



HOW THE CHURCH CONTRIBUTES TO WELL-BEING IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED FRAGILE STATES: VOICES FROM THE LOCAL CHURCH

Full research report



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Cover photo: Reverend Moses Malai Mathian, 64, whose community has been deeply engaged in the peacebuilding process in South Sudan. Credit: Tom Price/Tearfund

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The report was mainly written by Marjorie Gourlay (CCCW), with input from Dr Muthuraj Swamy (CCCW) and Dr Madleina Daehnhardt (Tearfund). Various stakeholders at Tearfund contributed to the report through extensive comments, namely: Lauren Kejeh, Pete Evans, Oenone Chadburn, Rachel Swift, Veena O'Sullivan, Stephen German, Jodi Blackham, Chris McDonald, David Couzens and Fennelien Stal.

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FOREWORD

The importance of hope in conflict-affected fragile states

We as Tearfund are compelled to work in places where the need is greatest. Protracted crises in places affected by conflict make a difficult context even more challenging – yet this makes our compulsion to act all the stronger. The needs in such places are huge and often persist over long periods of time. It is almost impossible to walk away. Our DNA is embedded in such places: historically, Tearfund was birthed out of the UK church's compassionate desire to respond to the Biafra conflict in Nigeria. This and many subsequent experiences have shaped our long-term commitment and response to protracted crisis in places devastated by conflict.

Looking back over our 50-year history, one can see the deep footprints of Tearfund's journey with the church in places where the need has been overwhelming because of the poverty and pain such places bear. Churches, whether powerful or small, have been allies for Tearfund, bringing good news and hope in hard-to-reach communities and situations of great complexity. Indeed, we believe the church is uniquely placed to contribute to well-being in all its expressions in these settings. This preferential partnership has defined our organisational history. Contexts differ, depth and scale of needs vary but, in many places, the local church has been the hope that people look for. These expectations on the church are magnified in places where conflict is very present. There, the local church really can be the place of refuge in times of trouble.

However, Tearfund also recognises that this has not always been the story everywhere. Sometimes, the church itself has been impacted by conflict, embroiled in politics, drawn into divisions of power and ethnicity. Church leadership has sometimes taken a stand and been the voice calling for justice and peace, but not always. The church has sometimes found the path of peace and reconciliation to be like walking a tightrope amid all the pain and division surrounding it, and has not always felt able to respond. Conversely, often the church has found this pain hard to resist as the call to serve the poor and vulnerable is so loud and so deep. Sometimes the church has rushed in without realising the magnitude of the task and its own limitations which have been difficult and overwhelming for the church. We have a lot to learn and reflect from this experience. Yet, where the church has had the capacity, vision and clarity to respond it has been able to stand firm and respond well to people's needs. Here it has enabled communities to regain hope and thrive, promoting well-being even in the midst of protracted crisis. It has been that light on the hill (Matthew 5:14).

Tearfund is fully committed to supporting and enabling the local church to be a channel of hope in conflict-affected fragile states. This research seeks to understand how we can do this well, to learn from the successes and the struggles, as we listen to the voices and experiences of the church working in these settings. The probing questions in these pages are an expression of Tearfund's commitment to partnership with the church whose vital role in protracted crisis settings has mostly been a hidden story.

We explore these questions, with open hearts and minds, with the determination to seek, reflect and learn courageously. We truly want to understand what the church is best placed to do and what the church finds hard, so that we can serve our ally better over the next 50 years.

Veena O'Sullivan
Head of Thematic Support, Tearfund

October 2019

PREFACE

The Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide (CCCW) is committed to promote the understanding of world Christianity and the work of the church globally, as it has done now for several decades. In this endeavour it is always seeking to learn from churches across the world, about their challenges and their contributions to communities' holistic well-being. Today, churches in many parts of the world find themselves in changing contexts, facing new challenges. Many operate in the context of other religions, traditions and political ideologies, some of which are hostile to Christianity. Where there is violence and conflict, the church is not immune to their impacts. Christian life and witness needs to be understood and exercised against this broader context.

Peacebuilding and reconciliation – central to Jesus' mission on earth – are an urgent necessity for our world today. They are an increasingly important part of the role of the church and ecumenical associations globally, as they are for many other committed international and local organisations, both faith-based and non-faith-based. One example, in the Anglican Communion, is that of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who has made reconciliation one of the three key ministry priorities. I had the privilege of writing his 2019 Lent Book on this very theme: *Reconciliation: The Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book* (London: SPCK). CCCW will continue to keep peacebuilding and reconciliation as an important theme in the study of world Christianity.

It is very encouraging to learn that Tearfund has been expanding its work in the areas of peacebuilding and reconciliation as part of its efforts to build a better society based on the values of the kingdom of God that Jesus has inaugurated. This report, of which I am a co-author, is the fruit of our research, commissioned by Tearfund, to study local churches' responses to protracted conflict in seven conflict-affected fragile states. Its findings are important: the complex nature of the conflicts; the multidimensional responses of local churches to build peace and contribute to community well-being; and the numerous challenges they face in so doing.

Trying to reconcile communities and people in conflict is a noble effort but there are shortcomings, if not dangers, when these efforts come from external agencies and 'people from outside'. Too often, these interventions are based on generalisations and reductions about the causes and nature of conflicts. For any peacebuilding and conflict-resolution to be viable and long-lasting, grassroot realities and local responses are vitally important and must not be disregarded. For this reason, this research has focused more on what the local churches *are* doing rather than what they *should* do. It was also important to hear local church perspectives, which are rarely documented. Faith-based organisations are sometimes seen as problematic rather than helpful actors, given the dubious binaries constructed between 'secular' and 'religious' spheres. It is not always a rosy picture and the church does not always get it right. Yet, as this study shows, many local churches in different parts of the world are committed to lessen conflicts in society and are making significant contributions to the people's well-being, both within and outside the church.

This report illustrates the importance of empowering local churches in what they are already doing to address conflicts and resolve tensions. I very much hope it will generate enthusiasm and prompt reflection on how best to support the church in this vital work.

Dr Muthuraj Swamy
Director, Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide, Westminster College, Cambridge

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research subject and method

This study analyses the multidimensional roles local churches play in responding to protracted crisis in conflict-affected fragile states. It also provides an important and little-documented church perspective on faith-based organisations' distinctive contribution to holistic well-being. The research focuses on four themes:

1. The impacts of conflict on the local church.
2. The roles the church takes on in responding to conflicts.
3. Churches' motivations for responding.
4. The church's own perspectives on barriers, constraints and opportunities for engagement.

The research covers seven fragile states:

- Iraq
- Syria
- Myanmar
- Burundi
- Central African Republic (CAR)
- Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
- South Sudan

Fieldwork was conducted in South Sudan (Juba, Nyamlel and Aweil) and Syria (Damascus), with supplementary data collection in Lebanon (Beirut, Antelias and Rmeileh). Research participants included:

- representatives of local churches
- denominational and parish leaders
- church-based relief, development and reconciliation projects
- Tearfund national staff.

Major findings

Impacts of conflict on local churches

The experience of the local church in protracted crisis settings varies significantly and is influenced by the particularities of the context. One of the primary impacts of conflict on local churches is displacement, which leads to high expectations being placed on the church in terms of its emergency response (particularly evident in the South Sudan case study). Other impacts on the church relate to suffering in its many expressions:

- loss of members and leadership
- community disintegration and disunity among churches
- trauma
- loss of trust
- xenophobia.

A third significant impact on the church are demographic changes (as evidenced in the Syria/Lebanon case study). All of this contributes to people having a sense of no longer belonging. Other impacts include:

- increased health problems
- high numbers of vulnerable people, especially widows, orphans, and the elderly

- increased crime
- fewer education and employment opportunities
- a sense of hopelessness among the youth.

For the church, these factors exacerbate economic difficulties and put extra strain on existing resources. There are also theological implications for the churches as they grapple with establishing their place in a constantly changing environment that tests them in every respect.

Churches' roles in crisis settings

The churches in protracted crisis settings take on varied, multidimensional roles in responding to people's diverse needs. They are active in offering hospitality to displaced people, doing relief and development work, mediation, reconciliation and peacebuilding, and youth work, and offering solidarity in suffering. They continue to offer teaching and hope through church services and prayer, and provide clinics and support for the sick and vulnerable. An important area of work for churches is giving psychosocial support for trauma relief. In some contexts, they also exercise a 'prophetic voice' to speak out against injustice in society and advocate for persecuted minorities, although this is more possible in some contexts than others. However, sometimes they strive for strategic neutrality, to avoid politicisation, and where this is the case, they appear to have greater ability to act. In the Middle East, for example, the church plays more of a pastoral role, as speaking out and challenging norms may be too risky or dangerous. As mentioned, the churches also develop theologies pertinent to the evolving particular contexts of protracted crisis: an example is the emerging theology and practice of showing hospitality to refugees in Lebanon that undergirds the unconditional nature and impartiality of the churches' relief efforts.

Motivation of churches during protracted crisis

The churches in this study say they are inspired and sustained by faith in a God who gives them courage and perseverance to serve their communities despite adversity and fatigue. They are encouraged by the biblical 'great commission' (Matthew 28:18–20) and a sense of calling. The power of the Holy Spirit strengthens them, as does their own lived experience of suffering and trauma, but also of healing, transformation and hope. In some places, the church is politically motivated where its leadership has a complex inter-relationship with the political landscape, as in South Sudan and Democratic Republic of Congo.

Challenges and opportunities for local churches

The churches in conflict-affected states are restricted in many respects, but they often interpret the challenges they face as opportunities too. Ecumenical division, for example, is a challenge but also an opportunity for cooperation; the church being taken out of its comfort zone is a challenge, but also an opportunity for capacity building. The main challenges the churches face include:

- lack of funding and resources
- lack of genuine long-term partnership that might help provide the skills needed to help them provide services
- tensions arising from the strain of taking on such new roles
- disunity
- mindsets of dependency
- interfaith rivalries
- debilitating fear
- trauma and exhaustion among leadership.

Additional difficulties are donor fatigue, secular providers' perceptions that faith institutions are partial, and ecumenical divisions which increase competition for scant resources and sometimes lead to duplication of activities.

Conclusions and key insights

The church is remarkably strong in many of these fragile contexts despite surveillance, persecution, loss of members and many other challenges relating to lack of funding and resources, trauma and weariness among leadership. It is evident from fieldwork that, despite contextual variations, local churches welcome the support of genuine, long-term partnership to enhance their capacity to respond and contribute to the holistic well-being of their suffering communities.

Important insights expressed by the churches in this study include: the need for partnership; ecumenical unity and creativity in working together for community healing and transformation; establishing peace and long-term peacebuilding; and a focus on the youth to bring hope to new generations. Establishing peace and long-term peacebuilding are the most urgent needs. Continued humanitarian aid projects that are shared across ethnic and religious communities, and development programmes that bring people together, are vital. The Lebanon case study, for example, discusses the creation of places of collective memory to help heal trauma across the community. A focus on children and young people would bring hope to these fragile states where hope has been lost. This was particularly evident in South Sudan but also in Lebanon where historical sectarianism has discouraged many young people from engaging with religion.

In listening to the voices of local churches, it becomes clear that there is a vital role for establishing and strengthening balanced partnership with agencies such as Tearfund. Links with such bodies are seen as key to maintaining the efforts of the churches in these fragile contexts. The churches themselves are seeking to become more ecumenical in their approaches, to improve capacity and efficiency and to demonstrate the unity necessary for post-conflict restoration of communities. An empowered, united church supported by partnerships, a church that engages young people and is not paralysed by fear, has the potential to bring about positive transformation on all levels of society. For, as one respondent put it,

'Where the church is, there is hope.'



📷 Inside a church in Rwisabi village, Burundi, as it hosts a food security and nutrition project. Participants wait to be seen.
Photo: Tom Price/Tearfund

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the research

This piece of research is intended to be a key formative study informing Tearfund's recently formulated corporate priority of Fragile States (FS), and overlapping with that of Church and Community Transformation (CCT). The CCT approach and its Church and Community Mobilisation (CCM) component have been adopted in several majority-Christian contexts and accompanied with research that has been central to formulating Tearfund's operational approaches in these areas.¹ However, in conflict-affected fragile states, these mechanisms may not be the most appropriate models and therefore this research seeks potential avenues for future engagement with the church in conflict-affected fragile states. The main perspective shaping this study is the voice of the churches themselves but some consideration is also given to the four humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.² The emphasis on the local in this study is pertinent as there is evidence to suggest that cycles of violence are perpetuated when grassroots voices have been ignored.³

1.2 Definition of terms

1.2.1 Conflict-affected fragile states

Tearfund's definition of fragile states is based on the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) definition that risk outweighs coping capacity, thus decreasing stability and increasing fragility.⁴ The assessment of fragility takes into account five factors that contribute to the level of risk: security, political, social, economic and environmental factors. Tearfund's previous focus on peacebuilding has now been subsumed into Fragile States. Other currently developing aspects of Tearfund's response in fragile states include non-violent action, psychosocial support, leadership training, and a focus on youth and nurturing peacebuilders. Three sub-themes of Fragile States are: *restricted*, in which Tearfund is exploring ways of working where the church is restricted in its ability to act and is often in a minority; *complex*, where humanitarian needs go beyond what the local church and partners can deliver, necessitating Tearfund to operate directly; and, thirdly, *root causes*, a focus that seeks to identify and address the root causes of conflict.⁵ The protracted crisis referred to throughout this research is defined as extended threat to life and livelihood in which government fails to protect or support its people adequately.⁶

1.2.2 Holistic well-being

Tearfund's measure of human development is through the concept of *holistic well-being*. This reflects the understanding that the nature of the church's contribution to society is in the restoration of four broken relationships: our human relationship with God, our relationship with others, our relationship with creation, and our own identity as 'Christ-bearers'.⁷ The LIGHT Wheel, developed by Tearfund's Impact and Effectiveness team in collaboration with the University of Bath, is Tearfund's framework for holistic well-being. It identifies nine areas that all affect the church's overall resilience or human flourishing and capacity for survival, general well-being and the possibility for growth and development. These nine domains are identified as: personal

1 For example, Tearfund QuiP studies (Flowers, 2018)

2 See UN OCHA (2012)

3 The World Bank (2011)

4 See Tearfund (2018c)

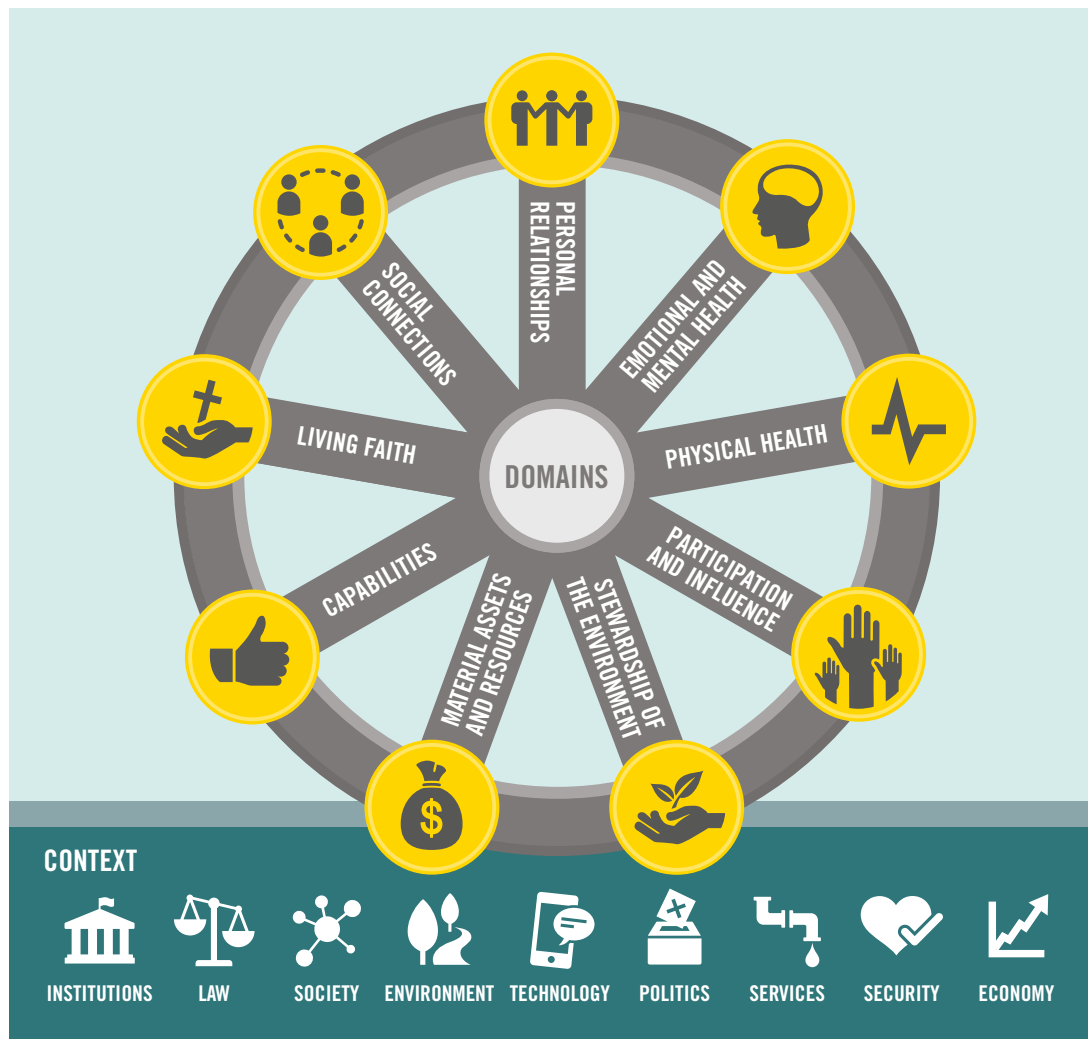
5 See Tearfund (2018e); also, interview with David Couzens, Conflict Programme Coordinator, 24.04.19

6 Flores (2005) quoted in Alinovi, Hemrich and Russo (eds.) (2008) 2

7 *Holistic* refers to the four broken relationships (with God, self, others, creation). See Tearfund (2018f)

relationships, mental and emotional health, physical health, participation and influence, stewardship of the environment, material assets and resources, capabilities, living faith, and social connections. These domains are considered within the context of: institutions, law, society, environment, technology, politics, services, security and economy (see Figure 1). Thus this study has sought evidence of local church contributions to all of these areas of human life.⁸ In conflict-affected fragile states such as those in this study, all nine areas of the context become eroded and human well-being suffers as a result. Political and economic insecurity is compounded by loss of or increased strain on existing services, with an additional negative impact on the environment and people's separation from agricultural land. Trust between communities and individuals becomes damaged, and the whole of society is affected. The law and other institutions crumble. As this study shows, in some countries, the church becomes one of the few remaining credible institutions with the responsibility to tend to well-being, without the stable context identified in the LIGHT Wheel framework (see pages 54–55).

