THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME'S CONTRIBUTION TO IMPROVING THE PROSPECTS FOR PEACE IN EL SALVADOR
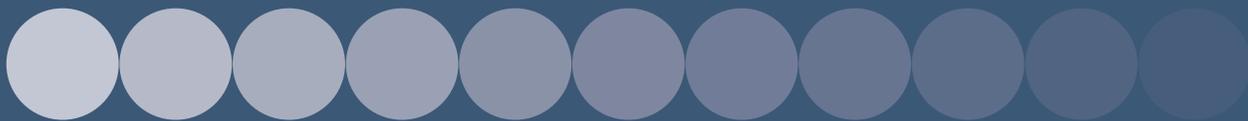
CAROLINE DELGADO

THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME'S CONTRIBUTION TO IMPROVING THE PROSPECTS FOR PEACE IN EL SALVADOR

Working Paper

CAROLINE DELGADO

November 2019

sipri

STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL
PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

WFP
World Food Programme

Methodology and disclaimer

This El Salvador Working Paper is one of four country case studies in the first phase of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute–World Food Programme Knowledge Partnership. For each case study, a joint team of staff from SIPRI and WFP conducted in-country research for approximately two weeks to identify the possible contributions to improving the prospects for peace resulting from WFP programmes. The methodology for this analysis involved a literature review of the country context and of WFP and other programmes, key informant interviews with WFP country office staff, beneficiaries and local experts, focus group discussions with beneficiaries, and consultations with partners and experts in the country. Each country visit ended with a presentation of the findings and a discussion with the managers of the country office. The presentation led to a discussion of the contemporary political, social and technical challenges of incorporating a conflict lens, conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding work into WFP programming. The country report was then written up, incorporating clarifications and additional evidence as these became available. As a result, this analysis is not independent of context. The findings of all four country working papers informed the *World Food Programme's Contribution to Improving the Prospects for Peace,* the preliminary report on phase 1 of the partnership, which was published in June 2019.

Some of the recommendations in this Working Paper will require long-term, corporate policy adjustments at WFP Headquarters level, beyond that which the country office can decide and take action on as an independent entity.

The findings and recommendations and any errors or omissions are those of the author and do not represent the position of SIPRI, WFP or the management, executive directors or boards of these institutions.

Contents

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

ADESCO	Asociación de Desarrollo Comunal (Community development association)
CBPP	Community-based participatory planning
CSP	Country Strategic Plan
DUI	Documento Unico de Identidad (National identification document)
FFA	Food assistance for assets
IDP	Internally displaced person
KYC	Know Your Client
PBF	Peacebuilding Fund
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SO	Strategic Outcome
TOC	Theory of change
TPS	Temporary protected status
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive Summary

This case study is part of a wider knowledge partnership between the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), which seeks to better understand and strengthen WFP's contribution to improving the prospects for peace. Phase 1 began by devising three key questions, the answers to which would build the evidence base needed to assess WFP's programming from a peacebuilding perspective, refine practice and develop policy. The questions were:

1. What is WFP's contribution to improving the prospects for peace?
2. How could WFP enhance its contribution to improving the prospects for peace?
3. How can WFP measure its contributions to improving the prospects for peace?

To test the validity of these questions, four country case studies were selected: El Salvador, Kyrgyzstan, Mali and Iraq. The four countries represent WFP programming in diverse situations, ranging from conditions of outright violent conflict to cases where a transition to peace is under way.

This case study Working Paper contains detailed findings from the field research in El Salvador. This research involved a review of country office and programme documentation and the relevant literature. The core of the country case study research, however, involved qualitative assessment through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and project site visits. Interviews were held with country office staff, project beneficiaries and other key stakeholders.

The case study focused on three specific interventions in WFP's portfolio in El Salvador: supporting the Government of El Salvador's social protection system, resilience building and crisis response. To help articulate and test the impact of WFP interventions in complex conflict and peacebuilding environments, the case study employed the concept of theories of change. A theory of change (TOC) spells out an understanding of how a specific activity will result in the achievement of desired changes in a particular context, as expressed in a simple cause and effect statement. It provides a testable hypothesis that makes explicit the assumptions that underpin the planned activities, setting out the expectation of what they will achieve. A detailed methodology for using theories of change in research is set out in the preliminary report on the WFP–SIPRI Knowledge Partnership, which was published in June 2019.[1]

Conflict context analysis in El Salvador

El Salvador is among the most violent countries in the world, as measured by the number of homicides. Violence is largely linked to rival street gangs—maras—fighting one another and against the state. The origins of the maras can be found in the civil war that ravaged the country in the 1980s, and among emigrant Salvadoran communities that fled to the United States during the civil war. Faced with limited opportunities in the USA and their resultant exclusion from society, youth in particular began to associate with the gangs that were already part of an established subculture in the USA. On their return to El Salvador—either having been deported or following the end of the civil war—the post-conflict context proved favourable for a replication of the gang culture, which rapidly expanded across the country.

---

[1] Delgado, C. et al., *The World Food Programme's Contribution to Improving the Prospects for Peace* (SIPRI: Stockholm, 2019).

To address the increasing gang problem, successive governments have responded with a mix of iron-fist security policies and concerted efforts to increase community-based violence prevention activities with a focus on strengthening social cohesion.[2] The policies aimed at preventing marginalized youth from joining gangs and supporting their reintegration into society have had only limited success and the programmes have not resulted in significant reductions in crime. The failure to address the underlying causes of the civil war, which were tied to socio-economic inequality, inequitable land distribution and lack of employment opportunities, means that gangs have in many cases come to represent the only opportunity for disenfranchised youth to cater for their economic and social needs.

While gangs can provide for certain socio-economic needs in marginalized populations in a context of state weakness, more than anything they are perpetrators of intense and persistent levels of violence, from homicides and threats or extortion to social control. Moreover, fragile and weak rule of law institutions and official corruption have resulted in high degrees of impunity, as the states does not have the capacity to protect people who are willing to testify in court from acts of reprisal. The situation has resulted in low levels of trust in law enforcement, the police and the security forces.

All of these factors have important regional implications. The country is an important trafficking route for drugs, arms and people. The establishment of transnational gangs has had a serious effect on local dynamics but can only be tackled through a regional response. Similarly, migration from El Salvador and back through deportations is a phenomenon that has devastating human rights and security implications that cannot be managed or regulated by individual states.

There is a negative cycle of food insecurity, violence and migration, as structural inequality, poverty and gang violence affect the food security of the most vulnerable. Gang dynamics, which in addition to direct violence and the threat of violence involve high levels of extortion and restrictions on communities, result in the destruction of livelihoods and forced migration. In addition, the country is regularly exposed to severe climate effects, such as El Nino, that cause both severe drought and extreme flooding.

WFP's contribution to improving the prospects for peace in El Salvador

*TOC 1: **If** urban youth at risk of stigma, violence and displacement have access to opportunities for socio-economic inclusion and safe spaces, **then** they can connect and develop, become agents of change in their own communities and support themselves and their families without becoming caught up in conflict dynamics.*

This TOC focuses exclusively on urban youth at risk of violence, displacement and stigmatization because they live in marginalized and gang-controlled areas in the capital, San Salvador. Two specific WFP projects—Gastromotiva and ConectArte—target this group, seeking to improve food security and contribute to inclusion by enhancing employment prospects and increasing incomes while reducing stigma. The Gastromotiva project is funded by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (PBF). These projects make an identifiable contribution to improving the prospects for peace in two main ways: by enhancing everyday peacebuilding at the local level; and by enhancing resilience to gang-related dynamics through the empowerment of vulnerable individuals. The projects created important peacebuilding spaces that allowed youth to find collective meaning and organize against violence, marginalization and

---

[2] A new government took office shortly after the case study was conducted. This section does not refer to any policies or interventions by the government that has been in office since June 2019.

exclusion by fostering relationships, community cohesion and trust, and breaking with the past. Both projects also helped in a number of ways to reduce the push and pull factors of gang recruitment. In particular, youth were able to find a sense of belonging in the project, which helped individuals to resist looking to gangs to meet this need.

*TOC 2: **If** returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) have access to transitional humanitarian assistance linked to a comprehensive package of support, **then** this improves the opportunities for sustainable economic, social and psychosocial reintegration.*

This TOC relates to WFP's humanitarian response to the human mobility crisis, which targets highly vulnerable communities affected by violence and forced migration. Beneficiaries can be either returnees or IDPs. While both groups face similar challenges, there are also important differences. The joint support provided by WFP, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Plan International is based on the assumption that the path to reintegration is linked to psychological, social and economic support. It makes a clear and tangible contribution to the re/integration process of these vulnerable and neglected populations, set against the limited and fragmented state and non-state response. In particular, psychological and psychosocial support were found to be extremely important in the re/integration process. WFP is also well-placed to make an important contribution to improving the strategic national response, which the expiry of the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) programme in the USA has made a pressing issue (see box 4.2).

*TOC 3: **If** rural communities vulnerable to climate change and violence have access to: (a) avenues for community participation; (b) diversified sources of income; (c) increased knowledge; and (d) enhanced mechanisms for improving the management of natural resources, **then** there will be increased social cohesion and greater resilience to contextual conflict dynamics.*

This TOC focuses on improving social cohesion among rural communities in the Dry Corridor and on improving resilience to conflict dynamics and climate change impacts. Climate change acts as a risk multiplier, especially in contexts of social tension and conflict. The region is experiencing one of the worst droughts of the past 30 years.[3] This has had disastrous consequences for the production of staple grains, and particularly affected small-scale farmers who have lost most of their maize harvest. At the same time, social cohesion is low, largely as a result of gang-related conflict dynamics, which has resulted in high levels of individualism and a lack of solidarity as a self-protection mechanism. The TOC is based on the assumption that restoring social relations is an important aspect of peacebuilding. To this end, WFP's resilience interventions have made identifiable contributions to improving social cohesion by creating space for communities to come together and avenues for communication and support. This has involved the creation of channels for horizontal communication and collaboration through the involvement of landless agricultural daily wage labourers and smallholders with landowners, as well as vertical communication channels between communities and local government. The interventions also had important impacts on women's empowerment.

---

[3] Vaqué, J., 'Chronology of the dry corridor: the impetus for resilience in Central America', Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1 June 2017.

TOC 4: **If** *mechanisms for connecting citizens with local and national authorities are strengthened and referral mechanisms put in place to enhance access to services and the quality of service delivery,* **then** *this will contribute to fostering trust between the state and its citizens.*

This TOC applies to WFP's programming as a whole rather than to any specific intervention. It focuses on vertical integration to restore the ruptured social contract between state and society, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach and partnerships. Vertical integration refers to the need for greater coherence and coordination up and down the chain of relationships that links international, national and local level actors in peacebuilding contexts. The TOC is based on the recognition that the strength and behaviour of state institutions are among the key determinants of insecurity and marginalization in vulnerable groups. It is through institutions that the state generates a secure and inclusive living environment, and ensures that policies and legal frameworks are developed and applied equitably. WFP's work supports the restoration of the state-society contract, the fragility of which is at the heart of El Salvador's development dilemmas. WFP is able to work with marginalized communities and the state alike. Throughout over 40 years of working in El Salvador, WFP has gained the trust and respect of the government, other agencies and local communities, which look to WFP for leadership in the humanitarian and development realms and increasingly for its support of wider peacebuilding activities.

Enhancing WFP's contributions to improving the prospects for peace in El Salvador: challenges and opportunities

Conflict sensitivity around gang dynamics

It is well known that the introduction of aid into conflict and peacebuilding environments can influence patterns of violence and expose intended beneficiaries to new risks. The conflict sensitivity concerns identified in this country case study predominantly relate to gang dynamics. The projects have to navigate the contextually fluid boundaries between marginalization, gang affiliation and criminality. While great efforts are made to ensure that beneficiaries are not gang members, such affiliations are not always clear-cut. Moreover, in all the projects visited by the research team, gang dynamics translated into a need for WFP to negotiate access with the gangs, while many project beneficiaries had to negotiate permission to participate. In addition, interventions will in general risk exposing beneficiaries to gangs. This can be particularly problematic when beneficiaries want to remain hidden.

Gender

The importance of a gender-sensitive approach is well established in all forms of peacebuilding, humanitarian and development work. In El Salvador, sharp gender distinctions and inequalities are written into gang dynamics and the wider macho culture. This results in a much more limited space for women to exercise agency and puts pressure on men to adopt dominating behaviour. Interventions that seek to contribute to enhancing the prospects for peace must consider how violence and insecurity have differential impacts on women and men.

