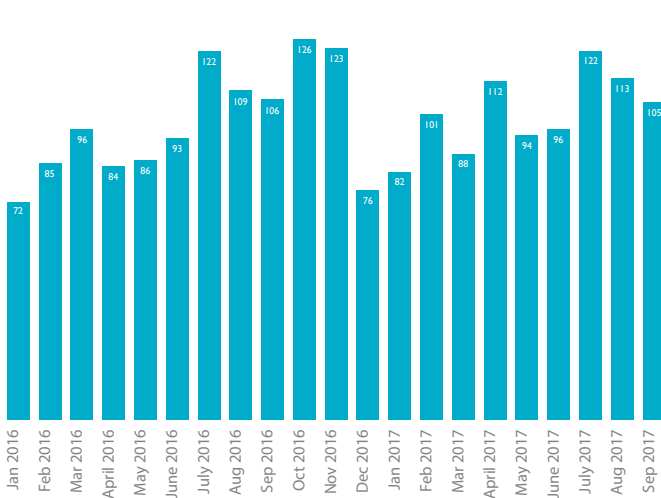
The co-opting of humanitarian assistance by military and armed actors has eroded the perception of humanitarian workers as impartial, neutral and independent of any political agenda. The proliferation of armed actor groups has also made access negotiations and the maintenance of a strong military distinction increasingly difficult. These two combined factors have increased risks to humanitarian workers.

### Security trends for aid personnel

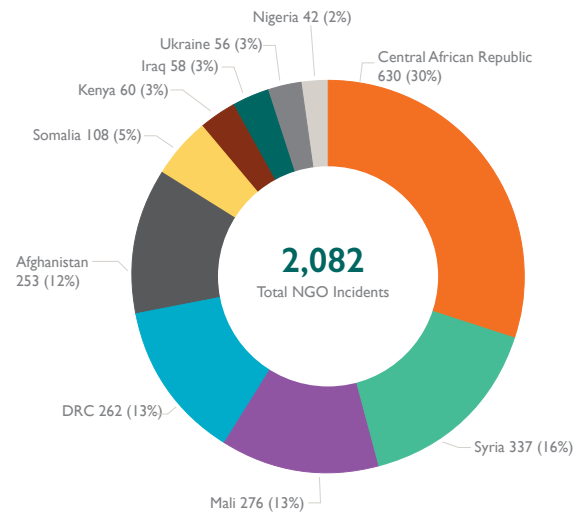
Afghanistan, Syria, South Sudan, the CAR, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Iraq and Somalia account for 60 per cent of all violent attacks on aid workers. From January 2016 to September 2017, there were more than 2,000 incidents of either direct or collateral violence against aid actors. Aid workers were either wounded, kidnapped, or murdered, and often were used as proxy targets or tools for terror or propaganda. During this time period 160 lost their lives (see Figure 2). Data from the Aid Worker Security Database shows an overall decrease in security incidents in recent years, but this is not the result of lower insecurity or threats to aid workers. It is driven by shrinking humanitarian space due to increased volatility, restricted humanitarian access and disregard for International Humanitarian Law. Fewer agencies and humanitarian workers are willing to establish operations. Fewer donors are investing in NGO-led response programmes due to high insecurity and risks to humanitarian personnel. Security in those contexts is a greater determinant of where aid agencies operate than people's needs.

**Figure 2. Total NGO Incident Data (2016–17)**

Total NGO Incidents per Month



Total NGO Incidents per Country



Source: INSO, <http://www.ngosafety.org/keydata-dashboard/>

In order to ensure World Vision is able to stay and deliver aid for conflict-affected populations, World Vision has implemented a number of minimum requirements for its offices. Through regular security briefings all staff are made aware of the risks they may face. In countries rated high risk, staff are required to complete Hostile Environment Awareness Training in order to be deployed or hired. World Vision has also established a Security Risk Management Training programme designed to prepare operational leaders in high-

risk contexts, equipping them with security risk management, profile management, core security requirements, hostage incident management, and crisis management.

Proactive security measures must also consider staff mental health and psychosocial well-being. World Vision supports staff in post-conflict and disaster situations by providing appropriate stress leave, R&R (rest and relaxation), peer support, counselling and access to mental-health professionals.



## Conclusion and recommendations

There is no simple roadmap for operating in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. The nature of these contexts demands constant learning, adaptation and revision. And whilst contexts vary considerably, World Vision's experience across diverse geographies and situations has revealed a number of core lessons:

### **Context: Understand the operating context and develop community trust**

- All humanitarian actors must build in and prioritise systematic context analyses. More staff must be trained to use existing context and conflict-analysis tools at the national and community levels.
- Where contextually appropriate and feasible, all humanitarian actors should build the capacity of communities to analyse their own contexts, develop most likely scenarios, and develop mitigation and response plans accordingly.
- All humanitarian actors should consolidate and triangulate information from programming (including available referral services) as well as operational and security assessments to continuously inform programme strategy and operational decision making. Not doing so (from the start and throughout the programme) can put staff and operations at risk.
- All humanitarian actors must operationalise commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit to carry out the New Way of Working by jointly developing a common narrative and strategy to address drivers, consequences and prevention of future conflicts.
- Donors must resource the development of context-appropriate analyses frameworks.
- Donors must prioritise funding based on needs identified by children and their communities.
- All humanitarian actors must support local ownership of analyses, operational planning and aid delivery. This includes identifying and engaging with existing formal (such as local government, leaders of recognised faith groups) and informal systems and structures (traditional healers, unrecognised faith minorities and so on).