Figure 1 Tearfund's LIGHT Wheel framework



8 See Tearfund (2016b)

1.2.3 Local church

The phrase 'local church' as used throughout this report refers to indigenous and emerging ecclesial bodies of all denominations. Tearfund publication *Partnering with the local church* defines the church as 'a community of believers who follow Jesus and are an expression of the kingdom of God on earth'.⁹ For the purposes of this report, the main emphasis is on church leadership (ordained and other active leaders) although these too are not immune to the direct impact of conflict and may also need support themselves.¹⁰ This study has sought input from the church in its widest sense, with various expressions of how it lives out its role. Interviewees included parish priests, denominational leadership, ecumenical bodies and youth projects, as well as development branches of more established denominations. One of Tearfund's objectives is to support these church partners to 'tackle the root causes of poverty, injustice and fragility in their wider communities'.¹¹ The majority of Tearfund partners are Protestant evangelical denominations; however, this study takes a wider perspective by including what Tearfund calls 'Sustainable Christian communities where recognised churches are very small or non-existent and Tearfund has committed to supporting them'.¹² The search for literature included all denominations, and fieldwork included interviews with multiple denominations and emerging churches. This study has, therefore, taken an ecumenical approach in order to capture the widest sample of voices. An attempt is made to draw out shared themes while recognising it can be problematic to group the church as one homogeneous entity given the rich variety of voices within even one denomination and one location.

1.3 Objectives of the research

This research has three main objectives. Firstly, it aims to understand the impact of conflict on the local churches. Secondly, it seeks a deeper understanding of the practices and roles of the local churches in conflict-affected fragile states (including how this is affected by their history and prior engagement in the conflict). Thirdly, it aims to offer some reflections on the areas in which Tearfund could develop in these settings, taking local church perspectives into account.¹³ The study explores four major research questions for each of the protracted crises covered in this report:

- What are the impacts of conflict on the local church?
- What roles does the local church take on in responding to conflict?
- What is the church's motivation for responding in these ways?
- What are the church's own perspectives on barriers, constraints and opportunities as it seeks to improve holistic well-being?
- What are the churches' own perspectives on opportunities, constraints and barriers to their work?

This report seeks to inform Tearfund's Fragile States corporate priority business plan. As such, its overall objective is to develop a clearer understanding of the multidimensional roles the local church is playing in these settings. Subsequently, it aims to influence Tearfund models so they can be better applied to *complex and restricted* fragile states such as those in this study.¹⁴

Church and community mobilisation (CCM, a key component of Tearfund's wider CCT portfolio) is one way that Tearfund works through local churches to facilitate a response to the needs around them. Local churches work together with their communities to identify and address shared needs using their own resources.¹⁵ One of the aims of this research is to understand how characteristics that are particular to fragile states may be identified and taken into consideration to develop programmes applicable to these contexts. It may be

9 Blackman (2007) 7

10 As with, for example, the church of Kajo Keji (chapter 3)

11 Research Terms of Reference (ToR) for the commissioning of this report as of November 2018

12 Ibid., 3

13 Ibid., 5

14 See Tearfund (2018a) (2.2.3), 9

15 Tearfund (2018d); see also Tearfund (2018b); interview with Jodi Blackham and Steven German, 27.03.19

that existing approaches such as CCM are not directly applicable but could be adapted and developed in ways that can further enable local churches to be a ready resource.

This research focuses on seven conflict-affected fragile states in which Tearfund currently operates (Iraq, Syria, Myanmar, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Burundi and South Sudan). The priority countries in this research provide a cross-section of accessible contexts and a range of the roles of the church both in *complex* and *restricted* countries. Examples of non-Christian-majority contexts are included to add to previous research that focused on Christian-majority situations.¹⁶ The four research questions underpinning this study are pertinent, with empirical, religious and organisational implications. They are also highly relevant to the longer-term survival of many of the churches represented in this study.¹⁷ It is hoped that by listening to the voices of the church in protracted crises, tangible solutions may be found in order to better support the churches in conflict-affected fragile states. This will inevitably mean adapting perspective to accommodate a longer time frame for the work of transformation to become visible.¹⁸

1.4 Research methods

1.4.1 Project overview

Phase one of this research was a desk review of internal Tearfund documents and internal stakeholder interviews. During this stage, the settings of conflict in each of the seven focus countries was broadly reviewed. A wider search for existing and available literature was also undertaken, with a particular focus on that which provided answers to the four main research questions. Phase two was in-country field visits in the two case study countries, South Sudan and Syria, with supplementary fieldwork interviews in Lebanon. During field visits, interviews were conducted with field staff and representatives of the local church.

1.4.2 Limitations

Overall, the limitations on this piece of research were: the breadth of its scope, which limited the depth possible in each case study; budget and time; and insecurity. Fieldwork interviews that ask the churches' perspectives necessarily create a bias in the data. Equally, they do not reveal fairly to what extent the churches themselves can become corrupted or politicised and can compound existing problems rather than alleviating them.

1.4.3 Challenges in phase one research access

A review of available literature revealed a lack of current, published material that addresses the particular focus of this research. Widening the search to include online articles and sources, it was possible to find information on the roles of the church, particularly for churches in Africa. However, there was little that addressed the churches' motivations or their own perspectives on opportunities, constraints and barriers to working towards holistic well-being.¹⁹ This is evident particularly in what Tearfund identifies as *restricted* contexts, where the church is a small minority and is experiencing persecution, which restricts its freedom to act.²⁰ Another limitation is that the literature available in English is often written for an international readership, taking into account donor expectations and project measurability.²¹ Particularly in terms of peacebuilding, measurability is near impossible and should not be depended upon to assess the progress of what is often costly, long-term local effort. Reviewing local-level and local-language newspapers or other

16 Interview with Sarah Newman, Head of Eurasia and North Africa team, 27.03.19

17 As reflected by David Kasali, Founder and President of the Congo Initiative in correspondence, 15.07.19

18 Interview with Oenone Chadburn, Head of Humanitarian Support Team, and Douwe Dijkstra, Head of East and Central Africa, 27.03.19

19 Most available and recent publications are online reports and articles but not academic papers.

20 See Tearfund (2018e)

21 English is not an official language in most of the seven countries, with the exception of Burundi and South Sudan (which has more than 60 indigenous languages and uses English as a unifying tongue).

resources was beyond the scope of this particular research but would be fundamental in developing a richer picture of each particular context. It is important to note that this has been a review of literature only and has not, in most cases, been verbally confirmed. In all seven countries, churches face significant hurdles: enormous strain on already limited resources; serious scarcity of capital and resources; fragile infrastructure; and the fear of reprisals resulting from publication, particularly online. Perhaps most importantly, the churches identified in this research are composed of individuals who are themselves suffering the effects of protracted crisis; they too are in need of the support they are extending to their communities.²² For this reason, field visits were crucial in order to hear local voices.

1.4.4 Fieldwork interviews

Most fieldwork interviews were arranged in advance by local Tearfund staff who invited representatives of the local church to participate in the research. They were supplemented by some connections established in the field or the researcher's own contacts.²³ This approach was chosen because Tearfund already has established relationships with some of the major stakeholders and they are seen to add the most value to this discussion. Local Tearfund staff were aware of the sensitivities, could broker relationships, and could facilitate trust and openness in a short period of time. This presence of Tearfund staff in South Sudan was generally positive, and their absence in Syria and Lebanon was generally a negative factor. The majority of the sessions were interviews with individuals or small groups representing church-based development organisations or denominations at all levels. Most interviews were with established denominations as well as emerging churches and church plants, and focus groups from ecumenical bodies as well as church-based development organisations. There were no formal contributions from non-church voices in South Sudan, Lebanon or Syria.

1.4.5 Challenges in phase two research access

Limitations associated with this process included: existing relationships and expectations; language and translation barriers; and restrictions on mobility and access to certain regions.²⁴ The motives of the participants should also be considered. It was evident that many of those who were willing to participate regarded these conversations as an opportunity to reach out to the wider world church for support. The two major limitations in the second field trip were the narrow focus on Lebanese churches and lack of time. Interviews in Lebanon provide only one perspective on the Lebanese churches' own experience of conflict during and since the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990) and the consequent implications of the influx of refugees from Syria. In Damascus, an environment that is culturally very relational, a longer period would have been crucial to showing honour and building trust. This is even more the case given that the country is suffering greatly from broken trust and vulnerability, and people are wary of the hidden agendas of external agencies. The time available was insufficient for establishing such relationships, particularly when Tearfund is largely unknown and its evangelical and Western associations may make people guarded.²⁵

At no point did the churches speak about what they considered *not* to be their role. They appeared universally to assume responsibility for all areas of holistic well-being in their communities and to see the church as key to long-term societal transformation and peace. There appeared to be little discomfort with or resistance to gender equality. There was fair representation of female perspectives offered in interviews and demonstrated in church leadership, despite all ordained clergy being male. People made regular reference to the importance of women's rights and equality and the need for government policies that would protect the vulnerable, especially war widows. Chapter 5 provides a more comprehensive assessment of the variety of views offered, the language used and the authenticity of the voices heard.

22 This becomes apparent in chapter 3 (South Sudan case study).

23 In Juba, participants were invited by letter to participate in 'protracted crisis research'. In Damascus, the researcher entered the field as an 'ecclesial coordinator'.

24 Providing another argument for the mobilisation of local actors.

25 Ruiz de Alvira and Zinti (2012) 5–30; and Farah (1976)

1.5 How the report is structured

Chapter 2 provides a literature review relating to the research questions in the seven conflict-affected fragile states explored in this study. It also sets out an argument for supporting the local church followed by a brief synopsis of the roles of the church in responding to crisis in each country. Two case studies form chapters 3 and 4, with fieldwork reports from South Sudan and Syria, and supplementary interviews from Lebanon. Each provides background to the conflict, assesses the impacts on the local church and captures the local church's own experience and perspectives. Chapter 5 collates the findings of both literature review and fieldwork interviews and offers some interpretation of the data, with particular emphasis on the roles of the local church. Finally, the conclusion offers some insights arising from the study on possible ways the church could be supported in its endeavours.

2 FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview and analysis of literature that addresses the questions posed by this research. Firstly, it offers a framework for the local church response to crisis, with particular reference to two major areas. It sets this response against the context of the 'dual legacy' that regards religion both as a cause and a solution of conflict and violence, and also against the context of external intervention in the form of humanitarian relief, development and peacebuilding.²⁶ Secondly, it argues for the local church as being important communities who remain throughout protracted crisis and into the post-conflict era when direct support from international actors has been reduced or withdrawn. Thirdly, it provides a brief illustration of the particular roles of the churches in responding to protracted crisis for each of the seven fragile states that are the focus of this study: Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Central African Republic (CAR), Burundi, South Sudan, Myanmar, Iraq and Syria. Limitations in the available literature are identified, as well as some reasons for this lack, particularly in restricted contexts.²⁷ These factors also highlight the importance of impartiality in capturing local voices as well as the necessity of field visits in person (where possible) to hear directly the local churches' lived experience.



Children worshipping in church in Madzangina village, near Bunia, Ituri Province, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).
Hannah Maule-finch/Tearfund

²⁶ Gopin (2000), 199

²⁷ Tearfund's definition of *restricted* contexts applies to countries with specific challenges such as general insecurity, authority restrictions on civil society space and restrictions on the local church, rendering it unable to operate. Iraq and Syria are affected to an extent by all three restrictions; Myanmar by general insecurity and authority restrictions but the church is largely able to operate. In South Sudan, the church is free to operate and constitutes a major part of civil society but is restricted primarily by fragility and general insecurity. See fig. 1 'Classification of countries according to the three restriction criteria' in Newnham and Piscoi (2018)

2.2 The importance of the local church

2.2.1 'Dual legacy' of religion as both cause and solution of conflict

Local churches have a valid contribution

There is considerable discourse in media, policymaking and academia on the inter-relatedness of religion and violence, with many contending that religion causes conflict.²⁸ This over-simplification of conflict narratives often serves to reinforce prevailing stereotypes, fears of the 'other' and vilification of faith-based communities. It has been suggested that this idea that religion causes violence has grown out of Western constructions of the concept of religion. There are also suggestions that it underpins much of modern domestic and international policy, including the justification of neo-colonial violence against the perceived 'other'.²⁹ It is essential that international agencies seek to understand the particularities of the local contexts that they are entering. It is equally important that neo-colonial perspectives on religion do not jeopardise international projects, especially in countries experiencing protracted crisis that are particularly vulnerable to the influence of interventions promising change. There is, however, an increasing recognition that traditional 'top down' models of international humanitarian aid, development and peacebuilding could be augmented by participatory local-level and faith-based engagement with a holistic approach, particularly in the reconstruction of fragile states.³⁰ International actors have often failed to recognise the role that faith actors play in these multi-institutional contexts in which religion is often visible and active in the public realm at local, national and international levels. It is vital that international agencies value the potential and existing authority and function of the local church in these complex environments.³¹

Theological motivation of the church

It has been said that the church must be like a 'field hospital', daring to step out into the physical and spiritual battlefields to treat the wounded, not from a position of spiritual superiority but as fellow humans reaching out in a wounded world.³² It must be recognised that the church sometimes plays a role in authorising violence and sustaining sectarian division. But equally, its significant potential to construct global community and offer a non-violent vision for the world should also be acknowledged.³³ Central to the theological foundations of the church's role in peacemaking is the primary belief that all are created in the image of God, *imago Dei*. Therefore, central to the Christian faith is the sanctity of human life and inherent value of every person and community, as well as the possibility of transformation and emancipation that comes through the cross.³⁴ The mission of Christians is to restore the four broken relationships (with God, each other, creation and with the self). In protracted crisis the local church should particularly emphasise its response to a) personal internal brokenness, and b) conflict transformation, alongside c) a theology and eschatology that offers hope and comfort to all, and d) attention to creation, seeking to restore beauty in its brokenness. From a theological viewpoint, Christians are therefore called to be 'Christ's ambassadors' for reconciliation, sharing that which is first found with God. They are also taught that the difficult and sometimes costly work of peacemaking is blessed.³⁵ There is a strong case for empowering religious communities to become principal actors in bringing about peace and bridging the gap between conflicting parties. High-level negotiations alone are incapable of bringing about peace without the participation of those at the grassroots.³⁶ In fact it has been said that the very characteristics in religious communities that can bring about violence and destruction are also those that could bring peace, justice, reconciliation and transformation to interpersonal relationships, families, communities, tribes and nations.³⁷

28 See Juergensmeyer (2017)

29 See Cavanaugh (2009)

30 Haynes (2007)

31 Meerkerk and Bartelink (2015)

32 Cavanaugh (2016)

33 See Gopin (2000) and Appleby (1999)

34 See Cunningham (1996)

35 2 Corinthians 5:18–20; Matthew 5:9. See also Swithinbank (2016); and Eaves (2018)

36 Gopin (2005)

37 Meerkerk and Bartelink (2015); and Tveit (2018)

Capacity of the local churches

Despite all the conflict and violence associated with religion, some local faith-based communities have proved themselves a formidable force for social good. They have worked together successfully to overcome dictatorships, become architects of democracy, enabled peace and reconciliation, promoted economic development and fought for human rights and gender parity, as well as working to eradicate disease and poverty.³⁸ In fact, among the main strengths of these local actors is their ability to 'spontaneously emerge, adapt to local conditions by tapping into the decentralised knowledge, and rely on feedback mechanisms for success.'³⁹

With positive support for capacity building, training and leadership development, these local actors could be empowered to be a stronger force for good in their local communities and societies, and with long-term implications.⁴⁰ They often have very strong connections to their communities and have strong capital, both social and human. They are also well respected and trusted to deliver diverse support by mobilising their members. Furthermore, they have 'spiritual capital,' which is the faith that both motivates and sustains their efforts. In addition, local churches often have material and financial capital through the ownership of land and buildings that may provide shelter and a base for gathering and distribution.⁴¹ These are all factors that, with sensitive and wise external support, could enable local churches to have and extend their significant positive impact on communities and nations for relief, development, peacebuilding and societal transformation.

2.2.2 The church in relation to international actors

Limitations of international support

In the humanitarian space, external agencies and models imposed from outside function in myriad ways, leading to a diverse range of impacts. They often fail to reach their desired objectives due to factors such as: ineffective project planning and preparation; inadequate prior communication between relevant parties; the failure to adapt to unforeseen challenges; and excessive use of international staff.⁴² Many international agencies are limited by a lack of contextual or cultural understanding and nuances, and attempt to apply one model to varying situations or expect Western frameworks to function in other contexts. Furthermore, they lack rootedness to the particular place they are serving and may have to work for many years to establish any sense of accepted local identity or earn respect and authority. External projects that do not persevere with this slow work are not sustainable long term, as is evident in fragile states such as Burundi.⁴³ International agencies must therefore be careful not to impose models, language and thinking without careful consideration of contextualisation.⁴⁴

Existing roles of the local church

Holistic care

Tearfund's LIGHT Wheel illustrates the importance of a holistic approach to well-being and provides a framework for its work that takes into account nine domains considered vital to human flourishing. These are: personal relationships, mental and emotional health, physical health, participation and influence, stewardship of the environment, material assets and resources, capabilities, living faith, and social connections.⁴⁵

Similarly, in *Preparatory paper no. 11: the healing mission of the church*, the World Council of Churches (WCC) defines 'health' as 'a dynamic state of well-being of the individual and society, of physical, mental,

38 Phan (2016) 27

39 Williamson (2010)

40 Meerkerk and Bartelink (2015)

41 El Nakib and Ager (2015)

42 See Rondinelli (1976)

43 Brooks (2019)

44 See chapter 3

45 Tearfund (2016b)

spiritual, economic, political, and social well-being – of being in harmony with each other, with the material environment and with God.⁴⁶

This study of the voices of the church on contributing to well-being in conflict-affected fragile states reveals that, despite the negative associations mentioned above, there is significant evidence to suggest that local churches can be an effective force for good. Where the church is strong, there are multiple possible roles the church may take on in working towards holistic well-being. Part of this holistic care is the church's role in influencing social norms and behaviour, which is more evident in Christian-majority contexts but nevertheless a key role underpinning much of the church's work.

Emergency response and development

In many of these fragile contexts, the church contributes to emergency response or becomes a channel to deliver what NGOs provide. It delivers emergency relief by means of physical protection and humanitarian aid, as well as offering shelter, food, water, sanitation and winterisation kits, and administering medical aid through denominational hospitals and clinics. These development interventions are undertaken by local churches (to some extent) and development branches of church denominations which are better placed to deliver long-term development projects in education, employability and livelihoods programmes.⁴⁷

Spiritual care

Churches can offer specifically religious support to take care of the spiritual well-being of their own adherents in the local community. They do so by maintaining regular services, as well as offering pastoral care more broadly to those of other faiths and none, and giving people hope.⁴⁸ Even in cases where church buildings have been destroyed and communities scattered, those who make up these communities minister to each other in exile.⁴⁹ If they have access to resources, churches may also work to provide for religious celebrations as with the Little Smiles project, which organises the distribution of Christmas presents to children in Iraq.⁵⁰ This also serves to build community and aid social and mental well-being, as well as preserving spiritual ritual.