Measurement

WFP is making identifiable contributions to enhancing the prospects for peace in El Salvador. However, few of these contributions are currently captured in existing monitoring and evaluation procedures. Capturing such aspects in order to measure

WFP's contribution will require a greater focus on qualitative and innovative methods. This Working Paper recommends a specific focus on the development of community-identified indicators as a way to capture the thus far undocumented outcomes observed by the research team and, indeed, by country office staff.

Ways forward

The evidence compiled for this Working Paper indicates that WFP programming does have a positive contribution to make to improving the prospects for peace in El Salvador. There are, however, problems, deficiencies and missed opportunities that need to be addressed. The Working Paper makes 24 context- and programme-specific recommendations to this end. However, the most important recommendation is to conduct a solid conflict analysis. Further research is required and phase 2 will both broaden the inquiry, by incorporating new countries, and deepen it, through a rigorous focus on specific intervention areas. WFP programming in El Salvador will both contribute to and benefit from future findings as the Knowledge Partnership evolves.

1. Introduction

The World Food Programme (WFP) and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) have established a knowledge partnership in order to build an evidence base to assess whether—and if so how—WFP's programming contributes to improving the prospects for peace and to identify where—if anywhere—it has unintended negative effects. The partnership will support future operational refinement based on the research conclusions and it is expected that this work will inform an evaluation of the policy on WFP's role in peacebuilding that is planned for 2021. Given the complex context in El Salvador, where post-conflict gang-related violence now surpasses the levels of violence seen in the civil war of the 1980s, WFP El Salvador was selected to participate in the research as one of four case studies in phase I. The objectives of the case studies were to understand in each context: (*a*) WFP's contribution to improving the prospects for peace; (*b*) how WFP might enhance its contribution to improving the prospects for peace; and (*c*) how WFP can measure its contributions to improving the prospects for peace.

The case study research involved a review of programme documents and the literature on El Salvador, a review of the data gathered by WFP, discussions with staff and in-depth interviews with a wide range of stakeholders. There were also field visits to project sites in the municipalities of San Miguel and Uluazapa in the department of San Miguel; Jiquilisco, Ozatlan and Usulután in the department of Usulután; Suchitoto in the department of Cuscatlan; and Agua Caliente in the department of Chalatenango, as well as to project sites in San Salvador.

The case study focused on part of the portfolio of the Country Strategic Plan (CSP) and identified four main theories of change (TOCs) on how programming might be contributing to improving the prospects for peace in El Salvador. Due to funding constraints and other factors, part of the CSP is currently on hold. As a result, not all of the Strategic Outcomes (SOs) are currently being implemented. The TOCs therefore covered three of the five SOs. This case study provides valuable input into the upcoming mid-term CSP evaluation. It is also an important step in a longer process of reflective organizational learning for the country office.

2. Contextual analysis

The civil war and gang violence

The civil war in El Salvador formally ended in 1992. The Chapultepec peace accords have been hailed as a success by the international community but the violence did not end with end of the war. El Salvador had the highest homicide rates in the world in 2015, at 105 per 100 000.[4] The global average in the same year was just over 5 per 100 000.[5] Translated in actual figures, an estimated 20 000 Salvadorans were killed between 1 January 2014 and 31 December 2017.[6] Around 75 000 people were killed during the 12 years of civil war. The majority of recent killings are attributed to street gangs known as maras (see box 2.1).

In response to the escalating violence, the Salvadoran Government brokered a truce between the two main street gangs in 2012. As part of this truce, concessions were granted to the gangs such as the release of imprisoned gang leaders. So-called peace zones were created where the gangs agreed to halt violence and other criminal activities in return for the government agreeing to withdraw the military. However, the truce did not lead to a reduction in violence.* While the homicide rate did fall, it is believed that killings were simply replaced by disappearances.[7] The truce broke down in 2014, after which levels of violence sharply increased. Following the ending of the truce, the government granted the authorities the right to use unrestricted force without any fear of consequences. The result was that eight times as may gang members were killed by the police in 2015 than in 2013.[8] There have also been widespread human rights abuses perpetrated by the state, including extrajudicial and arbitrary executions.[9]

Violence and insecurity in El Salvador have been exacerbated by the weak judicial system, corruption and high levels of impunity. The lack of trust and confidence in the state authorities and the intense pressure from gangs mean that the majority of crimes go unreported. Moreover, of the crimes that are reported, an estimated 90 per cent remain unsolved.[10] According to Transparency International, 31 per cent of Salvadorans reported having paid a bribe in order to access basic public services in 2017.[11] Judges have also accepted bribes from gangs. In 2012, it was announced that 80 per cent of the country's judges were under investigation in connection with corruption-related complaints made against them.[12] The country's prison system is among the world's most overcrowded. Approximately 39 000 prisoners are held in 14 prisons. Some of these have been placed under a state of emergency due to the high number of prisoner deaths.[13] In order to stem the killing of rival gang members inside the prisons, different gangs are now housed in separate prisons. This practice, however, has given the gangs a safe place to organize and consolidate their structures while confirming their identity as social outcasts.[14]

---

[4] World Bank, 'International homicides per 100 000 people: El Salvador, 1994–2017', [n.d.].

[5] McEvoy, C. and Hideg, G., *Global Violent Deaths, 2017* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2017).

[6] International Crisis Group, 'Life under gang rule in El Salvador', 26 Nov. 2018.

[7] InSight Crime, 'El Salvador profile', Updated 15 Sep. 2017.

[8] Cheatham, A., 'Central America's turbulent northern triangle', Council on Foreign Relations, Updated 1 Oct. 2019.

[9] United Nations, General Assembly, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions on her mission to El Salvador', A/HRC/38/44/Add.2, 7 Dec. 2018.

[10] InSight Crime (note 7).

[11] Pring, C., *People and Corruption: Latin America and the Caribbean* (Transparency International: Oct. 2017).

[12] InSight Crime (note 7).

[13] International Crisis Group, 'El Salvador's politics of perpetual violence', *Latin America Report* no. 64 (Dec. 2017).

[14] International Crisis Group, *Mafia of the Poor: Gang Violence and Extortion in Central America* (International Crisis Group: Brussels, 2017).

* This is a correction of the text in an earlier version, which read: 'However, the truce *did lead* to a reduction in violence'.

Box 2.1. Gangs

Gangs have been a persistent phenomenon in El Salvador but it was only in the post-conflict period that the mara street gangs emerged as the main national security threat. The gang structures can be traced back to emigrant Salvadoran communities who fled to the USA during the Salvadoran civil war. Most youth in particular found only limited opportunities in the USA. Unable to integrate into US society, many started to associate with the local gangs that were part of an existing subculture there. The peace accords between the warring parties in El Salvador, however, prompted several rounds of mass deportations from the USA, which included the return of hundreds of thousands of gang-affiliated youths with criminal records. Once back in El Salvador, deported youth were often stigmatized by both their communities and the authorities, and had only limited access to education, social services and employment. The lack of development opportunities pushed many to replicate US gang structures in El Salvador. Being better organized, more violent and equipped with heavier weapons, they quickly usurped the local street gangs, which had mainly been involved in localized turf disputes.

The government responded with repressive security policies. These expanded police and military powers but involved few policies aimed at preventing marginalized youth from joining gangs or to support their reintegration into society. The approach largely failed to reduce crime or to address the underlying causes of the civil war, which were linked to socio-economic inequality, inequitable land distribution and the lack of employment opportunities. The gangs in many respects came to represent the only opportunity for disenfranchised youth to cater for their economic and social needs. Youth between the ages of 14 and 19 are most affected. The average age of recruitment is 16 but children as young as 7 are sometimes recruited. Recruitment often happens in the schools, where the gangs have a strong presence. In general, boys are recruited to kill while girls are recruited for sexual exploitation, to recruit other girls and to collect extortion money. Being a member of a gang is a path to social recognition for youth, which is itself a reflection of serious underlying structural tensions such as family disintegration and break-up, social stresses and institutional weaknesses.

Today the maras have an estimated 70 000 members and an additional support base of family members and communities of around 400 000 who rely on the income they generate—this in a country of just over 6.3 million people. The majority belong either to Barrio 18 or to Mara Salvatrucha 13. While gangs can provide for some of the socio-economic needs of marginalized populations in a context of state weakness, more than anything they are perpetrators of intense and persistent levels of violence. Extortion is the main source of income and the most widespread activity. According to the El Salvador Central Bank, extortion is estimated to cost business USD 756 million annually.

Source: International Crisis Group, *Mafia of the Poor: Gang Violence and Extortion in Central America* (International Crisis Group: Brussels, 2017).

All of these factors have important regional implications. The country is an important trafficking route for drugs, arms and people, which has led to the establishment of transnational gangs with ties to Colombian and Mexican drug cartels. These transnational gangs are aided by local Salvadoran gangs and by corrupt border police and military officials.[15] There is a vicious circle of marginalization, gang membership, international organized crime, illegal trafficking and migration. These dynamics transcend national borders. The policies of countries such as the United States and Mexico—in particular their migration policies—have had a big impact on the dynamics of El Salvador and other countries in the Northern Triangle.[16]

Gang violence and food insecurity

The situation also has important implications for food insecurity. Many livelihoods have been destroyed by the gangs, and this particularly affects the populations most vulnerable to food insecurity, such as urban and rural marginalized communities. Gangs restrict movement and operate through extortion, which further reduces the resources of marginalized populations by limiting their capacities to generate income. Delay or refusal to pay trigger violent retaliation. Extortion also leads to significant increases in food prices, especially in areas that have fewer shops or are

---

[15] InSight Crime (note 7).

[16] Menjìvar, C. and Gomez Cervantes, A.. 'El Salvador: civil war, natural disasters, and gang violence drive migration policy', Migration Policy Institute, 29 Aug. 2018; and Author interview, Facultad Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (FLASCO), San Salvador, 13 Mar. 2019.

more easily controlled by gangs.[17] All the above, along with the death or disability of a breadwinner resulting from acts of violence, increase the level of household debt—often to unbearable levels.[18] Those who decide to migrate become indebted to people smugglers and are often forced to pledge their property as security.[19] If the migration is unsuccessful or there is a loss of life in the attempt to emigrate, the entire family can be made landless and/or homeless. Overall, the emigration of family members can result in increased precariousness and the potential exploitation of family members who stay behind—especially the women and children. In addition, families that receive remittances from abroad often become victims of threats from and extortion by gangs.

[17] WFP et al., *Food Security and Emigration: Why People Flee and the Impact on Family Members Left Behind in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras* (WFP: Panama City, Aug. 2017).

[18] WFP et al. (note 17).

[19] WFP et al. (note 17).

3. WFP presence in El Salvador

WFP has been present in El Salvador since 1971, supporting the national government in its efforts to improve the food security and nutrition of the population. Although significant progress has been made over the decades, food insecurity and malnutrition remain persistent challenges exacerbated by natural or human-induced disasters, gender inequality, slow economic growth, high levels of public debt and the high homicide rate.

The Government of El Salvador is implementing a Five-Year Development Plan (2014–2019) and the Plan El Salvador Seguro in response to these challenges.[20] These plans focus on social protection measures by, among other things, seeking to increase access to basic services and food production. The government is seeking WFP's support and cooperation with enhancing national food security, the nutrition framework, the social insurance system, nutrition programmes, assistance to smallholders and resilience-building. WFP's Country Strategic Plan sets out its support for improving food security and nutrition in El Salvador between 2017 and 2021. In addition, responding to the context and the needs of the country as outlined in the Plan El Salvador Seguro and the reintegration strategy for returnees,[21] WFP El Salvador is adapting and diversifying its work to include programmes that address the protection concerns of youth through training projects involving the teaching of chef skills and an urban art project.

WFP has faced funding challenges that have impeded project implementation, particularly in the areas of nutrition and activities to provide farmers with access to markets. These difficulties can be attributed principally to a reorientation of traditional donor support to migration-related and violence prevention programmes. Resource availability for longer term climate change adaptation and resilience-enhancing activities has been more consistent.

In 2018 the WFP country office took a strategic decision to expand its activities around violence prevention, assistance to victims of violence and migration-related activities, particularly in the areas of migrant returnees and displaced populations. As a direct result, WFP has built stronger partnerships with the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and was able to secure new funding from what are considered non-traditional donors to WFP in El Salvador, such as the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).