- Humanitarian actors must intentionally increase engagement with faith actors, who often occupy unique positions of influence and can help rebuild trust in broken communities and support recovery and positive coping mechanisms.
- In line with commitments made to the Core Humanitarian Standard, World Vision and all humanitarian actors must continue to invest in finding the best avenues to develop two-way communication with communities in context-appropriate languages and media. Clear, consistent communication is even more crucial if on-site presence is not easily maintained.
- Humanitarian actors must maintain flexible global operating and programming approaches that allow local decision making according to the context.

### **Cohesion: Implement a rights-based approach and strengthen social cohesion from the start**

- Humanitarian actors must continue deliberately to integrate conflict sensitivity as a minimum at the onset of responses in conflict-affected contexts and integrate peacebuilding approaches and recovery and transition planning.
- Humanitarian actors should ensure that peacebuilding and social cohesion programming must be paired with opportunities to seek alternatives to conflict, namely, through youth-focused livelihood programmes,
- All humanitarian actors must support local ownership of analyses, operational planning and aid delivery. This includes identifying and engaging with existing formal (such as local government, leaders of recognised faith groups) and informal systems and structures (traditional healers, unrecognised faith minorities, and so on).
- Humanitarian actors must increasingly engage with faith actors.
- Donors must prioritise a peace-first approach and fully resource peacebuilding and social cohesion programming, particularly programming with longer funding cycles.

- States and regional bodies with influence must use their political capital to press for peaceful resolutions to ongoing conflict, support inclusive dialogues for peace and reconciliation, and use their influence to stop further escalations of conflict.

### **Children: Keep children at the centre**

- All humanitarian actors should commit to putting children at the centre of response strategies – this includes mainstreaming child protection and MHPSS across all levels and sectors within humanitarian programmes.
- All humanitarian actors must meaningfully scale up consultation with and involvement of children and youth in the design, development and delivery of humanitarian and development programming.
- Donors must prioritise investment in child protection, MHPSS and education as life-saving interventions and provide necessary resources to meet needs and ensure families (caregivers and parents) are included in programmatic approaches to supporting child well-being.

### **Culture: Create a flexible, agile organisational culture that equips the right staff for the right job**

- Humanitarian actors must continually improve communication with all stakeholders regarding context shifts and decision making.
- Humanitarian staff should be trained and familiar with International Humanitarian Law, Humanitarian Principles, Core Humanitarian Standards and all tools to ensure principled humanitarian assistance.
- All humanitarian actors must develop fit-for-purpose organisational systems and procedures to ensure humanitarian operations are responsive to rapidly changing contexts.
- Donors must reassess the risk appetite for conflict-affected contexts and work with aid actors to jointly develop context-appropriate thresholds for risk.

- Donors must actualise commitments made towards the Grand Bargain by scaling up more flexible multi-year funding to support adaptability and programme responsiveness.
- Humanitarian staff must be appropriately briefed on the contexts and risks of the areas in which they will be working and on the resources made available to them.
- Staff must perform their duties in line with the core humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence and understand the centrality of protection to their work.
- Humanitarian actors should invest in partner capacity and ensure that they have ownership of the programme from the beginning to the end.
- Donors must build staff security and well-being into grants and basic operational costs.
- Donors should recognise the additional costs associated with remote management, including emphasis on capability development and increased monitoring.
- In restrictive contexts negotiation skills take on an elevated importance. Staff should be equipped to negotiate with a variety of different actors, including armed groups, headquarter offices, local and central governments, community leadership, and so forth.

### **Care: Systematise proactive security postures**

- Humanitarian actors should ensure that all staff receive security training in line with the risk rating of the environments in which they are expected to operate.
- Humanitarian actors should ensure that all offices have the necessary equipment to support staff security. Aid actors should integrate and build security management into all cycles of the programme.
- Humanitarian actors should accept internal and external avenues for staff mental health well-being and resilience building as necessary costs of doing business in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

## Annex: Case studies from the field

This annex summarises five case studies touching on various project models and approaches collected from Uganda, the Central African Republic (CAR), the Kurdistan Region of the Republic of Iraq (KRI) and South Sudan (two case studies). The case studies provide an overview of World Vision’s programming interventions and document best practices of adaptation, implementation and iteration of project models and approaches to fit the realities of those contexts and ensure that children affected by conflict are better served, resourced and empowered.

### South Sudan

Title: *Nutrition Programming in Conflict Settings: South Sudan Case Study*



### Uganda

Title: *A Case Study for the Child Protection in Emergencies (CPIE) Integrated Programme for Refugees in Uganda 2016*



### Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Title: *Let Us Learn: A Case Study of Delivering Adaptive Education and Protection in Emergency Programmes in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*



### Central African Republic

Title: *Reducing Children’s Vulnerability to Violence: A Case Study from the Central African Republic*



### South Sudan

Title: *Cash-based Programming to Address Hunger in Conflict-affected South Sudan: A Case Study*







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