Psychosocial support

One key challenge that is particular to conflict-affected fragile states is the prevalence of trauma and its capacity to undermine progress and compound suffering. An identifying aspect of trauma is that it significantly undermines one's understanding of the world.⁵¹ In light of this, it is said that spirituality and religious tradition can be 'uniquely capable' in rebuilding a 'new assumptive world'.⁵² World Vision conducted research in Indonesia and Thailand in 2006 on *The emergence of hope* and expanded its study in Democratic Republic of Congo in 2008. It concluded that religious faith was a fundamental factor in enabling people and communities to recover from trauma.⁵³ There is also evidence to suggest that recovery from trauma is better in community through creative arts and the sharing of stories.⁵⁴

Mediation, reconciliation and peacebuilding

The WCC's *Preparatory paper no. 11* outlines the ecclesial responsibility to be a healing community that can facilitate forgiveness and reconciliation with the past and with each other, as well as with those outside the Christian community.⁵⁵ Mediation and reconciliation are therefore key aspects of the role of the local church in protracted crises, from small-scale mediation between families or neighbours, to negotiating peace agreements between army militias and armed rebel groups. Peacebuilding is a broad concept that comprises a wide variety of actions, projects and initiatives; together, these help communities affected by protracted

46 CMC study on 'Healing and wholeness' in World Council of Churches (2005) 6

47 UNHCR (2014)

48 See interview in Aweil, South Sudan, in following chapter

49 As for example, in Iraq, 'Displaced Christians living in church caravans', AP Archive www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cn9DK6X1aXY

50 Snell (2017). Etuti Institute focuses on leadership and is run by Assyrians living in the USA. www.etuti.org/

51 Walker and Mazurana (2012)

52 Matthews and Marwit (2006)

53 K. Duryee and M. Kawaharada, *WV Eastern DR Congo Assessment Report* May/June 2008 (London: World Vision International, 2008) cited in Walker et al. (2012) 16

54 Harvey (2000) 58–62

55 World Council of Churches (2005) 50

conflict to overcome hostility, fear, woundedness, resentment and hatred, and work together for peace on all levels of society. For churches this may take the form of, for example: sharing narratives; public confession; joint prayer; trauma awareness and healing programmes; and the use of creative arts to deepen understanding across boundaries.⁵⁶ In terms of political engagement the church is often present in an advocacy or prophetic role, speaking out against violence, corruption and injustice. It can also address issues such as sexual and gender-based violence, which can be rife in fragile contexts. There is much evidence to demonstrate the local church's capacity and ability and its multifaceted approach to improving well-being, which will be explored further below.

2.2.3 Importance of empowering the local church that remains throughout protracted conflict

By excluding local faith-based actors, international development has often overlooked a key component of society that is uniquely placed to mobilise and deliver a wide variety of services in time of crisis and to influence longer-term societal transformation.⁵⁷ Many international and national organisations engaged in protracted crises have traditionally treated the symptoms of conflict with humanitarian relief and development. But now they are increasingly looking to the root causes of conflict, particularly in fragile states, to address them directly. Whereas the era of globalisation saw attempts to impose international models of relief and development, new trends are developing with a focus on localisation. The aim now is to empower existing local actors in order to hand over leadership to the local communities after external actors withdraw.⁵⁸

This brief overview illustrates that there is great significance in the roles of the local church in its response to protracted crisis and in its long-term efforts contributing to holistic well-being. Secular organisations have often tended to overlook the local church, perceiving it to have deficient capacity and coordination, conflict of interests, or little relevance for wider development. Now, international agencies must seek to empower and encourage that which already exists (and is working out with its own resources) for some of the same objectives of positive societal transformation (three out of the four broken relationships are common focuses for the local church and the secular agencies).⁵⁹ In particular, the peacebuilding efforts of the churches demonstrate their faithful commitment in the face of adversity, and their powerful potential without which international agencies would be limited.⁶⁰

2.3 Local church responses to conflicts in seven fragile states

There follows a brief illustration of the four research questions in relation to each of the seven protracted crises studied in this report. These questions are, again:

- What is the impact of protracted crisis on the local church?
- What are the particular roles that the churches identify themselves as having taken on in responding to crisis and contributing to holistic well-being?
- What is the churches' motivation for responding as they do?
- What are the churches' own perspectives on opportunities, constraints and barriers to their work?

56 Zelizer (2013)

57 Haynes (2007)

58 For example, Flowers (2016); and Tomalin and Wilkinson (2018)

59 See Tomalin and Wilkinson (2018) 43–46

60 Zelizer (2013)

2.3.1 Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Protracted crisis in DRC has affected the church in many ways. Some of the negative impacts of ongoing conflict include: the political maintenance of ethnic divisions which consequently divide believers of different faiths; loss of members due to displacement and therefore also loss of financial and human capital; the proliferation of sects as a means of financial survival, and competition over access to resources; direct attack on members of the church who have spoken out against injustice; and widespread trauma, including among church leaders.⁶¹ As DRC is a majority-Christian country, churches have stood with their communities and suffered with them during the long years of conflict. They have also engaged with political leadership to work for unity, contributing to political negotiations during the long transition period. As a result, the churches were called upon to organise political elections and established not only the transitional parliament but also the Independent Electoral Commission and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that has denounced human rights violations and political injustice.⁶² The Great Lakes Ecumenical Fellowship and the Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa were also established. These bodies have been effective in forging unity, advocating for disarmament and facilitating repatriation of armed groups, as well as supporting victims of gender-based violence.⁶³ It has been suggested that the churches have great capacity, for example in countering sexual and gender-based violence. It has also been proposed that a model similar to the sustainable livelihoods framework might also reposition churches in the region to respond to conflict and violence in a way that is more widely constructive and sustainable.⁶⁴

In DRC, the work of the Catholic Church in particular makes clear the church's role in responding to protracted crisis as mediator, political leader and unity-builder.

2.3.2 Central African Republic (CAR)

Much less literature is available on the majority-Protestant CAR than on DRC, due in part to its considerably smaller size and population, and perhaps a general lack of political interest in the country. However, a series of political crises and military coups have been accompanied by indiscriminate violence, exacerbating ethnic and tribal divisions and hostility.⁶⁵ The churches in CAR have been impacted by division and fragmentation as well as direct violence as with the 2018 armed attacks on a church in Bangui and a Catholic refuge accommodating 20,000 displaced persons in Alindao.⁶⁶ Some have labelled the conflict as inter-religious, and attacks have been interpreted as deliberate efforts of inter-religious hostility and violence. The church is therefore prioritising discourse on forgiveness and reconciliation to counter the desire for retaliation, as well as the reconstruction of churches and encouraging believers to be authentic witnesses (as exemplified by recent inter-religious efforts towards peace).⁶⁷ The Women of Faith movement grew out of the recognition of and desire for unity and peace. It began by offering theological training for previously uneducated women who were finding themselves publicly involved in political activism, as well as training on gender equality and mediating conflict, and continues to work to that end.⁶⁸ As a result of the crisis, Christianity has been more widely embraced and people seek treatment from church medical services which were developed as a result of the HIV pandemic and economic decline. However, there is a hunger for divine healing that churches are also working to address through various ministries.⁶⁹ There are constraints particularly for female actors from religious communities whose voices have previously been silenced and who are bravely acting in the public

61 Micah Network (2007)

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 Tenai (2017)

65 Siradağ (2016)

66 'Death toll from Central African church attack reaches 26', *Reuters*, 3 May 18 <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-centralafrica-violence/death-toll-from-central-african-church-attack-reaches-26-idUKKBN11428V> and 'Over 40 killed in attack on refugee base in Central African Republic', *Reuters*, 17 November 2018 <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-centralafrica-violence/over-40-killed-in-attack-on-refugee-base-in-central-african-republic-idUKKCN1NM0HZ>

67 Macqueron (2018)

68 Daimbaye (2001)

69 Kifon Bongmba (2017) 176

sphere, contrary to societal expectations.⁷⁰ These efforts are made harder by the fact that many women are traumatised by war and sexual violence.⁷¹

In CAR the local church is primarily occupied in the role of mediation, reconciliation and health services, and in addressing gender-based violence.

2.3.3 Burundi

In Burundi the Catholic Church, being the majority faith group (70–75 per cent of the population), has a strong influence but is said to be limited by political authorities and long-standing Christian president, Pierre Nkurunziza. The civil war in Burundi, which began in 1962, has created an environment of fear and distrust, and prompted a mass exodus of Christians. The church has largely remained silent in the face of injustice.⁷² One report states: 'Christians are easily intimidated and fear for their lives.'⁷³ A more recent article published by *Evangelical Focus* suggests that Christianity in Burundi may be 'more a part of the problem than the solution', given its systemic entanglement with politics; it also suggests that people are loyal to nationality before religion, being 'Burundian before Christian', supporting a corrupt leadership amid a climate of intimidation.⁷⁴ There is little available literature giving an alternative interpretation of the church's relationship with the state. There are, however, more positive signs of church engagement. The Conference of Catholic Churches of Burundi (CECAB) has been active politically, issuing public statements against the decisions of the Nkurunziza government, and playing an important role in fighting for justice and peace. Minority Protestants have been much less visible, perhaps to maintain a peaceful presence. Local churches have also been active in promoting interfaith dialogue in relationships that were previously strained by political differences,⁷⁵ and some are strongly involved in relief and development work.⁷⁶ About a quarter of Burundi's primary health care facilities and hospitals are run by churches, with a strong ecumenical emphasis,⁷⁷ although local health systems managed by the church and NGOs have been seriously compromised by lack of government funding, insecurity, disruptions to supply, and damage to equipment and infrastructure.⁷⁸

Despite the challenges, in Burundi the churches are performing many key roles in long-term development in the fields of education, health care, sanitation and livelihood support.

2.3.4 South Sudan

South Sudan, the world's youngest country and a predominantly Christian state, achieved independence in 2011. Two years later, it fell into internal conflict, entering a long period of political instability and fragility. This has been described as being in part due to people's exhaustion after spending years working for peace – which was particularly true for the church – and then lacking the energy required for building a new state.⁷⁹ The churches (in particular the Episcopal Church of Sudan) had been heavily involved in long-term peace negotiations and had become exhausted by 2011, just when arguably it was needed the most. The main impacts of conflict on the church include displacement, insecurity, increasing problems of gender-based violence, declining physical health due to limited water and sanitation, and severe poverty. Arguably, the most significant impact is the prevalence of trauma, which is also recognised as a root cause of continued conflict.⁸⁰ The churches were key to forming unity and working towards independence and have therefore established a role as a voice of authority and representative of the people at the grassroots, although they are excluded

70 Ibid. See also Daimbaye (2001)

71 Jackson (2018)

72 'Burundi: conflict profile', Peace Insight www.peaceinsight.org/conflicts/burundi/

73 Philippe (2015)

74 Soriano (2018)

75 Bureau of Human Rights, Democracy and Labor (2017), section III. 'Status of societal respect for religious freedom', 5

76 For example, the Anglican Alliance offers development and relief through improving access to water and seeds as well as working towards disease reduction. See: <https://anglicanalliance.org/project/livelihood-burundi/> Also, the Anglican Church of Burundi focuses on education (prioritising theological education), alongside work in areas of agricultural development, environmental protection, expanding health programmes and fighting gender-based violence. See: www.anglicanburundi.org/education/

77 Mullen (2008) 23

78 Zwi et al. (1999)

79 A Tearfund staff member, interviewed in South Sudan (19.05.19).

80 Mednick (2019)

from anything deemed 'political'.⁸¹ They are also trusted and expected to provide shelter and relief in times of crisis, which has led to the development of, for example, the South Sudan Development and Relief Agency (SSUDRA).⁸² In addition to regular spiritual teaching, church leaders raise awareness of other social problems and speak out against injustice at all levels of society in an effort to work towards long-lasting peace.⁸³ The main challenge for the churches is the burden of expectation to deliver aid and the challenge of speaking into politics without becoming itself politicised.⁸⁴ Additional challenges are deep-rooted tribalism and the mindset of dependency that is a result of long-term reliance on external agencies, humanitarian aid and relief.⁸⁵

The role of South Sudanese churches in nation-building then peacebuilding through mediation and negotiation is extraordinary; however, current roles focus on reconciliation, trauma healing, livelihoods and sanitation.

2.3.5 Myanmar

Christians constitute approximately 8.5 per cent of the population of Myanmar and are found in all of its Karen, Kachin, Chin, Karenni, Lahu, and Naga ethnic tribes.⁸⁶ Although eclipsed in the media by the plight of the Rohingya Muslims, all minorities are suffering. Open Doors describes very high persecution levels of the Christian-minority population, with more than 100,000 internationally displaced persons (IDPs), many of whom are deprived of access to food and water.⁸⁷ An article on Burmese Baptists suggests that more than 300 churches and 100 schools have been destroyed by the military since 2011.⁸⁸ According to Harvard's Religious Literacy Project, Christian ethnic minorities have been victim to forced conversion, restriction on religious activities and church building, forced labour, abduction, torture, rape, and killings by the Burmese military.⁸⁹ The local church has, however, long been a key actor in Myanmar's social development, fighting for the rights and equality of ethnic and religious minorities, promoting peace. For example, Catholic Bishop Francis Daw Tang has made statements calling on all parties to promote unity and peace. Churches are also engaged in delivering education, health services and humanitarian relief, despite their own needs and limitations, and direct Christian involvement in government which, it is hoped, will enable change from within.⁹⁰ There are also significant contributions in the form of academic writing by theologians such as Moe and Khawsiamia who work towards theologies of inter- and intra-religious dialogue and reconciliation.⁹¹ An interesting article by Steve Curtis addresses the problem of disunity among Christians of Myanmar and argues for the need for theological education to build unity.⁹² The Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC – which unites traditional Protestant denominations), the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar and the Myanmar Evangelical Christian Fellowship are all engaged in social action, advocacy and leadership development. Local church leaders have also worked tirelessly between ethnic armed groups and civilians and the government, urging them to pursue peace. Myanmar's Cardinal Charles Muang Bo has worked tirelessly to be a voice for the voiceless, advocating for the vulnerable and marginalised. He is quoted as saying, 'The Church has never flinched from her social mission, even when it had no support.'⁹³

The churches in Myanmar have a clear prophetic role in speaking out against injustice and in advocacy for those who are suffering.

81 See Tomalin and Wilkinson (2018); Wilson (2019)

82 Jeffrey (2018a)

83 UN Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Programme (WASH) www.unicef.org/southsudan/what-we-do/wash and 'South Sudan Council of Churches presents new website for peace', World Council of Churches, April 2019 www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/south-sudan-council-of-churches-presents-new-website-for-peace

84 Ashworth and Ryan (2013) 51; Wilson (2019)

85 Kaler and Parkins (2015)

86 Harvard Divinity School, Religious Literacy Project <https://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/faq/christianity-myanmar>

87 Open Doors Myanmar country report 2019 www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/myanmar/

88 Williams (2018)

89 Harvard Divinity School, Religious Literacy Project <https://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/faq/christianity-myanmar>

90 See Rogers (2015) 60

91 See Khawsiamia (2012); Moe (2018) 128–153, and Moe (2017)

92 Curtis (2018)

93 Ibid., 61

2.3.6 Iraq

The churches of Iraq are seriously affected by displacement and migration as a result of devastating protracted conflict, contributing to a steep decline in and near extinction of the Christian population.⁹⁴ The majority of those Christians remaining in the country have fled Iraqi Arab-controlled areas to Kurdish-controlled areas of the north for safety. There is significant evidence of persecution directly targeting the Christians of Iraq in the form of violence, kidnap, forced conversion, torture and execution.⁹⁵ In addition, there have been numerous targeted attacks including car bombs, apparently targeting international agencies and churches, leading to high death rates. Although many are leaving, looking for life elsewhere in the face of almost certain death, there are, however, those who stay, some even joining armed groups to fight for their homeland.⁹⁶ Some Christians are tentatively returning home after liberation from Isis but in trepidation.⁹⁷ The churches of Iraq have been primarily occupied with survival and serving the immediate needs of their own congregants. Now, they are beginning on the long journey to recovery and Christian communities are slowly returning to life.⁹⁸ The Iraqi Chaldean church is attempting to take a more political role but this is meeting with disapproval from Christian parties who see it as unwarranted interference.⁹⁹ Lara Zara, mayor of Alqosh, northern Iraq, claims that Western aid money that is channelled through the government does not reach local Christians in need; it only reaches them, she states, when it is sent directly through the churches.¹⁰⁰

Iraqi churches are severely vulnerable and, having focused in recent years on survival and spiritual nourishment of the few remaining believers, the future of the church is unclear.



📷 Ninewa Region, Iraq, where persecution of the church is strong. It is not clear what the future of the Iraqi church is.
Photo: Abigail Drane/Tearfund

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- 94 See Gardner, Frank, 'Iraq's Christians "close to extinction"', BBC, 23 May 2019 www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-48333923
95 Haider (2017) and Open Doors USA profile of Iraq www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/iraq/
96 Chick (2015)
97 Hall (2019)
98 'Iraq church leader pleads with UK government to help rebuild devastated Christian town', *Christian Today* (2019) www.christiantoday.com/article/iraq-church-leader-pleads-with-uk-government-to-help-rebuild-devastated-christian-town/132156.htm
99 Mamouri (2018)
100 'Ninevah SEED' section of 'Western Aid money does not reach Iraqi Christians', FFRME, 28 September 2018 <https://frme.org/western-aid-money-does-not-reach-iraqi-christians/>

2.3.7 Syria

Syria has been devastated by the civil war and has lost many of its church buildings. Yet, the greatest cost to the church has been the loss of its members in great numbers, as casualties of war or through displacement and migration. Like Iraq, the focus has primarily been on survival, the struggle to support their local communities with limited resources, instability and the constant threat of violence. As some are slowly returning to liberated areas such as Aleppo, there are hopes of rebuilding church buildings, buying land and developing centres from which the churches can offer food distribution, training in discipleship and leadership, trauma healing or clinics.¹⁰¹ The majority of Syrian Christians have maintained neutrality throughout the war but recognise that President Assad offers some protection for the Christian community.¹⁰² Assad and the church are, to a certain extent, mutually dependent and many Christians fear that, without him in power, there would no longer be a place for the church in Syria, particularly with the rise of Islamic extremism and recorded violence directed at Christians during the war.¹⁰³ Under Assad, the church has had relative protection and a freedom that has increased during the war years, as the regular government informants who existed before are now largely absent. The church has therefore maintained a presence throughout the war, steadfastly remaining and administering spiritual and other aid to its communities, thus establishing itself as indispensable.¹⁰⁴ Most Syrian churches have sister churches in Lebanon, a connection that has sustained many of the churches throughout the crisis. Many Protestant pastors, for example, are trained at the Near East School of Theology, an ecumenical college serving the wider Middle East region.¹⁰⁵ The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon have strong connections across the borders and run various committees and schools, as well as a home for the elderly in Homs.¹⁰⁶ Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development (LSESD) works ecumenically to empower churches in the Arab world and serves local communities through its work with, for example, faith-based organisation Middle East Revive and Thrive (MERATH). MERATH partners with local churches in the region to respond to the urgent needs of the most vulnerable in the community, and facilitate long-term, sustainable change.¹⁰⁷

The church's role of holistic community service is apparent in Syria, despite limited resources.

Although local churches are active, there is less literature available on the roles and activities of the churches in the Middle East. This may be due in part to high levels of displacement and migration, strain on limited resources, and fear of consequences. The church is aware that it could easily be wiped out from the region of its origin. This provides another argument for the necessity of fieldwork interviews to fully understand the extent of the church's role in restricted contexts such as these and to capture the voices, perspectives and insights of those who are actively engaging with their communities to preserve a Christian presence and demonstrate Christian forgiveness and hospitality to their neighbours.