---

[20] Secretaría Tecnica y de Planificación Gobierno de El Salvador, 'Plan Quinquenal de Desarrollo, 2014–2019', 2014 [Five-year development plan, 2014–2019 of the Government of El Salvador Technical and Planning Secretariat]; and 'Plan El Salvador Seguro', Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Ciudadana y Convivencia [Secure El Salvador plan of the National Council of Citizen Security and Coexistence].

[21] Política Nacional para la Protección y Desarrollo de la Persona Migrante Salvadorena y su Familia [National policy for the protection and development of salvadoran migrant people and their families].

4. WFP's contribution to enhancing the prospects for peace in El Salvador

National technocratic peacebuilding interventions and localized everyday peacebuilding

Peace and conflict are complex phenomena and each takes many different forms and has many different qualities. Peacebuilding interventions have traditionally focused on technocratic state building and good governance to induce change and ensure that the state and society no longer exclude particular groups from political participation or economic benefits.[22] International actors that seek to contribute to greater peace in the world, however, need to ask themselves what they mean by peace, while recognizing that peace is perceived in different ways by different people at different times in different cultures and political systems. It is often the case that peace and conflict are described in ways that are alien to the societies that are experiencing conflict or a transition to peace, and that alternative ways of reading conflict and peace are undervalued.[23] If WFP programming is to contribute to improving the prospects for peace, it must consistently engage both with macro-level technocratic peacebuilding interventions around state building and good governance, and with localized everyday peacebuilding efforts. WFP, which enjoys strong support and is trusted by state and grassroots level actors, is well positioned to strike this balance and make a tangible contribution to enhancing the prospects for sustainable peace in El Salvador.

Fundamentally, peacebuilding is an experiment. It is impossible to predict with any certainty prior to implementation whether a peacebuilding activity will achieve its desired peacebuilding outcome, or whether that outcome will have the hypothesized effect on violent conflict or peaceful cooperation in the recipient country.[24]

Objectives of the country case study

The El Salvador case study is part of a knowledge partnership between WFP and SIPRI that aims to better understand and strengthen WFP's contribution to improving the prospects for peace. The overall objective of the case study was to contribute to the evidence base that is being built by the WFP–SIPRI Knowledge Partnership around understanding WFP's contribution to improving the prospects for peace, how WFP might enhance its contribution to improving the prospects for peace and how WFP can measure its contributions to improving the prospects for peace. To answer these questions, the research in El Salvador mainly consisted of qualitative research interviews involving key stakeholders at the national and subnational levels. Qualitative research was complemented by assessments of the available quantitative data.

The country case study looked across WFP's entire programme portfolio as set out in the five-year CSP and identified four main TOCs around how programming could be contributing to improving the prospects for peace in El Salvador. The TOCs were discussed and refined in collaboration with country office staff and existing data collection tools were reviewed to determine the availability of relevant data on the proposed TOCs. The case study should provide valuable input into the upcoming

---

[22] Campbell, S. P., *Global Governance and Local Peace: Accountability and Performance in International Peacebuilding* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2018).

[23] MacGinty, R., 'Indicators+: A Proposal for Everyday Peace Indicators', *Evaluation and Program Planning*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2013).

[24] Campbell (note 22).

mid-term CSP review. It is also an important step in a longer process of reflective organizational learning for the country office.

El Salvador and the prospects for peace

El Salvador represents a particular peacebuilding situation. Although the civil war ended almost 30 years ago, the disruption to daily life caused by widespread gang violence is becoming increasingly like experiences of war. International law classifies gang violence as a domestic criminal issue in most circumstances. The nature, organizational structures and capacities of gangs do not usually meet the definition of armed groups. In El Salvador, however, gangs are increasingly pitted against state forces in a political struggle to gain control of both territory and populations.[25] Military force is increasingly being used to combat gangs, while gangs increasingly display a level of political organization that strains and challenges the legitimacy of the state.[26] The gangs have significant levels of territorial control, albeit highly localized, and exercise strong control over communities. Nonetheless, since gang violence is not considered armed conflict, the humanitarian agencies that respond to the consequences of gang violence do not enjoy the special protection of international humanitarian law. In fact, any humanitarian agencies that interact with gang members risk being considered associates of criminal entities.[27] Against this background, exploring the potential for WFP's food security interventions to contribute to enhancing the prospects for peace becomes highly pertinent.

Findings

TOC 1: **If** *urban youth at risk of stigma, violence and displacement have access to opportunities for socio-economic inclusion and safe spaces,* **then** *they can connect and develop, become agents of change in their own communities and support themselves and their families without becoming caught up in conflict dynamics.*

This TOC relates to SO1, which is focused on supporting the Government of El Salvador to strengthen its capacity to deliver an integrated, gender- and nutrition-sensitive national social protection system. To this end, WFP implements the Gastromotiva and ConectArte projects, among others, from which this TOC is derived.

Gastromotiva and ConectArte are aligned with the government's response by helping returnee migrants to break the vicious circle between food insecurity, violence and migration. Both projects aim to improve food security and protection for youth in situations of social vulnerability in El Salvador by improving their employment prospects and incomes through professional development. The projects are implemented in partnership with public and private sector entities, such as the University of Francisco Gavidia, supermarket chains, cafes and restaurants. WFP intends to scale-up the projects by increasing the number of participants and private sector partners in 2019. Gastromotiva is funded by the joint UN PBF and is fully supported by the government, which aims to replicate the model in its national social protection system.[28]

Gastromotiva and ConectArte are implemented over a period of six to nine months. Project beneficiaries—and the ConectArte implementation locations—are selected in conjunction with local authorities. The local mayor's office proposes a list of beneficiaries and WFP assesses their eligibility. Gastromotiva, which specifically aims

---

[25] Applebaum, A. and Mawby, B., *Gang Violence as Armed Conflict: A New Perspective on El Salvador,* Policy Brief (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security: Washington, DC, 2018).

[26] Applebaum and Mawby (note 25).

[27] Applebaum and Mawby (note 25).

[28] The other partners in the PBF are the IOM and the United Nations Development Programme.

to target returnees and displaced youth, also involves migration officials in the selection process. However, the mechanisms for the targeting of and outreach to prospective participants in Gastromotiva were unclear. There were not many returnees or IDPs in the group interviewed by the research team. Instead, the beneficiaries could be characterized as 'youth at risk'. In the first month, interested youth participate in a selection process that combines individual and group-based interviews and a four-day residential camp. Following the selection process, Gastromotiva participants acquire professional cooking skills and hands-on practice in a two-month work placement in a restaurant, as well as a university diploma in chef skills, with the aim of gaining formal employment. Project participants receive a monthly cash incentive of $75 for the duration of the programme.

ConectArte has a stronger community-oriented focus and interrelated objectives to transform spaces, improve community cohesion and reduce stigma. Participants receive training in street art techniques and complete a community project designed to revitalize the public spaces in their communities. They are also engaged in voluntary work through which they share their skills by giving classes to children in their communities.

Both projects target vulnerable youth in marginal areas of San Salvador. These urban areas are characterized by a strong gang presence and related gang dynamics, such as access and movement restrictions, high levels of social control, forced recruitment, extortion, threat and killings. Gang dynamics have a negative impact on schooling, which—coupled with stigma—contributes to high levels of unemployment and high school dropout rates in these areas. According to the WFP Country Office, 62 per cent of 15–24-year-olds are not in education due to economic hardship and violence, whereas 26 per cent neither study nor work.[29] As a consequence of living in violent and marginalized areas, youth are often stigmatized as dangerous.

Analysis

Through their focus on urban youth at risk of stigma, violence and displacement, the Gastromotiva and ConectArte projects contribute to improving the prospects for peace in El Salvador by enhancing everyday peacebuilding at the local level and enhancing resilience to gang-related dynamics through empowerment.

Enhancing everyday peacebuilding at the local level. The importance of local everyday aspects of peacebuilding is increasingly recognized, as are the weaknesses of the predominant understanding of peacebuilding as a technical exercise in state building.[30] The notion of everyday peace recognizes the agency and significance of actors at the sub-state level. Drawing on notions of vernacular and human security, everyday peace is context-specific and involves the observations and decisions made by individuals and communities as they navigate their everyday environment.[31] The 'local' and 'the everyday' are important spaces for politics, knowledge production and potential emancipation, and thus important locations for peacebuilding.[32] Everyday practices in this sense means responding to structural attempts to organize life, negotiate structural and overt violence and re-appropriate spaces that have been

---

[29] Data based on government surveys cited in the Gastromotiva concept note.

[30] MacGinty, R. and Richmond, O. P., 'The local turn in peace building: a critical agenda for peace', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 5 (2013); MacGinty, R. and Firchow, P., 'Top-down and Bottom-up narratives of peace and conflict', *Politics*, vol. 36, no. 3 (2016); and Björkdahl, A. and Höglund, K., *Precarious Peacebuilding: Friction in Global-local Encounters* (Taylor & Francis: London, 2013).

[31] MacGinty and Firchow (note 30).

[32] Berents, H. and McEvoy-Levy, S., 'Theorising youth and everyday peace(building)', *Peacebuilding*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2015).

lost to conflict.[33] This is achieved through engagement with the community and its daily experiences, and through relationship building within these spaces. The space of the everyday is therefore a political space where those who are most marginalized and excluded from formal political discourses find collective meaning and organize in response to conflict, violence and exclusion.[34] UN policies focused on conflict environments, such as the Agenda for Peace and the Peace Promise, also implicitly rest on an assumption that the everyday is significant.[35] Young people in conflict-affected environments create everyday peace through efforts to foster human relationships, bridge differences and counter structural violence. These practices, at an everyday level, illustrate the complexities of peace and strengthen the case for considering the contextually specific roles of youth in peacebuilding efforts.[36]

It is important to note that everyday peace is not a blanket term that might potentially encompass any activity involving local communities and their everyday lives. Rather, it should be used as an analytical lens to identify the conflict containing, minimizing and avoidance activities that occur beyond the realm of NGO programmes and projects. It is highly context-, location- and time-specific and thus difficult to model or replicate. By recognizing where it occurs, however, initiatives can facilitate everyday peace efforts.[37]

The Gastromotiva and ConectArte projects are important contributions to everyday peacebuilding in general, and to encouraging the role of youth as agents of peacebuilding in particular. In addition to the specific and intended outcomes of the projects, the projects create important peacebuilding spaces that allow youth to find collective meaning and organize against violence, marginalization and exclusion by fostering relationships, community cohesion and trust, and by breaking with the past. These processes were slightly different in the two projects. Gastromotiva has a predominantly individualistic focus, with the objective of improving the prospects of youth gaining employment, an income and empowerment through learning restaurant skills. Nonetheless, the way in which the project has brought youth together has resulted in the creation of new relationships, which in turn fosters collaboration, teamwork and empathy. For many, the residential camp was a deeply emotional experience and a unique opportunity to be with peers in a secure environment, which allowed them to open up about their personal realities and experiences. During this time, a professional therapist was available to help youth deal with trauma and see future prospects through a different lens. In this initial stage, important relationships were formed in which previous suspicions were replaced with a view of each another as future companions in progress in life. This is particularly important set against a daily context in which young people are met with mistrust and controlled, and as a result are often reluctant to open up to other people.

The Gastromotiva project also made important contributions to countering otherness through sensitization efforts to reduce stigma, particularly within the private sector, which is often reluctant to employ youth from marginalized areas. Gastromotiva creates private sector networks and bridges between employers and trainees, facilitating the reintegration of the most marginalized sectors of society into the wider social and economic sphere. This is partly evidenced by the fact that 38 per cent of those who have graduated from the programme have found permanent

[33] Berents and McEvoy-Levy (note 32); and Richmond, O. P., 'Becoming liberal, unbecoming liberalism: Liberal-local hybridity via the everyday as a response to the paradoxes of liberal peacebuilding', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2009).

[34] Berents and McEvoy-Levy (note 32).

[35] Richmond (note 33).

[36] Berents and McEvoy-Levy (note 32).

[37] MacGinty, R., 'Everyday peace: Bottom-up and local agency in conflict-affected societies', *Security Dialogue*, vol. 45, no. 6 (2014).

jobs. It is believed that the remaining 62 per cent have either set up their own businesses or returned to study.[38] It will be crucial, however, to conduct a thorough follow-up to assess with greater precision what happens to beneficiaries after they leave the projects. If it can be demonstrated that the majority of former participants become engaged in legal income-generating activities or study for a long period of time—and are thus able to resist gang dynamics—this would be a remarkable achievement that should be further exploited.