101 Wright (2018)

102 See Mousa (2016) and Gourlay (2015)

103 Starr (2012) 50

104 Ansabach (2019)

105 Near East School of Theology, Beirut, Lebanon www.theonest.edu.lb/en/Home

106 National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon <http://synod-sl.org>

107 Middle East Revive and Thrive (MERATH) <https://merathlebanon.org>

2.4 Conclusion

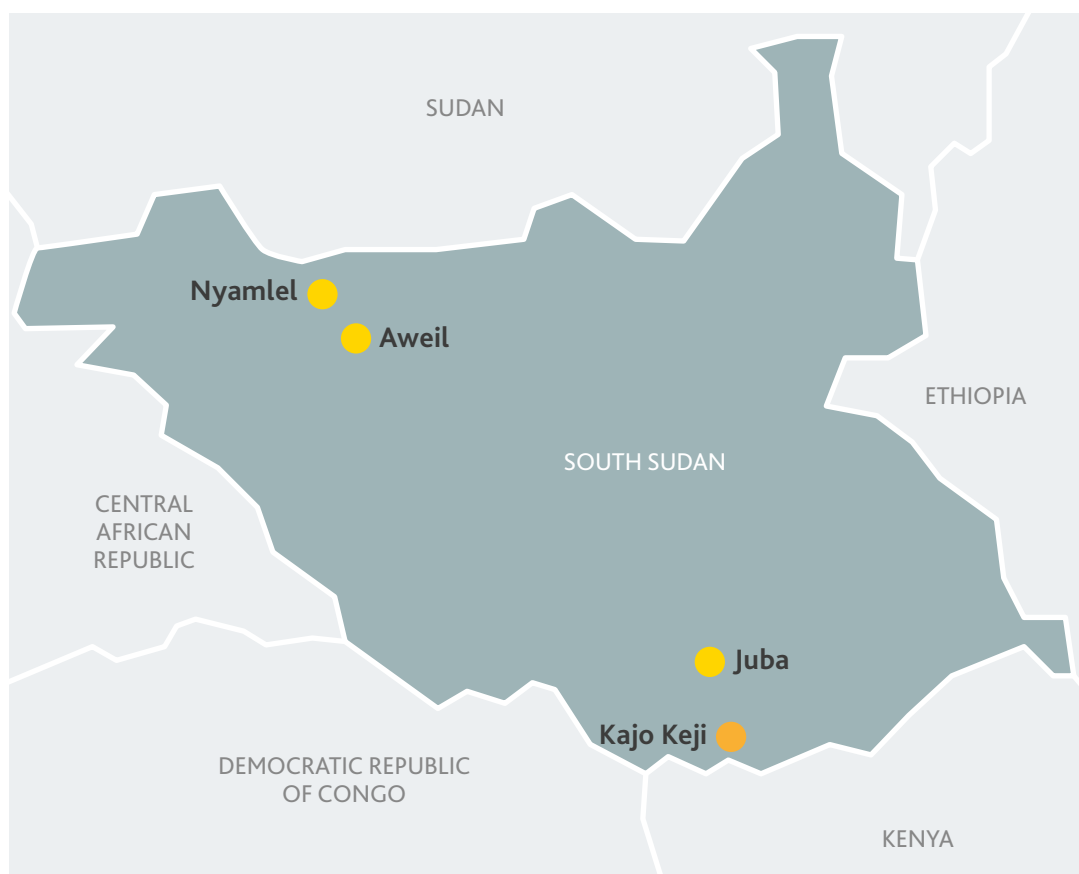
This chapter has provided an illustration of the importance of the local church in responding to conflict through steadfast commitment to a particular people and place. It has offered a very brief sketch of the protracted crisis in seven very different conflict-affected fragile states, its impact on the local church and the multidimensional roles the local church takes on in attending to the holistic needs of its community. There is also some evidence, however, of the political tightrope the churches are negotiating as they try to satisfy the state while remaining free to act in these fragile contexts, particularly at the institutional level, given the highly politicised nature of many of these contexts. The local church is by no means homogeneous and denominations that have strong connections to the West face additional tensions. A review of literature did not reveal how the local churches are influencing social norms and behaviours, a role that was more evident in fieldwork. There is substantial evidence, however, that there are local churches, even in the harshest of environments, that are faithfully engaged in the slow and vital work building towards holistic well-being, societal transformation and peace.

3 FIELDWORK – SOUTH SUDAN

3.1 Introduction and methodology

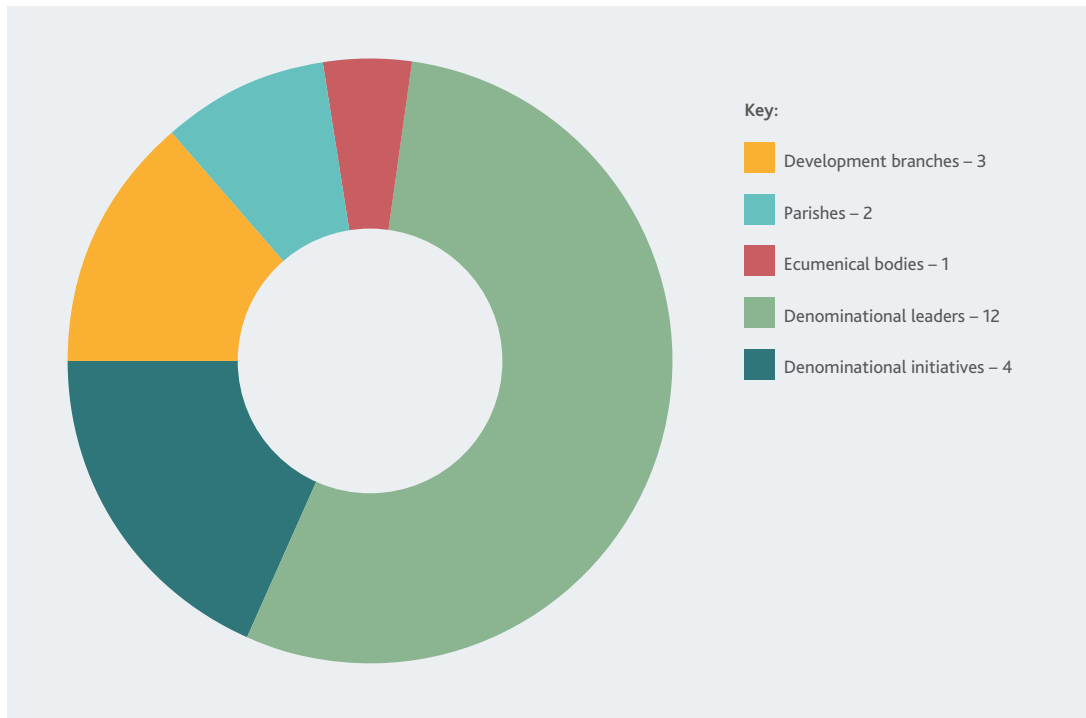
This chapter presents the first fieldwork case study, undertaken in Aweil, Nyamlel and Juba, South Sudan (see Figure 2), to explore the four major research questions. The research involved 18 semi-structured interviews involving 41 individuals over ten days, and sought to ascertain the church's own voice and perspective of their role in contributing to well-being in their communities. Participants in this research (see Figure 3) included leaders and representatives of different denominations and local parishes including: an ecumenical focus group and a youth group; peace and development branches; a radio station; an organisation that focuses on trauma healing; and some key individuals who are high-level actors in national peace negotiations. Tearfund local staff translated for participants who spoke in Arabic or Dinka (Tong Jieng).

Figure 2 Map of South Sudan showing the locations of research interviews and of Kajo Keji



The Episcopal Diocese of Kajo Keji, along with most of the general population, is in exile in Uganda. The researcher interviewed a representative of the diocese in Juba.

Figure 3 Affiliation of research participants in South Sudan



3.2 Background to the conflict

In South Sudan, protracted crisis is apparent through layers of conflict on every level of society. These range from endemic domestic violence to cattle raids (in which members of one tribe steal cattle, women and children from a neighbouring tribe, thus provoking retribution), the presence of firearms in the hands of civilians, and numerous rebel militias against whom there is little to no legal protection from the government. The added crises brought by floods and drought increase vulnerability and threaten food security.¹⁰⁸ South Sudan has experienced an almost continual series of conflicts predating Sudanese independence in 1956, the root causes of which existed prior to the colonial period.¹⁰⁹ Given that the region is populated by a mainly pastoral and agro-pastoral people in a vulnerable geopolitical region, these tensions lead to conflict and over-exploitation of natural resources, fluctuating in intensity and erupting spontaneously in parts of the country, while others are at peace.¹¹⁰ As a result, long-term 'resource war' mentality, which originates from nomadic practice (transhumance) in inhospitable terrain, continues between all parties, also reinforcing divisions in the church by competition for partnership and funding.¹¹¹

108 For example, wildfires during fieldwork, causing the loss of 10,000 cattle. 'South Sudan wildfire kills dozens of people', *Al Jazeera*, 7 May 2019 www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/05/south-sudan-bush-fire-kills-dozens-people-190507075855917.html

109 Alinovi, Hemrich and Russo (2008) 13, 26; and Johnson (2003)

110 von Habsburg-Lothringen (2016); Alinovi, Hemrich and Russo (2008) 14; Pantuliano (2008) 14; Johnson (2003) 125; and Pritchard (1940) 118

111 Johnson (2003) 151

3.3 Impact of conflict on the local church

The churches of the predominantly Christian southern part of Sudan were key to bringing about independence in 2011 and have established for themselves a role in national-level advocacy, mediation and peace negotiations.¹¹² The church is consequently an integral part of society and one of the few credible institutions remaining, much of its strength being in ecumenical unity and its direct contact with people.¹¹³ The recognition of the church's values of integrity and non-discriminatory support of people means it is expected to partner with the political authorities in delivering directly to the needs of the vulnerable in its communities.¹¹⁴ As a result, the conflict has impacted on the churches with negative effect, especially in zones of intensive fighting where churches have been destroyed and cannot continue to provide routine services. Because the church is such an integral part of the wider society, it suffers the consequences of conflict together with the rest of the population. However, the visibly evident holistic efforts of the church reveal a community that is actively engaged in trying to alleviate suffering in all areas of human life. As they say:

*'Anything that concerns a human being is of interest to the church.'*¹¹⁵

The main impacts of conflict on the churches identified were therefore wide-ranging and included:

- displacement
- economic and political insecurity
- unemployment
- loss of members and leadership
- growing numbers of widows and orphans
- high rates of crime and sexual abuse
- trauma
- increased problems of health and lack of sanitation
- decreased opportunity for education
- difficulties associated with emergency response and the reintegration of those who have returned from war or from exile, particularly child soldiers
- tribalism and disunity pervading all levels of society and threatening to destabilise the churches.

112 Jeffrey (2018a)

113 See Jeffrey (2018b); and <https://sscchurches.org>

114 Zink (2018)

115 Participant from Mercyland Gospel Church of All Nations, Juba (18.05.19).



Esther and her child, in Maar, South Sudan. Photo: Tom Price/Tearfund

3.3.1 Displacement

All interviewees cited displacement or 'scattering' as the primary impact of conflict on the church.¹¹⁶ Many congregants leave to escape violence or insecurity and the church is consequently displaced in great numbers, with people fleeing to refugee camps abroad or being displaced internally into the Protection of Civilian sites.¹¹⁷ One participant said:

'The church is hugely affected in that regard... Our congregations are scattered, forcing us to manage satellite structures.'¹¹⁸

There are other IDPs who stay within the country but, rather than settling in camps, move around from place to place. This constant movement has an unsettling effect on both the churches they leave and those they go to. In the case of Kajo Keji, for example, the whole diocese is in exile, as indeed is the entire population of the area.¹¹⁹ Despite accounts that church attendance can increase in times of conflict, there is a decline in regular church membership and disproportionately more women and children present in congregations. The result in many places is that women are taking up positions of leadership but this brings additional difficulties. It was said:

'Women who are resilient are leading the churches but there is a high rate of illiteracy among them so they are unable to read the Bible or interpret it.'¹²⁰

People also lose their Bibles in displacement and are unable to buy new ones.

116 Including a participant from the African Inland Church (AIC), also a member of the board of trustees for the South Sudanese Council of Churches (SSCC) and General Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance of South Sudan (EASS) (20.05.19).

117 UN Mission in South Sudan's latest report documents 178,186 civilians seeking safety on its bases <http://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/unmiss-poc-update-may-27-2019>

118 Participant from the African Inland Church (20.05.19).

119 According to the Diocese of Kajo Keji (21.05.19), there are several dioceses in a similar position.

120 Participant from the Trauma Education Initiative, Juba (18.05.19).

3.3.2 Economic insecurity

Due to economic insecurity stemming from the war, many migrate in search of work or go to war and often do not return. This leads to raised levels of poverty in their communities, increasing numbers of street children and orphans, and fewer people in church because they have to work to earn a living. Even church leaders who have no resources take up casual employment with NGOs but are often required to work on Sundays.¹²¹ Many church leaders abandon their positions altogether and some even join the military. As a result, the church lacks the strength that comes with leadership.¹²² Apart from this and the resulting impact on the leaders themselves, the most competent people are working elsewhere, further weakening the church. One participant said:

'The risk is (that) the church begins to look incompetent'

...which has a subsequent bearing on the future of church services, projects and relationships with partners.¹²³

3.3.3 Increased vulnerability

The church is affected by growing numbers of vulnerable people: widows, orphans and street children and returning child soldiers, whom the church feels powerless to support due to limited resources. Many vulnerable youths become involved in petty crime because they are not in education and are not monitored by parents, who are living in extreme poverty and are struggling to provide for them. Some young people travel to fight in other parts of the country and do not come back. They are otherwise said to be 'loitering' without purpose and are tempted to join gangs or become involved in violent crime.¹²⁴ Sexual and gender-based violence did not feature prominently in interviews but was alluded to as a priority for the church to address by teaching against child marriage and domestic violence. UN OCHA recently recognised sexual and gender-based violence as 'reflective of deeply entrenched discriminatory cultural norms and gender inequality' and as a deep-rooted problem rife at all levels of society, associated with disempowerment, idleness and trauma.¹²⁵

3.3.4 Trauma

Conflict has had an impact on the church, directly and indirectly, to the extent that:

*'Every person in South Sudan is traumatised from a terrible war.'*¹²⁶

One participant stated:

*'Me too, I am traumatised. How can I not be when I have never seen peace? We are left with these wounds. Everyone is wounded and people are exhausted. The church is taking care of the traumatised but who is taking care of the church?'*¹²⁷

Even in areas that are now peaceful such as Bahr al Ghazal, people have family in areas where there is still fighting, and family members have been killed. This is a cause of anxiety and fear that is affecting the church and is added to by vicarious trauma. One church identified trauma as the primary impact of war on the church which is little understood and is the priority for the church to address.¹²⁸ A church-based trauma organisation based in Juba cited trauma in fact as a root cause of the ongoing cycles of conflict, adding:

*'People say that tribalism is a root cause but even tribalism is fuelled by trauma.'*¹²⁹

121 A participant in a focus group with the Inter-Church Committee in Aweil said: 'The work changes you and your church suffers' (15.05.19).

122 A participant from the Trauma Education Initiative, Juba, said: 'Church leaders give strength but if they are not there, things get worse' (18.05.19).

123 Participant in a focus group with the Inter-Church Committee in Aweil (15.05.19).

124 Participant from the relief and development branch of the Diocese of Aweil (DARD) (15.05.19).

125 UN OCHA (2019); A recent high-profile case involved a politician who bid for a child bride online.

126 Participant from St Joseph's Catholic Church Committee, Aweil (15.05.19).

127 Participant from the African Inland Church (20.05.19).

128 Participant from True Gospel Apostolic Church, Aweil (16.05.19).

129 Participant from the Trauma Education Initiative, Juba (18.05.19).

The direct experience of violence and fear of the other reinforce societal divisions and fuel the desire for retribution.¹³⁰ Trauma also has an impact on faith, causing increased hopelessness or despair.

3.3.5 Health, sanitation, education and reintegration

Due to the holistic nature of the church's involvement with society, poor physical health and limited opportunities for or access to education further burden the churches as they try to provide for the needs of their congregants and communities with limited resources. Lack of access to clean water is a severe concern, with some unable to attend services due to travelling long distances in search of water. Two groups interviewed for this research also noted HIV as a significant impact of the conflict, with infection rates rising due to migration and the increased vulnerability of women.¹³¹

3.3.6 Tribalism and disunity

Tribalism is the most widely recognised challenge affecting South Sudan and therefore also the local church.¹³² However, this was not identified as a primary impact of the conflict but rather as a root cause that exacerbates existing challenges and will take generations to overcome. One observation from fieldwork was that Christianity attempts to demolish tribalism and the culture associated with it. For example:

'Christianity starts with baptism. We address bad local culture such as marking foreheads and removal of lower teeth as a mark of manhood. We don't encourage discrimination against people and instead we take the good from each culture and adapt it for our joint culture.'¹³³

However, it appears that these new identity markers may inadvertently distinguish those who belong in the church from those who do not and raises questions about whether Christian tribalism is in some ways replacing traditional ethnic tribalism and whether it brings exclusion.

3.3.7 Emergency response expectations

Finally, one of the greatest burdens on the churches of South Sudan is the widespread expectation that the church will provide refuge in times of crisis. People fleeing danger tend to rush to church compounds in their hundreds and thousands seeking shelter, food and water. They expect protection from outbreaks of violence as well as spiritual nurture, counsel and even help with relocation. The churches consequently become makeshift camps serving as distribution points, sometimes with medical facilities.¹³⁴ These expectations widely held by the population are reinforced by the expectations of the government, which sees the church as a reliable institution. Furthermore, the churches themselves have the expectation that they should take care of those in need. However, it was said that:

'It is unrealistically believed that the church is an institution that can help people with whatever they need.'¹³⁵

The churches have few resources themselves and, for example, having no source of water can present an additional crisis. Given that at outbreaks of violence many international NGOs are forced to evacuate, UN OCHA has compiled a list of international NGO compounds that may be equipped for the same purpose in order to alleviate this burden on the churches.¹³⁶

130 See 'civilian fault lines' in Johnson (2003) 114–5

131 Participants from True Gospel Apostolic Church (16.05.19) and the Inter-Church Committee (15.05.19), both in Aweil.

132 A participant from the Trauma Education Initiative, Juba, said that there is a risk that 'Dinka domination' also creeps into the church (18.05.19). See also Johnson (2016) 19–20; and Johnson (2003) 51–53

133 Participant from the St Kizito Parish Youth Office, Juba (18.05.19).

134 See Tearfund (2019)

135 Participant from the African Inland Church (20.05.19).

136 UN OCHA on South Sudan www.unocha.org/south-sudan/about-ocha



▣ Madu, 50, a South Sudanese man whose T-shirt reads 'I support Peaceful Referendum'. A cataract in his left eye prevents him from seeing very well. There used to be a clinic around two hours from his community by car, which offered free cataract surgery, but this was destroyed by fighting in 2014. Photo: Tom Price/Tearfund

3.4 Local church responses

The impacts of conflict have therefore had a substantial bearing on the church and the multidimensional roles it takes on or is expected to deliver, and the church is active in responding in a variety of ways. Indeed, one participant said:

*'We as spiritual leaders are not sleeping.'*¹³⁷

At times of crisis, regular worship or prayers are disrupted and efforts are expended in emergency response, the provision of shelter, and humanitarian aid through distributing food and non-food items. Other roles the church is actively engaged in include:

- the ministry of healing (physical, mental and spiritual); supporting and advocating for the vulnerable; psychosocial support
- development of education, health facilities and economic prospects through training; raising awareness of or addressing controversial subjects (such as HIV and family planning) from a Christian perspective
- the prophetic role of speaking out against injustice and inequality on all levels of society; and local- and national-level mediation.

Finally, spiritual teaching, preaching and counselling, as well as other parish activities, play a significant role in healing, teaching unity and forgiveness, and contributing to peacebuilding and reconciliation.

137 Participant from the Seventh Day Adventist Church, Juba (20.05.19).

3.4.1 Ministry of healing

All participants in this research stressed the importance of a holistic approach, that the church should be offering...

'medicine, food, as well as a place of worship and a sense of community'.¹³⁸

One participant explained:

'As well as regular teaching, we also offer psychosocial support through counselling and teaching. The sermons should touch real-life situations. The church offers them peace and relief from the pain and suffering.'¹³⁹

Bible studies also offer spiritual teaching. One church mentioned reflection days using the Virgin Mary as a model for helping women in their own healing. Only one church interviewed mentioned part of the church's role of spiritual healing in terms of 'release from possession by demons'.¹⁴⁰

3.4.2 Development, health and education

The world church has traditionally played a role in facilitating health and education and this is also apparent in South Sudan. Although all churches appear to take on responsibility for development to some extent, those with the greatest capacity are established denominations with dedicated development wings. These have strategic objectives that focus on: capacity building; providing emergency relief and improving access to water and sanitation; support for education and training in order to increase economic prospects; and support for agriculture and food security through collaboration with state ministries, the UN, and national and international NGOs.¹⁴¹ Church development branches such as Diocese of Aweil Relief and Development (DARD) have the capacity to support large numbers of vulnerable people, such as the school food programme in Aweil that currently feeds 22,586 children daily across 48 schools. It has also facilitated the construction of a women's centre and a special prison unit for minors (with the support of UNMISS). On a congregational level, members of the church are voluntarily teaching in schools to support poor people and develop education, which is seen as key to community transformation. In terms of health, the church is active in raising awareness around issues including: hygiene and sanitation; HIV; promotion of women's rights; denunciation of sexual and gender-based violence; and advice in family planning to reduce the severity of poverty. There is also a holistic approach to trauma education, including a spiritual aspect, teaching on how trauma leads to certain behaviours and affects interpersonal relationships, and also how it has an impact on children.

3.4.3 Mediation, reconciliation and peacebuilding

Mediation, reconciliation and peacebuilding are priorities for the church to minister to all levels of society, from domestic conflict to the national impasse between the government and rebel militias. One participant commented:

'The roles [of the church] are to pray and struggle for reconciliation: reconciliation before development... political, communal and relational reconciliation and also [for] the inter-tribal conflicts that affect the church.'¹⁴²

138 Participant from the relief and development branch of the Diocese of Aweil (DARD) (15.05.19).

139 Participant from St Joseph's Catholic Church Committee, Aweil (15.05.19).

140 Participant from True Gospel Apostolic Church, Aweil (16.05.19). 'Demons' were not defined within this conversation but appeared to refer loosely to mental and spiritual oppression.

141 See, for example, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).

142 Participant in a focus group with the Inter-Church Committee in Aweil (15.05.19).

At a local level, church leaders say they discourage violence and encourage peaceful coexistence, teaching that:

'It is time to reconcile, even if we are divided in opinion.'¹⁴³

As a result of displacement, many churches now have mixed (inter-tribal) congregations, which present both a challenge and an opportunity for creative ways of building trust between groups. One church said:

'We share culture through dancing and drama... We pray in different languages – Dinka, English, Arabic... To love each other is our main aim, and to make peace and reconciliation.'¹⁴⁴

On a national level, the church has had a key role in contributing to peace. It has played its part, for example, in 1972 when the South Sudan Autonomous Region was established, with the comprehensive peace agreement of 2005, and in ongoing peace negotiations. In March 2019 the opposition formed an alliance which disintegrated in May and the church stepped up in an effort to restore cooperation, endorse a mandate focusing on issues of leadership, and establish criteria for particular positions. The church hopes to encourage coexistence between the army and youth rebels. It will also continue to protect the most vulnerable and prioritise the work of prayer and struggle for peace and reconciliation over the work of development by organising ecumenical prayers. Representatives of the Inter-Church Committee (ICC) said:

'Unity as the body of Christ is key. ICC shows unity through the love of Christ. Before ICC we were strangers.'¹⁴⁵

An example of such work at a local level is that of two pastors with whom the researcher met in Nyamlel. They had travelled for two hours to mediate between two families in conflict and were able to join us once reconciliation had been achieved.

3.4.4 Creative initiatives

There are many examples of the church's creative initiatives for peacebuilding in South Sudan. In the area of youth ministry, for example, churches place a focus on drama and songs to make teaching accessible.¹⁴⁶ In addition, youth committees provide an aspect of training in leadership and contribute towards a sense of project ownership and empowerment among the youth. Many churches also run choirs, which are a way of building unity, creating joy and sharing different tribal cultures.¹⁴⁷ Many South Sudanese churches have a strong television presence that could be better employed in promoting holistic messages and ministry in both broadcasting and more targeted narrowcasting.¹⁴⁸ One denomination runs a radio station called Salvation FM which focuses on peace and reconciliation, broadcasting words of hope and the message of inter-tribal peace.¹⁴⁹ The church is very creative in finding ways to communicate its messages in ways that are easily accessible and understood, such as role play, drama and songs and visual materials for trauma care, especially for those who are the illiterate or speakers of tribal languages only.

143 Participant from the Trauma Education Initiative, Juba (18.05.19).

144 Participant from St Joseph's Catholic Church Committee, Aweil (15.05.19).

145 Participant in a focus group with the Inter-Church Committee in Aweil (15.05.19).

146 A participant from Full Gospel Church in Nyamlel made reference to the gang culture as a 'system of niggas' (16.05.19); see also Price and Orrnert (2017) 19–20; and Danish Refugee Council and Danish Demining Group (2017)

147 A participant from St Joseph's Catholic Church Committee, Aweil, said that 'choirs are good for the soul as much as regular teaching is' (15.05.19).

148 For example, the peace-focused songs of J.C.C. Choir (Joint Christian Centre) on national television.

149 Seventh Day Adventist Church, Juba (20.05.19).



▣ A community of nomadic pastoralists gather a few hundred metres from the Nile, having suffered recent cattle rustling raids. Raids like these are common and constitute one layer of the protracted conflict in South Sudan. Photo: Tom Price/Tearfund

3.4.5 Solidarity in suffering

One of the most significant roles of the church, however, is spiritual nourishment and its continued presence, as it suffers with those who are suffering, fleeing when others are fleeing and taking their faith with them, ministering to their neighbours in every situation. One participant said:

*'We end up crying with them... the most important thing we can do is to cry together'*¹⁵⁰

...thus echoing the biblical instruction to mourn with those who mourn (Romans 12:15). Similarly, another participant said that role of the church in times of crisis is to...

'take the pain together with them and stay with them in their pain'.¹⁵¹

He recalled the mass exodus of 116,000 people from Bor to Lak State, saying:

*'We sat together in groups and prayed together. Women saw daughters raped, another saw someone killed, others are [sic] suffering from disease... We went through the pain with the people.'*¹⁵²

150 Participant from the African Inland Church (20.05.19).

151 Participant from the South Sudan Development and Relief Agency (21.05.19).

152 Ibid.

3.5 Motivation for responding

It was apparent during interviews that when the question of motivation arose, many previously weary faces lit up and revealed a deep faith that both motivates and sustains the church's immense efforts in responding to protracted crisis. Participants cited their main motivation as the 'great commission' (Matthew 28: 18–20) and a sense of calling to make the gospel known, baptise new believers, and share the hope that they themselves have received. One participant said:

*'Our commitment leads us and motivates us to go beyond what we can manage.'*¹⁵³

In fact, there was a unanimous expression of the sense of responsibility and duty to fellow citizens with some mention of the promise, 'Blessed are the peacemakers' (Matthew 5:9). One participant said:

*'God's looking to you as his vessels. He will use you first. We are called to be salt and light, to be a peacemaker even in the midst of this, difficult as it is. It is our responsibility.'*¹⁵⁴

A second motive identified was seeing the face of Christ in the other, as recognised by one participant who said:

*'God sent us to that person: we see God's image in their face.'*¹⁵⁵

Another said:

*'We are all created in God's image. If my brother is suffering, it is part of me. As a human being we [sic] want to help.'*¹⁵⁶

The knowledge and experience of the transformation that God can bring was also cited as an inspiration to act and continue doing so. One participant said:

*'People become changed and respond to teaching... They are transformed... God doesn't disappoint us. We see transformation in people and it encourages us to do more.'*¹⁵⁷

Faith in God was therefore identified as the main inspiration for helping people in need as well as the source of strength and encouragement that sustains the church's efforts. One participant said:

*'Our faith motivates us – love of God, compassion for humanity, for the suffering, the elderly and the sick. As Christians we share the little we have. Church is a place of peace, not war. We enter, receive forgiveness, and forget.'*¹⁵⁸

Another added:

*'We are also motivated by the belief that the church is for service – that if I go into a church, I will be served with the word of God, a word of encouragement – and a little hope to send them on their way [sic]. If we miss an opportunity, we can't sleep for thinking about that person and how we could have given someone some peace.'*¹⁵⁹

153 Participant from the Trauma Education Initiative, Juba (18.05.19).

154 Participant from the African Inland Church (20.05.19).

155 Participant from the development branch of the Diocese of Aweil (DARD) (15.05.19).

156 Participant from Mercyland Gospel Church of All Nations, Juba (18.05.19).

157 Ibid.

158 Participant from St Joseph's Catholic Church Committee, Aweil (15.05.19).

159 Ibid.

3.6 Challenges, limitations and opportunities in the local churches' response

3.6.1 Challenges and limitations

Limited resources

Lack of resources and funding, as well as the need for partnership, was raised in all interviews alongside the recognised risk of donor fatigue when conflict continues for too long and no visible change is perceived.¹⁶⁰ Certain long-established international denominations have the benefit of external support which can sustain local efforts when resources are low, whereas emerging churches or those born out of mission do not have this backing. Limited access to resources was therefore considered the primary obstacle to the work of the church and one that sometimes jeopardises peace. People also referred to the limitations of fragile infrastructure, weak church administration and limited mobility.¹⁶¹ The need for transport was noted as a priority by several churches in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, with one commenting:

*'Between the churches here, there is not even one motorbike.'*¹⁶²

When conflict erupts, INGOs are forced to evacuate and only the church remains, which makes it harder as churches try to respond without the necessary resources.¹⁶³ For the diocese of Kajo Keji, for example, there is the tremendous challenge of ministering to a community that no longer exists in one place.

Tensions arising from its humanitarian role

Some donors are reluctant to fund local churches due to what are sometimes seen as haphazard approaches to service delivery and doubtful motives such as evangelisation. Being donor driven, NGOs are restricted by policies and procedures, and it can be hard for them to meet funding criteria. The churches interviewed feel that NGOs often also take credit away from the local church, and that it should be returned by giving a little support.¹⁶⁴ There is also competition with other bodies as donors give to more established organisations. Many of the churches are recognised by UN OCHA as part of a cluster (thematic area).¹⁶⁵ One participant commented that while there is church fundraising in the UK for large organisations, it is not reaching the local churches.¹⁶⁶ In times of crisis, UN OCHA identifies a need and calls on certain groups to deliver and holds them accountable but local churches cannot always deliver. Corruption and tribalism are also present in the church and threaten to undermine the potential for developing partnership and access to funds. Furthermore, the church's unique role in society and the esteem in which it is held can be perceived to undermine government power, thus arousing further suspicion.¹⁶⁷ The church does not always have the power to change things and therefore is required to maintain a good relationship with the government in order to influence possible change. However, this can also pose a risk to its integrity and freedom.¹⁶⁸ Prominent church leaders are also so active in this role that they feel they are neglecting what they consider to be their primary duty to their congregations. There is a feeling of great pressure on the church in this regard due to a general perception that the church has power to mediate. However, despite efforts advocating for peaceful reconciliation that have extended to the White House and the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), and have included the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope, there is a feeling that South Sudanese church clergy are 'chasing the wind' and there is a sense of hopelessness.¹⁶⁹

160 A participant from the South Sudan Development and Relief Agency said: 'If there is no peace, there is donor fatigue... with problems finding resources' (21.05.19).

161 For example, unfinished buildings, or difficulties in the rainy season for churches that meet under trees.

162 Participant in a focus group with the Inter-Church Committee in Aweil (15.05.19).

163 St Joseph's Catholic Church in Aweil has recently acquired containers for the storage of supplies in order to be prepared for future events but not all churches are able to do this.

164 See also <https://charter4change.org/>

165 See UN OCHA South Sudan www.unocha.org/south-sudan/about-ocha

166 Participant in a focus group with the Inter-Church Committee in Aweil (15.05.19).

167 Participant from the South Sudan Development and Relief Agency (21.05.19). This is also addressed in Tomalin and Wilkinson (2018)

168 See UN OCHA (2012)

169 Participant from the African Inland Church (20.05.19).



📍 Location where the researcher met two pastors from Full Gospel Church in Nyamlel, South Sudan. The pastors can be seen in the background, beneath the tree, mediating between two conflicting families. Photo: Marjorie Gourlay/CCCW and Tearfund

Disunity, trauma and dependency

Other significant challenges are disunity, dependency and trauma. Disunity can destabilise local churches but can also impede access to certain places.¹⁷⁰ When communities are displaced, they bring their tribal and clan conflicts with them into the church compounds and congregations.¹⁷¹ Similarly, although also an opportunity, an added challenge in displacement is the presence of multiple tribes and languages in one congregation, creating difficulties for maintaining unity. Furthermore, despite the positive development of ecclesial unity with ecumenical bodies, many smaller denominations feel they are excluded from ecumenical projects and suffer from isolation.¹⁷² Trauma is a serious challenge that the churches are aware of but feel they are ill-equipped to address. Its effects are compounded by the fact that church leaders are also traumatised and in need of healing. Finally, exhaustion and loss of faith due to seemingly unending suffering and struggle are a challenge to maintaining church activity, congregation numbers and hope for the future.¹⁷³ The mindset of dependency presents another challenge for long-term development and community transformation as well as unrealistic expectations placed on clergy.¹⁷⁴ One participant commented:

*'It takes time to change a mindset... Truth talking is sometimes difficult.'*¹⁷⁵

170 A participant from the True Gospel Apostolic Church in Aweil, said: 'We might be killed for being one tribe in the area of another' (16.05.19).

171 As happened in the Raja incident in Aweil, 2016, according to a participant from St Joseph's Catholic Church Committee.

172 According to a participant from the Full Gospel Church in Nyamlel, '(Independent) local church is not enough... churches struggle alone' (16.05.19).

173 A participant from the Trauma Education Initiative, Juba, said: 'That is the biggest problem – trust in God' (18.05.19).

174 A participant from the African Inland Church said: 'I am not Jesus, I can't do a miracle' (20.05.19).

175 Participant from the St Kizito Parish Youth Office, Juba (18.05.19).

3.6.2 Opportunities

The general consensus among all participants was that there are many opportunities for the church to serve their communities. Despite being severely affected by protracted conflict, the churches say they are well established in their communities and have access to places and people that other organisations do not. They recognise that:

'We become a blessing, somehow'

...and that there are opportunities to restore trust, confidence and hope among the scattered communities with programmes to encourage shared vision and development.¹⁷⁶ Additional opportunities include: educational development, such as the building of schools; establishing water and sanitation programmes in rural places; and trauma-awareness training, healing and counselling. In addition, the restoration of livelihood programmes could encourage the young to become self-reliant and start businesses that would generate capital and give people practical skills and would also help war widows who need a source of income. Many of the churches consulted in this research have plans to finish constructing church buildings for growing congregations. Many also shared a desire to develop further education (such as diversifying the Episcopal University) as currently many leave the country to pursue their studies. Finally, one participant mentioned that there are now Muslims in the church, which is in itself an opportunity for extending God's love, building trust and overcoming disunity.¹⁷⁷

3.7 Local stakeholder insights on strengthening church responses

It was evident from interviews that the greatest need cited was peace. This would enable churches to come together to serve their people and, with peace, government unity could form, enabling the development of policies to empower women and protect the vulnerable. Without war, people felt that there would be more investment in the country and that the church itself would no longer be so vulnerable.

Secondly, partnership of various kinds is vital. As people said:

'The church cannot live in isolation.'

*'What we are longing for is partnership.'*¹⁷⁸

This was seen not only as financial support of international NGOs but also prayer and 'visits of encouragement' from the wider world church.¹⁷⁹ It was said that donor criteria for initial partnership assessment can be hard to meet, especially for local churches. People also highlighted a need for consistent transparency and fairness in initial assessment, which is perceived not to be the case currently. It was suggested that the churches would benefit from help to meet the criteria, particularly in capacity building in the form of training and development of 'professionalism' (management and accountability). This they saw as fundamental for the churches to remain strong and maintain the trust of political authorities to deliver when NGOs are gone. One participant said:

*'If you can include the churches (with support and humanitarian assistance), then it will reach the people in need. We are the people who will stay.'*¹⁸⁰

176 Participant from the African Inland Church (20.05.19).

177 St Kizito parish priest, Juba (18.05.19).

178 Participants from the Inter-Church Committee and St Joseph's Catholic Church Committee, both in Aweil (15.05.19).

179 Participant in a focus group with the Inter-Church Committee in Aweil (15.05.19).

180 St Kizito parish priest, Juba (18.05.19).

Thirdly, there is a need for unity, for the churches to come together to rebuild the country, demonstrating reconciliation and a Christianity that overcomes differences. This will also involve including in ecumenical bodies denominations that are excluded at present.

Finally, trauma awareness and training was unanimously recognised as vital among leaders, both church and community chiefs. There is a particular need for holistic support and healing for those in leadership. They are often suffering the same poverty and trauma as those they are ministering to. Leaders desire to see young people taking up the work of the elders and yearn to have the support of the world church to listen and pray. They say:

*'There is a need to heal the healers. There is no way out but we have to somehow stand.'*¹⁸¹

3.8 Summary and conclusion

It is evident from this overview of interviews in Aweil, Nyamlel and Juba that the impact of protracted conflict on the church is severe. The expectations with which churches are burdened threaten to destabilise them but nonetheless they are active in multidimensional roles in contributing to the well-being of their communities. The church is unique, through its connection to community and in the strength that lies in having its community for support. It is also trusted in ways that political leadership is not. Despite the high number of INGOs present in South Sudan, such agencies may not have access to places that the church does due to the established relationships it has with people at the grassroots. Churches say:

*'We have a presence all over the country... When something happens, we have the first information as we have people on the ground so we can inform the authorities here and abroad.'*¹⁸²

Several of the participants mentioned their hope that this research might articulate their experiences and difficulties, and might generate future partnerships.

The most significant observation, however, was that a strong, empowered, equipped and united church has the potential to realise positive transformation on all levels of society and that, where the church is, there is hope.