Enhancing everyday peace processes through the creation of spaces and community cohesion was even stronger in ConectArte, which has a strong community-oriented focus. The cleaning and painting of murals in gang-dominated areas created a physical place and re-appropriated space lost to gang dynamics. Including the wider community in actions that promote peaceful behaviour, such as various themed days in which the wider community are involved, helps to build a culture of peace in areas permeated with violence. These days entail the joint preparation and sharing of meals, and often specific activities targeted at young children. They also help to counter stigma by signalling to people outside of the community that there are young people in the community with dreams and artistic talent, and a vision of peaceful coexistence. Beneficiaries expressed how the project helped them to break with the past—to break with the stigma linked to gang-dominated areas and with the associated symbolism—and helped to break the cycle that leads young people to fall into poverty, delinquency and violence. One beneficiary noted how the project generated 'positive action to break the cycle of violence, the stigma around a community, in our own minds as well as in other people's eyes'.[39] While ConectArte did not aim to improve beneficiaries' employment prospects, it was found that all the participants were able to find work or return to education following the project. This is indicative of progress towards ending stigma and everyday local action to counter structural violence.[40]

Resilience to gang dynamics through empowerment. Over the past decade, the international peacebuilding agenda has developed a growing interest in youth as a 'force for peace' or a 'threat to peace', as well as a strong emphasis on youth employment.[41] The UN 'Guiding principles on young people's participation in peacebuilding' identifies young people as central to the economic development of their country and promotes their access to economic opportunities as essential for their own and national development.[42] On the other side of this coin, however, is the assumption that vulnerable young people with few life prospects are likely to become involved in violence of various forms.[43] Consequently, enhancing the employability of youth and increasing their job opportunities are widely regarded as major priorities in post-conflict countries, as a bridge between security, peacebuilding and development. While there is common agreement that a lack of economic opportunities available to young adults can lead to feelings of disempowerment and disillusionment, little is

---

[38] From conversations with former project beneficiaries, WFP estimates that the remaining 62 per cent either returned to study or set up their own businesses.

[39] Interview with ConectArte participant, San Salvador, 12 Mar. 2019.

[40] As with the findings by Gastromotiva on what happened to beneficiaries after they competed the course, this is based on discussions with the communities. No rigorous surveys have been conducted to assess levels of employment or return to study.

[41] Izzi, V., 'Just keeping them busy? Youth employment projects as a peacebuilding tool', *International Development Planning Review*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2013).

[42] Cardozo, M. L. et al., *Literature Review: Youth Agency, Peacebuilding and Education* (University of Amsterdam, Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding: Amsterdam, 2015); and UN Inter-agency Network on Youth Development, 'Guiding principles on young people's participation in peacebuilding', 1 Apr. 2016.

[43] Izzi (note 41). This view is reflected in major policy documents by, among others, the UN and the World Bank. See e.g. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Review of National Action Plans on Youth Employment: Putting Commitment into Action* (UN: New York, 2007); and Africa Development Indicators, 2008–2009 in World Bank, *Youth Employment in Africa: The Potential, The Problem, The Promise* (World Bank: , Washington, DC, 2009).

known about the impact of providing jobs to young people on strengthening peace in post-conflict societies.[44] There have been few rigorous evaluations of the sustainability of these jobs, the overall impact on the labour market and the links to social cohesion. There is thus a need to strengthen and extend the empirical evidence on the linkages between employment programmes and peacebuilding.[45]

Nonetheless, even if youth employment programmes do not achieve their objectives around job creation, they might still be successful in contributing to improving the prospects for peace. Gastromotiva participants maintained that the project was an important escape from the many push and pull factors of gang recruitment, which include using crime as a coping mechanism (see box 4.1). Based on in-depth interviews with participants, the research team found indications that the Gastromotiva and ConectArte projects helped in a number of ways to reduce the push and pull factors in gang recruitment.[46] As discussed above, one important aspect of both projects was the generation of space, which generated a sense of inclusion. This is particularly important because youth often join gangs looking for a sense of belonging. Coming together, sharing experiences and receiving both professional psychological and peer support reduced feelings of 'being alone against the world', according to one interviewee. Gastromotiva and ConectArte also fostered leadership, teamwork and collaboration skills, which youth argued helped to counter common practices of looking to gangs for solutions to their problems. The projects also transmitted positive values and helped confront issues such as gender inequality and machismo, which permeate society. Project participants were able to transmit these values in their neighbourhoods through the communal events organized with their wider communities. For example, a ConectArte participant spoke of children and young adolescents appreciating and engaging with the artwork and other project-related community activities. Transmitting such positive examples of youth engagement in their communities to children and adolescents is extremely important as this is the age when many begin to affiliate with gangs.

Both Gastromotiva and ConectArte are seen as small-scale, high maintenance projects that require minimum levels of critical investment per beneficiary and levels of maintenance by WFP staff that are higher than is typical for a WFP programme. The two projects are implemented directly by WFP in coordination with local authorities and not through NGO partners. However, the contributions to improving the prospects for peace made by these projects should not be underestimated. Peacebuilding takes place at all levels, from the macro-level to the micro-level. The two projects make identifiable contributions to increasing the prospects for peace at the micro-level, giving voice to and providing avenues for marginalized youth who are frequently excluded from formal political discourse to act as agents for peace. Moreover, Gastromotiva and ConectArte have created successful models that could be scaled-up or replicated at the national level and integrated into the social protections and safety nets of vulnerable youth and returnees.[47]

Conflict sensitivity concerns

Implementing projects in communities dominated and controlled by gangs inevitably presents a number of conflict sensitivity concerns. Although informants argued that

---

[44] Cardozo et al. (note 42); and Izzi (note 41).

[45] International Labour Organization et al., *Employment Programmes and Peace: A Joint Statetment on an Analytical Framework, Emerging Principles for Action and Next Steps* (ILO: Geneva, Sep. 2016).

[46] This is different from forced recruitment and the research team found no evidence that the project has any impact on such practices.

[47] The way in which such potential for scale-up or replication might enhance everyday peacebuilding is, of course, unpredictable and will vary according to time and place.

Box 4.1. Push and pull factors of gang recruitment in El Salvador

Push and pull factors are used to describe the circumstances that push or motivate a person to pursue a particular action, or which pull or drive a person away from a place or current course of action. The reasons why youth join gangs in El Salvador are often a mix of both push and pull factors (in addition to forced recruitment or the threat of violence). The youth living in marginalized gang-controlled areas of San Salvador interviewed for this research identified six major factors associated with gang membership.

Family disintegration and dysfunctional family dynamics (push factor): the civil war and the interrelated migration crisis have led to the breakdown of many Salvadoran families. Children become separated from their parents, who migrate for extended periods leaving their children in the care of a relative. Such arrangements often result in child abandonment or neglect, as well as high school dropout rates. On the other hand, in households where families live together, there is a tendency for parents to neglect the needs of their adolescent children who then seek the social acceptance that gangs can offer.

Disadvantaged economic situation (push factor): families are often unable to support children economically who want to continue in education or pursue specific careers. Interlinked with unemployment and the lack of development opportunities, this situation can lead young people to engage in criminal gang-related activities as a coping strategy or for self-protection.

Education (push and pull factors): schools tend to fail to transmit positive values or models to help youth resist turning to gangs as a solution to their socio-economic problems.

Violent domestic environments and a macho culture (push and pull factors): high levels of domestic violence in the home can push children to look for an escape from the violence. At the same time, negative perceptions of what it means to be a man encourage violent behaviour, which further facilitates recruitment into gangs. Such perceptions are fuelled by negative examples from male parents, coupled with limited dialogue and/or understanding between parents.

Abuse of state power (push factor): abusive behaviour by institutions such as the national police contributes to the creation of a climate of insecurity and violence. The police are often seen as using violence and persecution to assert their authority in difficult neighbourhoods, and show little respect for citizens. Arbitrarily violent police behaviour undermines trust in the state while enhancing the power and authority of gangs.

Social pressure (push factor): youth can be pressured by their peers to join a gang, while also facing genuine risks to their lives if they refuse to be recruited.

Source: These findings concur with other research on gang recruitment in El Salvador. See e.g. Fogelbach, J. J., 'Gangs, violence, and victims in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras', *San Diego International Law Journal*, vol. 12, no. 2 (Spring 2010).

---

the gangs have not imposed any major limitations, both projects, and in particular ConectArte, are dependent on the approval of gangs. The gangs must be informed of project activities and such activities cannot openly engage with sensitive topics or voice any opinions on gang dynamics in their communities. Gang dynamics particularly affected the first ConectArte project, not least by restricting mobility and preventing access. Negotiating with a gang—even if done indirectly through community leaders—effectively reinforces gang structures.

Enhancing employability could have the unintended consequence of serving as a push factor for irregular migration abroad. A cook in El Salvador earns $300 per month on average, whereas a similar role in the USA pays on average $500 per week.[48] Moreover, as is recognized in the national development plan, more than 360 000 young people are entering the job market each year, whereas only 127 000 jobs are created annually.[49] Irregular migration risks exposing individuals to severe violations of their human and civil rights in countries of transit and destination. While the research did not find Gastromotiva to have encouraged youth to migrate abroad, apart from in isolated cases, it was spoken about among beneficiaries and could become part of the narrative and the motivation for joining the project.

---

[48] Figures quoted at a workshop convened by USAID in San Salvador, 5 Mar. 2019.

[49] United Nations Economic Commission for Latim America (ECLAC), *Plan De Desarrollo Integral* [Integral development plan] *El Salvador-Guatemala-Honduras-Mexico* (ECLAC: Mexico City, 2019).

Recommendation 1.
Integrate a stronger community-focused component into Gastromotiva, drawing on the best practices of ConectArte, in order to maximize contributions to enhancing the prospects for peace. This could include, among other things, thematic days implemented in the community accompanied by food-based activities that showcase the skills of the beneficiaries to the wider community.

Recommendation 2.
Ensure that Gastromotiva takes a long-term view, is connected with macro-level policies around social protection and employment, and is based on a thorough understanding of the local economy and labour market, in order to build evidence and maximize the potential for improved employment opportunities to contribute to enhancing the prospects for peace.

Recommendation 3.
Conduct thorough follow-up of beneficiaries for a minimum period of two years after they leave the projects to ascertain to what degree beneficiaries are sustainably engaged in legal income-generating activities and/or study, and the impact on resisting gang recruitment.

Recommendation 4.
Strengthen targeting to focus more on returnees and IDPs as the direct beneficiaries, while ensuring that other equally vulnerable youth are not excluded from wider community-oriented outreach activities, such as those included in ConectArte.

Recommendation 5.
Invest in all avenues that increase the sustainability and institutionalization of the project at scale through social protection systems, while acknowledging that small-scale projects like these have important contributions to make to wider peacebuilding, in particular as proof of concept models.

*TOC 2: **If** returnees and IDPs have access to transitional humanitarian assistance linked to a comprehensive package of support, **then** this improves the opportunities for sustainable economic, social and psychosocial reintegration.*

This TOC relates to SO4, which is focused on emergency preparedness and response. Under this SO, WFP provides humanitarian transfers to households affected by crises to facilitate immediate relief and early recovery. It also helps the government to strengthen its emergency response capacity. In developing this TOC, the research focused on a humanitarian transfer project that targets vulnerable communities affected by violence and forced migration.

WFP is partnered with Plan International and UNHCR in the project 'Humanitarian Assistance to Families Affected by Unconventional Violence'. The project targets 960 individuals and their families in 58 municipalities across El Salvador. It particularly targets those who have been affected by violence and gang dynamics. The project beneficiaries are returnees, either voluntary or forcibly repatriated, IDPs who have been displaced by violence and individuals who have had their lives constrained by gang dynamics. While beneficiaries have different levels of vulnerability and complex motivations for participating in the project, two groups stand out. About 9 per cent of project beneficiaries are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Another large group is made up of individuals who have been rehoused in anonymous safe houses due to an acute gang-related threat to life.

The project is implemented in both urban and rural areas. This raises context-specific security issues. Based on conversations with key informants, urban areas seem to be more affected by restrictions imposed by gangs through threats and extortion. Rural areas, on the other hand, are more affected by displacement and by direct child recruitment into gangs. Working in rural communities is particularly difficult not only due to insecurity and the gang presence, but also because many displaced persons wish to remain hidden.