181 Participant from the African Inland Church (20.05.19).

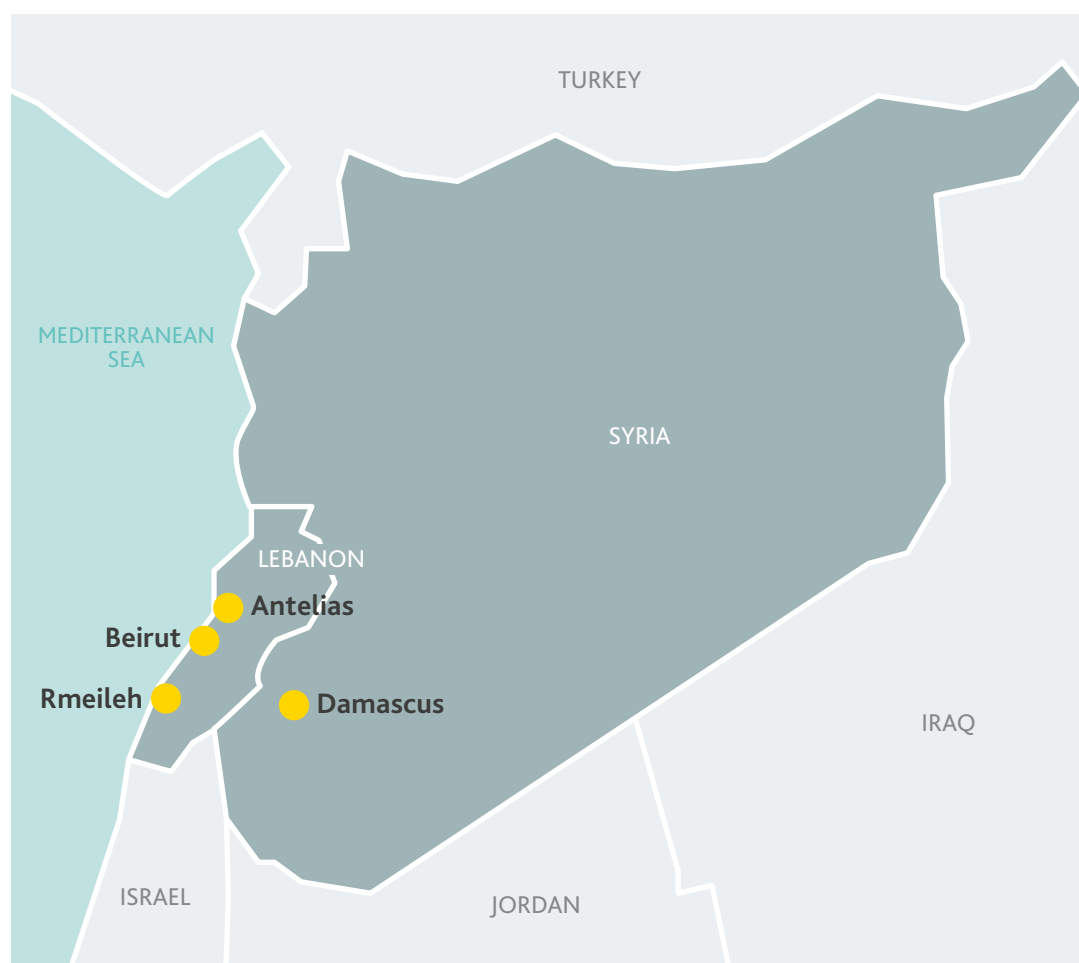
182 Participant from the South Sudan Development and Relief Agency (21.05.19).

4 FIELDWORK – LEBANON/SYRIA

4.1 Introduction and methodology

This chapter presents the results of the second field trip, to Lebanon and Syria. This field trip was significantly shorter than that to South Sudan, being only two-and-a-half days in Lebanon (Beirut, Antelias and Rmeileh) and the same in Syria (Damascus) (see Figure 4). It was recognised in the early stages of this project that there would be difficulties in pursuing fieldwork in Syria, given the insecurity but also due to the registration of a Tearfund office in Damascus being very recent without established contacts. This study comprised 12 interviews with 20 individuals representing: church leadership from Catholic and evangelical denominations; an ecumenical forgiveness and reconciliation project; an ecumenical youth committee; an organisation that exists primarily to support believers with a Muslim background; and an NGO that serves as the development and education wing of an evangelical church, and includes a theological college and a project that has emerged directly out of the refugee crisis (see Figure 5).¹⁸³ Interviews were conducted in Arabic and English and, where appropriate, translated by the researcher.¹⁸⁴

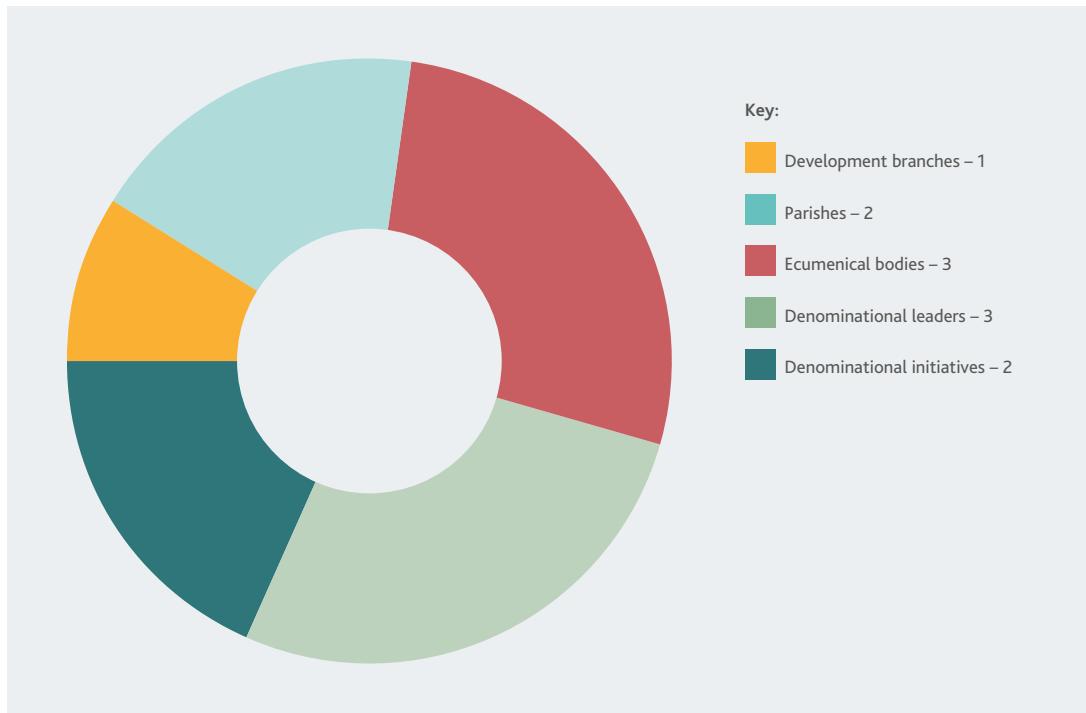
Figure 4 Map of Lebanon and Syria showing locations of research interviews



183 Further insight into the particularities of various Tearfund partners is offered in Bowen-Evans (2019).

184 Often the two languages were used in the same conversation.

Figure 5 Affiliation of research participants in Lebanon and Syria



4.2 Background to the conflict

The war in Syria, which started as a small-scale response to the 'Arab Spring', quickly degenerated into an eight-year war. Syria became a battleground for regional proxy wars and violent extremism, in what has been described as the 'most daunting humanitarian crisis of our time'.¹⁸⁵ Latest figures suggest that 5.6 million have fled Syria and registered as refugees in neighbouring countries and that another 6.2 million are displaced within the country.¹⁸⁶ Others have moved on to Europe, the US and Canada, but an estimated 1.5 million Syrians are currently in Lebanon, increasing the population by 26.6 per cent.¹⁸⁷ In Lebanon, the conflict is seen through the lens of the historical Syrian occupation of Lebanon and the resulting woundedness of Lebanese society. A recurring theme arising in interviews was therefore resentment towards the Syrians as a result of decades of Syrian hegemony. Consequently, people are fearful of what significant demographic shifts resulting from an influx of large numbers of Sunni refugees might imply, given the political background. They also refer back to their experience of receiving Palestinian refugees in the sixties and seventies, and the resulting presence of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), which contributed to igniting the civil war.¹⁸⁸

The creation of Syria as an independent state was based on a political system inherited from the French mandate in the form of *asabiyya*. This system is based on tribal solidarity and concentric circles of kinship, community and society, and is designed to empower minorities in order to control the majority.¹⁸⁹ In Syria, Assad, the Alawites and Druze are minority allies at the centre; other minorities (Christians and Shia Muslims) are in the inner circle; and Sunni masses are on the periphery.¹⁹⁰

185 Ferris and Kirisci (2016) 16. It is important to note that it is also a war that has been lost by the West.

186 Figures vary but these are taken from 'Syria Regional Refugees Response' Operational Portal Refugee Situations report August 2019 <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>; and UNHCR Internally Displaced People – 'Syria' August 2019 www.unhcr.org/sy/internally-displaced-people; and Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre: 'Syria' August 2019 www.internal-displacement.org/countries/syria

187 Fanack – 'Population of Lebanon' <https://fanack.com/lebanon/population/>

188 See Ferris and Kirisci (2016); Gourlay (2015); and Meier (2013)

189 See www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e202

190 Rabo (2012)

4.3 Impact of conflict on the local church

Churches in some areas have been more directly affected by conflict than others. Areas under the control of the opposition include Aleppo and Homs (which saw churches destroyed and priests killed) and, to a lesser extent, Hama. In Eastern Ghouta all churches were closed and Christians evacuated, and consequently the church adopted a low profile. In the Kurdish area near the Turkish border, many Christians were forced to leave but there are still Christian militia fighting (due to the strong connection of the Syriacs with their land). The majority-Christian areas have been less affected but are straining under the influx of Christian IDPs. The longer-term impact of conflict on the local churches (as well as associated challenges in responding to people's needs) were observed even in undertaking this particular field trip and the difficulties that posed. The lack of interview access the researcher encountered during fieldwork was perhaps the most significant insight the fieldwork generated. The magnitude of the impact of conflict depends on the particular region and period (and therefore varies considerably), and it must be noted that none of the main themes emerging from fieldwork stand alone, but are all interconnected and interdependent.

4.3.1 Displacement and its consequences

Economic impact

The primary impact of conflict recognised in interviews was displacement. In particular, many of Syria's young men have been lost to military service or by fleeing from it. Many Syrians with money left early in the war, established businesses outside the country or fled on boats to Europe. So many highly skilled individuals were lost, which risked affecting the church's capacity for conflict response as well as its recovery. As one participant said:

*'Many of the rich left and so there is more pressure on those who have stayed, with no income for church leaders, and increased dependency on the church for supporting them.'*¹⁹¹

Those from poorer sections of Syrian society who fled the country were obliged to register as refugees for UNHCR aid in surrounding countries, with Lebanon taking the major part of the burden.¹⁹² Another economic consequence of displacement is competition for jobs between existing and migrant populations and low salaries. The average monthly salary in Syria is now 50 USD.¹⁹³ Sanctions, inflation, and donor fatigue are crippling the country, affecting the poorest most severely. Churches are unable to provide for the needs of the people they are serving and are therefore forced to choose which families to prioritise in their support.

Demographic imbalance

The continual movement of IDPs leads to demographic imbalance in certain areas. This has been due to the loss of the Christian population, the arrival of Muslim IDPs, and the consequent Islamisation of previously Christian (mainly urban) areas where Muslims have sought refuge or bought property. For example, there is evidence of previously poor Shia communities buying property in Christian areas with the support of funding from Iran.¹⁹⁴ During Ramadan, signs appeared in a Christian neighbourhood in Aleppo ordering women to cover up. The relationship with Islam was present in every conversation in both Lebanon and Syria and revealed widespread and deep-rooted resentment and fear, which many churches are actively addressing.¹⁹⁵

191 Participant from an organisation that exists primarily to support believers with a Muslim background, Lebanon (05.08.19).

192 See 'Communities at risk inside Syria' in Ferris and Kirisci (2016) 71–107; and 'Syria Regional Refugees Response' August 2019

193 Participant from an NGO that serves as the development and education wing of an evangelical church, Lebanon (05.08.19). This is particularly severe for low-skilled labourers but all levels of society are in some way affected.

194 Participant from an organisation that exists primarily to support believers with a Muslim background, Lebanon (05.08.19).

195 See Rabo (2012); and Gourlay (2015)

Urbanisation

Another factor associated with displacement is internal migration, in two forms, with both leading effectively to urbanisation. In one case, rural people enter urban areas and become separated from their farming livelihoods or connection to the land, and increase pressure on the cities they enter. In the other, an influx of internally displaced people seek refuge in certain rural areas that have been less affected by fighting; this significantly increases the local population, leading to a loss of agricultural land, and contributing to the urbanisation of a previously rural area.

It is evident from fieldwork that the impacts of displacement are diverse and far-reaching, cyclically leading to and developing from secondary impacts such as economic consequences, inter-religious tension and urbanisation. The main impacts of displacement that directly affect the church and affect its contribution to well-being were identified as the loss of skilled members and the influx of large numbers of people in great need.¹⁹⁶

4.3.2 Community disintegration

Siege mentality

The second impact of protracted conflict on the local church was sustained grievance against the perceived 'other', alongside fear and suspicion, as a result of sectarian violence. In Lebanon, despite sects coexisting on a superficial level, this is manifest in what could be termed 'mutual avoidance'. Without efforts to counter this tendency, the same is likely to develop in Syria, where the warmth of Damascus friendliness in the street risks becoming lost altogether. The focus of the church during Lebanon's own civil war was inward-looking and self-defensive, with an emphasis on survival. One participant said:

*'We developed a "siege mentality" that continues to today from the church being a demographic minority and having an unknown future.'*¹⁹⁷



❏ An icon featuring Syria in the hand of Christ, in a church in Damascus. Photo: Marjorie Gourlay/CCCW and Tearfund

196 In South Sudan it was clear that church leaders continued to support 'their' parishioners who were scattered elsewhere but it was not evident in interviews whether this practice also occurs in Syria.

197 Participant from an NGO that serves as the development and education wing of an evangelical church, Lebanon (05.08.19).

There is a fear that Syria may become 'another Iraq' and will almost lose a place for Christianity altogether.¹⁹⁸ This mentality is visible in some Syrian (and Lebanese) churches today which are concerned with maintaining a Christian presence in the region.

War of memories

Another impact identified in Lebanon is the ongoing 'war of memories' which has been the result of not having any form of national reconciliation process and which continues to divide society.¹⁹⁹ Lebanese official history ends in 1945 as there has been no agreed narrative thereafter. In Syria too, there is already evidence of conflicting narratives. Some deem it necessary for there to be a place to commemorate individual and collective memory in order to help people heal.²⁰⁰ It may be too early in Syria as yet but there is a strong need for an agreed history, and the creation of a place for collective memory will also be crucial in rebuilding society. The situation in Syria is undeniably very different and official history is in different hands, but this highlights a potential long-term role for the church in peacebuilding.

Loss of trust

A direct experience of violence can quickly degenerate into fear and xenophobia, and such wounds are harder to heal than other kinds of war damage. It was said that trust between people has been destroyed and that:

'a house you can rebuild but your heart is harder to repair'.²⁰¹

In addition to the fear of other sectarian and ethnic groups, there is a fear of outsiders, as a result of external parties 'interfering' in their country (both extremist fighters but also NGOs with unclear agendas). Demographic shifts have also contributed to anxiety as a result of increased sectarian hostility.²⁰² There is therefore a complex interplay of the different factors and their layers in what could be categorised as community disintegration, as well as in their impact on churches and their members.

4.3.3 Erosion of the sense of belonging

The net result of all the impacts identified above is that they contribute to the sense of no longer belonging. People recognised that this loss of belonging applies to displaced communities as well as those who have stayed put. One participant said:

'Each time there is a wave of refugee internal displacement, I feel I am a stranger. Most of the faces in the church are not recognisable to me.'²⁰³

In addition to the discomfort of living with incomers and strangers, there is culture clash, even in the church. Another participant remarked that the Christianity of the new believers (refugees who are attending church and coming to faith) is unfamiliar and involves visions, dreams and miracles that are alien to the church the respondent attends.²⁰⁴ This is more pronounced in Lebanon where many refugees have come to adopt the Christian faith and congregations have had to adapt to the presence of women in Muslim headscarves, for example.

198 Tearfund staff member, interviewed in Syria (08.08.19).

199 Participant from an NGO that serves as the development and education wing of an evangelical church, Lebanon (05.08.19).

200 See Nora (1989); also Alexandra Asseily and the Garden for Forgiveness which is an attempt to rectify this absence <http://healingwoundsofhistory.com/garden-of-forgiveness/>

201 Participant from an ecumenical youth committee, Syria (09.08.19).

202 Starr (2012) 2

203 Participant from a theological college in Lebanon (06.08.19).

204 Participant from an NGO that serves as the development and education wing of an evangelical church, Lebanon (05.08.19).

4.3.4 Theological impact

Finally, and perhaps most significantly for the church, there is the direct impact on faith. In response to the demographic shifts, the church is forced to think theologically about situations it has never before encountered and must therefore rethink praxis, particularly in relation to hospitality. The Lebanese church has had to reconsider its relationship to its Syrian and Muslim neighbours. For those churches courageous enough to do so, the result has been positive.²⁰⁵ One participant said:

*'God is using our work with refugees to teach us about him. And the first lesson is about forgiveness.'*²⁰⁶

This has led to Lebanese communities developing from being 'bounded sets' in which a community is defined by its boundaries (and is therefore easy to tell who is in and who is out) to being 'centred sets' which is defined by Christo-centrism and opens the boundaries to include those who were previously excluded (women wearing headscarves, for example).²⁰⁷ Syria is at a different stage and theological shifts were harder to detect in a short visit. But, in Syria too there was evidence of the impact on faith and traditional sectarian distinctions with what appears to be a growing emphasis on ecumenical engagement and the emergence of youth movements. Young people in these movements say:

'Our one aim is to bring people together,'

a response to a long history of...

*'misunderstanding between sects and the difficulty in bringing them together'.*²⁰⁸

4.4 Local church responses

4.4.1 Strategic neutrality

The position of the church in relation to the state is very different in Lebanon from what it is in Syria. Yet, historically Christians in the two countries have worked closely together, with Syrian church leaders undertaking theological training in Lebanon and attending gatherings at places such as Dhour Choueir Evangelical Conference Centre.²⁰⁹ The Syrian government has depended on faith-based civil society organisations to provide charitable services, humanitarian aid, relief and development.²¹⁰ The church has worked at maintaining neutrality and has the continued support of the government as a result of not having taken sides during the war. Assad assured that the church would be able to continue acting openly without restrictions, in spite of much resistance coming from groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood. This obviously brings both opportunities and threats for international partnership but the fact that the church in Syria is not politicised as it is in Lebanon was identified as one of its strengths.²¹¹ One result of this perceived neutrality is the role of mediation, as witnessed in Homs when a group of Sunnis were under siege and needed to pass through an Alawite area to safety. They specifically requested the presence of a Greek Catholic priest to accompany them in order to guarantee their safety on evacuation.