The project is based on the assumption that reintegration requires psychological, social and economic support. There are therefore three main areas of intervention. First, food assistance is provided through cash transfers linked to psychosocial support. Each family receives $75 per month for six months to cover immediate and essential needs, such as basic food needs. Second, productive projects are set up, such as vegetable gardens and small-scale animal husbandry for food subsistence, and relevant training provided. Third, entrepreneurial approaches to food security have been piloted. WFP provides the transfers and technical assistance with asset creation, while Plan and UNHCR identify needs in the communities and select project beneficiaries. In addition, UNHCR provides resources for business development among sections of the youth population. A baseline survey conducted by WFP found that 96 per cent of households in the project areas are food insecure, close to half have been affected by climate-related events such as drought, flooding and earthquakes and 24 per cent of children were not attending school.

Analysis

The humanitarian needs of the communities served by this project are clear. Beneficiaries are exposed to high levels of violence and of food insecurity. Their ability to meet their basic needs is severely hampered by the presence of gangs. The main beneficiaries are returnees and IDPs. While these groups face similar challenges, there are also important differences. Returnees are faced with pressing reintegration challenges on their return to El Salvador. Depending on how long they have lived outside the country, they may face difficult challenges linked to language and cultural reintegration. Some return to their original communities but the majority settle elsewhere. Both returnees unable to go back to their communities of origin and IDPs face the challenge of integrating into new communities while maintaining the level of anonymity required to avoid being detected by the gangs that caused their displacement. Returnees and the displaced may have important psychosocial support needs as a result of exposure to violence, loss of or separation from family members and friends, a deterioration in living conditions, an inability to provide for self and family and a lack of access to services. All of the above can contribute to the development of phycological disorders.

Although the aim of the project is to attend to humanitarian needs—specifically food insecurity—through engagement with reintegration processes, it also makes important contributions to improving the prospects for peace. The integration of returnees and IDPs is crucial to peacebuilding and national reconciliation, to the promotion of state stability and legitimacy, and to the triggering of post-conflict economic development.[50] Return and reintegration are linked to human rights and the obligations on the state to protect and guarantee the security of its citizens.[51] There can be no hope of normalcy until the majority of displaced or expelled people are able to reintegrate into society.

[50] Vlassenroot, K. and Tegenbos, J., 'Going home? A systematic review of the literature on displacement, return and cycles of violence', *Politics of Return Working Paper*, no. 1 (2018), University of Gent, Department of Conflict and Development Studies.

[51] Fischer, M., 'Recovering from violent conflict: Regeneration and (re-)integration as elements of peacebuilding', eds A. Austin, M. Fischer and N. Ropers, *Transforming Ethnopolitical Conflict* (Springer, 2004).

Because it represents a tangible form of progress, the voluntary return of IDPs can have an important impact on public confidence in peacebuilding processes.[52] Most returnees in El Salvador, however, have not returned voluntarily, but were deported for not possessing the legal documents required to remain in another country, usually the USA, or for committing a crime. The lack of voluntary return is indicative of a situation in which the state is unable to protect its citizens and in which different groups of citizens are unable to live in peace alongside each other.

The reintegration of returnees and integration of IDPs into society are also linked to the economic dimensions of peacebuilding.[53] The return of displaced populations can have an important impact—both positive and negative—on the economic recovery of conflict-affected states. High levels of displacement and return can put strain on social services, agricultural systems and other basic programmes. However, even if in many cases returnees do not bring a great deal of financial capital with them, they possess a considerable amount of human and social capital.[54]

From both a human rights and an economic perspective, the provision of psycho-social support is of particular importance to the reintegration of refugees and IDPs due to the severely adverse effects of displacement on the physical, social, emotional and spiritual well-being of a person.

Reintegration in the context of gang-related dynamics is extremely challenging and has been made more difficult by successive governments' lack of recognition of displacement caused by violence (see box 4.2). The way gangs have permeated society, using their networks to reach most parts of the country, means that they are easily able to locate people who have fled from their grip. Most displaced people therefore seek to remain hidden and do not take advantage of projects set up to cater for their needs. Thus, identifying and targeting beneficiaries is a difficult and delicate process. While the use of local monitors who live in the communities and are well known to the inhabitants has facilitated targeting, soliciting the information needed to include beneficiaries in the project remains difficult. A survey carried out by PLAN and UNHCR found high levels of fear that personal information will be leaked to the gangs. An integrated approach involving partnerships with local actors with a long-standing presence in, and that are trusted by, the community is therefore fundamental to reaching the target population.

The research team visited one of the project sites and spoke with project participants and non-participant members of the community. All had been personally affected by violence, but not all were displaced. The majority expressed feelings of fear and insecurity underpinned by trauma. Trauma, in particular, causes many to experience difficult reactions to common everyday occurrences, such as being approached by someone from outside the community. Several spoke of feeling afraid at night, as this is usually the time when attacks occur. Such fears are often tied to having survived an attack or witnessed the killing of family members.

This makes psychosocial or psychological support extremely important to the reintegration process in order to help individuals overcome trauma and achieve reconciliation at the individual and inter-group levels. The project makes an important contribution through sessions conducted by psychologists. These sessions are highly valued by the beneficiaries as they provide space to come together and share experiences, talk about the traumatic events that have affected them and receive peer support. Sharing such experiences was difficult at the beginning, due to the pain of reliving memories and because of a lack of trust, but the sessions have become one

[52] United Nations High Commission for Refugees, State of the World Refugees, 1997.
[53] Vlassenroot and Tegenbos (note 50).
[54] Fischer (note 51).

Box 4.2. Migration

Patterns of migration from El Salvador and displacement within the country are shaped by the history of civil war, deeply rooted social inequalities, climate change and patterns of violence. The clandestine nature of much migration in El Salvador—both internal and cross-border—makes accurate figures hard to come by. In a 2017 public survey, just over 5 per cent of respondents stated that they had been forced to move in the previous year due to threats. This figure was extrapolated to reflect the population of El Salvador, producing a figure of 296 000 new displacements in 2017. Using a different methodology, the Salvadoran authorities estimate that at least one member in 1.1 per cent of families in El Salvador was internally displaced due to violence between 2006 and 2016. This figure, however, is widely rejected by organizations working with the IDP population as being too conservative.

The factors influencing the decision to migrate are intertwined and hard to isolate from one another. Principal triggers reported by both government and non-governmental sources include economic factors, family reunification, environmental disasters and gang dynamics. In addition, the research team found that remittances in rural areas with high levels of poverty act as a significant pull factor for migration abroad. The impact of remittances is highly visible in these communities, particularly investment in housing which stands out in the otherwise largely poor and underdeveloped settings. Such displays of wealth increase the desire to migrate abroad, regardless of whether people have income opportunities in the communities where they live. Gang dynamics, including extortion, forced recruitment and threats, are believed to be the main cause of forced displacement. Most IDPs settle in new places with few resources and are forced into precarious housing, including illegal settlements. Those who go to live with relatives face overcrowding. Displaced people have difficulties accessing bank loans and are often forced to take low paid jobs, frequently in the informal sector, which makes their economic recovery and development even more difficult. The majority of those displaced by violence wish to remain hidden as gangs have networks that reach into most corners of El Salvador and are able to locate people who have fled. Gangs are known to do background checks on IDPs settling in their communities to ensure that they do not come from an area controlled by their rivals.

The state has only limited capacity to respond to the displaced population. Internal forced displacement was only recently recognized by the government and there are no programmes targeted at this population. The matter is considered politically sensitive and thus rarely discussed in public debates or during election campaigns. At the time of the research, the incoming government had no position on the issue. Nor was there a strategy for government intervention or any response plan.

In the absence of effective state protection and viable internal options, many people flee the country. In 2017, approximately 60 000 new asylum claims were submitted by Salvadorans internationally, although many more are likely to have left the country irregularly. The majority who emigrate from El Salvador seek to enter the USA. The migration route to the USA, which crosses through Mexico, is highly risky and many are killed, attacked or caught up in human trafficking networks along the way. The USA and Mexico are taking a more severe stance on immigration. In 2017, close to 27 000 Salvadorans were returned. This figure is expected to increase dramatically following the expiry of the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) programme in January 2020, which has led to the cancellation of the residency of nearly 200 000 Salvadoran immigrants in the USA. A particular challenge in relation to the forced return of Salvadorans from the USA is that many have lived most of their lives there and therefore have few or no connections to El Salvador. Many do not even speak Spanish. The state's institutional capacity to respond to this population is very weak.

Sources: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) and the Refugee Law Initiative at the University of London, *An Atomised Crisis: Reframing Displacement Caused by Crime and Violence in El Salvador* (IDMC: Geneva, Sep. 2018); IDMC El Salvador, 'Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID), 2018: Conflict displacement figures analysis, El Salvador, contextual update', [n.d.]; Ministerio de Justicia y Seguridad Publica, 'Caracterización de la movilidad interna a causa de la violencia en El Salvador' [Character of internal migration due to violence in El Salvador], Mar. 2018; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 'El Salvador: Overview', [n.d.].

of the most valued components of the project. Non-project participants also attend the sessions, which further enhances relationships and trust between the displaced or returnees and receiving communities. Even the small-scale poultry farming component of the project has an additional psychological benefit, as the participants interviewed recognized its calming effect on alleviating trauma.

The project thus makes a clear and tangible contribution to the integration process of this vulnerable and neglected population, set against the limited and fragmented state and non-state response. Thus far, the state response has been highly centralized and reactive rather than preventative. Integration at the local level, coordinating state, private sector and civil society efforts, is one of the most challenging aspects of the project. Sustainable integration is a long-term process that requires a holistic

approach and partnership. WFP is well placed to make an important contribution to improving the strategic national response, including advocating for a more coordinated approach, through its partnerships with the government and the agencies working directly with this population, as well as its engagement in the humanitarian space through the humanitarian cash transfers programme. Improving the state's response is particularly urgent given the spike in returnees that is expected following termination of the TPS programme in January 2020.

A holistic approach and partnerships are thus essential for responding to the integration challenges posed by displaced and returnee populations. These aspects are discussed in greater depth in TOC 4.

Conflict sensitivity concerns

Working with hidden populations presents particular conflict sensitivity concerns. Potential beneficiaries are identified by Plan International but the selection of project beneficiaries is carried out jointly by WFP, UNHCR and Plan International's project monitors. The project monitors are local to the area and have detailed knowledge and understanding of the local context. To identify beneficiaries, monitors conduct in-depth interviews and surveys around the kind of violence experienced, family disintegration and the level of restriction faced. These are highly sensitive questions, but necessary in order to target the most affected households. However, providing this kind of information leaves individuals displaced by violence particularly vulnerable to leaks. Although strict protocols around data protection are in place and every effort is made to safeguard information, project staff from WFP, Plan International and UNHCR confirmed that information had leaked on a few occasions. Moreover, the selection procedure also places the project monitors at risk, due to the presence of the gangs. Monitors have to talk to community leaders, and sometimes these are—or have close ties to—gang members.

A further conflict sensitivity concern in relation to the kind of information collected by the project is linked to WFP's beneficiary registration and transfer management platform, Scope, which is used for beneficiary registration, and to plan cash transfers and disbursements. Although only the minimum information possible is collected in order to make individual cash transfers, many potential beneficiaries do not wish to provide any information that might identify them out of fear that it could be leaked. Moreover, some of the financial services providers used by WFP to deliver the cash transfers require national identification document (Documento Unico de Identidad, DUI) data to comply with international 'know-your-client' regulations. The DUI contains details of home addresses, and professional and marital status, which is highly sensitive information for individuals threatened by gangs. The country office implements a number of mitigation actions that have so far been accepted by beneficiaries and partners, from creating and using a new unique beneficiary code independent of the national identity card, to diversifying the service provider and cash delivery options for beneficiaries. The right to privacy is not only an important right in and of itself, but also a key element of individual autonomy and dignity. WFP has a personal data protection policy and written guidance on conducting privacy impact assessments to enable staff members to better understand and mitigate risks.

One of the main challenges of this project is to bring it to scale and institutionalize it. In the context of gang dynamics, only small investments are made to avoid attracting the gangs and subjecting beneficiaries to threats and violence. Responding to a population displaced internally by violence is a highly delicate process that requires high levels of trust and confidentiality. Scaling up risks losing trust and confidentiality as not all institutions are able to maintain the same level of confidence.

Recommendation 6.

Support communities to strengthen and expand the model of coming together to share experiences, and to support each other beyond the duration of the sessions with a psychologist. This could be done, for example, by training leaders trusted in the community to organize and lead similar community gatherings.

Recommendation 7.

Use WFP's partnerships, position and recognition at both the macro and the micro levels to advocate for a coordinated response, with a particular focus on the expected spike in returnees following the termination of the TPS. This could include mapping the different organizations working with returnees and displaced populations.

Recommendation 8.

Adopt a more integrated approach to WFP programming, working with partners on an integrated package of services and support in the receiving communities. Break down the silos between different WFP and external interventions to see whether some beneficiaries of the humanitarian cash transfers programme can be linked up with WFP's resilience programme and/or projects implemented by other partners.

Recommendation 9.

Make transitional support to returnees and displaced people a flagship service that WFP can provide through multi-purpose cash transfers, with cases referred from partners, integrating preparedness measures to ensure that assistance can be scaled up if the number of returnees suddenly spikes.

TOC: 3 **If** *rural communities vulnerable to climate change and violence have access to: (a) avenues for community participation; (b) diversified sources of income; (c) knowledge resources; and (d) enhanced mechanisms for improving the management of natural resources,* **then** *there will be increased social cohesion and greater resilience to contextual conflict dynamics.*

This TOC relates to SO3, which focuses on improving resilience and adaptation to climate change for people living in rural areas in the Dry Corridor, and working with the national authorities at different levels to strengthen government capacities to deal with climate shocks.

El Salvador is exposed to severe climate conditions, such as the increasingly severe El Nino effect. Most of El Salvador is part of the Dry Corridor, which runs through Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. The region is currently experiencing one of its worst droughts in the past 30 years. This has had disastrous consequences for grain production, and particularly affected small-scale farmers who have lost most of their maize harvest. The depletion of maize reserves has resulted in an increase in the number of food insecure households and the adoption of emergency coping strategies. Water scarcity is a major concern in rural El Salvador, including in the project sites visited. In 2016, even prior to the severe drought of 2018, more than 600 000 people in El Salvador were without any drinking water or sanitation services, and more than 1 million had access only to an inadequate water supply. In rural areas, less than 60 per cent of households are connected to the water network.[55] Most of the economically active rural population are small-scale farmers or day labourers, and there are high levels of unemployment and rural poverty. Many are landless. The drought has significantly reduced demand for the agricultural labour force, further

---

[55] United Nations, General Assembly, 'Report by the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation on his mission to El Salvador', Human Rights Council, A/HRC/33/49/Ass.1, 3 Aug. 2016.

increasing unemployment and poverty. Rural areas are also being increasingly exposed to gang dynamics (see box 2.1). Gang leaders have migrated to these areas and are recruiting locally. WFP project staff reported an increase in violence, as well as high levels of extortion and homicide. This combination of drought, food insecurity, poverty and violence has led to elevated levels of migration from rural areas. Some of this is short term, seasonal migration to other parts of the country less affected by drought. The majority, however, is people seeking to migrate abroad. An unknown number have been internally displaced (see TOC 2 and box 4.2).

In this context, WFP is partnering with national and municipal government to strengthen government capacities to deal with climate shocks and increase the resilience of smallholders. In 2018, WFP helped provide 18 250 beneficiaries with training and technical assistance on asset creation in combination with cash-based transfers.[56] Beneficiaries were based in 17 municipalities across four departments in El Salvador's Dry Corridor: Ahuachapán, Usulután, San Miguel and Morazán. Project activities on adaptation to climate change and increasing resilience involved reforestation, water conservation and soil management; livelihood diversification through the introduction of vegetable crops; the installation of solar panelled greenhouses and macro tunnels; and training on the production and use of organic bio-fertilizers. Community support committees have also been organized. The research team visited project sites in Usulután and San Miguel.

Analysis

According to WFP evaluations, interventions under SO3 have made solid progress in improving food security and increasing the resilience of smallholders to climate shocks.[57] However, interventions have also made important contributions to improving the prospects for peace by increasing social cohesion and making communities more resilient to local conflict dynamics. The web of social relations that connects individuals, groups and communities can often be severely damaged by armed conflict. Restoring social relations, which includes reducing horizontal inequalities that are seen as major root causes of conflict, is an important aspect of peacebuilding.[58] There is strong evidence that improving social cohesion can help to rebuild trust by building bridges within and between divided communities, and linking state and society.[59] Promoting social cohesion therefore provides a blueprint for conflict transformation that results in more resilient societies.[60]

Social cohesion has been defined and delineated in many ways.[61] Definitions often discuss two dimensions: reducing inequality and the divisions within a society, with the goal of promoting inclusion and equal opportunities and reducing disparities; and boosting social capital, with the goal of strengthening social relations, interactions and ties.[62] Social capital can be thought of as an intangible form of capital that comprises

---

[56] Three transfers, each of $75 per household, were distributed.

[57] WFP Panama, 'Evaluación final del Proyecto "Respuesta al fenómeno de El Nino en el Corredor Seco", El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras y Nicaragua, 2016–2018' [Final evaluation of the project 'Response to El Nino in the Dry Corridor', El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras y Nicaragua, 2016–2018], Aug. 2018.

[58] Stewart, F., 'Horizontal inequalities as a cause of conflict: A review of CRISE findings', World Development Report background paper, World Bank, 20 Aug. 2010.

[59] Brown, M. J. and Zahar, M.-J., 'Social cohesion as peacebuilding in the Central African Republic and beyond', *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2015).

[60] Brown and Zahar (note 59); and Lederach, J. P., *Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (USIP: Washington, DC, 1997).

[61] As is the case with many concepts in social science, it is difficult to give a precise definition of social cohesion. For an in-depth discussion of the different definitions of social cohesion and social capital, see Klein, C., 'Social capital or social cohesion: What matters for subjective well-being?', *Social Indicators Research*, vol. 110, no. 3 (2013); and Fonseca, X., Lukosch, S. and Brazier, F., 'Social cohesion revisited: A new definition and how to characterize it', *Innovation: European Journal of Social Science Research*, vol. 32, no. 2 (2019).

[62] Brown and Zahar (note 59); Berger-Schmitt, R., 'Considering social cohesion in quality of life assessments: Concept and measurement', *Social Indicators Research*, vol. 58, nos 1–3 (2002).

rules, norms and obligations, and the level of reciprocity and trust embedded in social relations.[63] Social capital is thus part of the broader concept of social cohesion. A focus on social cohesion, including social capital, from a peacebuilding perspective requires an interrogation of processes and who participates in what kind of activities and how, while acknowledging the multiplicity of power relations in society.

The civil war in El Salvador severely ruptured social cohesion and the web of horizontal and vertical relations. The peace accords paid little attention to the importance of restoring social cohesion, which has deteriorated further against a backdrop of increasingly violent gang activity. El Salvador is not a country divided along ethnic or religious lines or a deeply unequal country.[64] The social capital dimension is the most critical dimension of social cohesion. For this reason, this section uses the term 'social cohesion/capital', which acknowledges the connection between the two and emphasizes the capital component of social cohesion. The research found ample evidence of an erosion of social cohesion/capital in the communities visited, albeit to varying degrees.

According to project beneficiaries, staff and field technicians alike, levels of social cohesion/capital and community organization are low, with few exceptions. Every community in El Salvador has a Community Development Association (Asociación de Desarrollo Comunal, Adesco), which promotes and implements community-oriented projects on health, education, water or infrastructure. Many of these are either controlled by or perceived to be controlled by a small number of individuals with ties to local mayors, however, and most do little to promote community integration or build social cohesion/capital. Other forms of community organization or collaboration are rare.[65] Gang violence and migration were identified as the main reasons for the erosion of social cohesion/capital. A gang presence restricts mobility—even though rural communities are not restricted to the same extent as some urban communities are—and limits the activities that communities can undertake. Violence, extortion and threats cause internal displacement, which in turn leads to the disintegration of many families, mistrust and fear of the other. This has all contributed to high levels of individualism and a lack of solidarity. A telling indicator of the above, as related by key informants, is that people can live their whole life in a small, rural community without knowing each other. The lack of trust was also strongly reflected in some of the focus group discussions with beneficiaries, as participants were often reluctant to engage or make their views heard. Whether this was indicative of mistrust towards the external research team, mistrust within the community group, or both, is hard to tell. Nonetheless, in this context, it has been difficult for WFP project staff—including local field technicians—to organize communities, arrange community meetings to inform people about the project or select beneficiaries. It should be noted, however, that the beneficiaries in one community spoke of strong community relations, trust and support prior to the project, and that the level of social cohesion/capital is dependent on the context. While more research would be needed in order to understand why the degree of social cohesion/capital can vary in geographically close communities that display similar socio-economic characteristics, there appears to be an important distinction to be made in relation to the civil war. Social cohesion/capital is strong in communities in which the guerrillas were strong and to where demobilized guerrillas

---

[63] McIlwaine, C. and Moser, C., 'Violence and social capital in urban poor communities: Perspectives from Colombia and Guatemala', *Journal of International Development*, vol. 13, no. 7 (2001).

[64] Measured by the GINI coefficient, in 2016, El Salvador was the most equal country in Latin America after Uruguay, see World Bank, 'The World Bank in El Salvador', Updated 4 Apr. 2019.

[65] The low level of associativity within communities stands in sharp contrast to the high level of associativity in the gangs.

returned.[66] This is linked to the ability of former guerrillas to defend their territories against gang control. However, interviewees stated that working in such communities is difficult as they are generally suspicious of and confrontational towards outsiders.[67]

Nonetheless, WFP interventions under SO3 have made important contributions to improving social cohesion/capital. A key aspect mentioned by most informants has been the creation of space for communities to come together and avenues for communication and support. Holding community meetings is a new practice in many of these municipalities. While convincing community members to attend meetings was initially a challenge, it was noted that this has become much easier, and many beneficiaries expressed a desire to maintain these structures following completion of the project. In addition, having seen the benefits, individuals who had initially rejected invitations to participate in the project are now seeking to join. These structures serve a wider purpose than that intended by the project. In particular, they raise awareness, facilitate cooperation on a range of matters, promote solidarity and reduce individual tensions and stresses linked to gang dynamics. The starkest example given was that of a women's group that used the structures created by the project spontaneously to establish a revolving self-help fund to be used to support people in need. This has helped to cover funeral costs and transport costs to hospital, or to provide food baskets to families that have lost their main income provider. Other ways in which social cohesion/capital were improved include sharing good practices with the wider community. In one instance, links were established between project participants and local schools, through which pupils visited reforestation/tree nursery projects. This helped raise awareness among children of the climate-related problems affecting the area, and to build consciousness and a sense of belonging. Overall, informants noted a greater sense of empowerment in the conduct of communal activities, enhanced coexistence and solidarity, and an improved ability to manage community assets and resources.

Many of these achievements and benefits were recognized at the local state level, and several informants from various local mayors' offices noted an improvement in community unity and collaboration in the areas where WFP operates. While it is wise to be cautious about such statements, due to the composition of the research team and the interest in collaboration and funding opportunities, it is clear that the project has provided vertical communication channels between communities and local government that are appreciated by both sides.

The project also established horizontal channels of communication and collaboration through the involvement of landless agricultural daily labourers and smallholders, and landowners. Enhanced communication and collaboration between these groups enhanced trust and reduced 'otherness'. The specific project involved interventions around the building of macro tunnels and greenhouses, and forestry projects. Households needed access to land and water in order to participate. This was a major challenge, however, as only 20 per cent of participating households owned land. To overcome this limitation, WFP helped project beneficiaries to negotiate with local landowners over the use of land. There was widespread initial resistance from landowners, as these kinds of projects had not been attempted before and there was little confidence that they would succeed. In addition, landowners feared losing their land. WFP hired a lawyer to formalize agreements that ensured that project beneficiaries could make use of the land for the entire duration of the project and for three to five years beyond its end. Landless project participants thereby benefited from improved and diversified livelihoods and technical capacity, while the landowner

---

[66] WFP implements projects in these communities but these were not visited by the research team.

[67] Interviews with WFP project staff, 4–13 Mar. 2019.

benefited from improved soil and water management as a result of the participants' work on the land. Many informants noted increased support from landowners for the project after seeing the benefits to the community.

Finally, important gender dimensions were identified during the research. Specifically, the project helped highlight the role of women in collective asset creation activities and to position women as economic agents. Horticulture projects in particular were found to have a positive impact on the lives of female beneficiaries, as noted by both female and male community members. There are often few occupational alternatives for women outside the household. The income they derived from horticulture made the women feel confident that they could make a greater contribution to communal well-being.