205 See also Gavlack and Morgan (2011)

206 Participant from an NGO that serves as the development and education wing of an evangelical church, Lebanon (06.08.19).

207 Participant from a theological college in Lebanon (06.08.19).

208 Participants from an ecumenical youth committee, Syria (09.08.19), and an ecumenical forgiveness and reconciliation project, Lebanon (06.08.19). The term 'sects' was used in these conversations to mean denominations. This may be an acknowledgement that the churches need unity to ensure survival.

209 Dhour Choueir Evangelical Conference Centre <http://dcec-lb.xyz/>

210 See Ruiz de Alvira and Zinti (2012) 5–30

211 In order to ensure the humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality for working in a context such as this, the various geographical expressions of church in Syria and how they are politically aligned must be explored.

4.4.2 Hospitality

In responding to the impacts of conflict listed above, the church has a choice whether to take up arms and fight (as, for example, the Syrians of north-east Syria have done) or to work instead through non-violent means to bring peace. One participant said:

*'The church is faced with a choice – accept and embrace [Muslim refugees], or reject and leave these vulnerable people to another, like ISIS.'*²¹²

There are churches exemplifying both these responses but there are many that have chosen to welcome the strangers in their midst to offer Christian hospitality. Organisations such as LSESD place an emphasis on offering community, and of knowing people by name, thus preserving their dignity.

*'What we do through the local churches is more than practical assistance but the emotional assistance of [recognising them as] being someone, having a name, being known, not just a beneficiary of a food parcel.'*²¹³

In Syria another example is the protection offered to women and children from ISIS-controlled areas in a centre run by Catholic sisters who provide shelter, accommodation, food and non-food items, as well as psychosocial support for trauma relief through art and other media. Impartiality in offering assistance is another key principle that will be explored under *Challenges* below.²¹⁴

4.4.3 Relief and development

The church in both Lebanon and Syria is now involved in emergency relief (providing food, clothing, medicines and supplies for winter), as well as building bridges between communities. It is also developing collaborative partnerships with organisations that offer capacity building, provision of materials, spiritual and psychosocial support, and community development. In some denominations, committees have been formed in each parish to deliver aid and assistance to the community. In Syria, for example, a church dug wells in the church courtyard to extract drinking water and distribute it around the city.²¹⁵ Other roles the church has taken on in Syria include:

- medical provision
- running schools
- livelihoods programmes
- developing agriculture
- offering humanitarian protection as well as cash distribution.

The church has demonstrated flexibility and creativity in contributing to various aspects of holistic well-being in their communities. For example, in addition to emergency relief, one congregation has established a charity shop and a laundry to provide for the refugees in a society where these do not normally exist.²¹⁶

212 Participant from an NGO that serves as the development and education wing of an evangelical church, Lebanon (06.08.19). See also Gourlay (2015)

213 Participant from an NGO that serves as the development and education wing of an evangelical church, Lebanon (05.08.19).

214 See Kraft (2015)

215 Selimian (2016), 24

216 A participant representing evangelical church leadership, Lebanon (07.08.19).

4.4.4 Reconciliation, peacebuilding and hope

Another visible role the church is taking on in some cases is that of peacebuilding and reconciliation. One organisation interviewed in this study exists to overcome social divisions and bring people together through education and leadership development among youth. Their emphasis on young people brings not only the possibility of transforming future society but also of changing the hearts of wounded older generations, and there are many stories of such transformation.²¹⁷ The young people who formed a focus group for this research expressed a sense of responsibility to show their elders that it was possible to overcome fear and division.



❏ A workshop for young people run in Saida, Lebanon, by one of the participants of this research. The workshops create opportunities for young people from different communities to overcome the divisions between them. Photo: Kieran Dodds/Tearfund

4.4.5 Spiritual development

A final major role for the churches is the spiritual development and empowerment of their congregations with leadership development opportunities, Bible study and discipleship, as well as providing resources in Arabic.²¹⁸ The changing context in which it finds itself forces the church to rethink theologically its place in society and its relationship with others. There is therefore a significant theological role that is taking the church into political advocacy in ways that it has not previously been involved. There is also a sense that Syrian churches need no longer depend on Lebanon as before. They would like to become more independent and develop their own events and facilities, perhaps in an attempt to reinforce the place of Christians in the country. Due to the increasing numbers of believers with a Muslim background (BMBs), the church also has a role in advocating for a place in society for new Christians. One participant said:

'A Kurdish convert to Christianity cannot be an Armenian Orthodox, for example. Our churches are tied with ethnographic and political identity.'²¹⁹

217 An ecumenical forgiveness and reconciliation project, Lebanon (06.08.19).

218 For example, one of the participants in this research operates a publishing house.

219 Participant from an organisation that exists primarily to support believers with a Muslim background, Lebanon (05.08.19). See also Anderson (2019)

4.5 Motivation for responding

The reasons for the churches acting as they do are varied but there is a sense that Christianity existed in Syria prior to Islam and that the country needs the church in order to be rebuilt.²²⁰ The 'oldest known church' (Ananias' House) is in Damascus and reminds believers that even...

'the most blood-thirsty terrorists [a reference to the biblical Saul] can experience the love of Jesus and the power of Jesus for change'.²²¹

This story illustrates the belief that God takes care of his church and can use local church members to play a part in changing society. Similarly, another participant referred to the story of Ezra and Nehemiah, saying there was a need to protect the whole city in order to protect the temple. Thus, there is a need for the church to stay and take care of its surrounding community in order to ensure a place for itself. Or as one interviewee put it:

'If I as a leader leave, everyone will leave.'²²²

Several interviewees mentioned 'calling' as the main motivation for serving their communities and for persevering despite the difficulties it entails.²²³ One person recalled the story of Jesus healing the ten lepers and that only one came back to thank him.

'Our calling is not to be thanked but to show Christ and his love, to be salt and light, and God does the rest.'²²⁴

Others said that they were prompted by...

'the calling we have, and having witnessed unity, transformation and hope ourselves'.²²⁵

Likewise, such work is deemed to be...

'impossible without the Holy Spirit'.²²⁶

In Syria, people felt a common sense of responsibility towards the most vulnerable and, in Lebanon, for victims of war who are suffering what they once suffered themselves.²²⁷ One Lebanese participant said:

'The need is vast. This is a chance for us to witness in a new way, like a kind of repentance for us.'²²⁸

Despite varied motivations, it is clear that such work is not possible without the inspiration and encouragement of a God who...

'has a bigger perspective and can do what we can't imagine'.²²⁹

220 Ibid.; Sahner (2014) 39–76

221 Selimian (2016) 18

222 Participant representing evangelical church leadership, interviewed in Lebanon (07.08.19).

223 Participants from an ecumenical forgiveness and reconciliation project, Lebanon (06.08.19), as well as an ecumenical youth committee, Syria (09.08.19).

224 Participant from an NGO that serves as the development and education wing of an evangelical church, Lebanon (05.08.19).

225 Participant from an ecumenical forgiveness and reconciliation project, Lebanon (06.08.19).

226 Participant from a theological college in Lebanon (06.08.19). See also Merath (2017): 'When God puts someone in my way that he wants me to take care of, he gives me the heart and the resources to do it' (17).

227 Merath (2017) 17

228 A participant representing evangelical church leadership, interviewed in Lebanon (07.08.19).

229 Participant from an NGO that serves as the development and education wing of an evangelical church, Lebanon (05.08.19).

4.6 Challenges, limitations and opportunities in the local churches' response

4.6.1 Overcoming fear

In all conversations in both Lebanon and Syria, it was notable that what were considered to be challenges were also seen as opportunities. For example, one participant said:

*'Every time in Christian history that there has been major growth in the church, it follows response to crisis. In this way the challenges of conflict are also opportunities for us.'*²³⁰

It was unanimously suggested that living through such times gives the church an opportunity, if it is courageous enough to take it, to overcome the inward-looking tendencies of fear, hatred and despair. Such trials invite the church instead to look outward to those in need in the wider community and offer hospitality and hope; those who are doing so are experiencing transformation. One participant said:

*'Our fear and inward-looking mentality led to a mentality where the church exists only for its own self whereas we are supposed to be more missional.'*²³¹

4.6.2 Christian–Muslim interactions

Besides the challenge of changing mindsets of enmity and retribution as well as the pervading lack of trust between people, there is the added obstacle of what was identified as 'cultural Christianity' as opposed to 'living faith'.²³² Equally, the challenge to ecumenical unity is great but so too is the opportunity for it, which is seen as crucial to a healthy society that can form both inter-religious and intra-religious communities. There was no mention in interviews of collaboration with Muslim groups or organisations, although this does exist. In addition, humanitarian aid is seen to favour the Sunni Muslim population at the expense of the Christians who are statistically less affected but also in desperate need. This perceived favouring of one community over another can contribute to further discord between sectarian groups and increases resentment and hatred towards the perceived 'other'. However, it is also an opportunity for churches to show impartiality in relief services and thus also the unconditional nature of Christian love. A challenge for the churches is the balance between evangelisation and relief. One organisation interviewed for this research has policies to ensure the separation of the two so that aid is not conditional on any action of the beneficiaries. Not all churches have the same perspective but it appears to be fairly widely accepted that this approach is the most transparent and fair for providing relief services.

4.6.3 A new era of engagement/post-war transition

Finally, there is also the challenge of investing in transient communities and in individuals who ultimately leave the country altogether, leading to a loss of the most capable people.²³³ The churches are now entering a stage of engagement with their communities that brings both the risk of dependency where communities are not yet able to become independent, and donor fatigue. They also face the restrictions and prerequisites of donor requirements. There is also vulnerability to external agencies whose agendas are not always immediately clear. Churches also lack tools to assess and identify trustworthy partners, and sometimes the wisdom needed to deal with the integration and persecution of converts.

230 Participant from a theological college in Lebanon (06.08.19).

231 Participant from an NGO that serves as the development and education wing of an evangelical church, Lebanon (05.08.19).

232 Participants both from an ecumenical forgiveness and reconciliation project, Lebanon (06.08.19), and an ecumenical youth committee, Syria (09.08.19), made this distinction. Many young Lebanese are rejecting religion. See www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-middle-east-48729203/Lebanon-s-atheists-rejecting-their-religion

233 For example, scholarships given to church leaders, who then seek asylum outside. A participant (05.08.19) from an organisation that exists primarily to support believers from a Muslim background (Lebanon) said: 'If we build capacity today, they will leave tomorrow.'

4.7 Local stakeholder insights on strengthening church responses

4.7.1 Ecumenical unity and creativity

The main insights arising from this fieldwork were that the churches require both unity and creativity in response to conflict. Building ecumenical unity will enable them to face challenges coming from outside and will sustain them to continue their work despite adversity, as one participant said:

'for the church to end conflict, bring forgiveness, peace and reconciliation'.²³⁴

One example of such unity is denominations choosing to celebrate a saint's day on the same day for the first time (in 2018); previously it has been celebrated on separate days. Creative approaches such as those identified by the youth focus group (to take the church out of its walls and into the community with music, drama, etc) will encourage people to take a more active role in their churches and communities and, ultimately, help transform society.

4.7.2 Preservation of the Christian population

Because approximately 50 per cent of the Christians in Syria have left, the church is fearful that it may lose its place in society and recognises a need to close the door on Christian emigration. It also sees that it needs to find ways to help Christians stay, either through support in starting businesses or with vocational training, or offering rehabilitation programmes for those returning from exile. Investment in land was noted as one means of ensuring a place for Christians in Syria.

4.7.3 Partnership

Several participants identified the need for partnership with the wider world church, including people's physical presence through visits of encouragement or shared projects. This would help with capacity building and training in fundraising and help improve professional standards, as well as aiding in the *missio ecclesiae*. As one person commented:

'[The] universal church becomes very important to support mission. We can't do it alone.'²³⁵

Another said:

'The church is strong. It doesn't need spiritual support as much as [support in] operational management. This is a new phase and relationship [for the churches] with their communities. Needs are bigger, targets are bigger. The church needs to be more organised.'²³⁶

Helping the local church clarify its mission would help it identify which donors it should work with and it was suggested that a tool could be developed for the churches to assess potential donors. The churches are vulnerable and many external agencies are entering the country with what churches feel are 'dangerous' ideas.²³⁷

234 A participant from an ecumenical forgiveness and reconciliation project, Lebanon (06.08.19).

235 A participant representing evangelical church leadership, interviewed in Lebanon (07.08.19).

236 A Tearfund staff member, interviewed in Syria (08.08.19).

237 It was suggested that Tearfund POCA (Partner Organisational Capacity Assessment) could be adapted to suit this purpose, by a Tearfund staff member, interviewed in Syria (08.08.19).



📷 Syrian refugees attend an education programme, run by a Tearfund partner, in Lebanon. Photo: David Cavan/Tearfund

4.7.4 Hope for the new generations

On a practical level, there is a great need for projects that focus on vulnerable women, and care for the elderly, especially those whose families have left the country. Schooling for the generation of children who have lost out due to war is also vital. It has been noted that:

*'If hope for Syria depends on our children, then we have no hope unless we find a way to educate them.'*²³⁸

Another said:

*'The greatest need is with the young people. They grew up in the war and have never known anything else. They have no hope.'*²³⁹

As well as generating employment opportunities, there is also a desire to see young people take on leadership in the churches. This need is greater in established denominations than in Reformed churches where young people often do have roles of their own and becoming ordained is an easier process.

238 Selimian (2016), 25

239 Participant from an ecumenical youth committee, Syria (09.08.19).

4.8 Summary and conclusion

This chapter has outlined the result of conversations in Lebanon and Syria over the course of five days. It has shown that the local church in Syria is impacted in many ways by conflict and that, nearly 30 years after the Lebanese civil war, Lebanon is still suffering the after-effects of war. There are many lessons from the Lebanese experience that may be adapted and applied to the Syrian context in an attempt to protect them from the same continued division and suffering.

The main impacts of conflict identified in this research were:

- xenophobia and sectarianism
- an inward-looking focus on survival and disintegration of trust and community cohesion
- displacement, internally and externally, with an impact on communities losing as well as receiving migrants, and significant demographic changes and population imbalance resulting in certain areas
- the rise of urbanisation and Islamisation of certain areas
- the loss of a sense of belonging for all communities.

The church in Lebanon and Syria is finding itself taking on varied roles that extend beyond ministry to the congregation. Churches are also involved in:

- ministry to Muslim neighbours in the wider community
- humanitarian action
- emergency relief and development
- peacebuilding and reconciliation
- education programmes
- developing cross-denominational groups to help overcome social disintegration and build hope.

The motivations for the churches' response are also diverse and include a sense of calling and commitment to their land and people, as well as to the existence of Christianity in the region. They are also motivated by the experience of transformation in themselves and those they serve, and the knowledge of a God who has a wider perspective and can do things beyond our limited imagination. As one participant put it:

*'With all the challenges around us, I know we have God and so we have hope.'*²⁴⁰

It was widely agreed that the challenges for the church are also in fact opportunities. The main challenges at present are: fear of the other, sectarian hatred and the mindset of retribution; fear of surveillance; vulnerability to external agencies with unknown agendas; finding the balance between mission and relief; donor requirements and donor fatigue; loss of trust between people; and exhaustion among leaders. There are opportunities, however, to overcome xenophobia and to develop a theology that is current and transformative. There is a compelling and recognised need for a theology focusing on forgiveness, hospitality and community transformation, exploring these themes in the current context and in community engagement. It could be argued, in fact, that the responses of the churches are all the more valuable and effective because they are difficult and costly.

240 Participant representing evangelical church leadership, Syria (08.08.19).

5 ANALYSIS, INSIGHTS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction and context

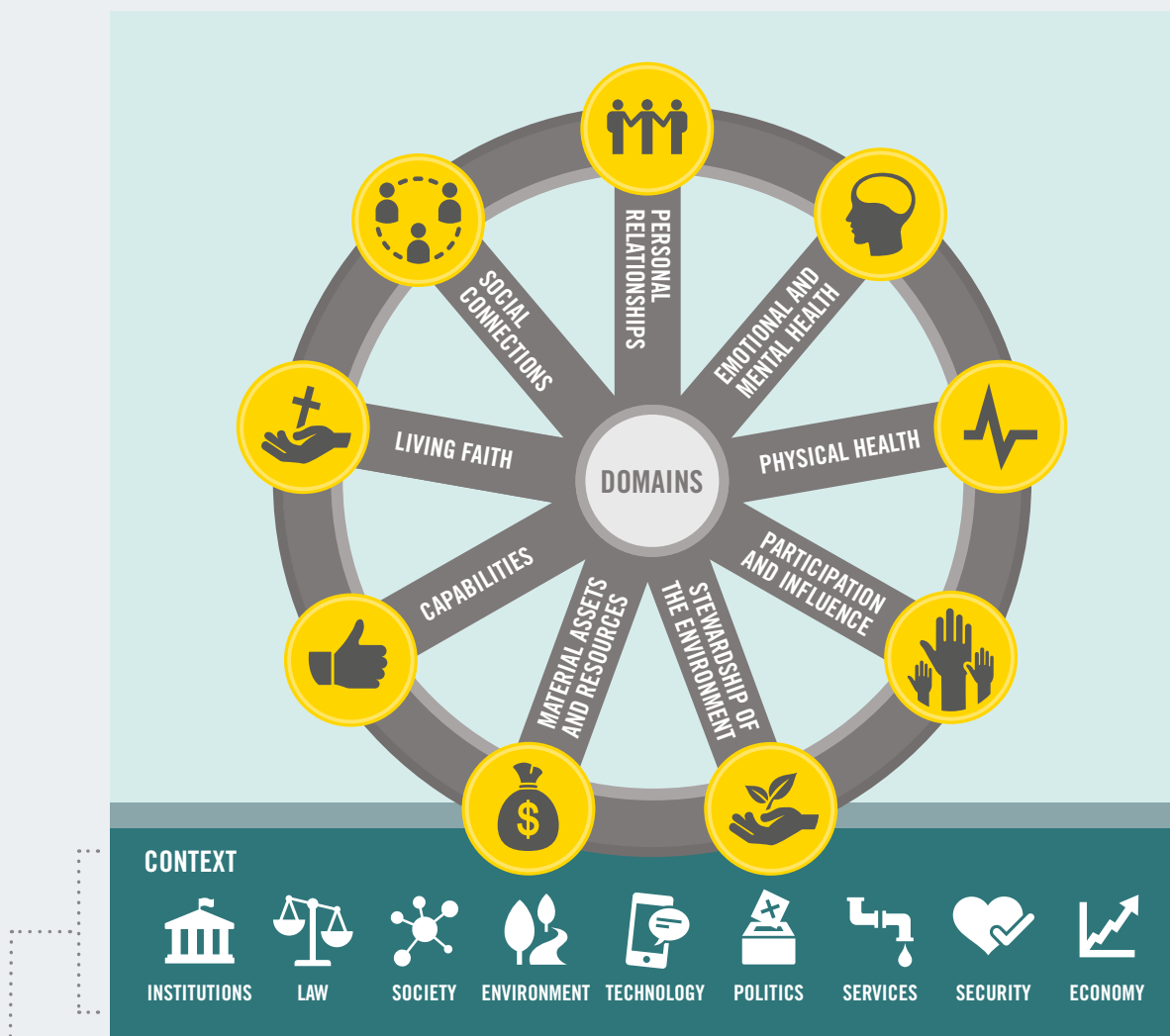
This study has conveyed the voice of the local church on its role in contributing to multiple aspects of human well-being in conflict-affected fragile states. The research was designed and intended to be a key study that would inform Tearfund's recently formulated corporate priorities of Church and Community Transformation (CCT) and Fragile States (FS). Its aim was to seek to identify emerging themes and offer some insights on partnering with churches in the context of protracted crisis. The four foci of inquiry were: in what ways conflict impacts the local church; the roles the local church takes on in responding to conflict; the church's motivation for responding in these ways; and finally, the church's own perspectives on barriers, constraints and opportunities. Thus, one of the primary objectives of this report was to develop a picture as painted by the local church itself of the multidimensional roles the local church assumes in fragile states. Its purpose was to inform a review of Tearfund's approaches in these particular contexts. In so doing, it is therefore hoped that this project contributes to collaborative mechanisms that can address root causes of fragility and restore broken relationships on all levels of society. Tearfund recognises that some existing models of and approaches to CCT are not necessarily directly applicable to all fragile contexts. So, one desired consequence of this study would be the possible creation of resources that could be beneficial to the churches that are functioning in sensitive, fragile environments. For example, CCM has been very successful in many African churches, but is not feasible where the church is subject to persecution, and may not be appropriate for the current context for churches in the Middle East.