Social cohesion/capital-related outcomes such as these might be small in scale and originally unintended, but they are vitally important to local peacebuilding. Peacebuilding seeks, among other things, to achieve change within individuals, in relationships between people and in relationships between individuals and the state. Although existing levels of social cohesion/capital varied across communities, and the impact of the project on social cohesion/capital has also varied, WFP has had a role to play in rebuilding relationships, trust and collaboration. Improved social cohesion/capital makes communities more resilient to the effects of local conflict dynamics. While improved social cohesion/capital might have no effect on gang-related dynamics—other than perhaps to prevent recruitment, to some extent—it can help people mitigate some of the effects through community support structures, increased solidarity and increased trust. Set against the wider linkages between food insecurity, climate change and conflict, improved social cohesion/capital, coupled with diversified livelihood opportunities and increased resilience to climate change, could have an impact on decisions to migrate, although more research would be needed to confirm this hypothesis.[68]

Following the research team's visit to El Salvador, the country office was selected for a specific study on the Food For Assets programme, focused on the economic return on investments in livelihood diversification activities and exploring the contribution of economic empowerment and participatory community planning to increasing social cohesion and resilience to contextual conflict dynamics.

Conflict sensitivity concerns

There were specific targeting concerns in connection to this intervention. An initial reluctance to engage with the project, including doubts about the possibility of growing vegetables in this region of El Salvador, made it hard to achieve the intended number of beneficiaries. Government-generated lists were used to identify potential beneficiaries and it was acknowledged that corruption affected some of these lists, resulting in comparatively better off landowners benefiting from the projects.

The leasing of land to enable landless participants to benefit from the project also increases the risk of elite capture of assets. Assets such as macro tunnels and greenhouses remain on the land once the project has ended, effectively becoming the property of the landowner rather than the project beneficiaries. Moreover, where rent is paid, participants are potentially vulnerable throughout the project to rent increases or the landowner terminating the agreement. WFP has taken innovative steps to reduce these risks, including contracting lawyers to legally formalize rental agreements. It also stipulates that ownership of the assets belongs to the individuals who are part of the working group and not to the landowners. Another instrument, the Shared Benefit Compromise Letter, is signed by the landowners and project

---

[68] For an extended discussion on these linkages, see Delgado et al. (note 1).

participants to ensure that the benefits of asset creation activities are shared for at least 3–5 years beyond the end of the programme.

Recommendation 10.

Ensure the sustainability of community participation mechanisms beyond project duration and document the benefits and multiplier effects.

Recommendation 11.

Adapt existing planning and programming tools to ensure more systematic contributions to enhancing social cohesion/capital. This might mean incorporating conflict analysis and a peacebuilding lens into the community-based participatory planning (CBPP) process, supporting grassroots initiatives linked to the project, such as a self-help fund, or fostering complementarities with existing local institutions.

Recommendation 12.

Continue to monitor the landownership agreement to assess whether it is an appropriate tool for horizontal bridging and providing short term, workable solutions to unresolved root causes of armed conflict around unequal landownership.

*TOC 4: **If** mechanisms for connecting citizens with local and national authorities are strengthened and referral mechanisms put in place to enhance access to services and the quality of service delivery, **then** this will contribute to fostering trust between the state and its citizens.*

TOC 4 is slightly different from the first three, in that it does not relate to any specific SO but instead constitutes a cross-cutting TOC.[69] TOC 4 focuses on vertical integration to restore the ruptured state-society contract by emphasizing the need for a holistic approach and partnerships. TOC 4 is about social cohesion, as discussed in TOC 3, but on a much wider scale. It is cross-cutting because a holistic approach and partnerships are imperative to TOCs 1–3 and for peacebuilding as a whole. It is because of the acute importance of strengthening the state-society contract against poor state institutional capacity and reach, and because violent gang dynamics limit access to those services that do exist that this has been made a separate TOC.

State institutions in El Salvador are deficient in terms of their development, resources and reach. These deficiencies can be traced back to the peace accords, which failed to address the structural root causes of conflict such as inequality and lack of opportunity. The post-conflict period provided fertile ground for the expansion—in number and power—of gangs (see box 2.1). Repressive iron-fist security policies in response to the security threat presented by the gangs not only failed to neutralize the threat, but also distorted institutional development, undermining the inclusive policies and structures needed to build social cohesion and trust.[70] While levels of institutional strength (or weakness) and reach vary, limited state institutional capacity is obvious in all three TOCs. As discussed under TOC 1, marginalized urban youth suffer systemic exclusion and stigmatization. Similarly, as elaborated in TOC 2, the institutional capacity required to respond to the migration crisis (external and internal) is severely limited and fragmented, particularly at the local level. TOC 3 highlights the marginalization of rural areas, where populations have limited access

---

[69] This is different to the cross-cutting issues of concern detailed in the section below, which details concerns linked to programme design, including the need for a conflict-sensitive approach and the inclusion of gender-related aspects.

[70] Budd, M., 'Behind the numbers: Insecurity and marginalization in Central America', *Americas Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2014).

to basic social services and protection, and where levels of social cohesion/capital are low.

TOC 4 is based on a recognition that the strength and behaviour of state institutions are key determinants of insecurity and marginalization among vulnerable groups. It is through institutions that the state generates a secure, inclusive living environment, and that policies and legal frameworks are developed and applied equitably.[71] Citizens' interactions with these institutions over the course of their lives have important consequences for their personal development, how they understand society, their sense of belonging and the choices and decisions they make.[72] Against a background of civil war, the violent post-conflict period and institutional weakness, a culture of violence has emerged. Violence has become a means of social mobilization and positioning, and violence has become normalized in everyday life.[73] Gangs have in some places become de facto institutions that respond to certain economic and other immediate needs of vulnerable populations, but mostly operate through violence, coercion and fear. Government officials often have no choice but to deal with gangs, which are often the dominant local force.[74] As a result, confidence in state institutions is low, as is reflected in the low level of condemnation of violent crime, among other things. The high levels of migration (internal and external) is a strong indicator of the inability of the state to protect its citizens and a situation in which citizens are unable to live alongside each other in peace (see TOC 2). This all leads to an imbalance between society's expectations and the state's capacity to meet these expectations, or a ruptured state–society contract.

The work of WFP supports restoration of the state–society contract, the fragility of which is at the heart of El Salvador's development dilemmas. WFP is able to work with both marginalized communities and the state. Efforts to restore the state–society contract engage with vertical dynamics and are linked to an emerging concept in the peacebuilding field of vertical integration. Vertical integration refers specifically to the need for greater coherence and coordination up and down the chain of relationships that link international, national and local actors in peacebuilding contexts.[75] It rests on twin observations. First, that peacebuilding processes that focus on elite-level pact making are in most cases too narrow to decisively move societies from war to peace.**[76] At the same time, grassroots-focused peacebuilding efforts that are disconnected from wider political dynamics are likely to be more palliative than transformative. Instead, peacebuilding is about building effective and accountable state institutions and restoring social relationships, while also linking both sets of processes.[77] Effectiveness and accountability, however, cannot be willed or engineered by outsiders. They must emerge iteratively through the commitments of and interactions between institutions and wider society.

Nonetheless, organizations can act as connectors and facilitators across different levels, and act in ways that facilitate rather than socially engineer sustainable peace. WFP has strong credibility that it can leverage in order to play an important role as

---

[71] Budd (note 70).

[72] Budd (note 70).

[73] These are rather generalized statements on violence in El Salvador. It should be noted, however, that violence—like armed conflict—is complex and multidimensional. For a thorough problematization of violence in El Salvador, see Hume, M., 'The myths of violence: Gender, conflict, and community in El Salvador', *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 35, no. 5 (2008).

[74] Van der Borgh, C. and Abello Colak, A., *Everyday (In)Security in Contexts of Hybrid Governance: Lessons from Medellin and San Salvador* (London School of Economics and Utrecht University: London, Oct. 2018).

[75] Donais, T., *Towards Vertically Integrated Peace Building: Bridging Top-down and Bottom-up Approaches* (Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2013).

[76] Mccandless, E., Abitbol, E. and Donais, T., *Vertical Integration: A Dynamic Practice Promoting Transformative Peacebuilding* (Taylor & Francis: London, 2015).

[77] Mccandless, Abitbol and Donais (note 76).

** This is a correction of the text in an earlier version, which read: 'First, that peacebuilding processes that focus on elite-level pact making are in most cases too narrow to decisively move societies from *peace to war'*.

a connector and facilitator, as evidenced by its more than 40 years of work as a major humanitarian and development actor in El Salvador. During this time, it has gained the trust and respect of the government, other agencies and local communities alike, which look to WFP for leadership in the humanitarian realm and increasingly for its support of wider development and peacebuilding activities. For example, WFP has been asked by the government and international donors, such as USAID, to take the lead on understanding the linkages between violence and food security, while the government, the International Committee of the Red Cross and UNHCR have approached WFP to assist internally displaced families during both the initial crisis period and resettlement.

These facilitating and connecting roles generate a holistic approach among actors at different levels working on the various components that together contribute to vertical integration and to peacebuilding. A holistic approach requires each actor to understand its place in a process that is far larger than its own activities.[78] Peace is complex, contextual and multifaceted, and building sustainable peace entails influencing the behaviour of social systems that have been affected by armed conflict. At the same time, peacebuilding seeks to achieve change in a constantly changing context in which initial assessments and plans quickly become outdated.[79] Engaging with such complex challenges requires organizations to think and act in more integrated ways that cut across traditional boundaries, and to see peacebuilding not just through the narrow lens of their own core competencies, but in a holistic way that considers the peacebuilding needs of a situation at the systemic level.[80]

The complexities of peacebuilding set against state institutional deficiencies bring to the forefront the importance of partnerships. At the most basic level, partnerships are required to establish a referral network that allows a comprehensive package of services to beneficiaries to be tailored to their different needs. Including local authorities, and strengthening their capacity to respond, will be crucial to restoring state-society trust and enhancing institutional density. However, partnerships that extend beyond such traditional structures can be useful for better understanding and addressing these challenges.

First, partners, by virtue of their diversity of mandates and experience, have additional technical knowledge that can be useful. The gang dynamics that affect most parts of the country mean that there is usually only limited or incomplete information, as people fear speaking out about any matter that might be related to the gangs. Partners working directly with vulnerable populations have more intimate knowledge of local dynamics, the impact on the population and resulting needs. This was clearly evident from the research around TOC 2 and the lack of direct access to the beneficiary population for WFP. Moreover, an estimated 40 organizations work with returnees and IDPs. Their knowledge and experience could serve as the foundation for programme design and planning. The difficulties in targeting and reaching participants in numbers, which affected Gastromotiva and ConectArte in TOC 1 and the resilience project in TOC 3, could be addressed through strong partnerships capable of identifying and referring applicable individuals. Finally, local partners can provide feedback that is crucial for identifying actions that could reduce the gap between the peacebuilding aims of WFP at the organizational level and local peacebuilding outcomes.[81] This has

---

[78] For further discussion on the need for a holistic approach to WFP programming in the context of contributing to peacebuilding, see Delgado et al. (note 1).

[79] Campbell (note 22).

[80] Ricigliano, R., 'Networks of effective action: Implementing an integrated approach to peacebuilding', *Security Dialogue*, vol. 34, no. 4 (2003).

[81] For an in-depth discussion around the interrelations between peacebuilding aims at the UN organizational level and local level peacebuilding outcomes see Campbell (note 22).

the potential to help localize WFP peacebuilding aims in the Salvadoran national and subnational contexts. This, in turn, would contribute to a holistic approach in which actors work collaboratively in a coherent and mutually supportive way to maximize the collective contribution to peacebuilding.

Recommendation 13.

Map out in detail who is doing what and how WFP's interventions can better connect with others, given that WFP's direct footprint will remain relatively small.

Recommendation 14.

Maximize opportunities to engage national and local authorities in WFP project planning and implementation.

Recommendation 15.

Capitalize on partnerships, improved communication and information sharing with partners, including clear referral systems.

Recommendation 16.

Develop complaint and feedback mechanisms for WFP projects that can be used as a model and replicated by other partners and local authorities in their social programmes.[82]

---

[82] At the time of the research, WFP El Salvador was in the process of setting up CFMs. This recommendation is therefore for the longer term once the mechanisms are up and running.

5. Challenges and opportunities

This country study identified areas in which WFP programming might unintentionally be creating tensions or grievances or missing out on opportunities to contribute to improving the prospects for peace. Many of these are discussed above. However, two important aspects stood out as cutting across all the TOCs. The first is the issue of conflict sensitivity and the need for a dynamic conflict analysis to guide programme design and implementation. Conflict sensitivity and conflict analysis are discussed in more detail in the preliminary report and are applicable to WFP El Salvador too. However, the Salvadoran context demands a particular focus—that of conflict sensitivity around gang dynamics.

Conflict sensitivity around gang dynamics

Gangs reach into most aspects of life in El Salvador, although their strength and level of control and violence vary (see box 2.1). While gang dynamics affect all WFP interventions, the extent will vary depending on whether the gangs are external or internal to the area, and whether two rival gangs are operating in the same community. For example, it has been observed that there is a greater acceptance of WFP interventions in areas where gangs have emerged from within a community, as ultimately many of the beneficiaries will be gang members' own family members. Where external gangs have entered a community, these tend to exhibit more predatory behaviour. In all the projects visited by the research team, gang dynamics translated into the need for WFP to negotiate access with these gangs, while many project beneficiaries had to negotiate permission to participate.

Targeting is another major conflict sensitivity concern when implementing programmes and projects in gang-dominated areas. The projects must navigate the contextually fluid boundaries between marginalization, gang affiliation and criminality. While great efforts are made to ensure that beneficiaries are not gang members, such affiliations are not always clear-cut. In particular, this is the case when a close relative—such as a parent or sibling—or partner is a member of a gang. Gang dynamics penetrate these communities and control many aspects of daily life. As is the case in many other marginalized communities in which illegal and criminal structures have become entrenched, these structures also provide protection and means of survival in the absence of the state. Thus, excluding an individual with close ties to a gang would be counterproductive given that most individuals have some kind of relationship with the gangs. Moreover, it is precisely because of their physical closeness to the gangs that youth in these communities are so vulnerable. Instead, attention should be paid on a case-by-case basis to the impact that a beneficiary's particularly close ties to a gang of might have on the cohort as a whole. Gangs might also demand that a family member who may or may not meet the project criteria be included as a project beneficiary. Knowledge of the community and of public information about gang affiliation allows WFP to minimize such risks. At the same time, not allowing a family member to participate would probably exacerbate tensions and protection risks.

WFP interventions involving cash transfers may risk exposing beneficiaries to extortion. This risk is increased when investment is made in machinery and tools, such as in projects that support farmers' organizations, or where the resources provided by the interventions are much more visible. The research team visited one former project site where WFP had facilitated the construction of a warehouse and processing facility as well as assisting beneficiaries to set up businesses. These interventions and related

investments were highly visible and ran a higher risk of being extorted than individual cash transfers. In a different case, a project was forced to close due to extortion and theft by gangs. Although WFP has not had any reports of the extortion of cash transfers, it has taken mitigation measures to reduce the risk of extortion, among other things, by providing transfers through a range of delivery systems (such as supermarket-specific vouchers) from which the beneficiary can choose, and disbursing transfers over a period of time rather than on a specific day. Such measures help to disrupt any regular pattern that can be detected and exploited by a gang.

Finally, interventions will generally risk exposing beneficiaries to gangs. This can be particularly critical when beneficiaries want to remain hidden (as discussed in TOC 2) or when beneficiaries have family members in the police force. Situations like this are inevitable in the Salvadoran context and, thus far, WFP has dealt with them on a case-by-case basis. WFP has taken measures to reduce the risk of extortion and infiltration. However, adapting to gang-related dynamics—which, as the discussions on the specific TOCs illustrate, is often essential in order to reach populations in need—in many ways reinforces those dynamics.

The different conflict sensitivity concerns around WFP programming in the context of gang dynamics can usefully be thought of as four types of risk: (*a*) community cohesion risks, in terms of exacerbating tensions in the community or reinforcing gang dynamics; (*b*) protection risks, in terms of the potential harm to direct beneficiaries of WFP programming; (*c*) safety risks for WFP field staff negotiating access to or monitoring programmes; and (*d*) diversion risks, should resources be captured by unintended beneficiaries. Although interlinked, these different risks require different response strategies.

Gender

The second cross-cutting aspect is gender. The importance of a gender-sensitive approach has been well-established in all forms of peacebuilding, humanitarian and development work. In El Salvador, sharp gender distinctions and inequalities are written into gang dynamics and the wider macho culture. This has resulted in a much more limited space for women to exercise agency and pressure on men to assume dominating behaviours. Domestic violence against women is largely silenced and tacitly accepted.[83] Sexual violence is used to force women into submission, to create a culture of fear and to punish community members who disobey the gang.[84] Women gang members risk serious physical violence from rival gangs, police and their own gangs; the unofficial motto of the MS-13, for instance, is 'kill, rape, control'.[85] Femicide—the gender-motivated killing of women—has become a critical concern as rates rapidly increase. Between 2007 and 2012, El Salvador had the highest rate of reported femicides in the world.[86]

This means that interventions that seek to contribute to enhancing the prospects for peace must consider how violence and insecurity affect women and men differently. The research did not explore gender to any greater extent, although some initial findings emerged on how various interventions had a different impact on women and men.[87]

---

[83] Hume (note 73).

[84] Applebaum and Mawby (note 25).

[85] Applebaum and Mawby (note 25).

[86] Musalo, K., 'El Salvador—a peace worse than war: Violence, gender and a failed legal response', *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism*, vol. 30, no. 1 (2018).

[87] See also World Food Programme, *The Potential of Cash-based Interventions to Promote Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Multi-country Case Study* (WFP: Rome, Sep. 2018).

Recommendation 17.

Incorporate conflict analysis into WFP programme planning and implementation cycles, in order to better understand gang dynamics in the specific intervention areas and ascertain whether gangs are internal or external to the community.

Recommendation 18.

Together with an external adviser, conduct a risk analysis in connection with the conflict analysis to thoroughly unpack the different kinds of risk and how they interlink with conflict sensitivity programming.

Recommendation 19.

Incorporate conflict analysis and the strengthened focus on WFP's contribution to enhancing the prospects for peace set out in this Working Paper into the CSP mid-term review.

Recommendation 20.

Ensure that all efforts, including local research activities such as the recently conducted Multipurpose Cash Study, integrate a peacebuilding lens to better understand how WFP interventions and modalities interact with violence dynamics or might exacerbate or reduce tensions.

Recommendation 21.

Establish protocols/parameters on how to deal with gang interference in projects.

Recommendation 22.

Incorporate a gender lens into the conflict analysis in order to understand how conflict/violence dynamics differently affect women and men.

6. Measurement

Measuring contributions to improving the prospects for peace presents a number of challenges. Many confluent social, economic, political and security factors collectively create a sustainable peace, which means that individual contributions cannot be ascribed explanatory power. Moreover, peacebuilding must happen at all levels, from the local community to the national, regional and international levels. The preliminary report discusses in detail the major challenges of measuring contributions to establishing or maintaining peace. These are all applicable to the Salvadoran context. With this in mind, this section sets out the challenges and concerns particular to WFP in El Salvador.

WFP is making important contributions to improving the prospects for peace in El Salvador. However, few of these contributions are currently captured in existing monitoring and evaluation processes. Monitoring is currently predominantly quantitative and output-oriented. Data collection by WFP includes that on food security, protection needs and gender, as well as on Gastromotiva attendance, completions and job placements. While this kind of measurement is adequate for assessing nutrition rates, food security, livelihood conditions and how projects help meet quantitative improvement goals, it is insufficient for capturing the complexities of peacebuilding. For example, the monitoring and evaluation around Gastromotiva says little about empowering youth as agents of change/peacebuilding, the generation of space in which relationships can be formed and trust built, countering stigma and otherness or improving resilience to gang pressures. Similarly, quantitative monitoring of SO3 focused on sustainable livelihood outputs will give few indications of changes in social cohesion/capital, such as improved community relations.

Capturing such aspects to measure WFP's contributions to enhancing the prospects for peace will require a greater focus on qualitative and innovative methods. In addition to what is discussed in the preliminary report, this Working Paper recommends a specific focus on the development of community-identified indicators as a way of capturing the thus far undocumented outcomes observed by the research team—and indeed by country office staff.

Community-identified indicators, in combination with existing top-down indicator systems, including the narratives and indicators contained in major international peacebuilding policy documents, are highly pertinent for capturing contributions to enhancing the prospects for peace.[88] Definitions of peace are multifaceted, culturally shaped and contested. They include elements such as feelings and relationships that are not easily quantifiable. As a result, peace is largely subjectively defined. There is therefore a need to develop indicators that capture local and subjective dimensions of peace in conjunction with the community affected by the interventions. All indicators provide a narrative and the narrative of community-identified indicators is one that community members feel is important to them.[89] The focus group discussions conducted by the research team provided indications of the issues that are important to communities, such as the creation of space. It is important in this context rather than imposing predetermined indicators, to ask people to reflect on the condition of peace in their own communities and to identify indicators that would help them track

---

[88] See e.g. World Bank, *World Development Report, 2011: Conflict, Security and Development* (World Bank: Washington, DC, 2011); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Governance for Peace: Securing the Social Contract* (UNDP: New York, 2012); and World Bank and United Nations, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank: Washington, DC, 2017), as well as WFP's own existing indicators.

[89] Firchow, P. and MacGinty, R., 'Measuring peace: Comparability, commensurability, and complementarity using bottom-up indicators', *International Studies Review*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2017).

changes.[90] This would be in sharp contrast to top-down indicators, where the narrative may be set by an organization specifically to tell policymakers about key trends and categories in society that they deem important.[91] The intention here is not to dismiss top-down, technocratically oriented indicators, but to highlight that an overemphasis on such indicators may neglect other elements of peacebuilding, particularly those linked to grievances, perceptions of grievances and relationships. Used in conjunction with existing indicator systems, community-identified indicators have the advantage of generating a more complex and nuanced representation of conflict-affected societies. Such indicators can provide detail, texture and local meaning that top-down indicators are unable to capture.

WFP is well-placed to develop community-identified indicators that can be used in conjunction with existing indicators as a way of capturing contributions to enhancing the prospects for peace. Many local narratives are already being picked up by project staff through process monitoring in focus group discussions, direct interviews with beneficiaries, field visits and observations. However, these narratives are not captured in existing monitoring, partly because the WFP corporate results framework does not allow for this. As a result, they go undocumented. While the country office can develop its own indicators alongside the corporate ones, this requires considerable financial resources and time.

A second important consideration for measuring the contribution to peacebuilding is to recognize that peacebuilding is a long-term process and that change often takes place over generations. In contrast, the projects visited by the research team have only a relatively short timeframe. Thus, WFP programming must be prepared to measure its contribution to enhancing the prospects for peace in the long term, and not just rely on the much shorter monitoring and evaluation frameworks of the specific projects.

Finally, the Working Paper has already made some recommendations on measurement in relation to the specific TOCs. In particular, two previous recommendations are worth reiterating here: recommendation 3 (on conducting thorough follow-up of beneficiaries after they leave the projects to ascertain to what degree beneficiaries are sustainably engaged in legal income-generating activities and/or study, and the impact on resisting gang recruitment) and recommendation 4 (continuing to monitor landownership agreements as an appropriate tool for horizontal bridging and providing short term, workable solutions to unresolved root causes of armed conflict around unequal landownership). In addition, more work can be done at the local level to ensure the micro-validity of measurement indicators.

Recommendation 23.

Facilitate the development of community-identified indicators to capture local everyday peace dynamics.[92]

Recommendation 24.

Document local narratives to feed into both conflict analysis and programme design.

---

[90] Firchow and MacGinty (note 89).
[91] Firchow and MacGinty (note 89).
[92] This could entail exploring the possibility of soliciting the assistance of SIPRI.

7. Ways forward

The evidence compiled for this Working Paper indicates that WFP programming does have a positive contribution to make to improving the prospects for peace in El Salvador. There are, however, problems, deficiencies and missed opportunities that need to be addressed. The report makes 24 recommendations to this end. The most important recommendation, however, is to conduct a solid conflict analysis. Without such an analysis, it is impossible to assess a programme's potential interaction with conflict or instigating change in a constantly changing context. As phase I of the WFP–SIPRI Knowledge Partnership comes to an end, a number of overarching recommendations have been made that are applicable to all WFP interventions in conflict and peacebuilding environments. Further research is required. In phase II, inquiry will both broaden, by incorporating new countries, and deepen, through rigorous focus on specific intervention areas. WFP programming in El Salvador will both contribute to and benefit from future findings as the Knowledge Partnership evolves.