Women representatives of United Church Women's Association in Maar, South Sudan, celebrate the success of their peacebuilding and agricultural training projects in 2017. Photo: Tom Price/Tearfund

LINKING THE RESEARCH TO TEARFUND'S LIGHT WHEEL APPROACH

The LIGHT Wheel is Tearfund's main framework for holistic well-being currently and is a very useful tool for context analysis.



The LIGHT Wheel identifies nine domains for flourishing individuals and communities set against various contexts: institutions, law, society, environment, technology, politics, services, security and economy. The LIGHT Wheel framework uses the image of the soil for these contextual factors, of which 'security', or the absence of peace and stability, is particularly relevant here.

In fact, protracted crisis negatively impacts all of these contextual factors. In some cases, the church becomes one of the few remaining reliable institutions that can be depended on to deliver emergency aid as well as longer-term development programmes, despite suffering negative impacts itself (as the South Sudan case study in chapter 3 illustrates). The work of the church in contributing to the well-being of its communities is therefore impeded by the fact that it is also having to make efforts to stabilise the context itself. Its power and perceived impartiality as peacemaker depend predominantly on its status and relationship with the state. In South Sudan and DRC, for example, the churches have had high-level engagement with the authorities and have played key roles in establishing governments and working towards reconciliation and peace. This comes, as some would see it, at the cost of care for the church body itself which church leaders themselves feel they are neglecting.

The church's own well-being is affected by the disintegration of the context as its position and communities become threatened. It faces additional burdens as it reaches out to displaced people cut off from their livelihoods by forced urbanisation and separated from their original communities, becoming dependent on aid. In addition, limited access to resources and technology further undermines well-being and, in turn, adds to the burden on the church.

It was apparent from this study that the LIGHT Wheel framework is indeed a useful tool for recognising contextual vulnerabilities and needs in each of the nine domains of well-being it identifies. In outbreaks of violence, the primary focus is on safety and shelter, access to water and sanitation, and provision of food and non-food essential items. As violence continues and communities continue to live in displacement, the needs expand and call for more creative longer-term strategies. There is evidence from this research that the church is active in all nine of these domains, with less evidence of its building material assets and resources or opportunities for stewardship for the environment, although there is evidence of both of these with agricultural support programmes and the provision of seeds. With varying degrees of influence, depending on the context, the most relevant to this research are the church's contribution to **physical, mental and emotional health** by providing shelter, clinics, schools and trauma initiatives; also key is its contribution to nurturing **living faith** by Bible study, access to publications and preaching that gives people hope. In both South Sudan and Syria, the church is kept alive and functioning by volunteers. Syrian churches have created support teams in each congregation and in South Sudan, some churches asked the displaced people seeking refuge in their compounds to organise their own committees to provide a unified voice for the people and improve services. In both cases, this has given people a sense of **participation and influence**.

Comparing these findings with the four humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, it is apparent that these are successful to varying degrees. The danger of delivering a dependable service is the risk of developing dependency among beneficiaries. Impartiality was most evident in Lebanon, a country dealing with outsiders, but less evident in Syria where trust has disintegrated and fear has grown.



📷 In prayer at Munuki church, Juba. Photo: Tom Price/Tearfund

5.2 Interpretation of data and findings

5.2.1 Literature review

A review of the available literature for the seven fragile states that are the focus of this study (Iraq, Syria, Myanmar, DRC, CAR, Burundi and South Sudan) explored published books, academic papers, and online publications of church denominations and para-church organisations, as well as media sources. The review revealed a church that is active, even in the most severe crises, amid violent conflict as well as in long-term exile or community fragmentation. It is evident that the traditional form and practice of 'church' is forced to change and adapt to adverse circumstances. Yet, it is also clear that the local church is committed to responding in whatever ways it can in order to continue to prioritise the well-being of its community, or even its nation (depending on the context). Even if these are not the terms that the churches interviewed used to identify their work, it is apparent that, as one participant in fieldwork noted:

*'Anything that concerns a human being is of interest to the church.'*²⁴¹

However, significant limitations in available literature meant that fieldwork was necessary in order both to observe and record church experiences directly. Given various constraints, this was possible in only two of the focus countries, South Sudan and Syria, with supplementary data collection conducted in Lebanon.

Impact of conflict on the church

The impact of conflict on the local church varies between the seven countries that feature in this research. In all, displacement and community fragmentation environments with increased levels of fear and loss of trust are primary impacts. In DRC, for example, this has been compounded by the political maintenance of ethnic divisions that drive further societal rifts.²⁴² Churches in particular are affected by the loss of members as a result of direct armed attacks or displacement, thus impacting human and financial capital. Ecumenical division compounds the problem, as competition for support arises between churches. For those with a majority-Christian population, there is a greater opportunity for speaking out against injustice in the public sphere but this may be curbed by direct attack as a means to control through fear. Those countries with a minority-Christian population such as Myanmar, or where the church is embroiled in the political realm such as Burundi, speaking out is all the more costly. Here, the church either falls victim to targeted attacks such as restrictions on religious activities, abduction and torture by the military (as in Myanmar), or it becomes silent (as it has in Burundi).²⁴³ In all seven cases, there is widespread evidence of deep-rooted fear and trauma, including within church leadership, as evidenced in DRC and South Sudan.²⁴⁴ In Iraq, the church is facing near-extinction as a result of direct violent persecution, forced conversion and mass exodus. Although some are tentatively rebuilding churches and returning to their homes, the continued existence of a Christian presence remains unclear.

Roles of the church in conflict

Again, due to the varying nature of the seven protracted crises, the church may have greater or lesser freedom, depending on its population and status, as well as its relationship with the government. In CAR, for example, the churches are prioritising forgiveness and reconciliation, counter to the desire for retaliation over the demolition of church buildings;²⁴⁵ the Women of Faith movement is such an example.²⁴⁶ In DRC, the church has contributed to political negotiations and was called on to organise political elections, establishing a transitional government and the Independent Electoral Commission and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.²⁴⁷ The local churches in Burundi have offered development and relief services, improving access

241 Participant from Mercyland Gospel Church of All Nations, Juba (18.05.19). See also the Humanitarian Principle of 'Humanity' in UN OCHA (2012)

242 Micah Network (2007)

243 See 'Literature Review'; Philippe (2015)

244 Micah Network (2007)

245 Macqueron (2018)

246 Daimbaye (2001)

247 Micah Network (2007)

to water and agricultural supplies, as well as establishing health and education facilities.²⁴⁸ In Myanmar, despite working under extreme persecution from the military, churches are key actors in social development, fighting for rights and equality, and delivering emergency aid and longer-term development services, as well as mediating between armed groups in the pursuit of peace.²⁴⁹ In some places the church simply cannot do anything except 'be'²⁵⁰ when persecution is intense, such as on the Ninevah Plain in Iraq. In other areas, the church responds by offering support for displaced people and distributing food parcels. Today, the role of the churches in Iraq is in tentatively rebuilding their communities, and in teaching their congregations that they do in fact belong and are 'not foreigners' as they feel. They are also attempting to be peacemakers among the major political parties.

Motivations, challenges and opportunities

The church's own perspectives on motivations, challenges and opportunities were particularly hard to identify by means of written sources only. Although there was email communication with church leaders in some of these contexts, there are limitations as to what can be written, as well as barriers of language and expectation. It is evident that the churches in all these contexts have a sense of responsibility for their communities and nations, and share the desire to work towards improving people's well-being and contributing to social change. It is evident that in minority-Christian contexts, there is the added motivation of maintaining a place for Christianity. It may be surmised that, in addition to being a response of genuine care, churches' partnership with donors, and delivery of humanitarian relief and development, are ways of reaching out to the world community and making themselves indispensable, as a means of survival.

5.2.2 Fieldwork

Fieldwork was conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews and focus groups in South Sudan (Juba, Nyamlel and Aweil), Lebanon (Beirut, Antelias and Rmeileh) and Syria (Damascus). Participants were representatives of local churches, denominational and congregational leaders, and church-based humanitarian and reconciliation projects, as well as Tearfund stakeholders and local staff. Interviews in these diverse contexts gave insight into very different situations and indeed revealed that experiences and perspectives within the country differ, between urban and rural areas, for example, as well as between established denominations and emerging churches. Local churches, by their strong connection to and regular involvement with their communities, are able to observe needs as soon as they arise. They are also able to mobilise some of the capital identified above to respond quickly where external agencies may be delayed by complex policies, procedures and the time required for the release of funding.²⁵¹ It is clear that denominations that have wide networks of support outside the country are stronger and more able to respond to people's needs. By contrast, more localised churches such as Africa Inland Mission do not have the advantage of these sources. In Syria, the National Evangelical Church (NEC) is the only denomination without a developmental wing but it is in the process of establishing one, for the specific purpose of responding to the refugee crisis.²⁵²

Major contextual differences

Status of Christianity

Christianity is the majority religion in South Sudan, having arrived with various missions throughout history. Syria has a minority-Christian population that has been present since the emergence of Christianity, despite the growth of Islam and the political consequences of the French mandate. The relationship with Islam is significant in both of these contexts although it was not a focus of this study, as is the particular expression of Islam and its political allegiance in each context. South Sudan as an independent state exists, partially, as the

248 Anglican Alliance 'Livelihood (Burundi)' <https://anglicanalliance.org/project/livelihood-burundi/>

249 Rogers (2015) 60

250 That is, living out Christian values as the church, being 'salt and light' in the community which is also a valuable contribution, a sign of intent and part of 'faithfulness metrics' contributing to CCT.

251 For example, the delay in the church's ability to respond to the death of parishioners by wildfires in Northern Bahr el Ghazal state, South Sudan. (Inter-Church committee, 15.05.19); the work of the Karen Baptists in Myanmar: Nicholson (2016); See 'Christians: part of the fabric of society in Iraq and Kurdistan' The Catholic Church in England and Wales, 13 July 2018 www.catholicnews.org.uk/Home/News/2018/Christians-in-Kurdistan

252 NEC is a Presbyterian denomination.

result of separation from the majority-Muslim north (Sudan). The church in Syria has a longer history, having existed since the biblical era and the beginning of Christianity, but is increasingly affected by Islamisation and sectarian hostility due to fractures appearing between religious groups during the war.²⁵³ Although Muslim–Christian relations offer only one lens to look at these different conflicts, the church's relationship to Islam was revealed in fieldwork as significant to the current position of the church.

Position of the church

The church in South Sudan (which exemplifies a Christian-majority context) has forged a unique role that is highly politically engaged and active, participating as it has in the creation of the independent state but continuing through the conflict as a mediator and prophetic voice for justice and peace. The church in Syria (which exemplifies a Christian-minority context) has, on the whole, a positive relationship with the state, being granted protection and freedom by the president and is expected to deliver charitable services in place of the state. It is, however, also under its scrutiny and surveillance, and faces opposition from groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, and therefore does not have the freedom or authority that is possible for the church in South Sudan, for example. In both cases, it must be noted that the state is not a neutral actor and neither is the church. The humanitarian principle of neutrality is therefore challenging to maintain when allegiance with the government may help in ensuring survival, and the implications of such a relationship with the state may jeopardise independence.

Relationship with Tearfund

Other differences that are relevant to the fieldwork are the relationship of the churches with Tearfund. In South Sudan this relationship is well established and the interviews were easy to facilitate due to Tearfund's positive reputation there and the existence of previous partnership. It was evident that the churches interviewed were familiar with and well versed in Tearfund's work and humanitarian and development terminology, and were eager to participate in the research to develop existing relations and possibly future programmes and partnerships. In Syria, Tearfund is not well known and its evangelical and Reformed associations pose unfortunate obstacles to relationship building, particularly with the more established denominations. Reformed churches are the minority and, despite a long presence in the Middle East, are often associated with the West and considered to have lost some degree of connection with their Christian roots and orthodoxy.²⁵⁴ The partnerships Tearfund has developed in Lebanon will facilitate the forging of relationships inside Syria but these will take time to establish, especially because of the divisive Syrian war. In a country where 'people so often speak in half-truths and use misdirection as the first line of defence', one has to be aware that often more is not said than said, and there is a need to read between the lines in every conversation.²⁵⁵ In contrast to the South Sudanese churches' explicit desire for partnership and openness, the churches of Syria may be tentative and fearful due to negative experiences, but are equally desiring of positive and constructive partnership.

Shared themes

Despite these significant differences, there were several shared themes that emerged in fieldwork interviews. These two very different countries are both home to diverse communities and have deep-rooted traditions of retribution as well as tribal, sectarian or closed-community mentality (which also seeps into the church). This is perhaps as a result of both countries being strategic geopolitical locations and having experienced a long history of human migration and settlement and therefore also conflict.

Impact of conflict on the church

The primary impacts of conflict on the church in both cases were identified as displacement and community disintegration. This has led to: high-level needs for emergency aid and humanitarian relief; decreased levels of education of the young; increased health needs; and high numbers of vulnerable people (such as widows and orphans, injured and traumatised people). Other impacts identified included: severe trauma; the loss of

253 See Starr (2012) 50

254 See, for example Bailey and Bailey (2010)

255 Joshua Landis in Starr (2012)

trust between people; increased hostility towards the 'other' (tribe, ethnic, or religious group); and a sense of no longer belonging that is shared by both displaced persons and those remaining, and echoes the experience of churches in Iraq. Another impact that affects the church in particular is the loss of skilled individuals through war, violence, displacement, migration or their seeking employment elsewhere, for example in the military or in NGOs. The risk arising from the loss of such people is that the church may become or appear to be incompetent, thus affecting the church's spiritual life, its funding and the delivery of services.²⁵⁶ Other impacts include emergency response expectations (see South Sudan case study) and theological implications (see Syria case study).

Roles of the church in conflict

The churches in both South Sudan and Syria are taking on varied and multidimensional roles that go far beyond the delivery of regular services and spiritual teaching. They are operating in territory that requires 'business'-like professionalism, structure and management in order to deliver humanitarian relief and development services in a way that is efficient and effective.²⁵⁷ The ways they do this vary but the implications are universally the over-stretching of an already exhausted church. By striving to attend to the full breadth of human need, churches are weakened in each area and capacity. In both countries, organisations and projects have been created to deal with this burden in order to develop partnerships with donors and create a unified approach. In South Sudan, it was said that a mindset of dependency has developed, obstructing progress to personal independence and further burdening the churches. However, in Syria, it was noted that although some donors are keen to initiate long-term development programmes, it is still too soon for real development work; the immediate humanitarian needs of shelter, food and water are still too great. Rather than taking a linear view of development, Tearfund aims to adopt (wherever possible) resilience practices in humanitarian response and protracted settings. Other significant and long-term roles of the local church include:

- psychosocial support through trauma education and healing programmes and various kinds of creative therapies to offer emotional relief
- education through the provision of schooling and literacy programmes
- medical support
- mediation, reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts
- speaking out against injustice in society
- advocating for persecuted minorities (such as writing public statements as exemplified by the churches in Myanmar)
- rethinking theologically about the evolving context the church finds itself in and the role of the church within it.

It was evident that the roles the church takes on in a crisis shape the future position the church may have in society in post-conflict times. The church in South Sudan has become a key facilitator of emergency response at the expense of other roles. In Syria, the church is making itself indispensable to ensure its long-term existence but at the same time, some suggest, it is better positioned to do peace work than emergency relief.

Motivation

The local churches interviewed in this research say they are inspired and sustained by their faith in God who gives them courage and vitality to care for those around them and to serve their communities despite severe adversity, limited resources and exhaustion. Interviewees said they are encouraged by the biblical 'great commission' to 'go and make disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28:18–20 [NIV]) and a sense of calling, and they feel enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit.²⁵⁸ They are also motivated by their own experience of suffering and trauma, but also of healing, transformation and hope that they desire to share among their people. The research shows that churches desire to see peace and unity, their communities transformed and given hope, and they yearn for normality to return. Because the church is a body of believing people,

256 A participant representing evangelical church leadership, interviewed in Lebanon, said: 'We train up great leaders and then they take their faith and they leave' (07.08.19).

257 A Tearfund staff member, interviewed in Syria (08.08.19).

258 It must be noted that this is not always positive.

it moves with them, even in displacement, and therefore is active in scattered communities and camps because the Christians themselves and church leaders with their families are also displaced. Wherever Christians are, the church is.

Challenges and opportunities

Many of the challenges and obstacles to the church's response to conflict were also seen as opportunities for growth, as they push churches to adapt to the changing context and rethink theologically their place in society. In both South Sudan and Syria, the protracted crisis has brought many back to church and seen the emergence of large numbers of new believers. Although this is by no means universal, another phenomenon resulting from conflict noted by one participant was increased numbers of people entering theological training; there has been a recent rise in Syrian students as there also was from Sudan at the establishment of the independent South Sudanese state.²⁵⁹ One positive result of demographic change is the increased role of women in leadership in the absence of men (for example in South Sudan), which offers an opportunity for further partnership engagement. Additionally, both contexts have responded to the needs of their wider communities by offering hospitality to those in need. This has included reaching out to those they previously perceived as enemies, thus exemplifying the humanitarian principle of impartiality. In doing so, churches are learning about forgiveness and wounds from the past are healing. A desire was expressed in both countries for ecumenical unity, an emphasis on reconciliation and peacebuilding, and a particular focus on projects that will support the youth and involve livelihoods training, encouraging young people to stay in the country and join in the work of the churches.



📷 In an IDP camp near Juba, in South Sudan, Mariol Koang speaks to her pastor. Photo: Tom Price/Tearfund

259 Participant from a theological college in Lebanon (06.08.19). This would not be the case in all fragile contexts.

Churches that, before the war, were primarily responsible for delivering church services and attending to the spiritual well-being of their congregants are now overwhelmed with the responsibility of wider communities in desperate need. As a result, some have established teams to deliver humanitarian aid (food boxes, winterisation kits or money) and have developed partnerships with donors; consequently they are learning to function in a new capacity which can make them seem 'like businesses'.²⁶⁰ It was apparent from conversations in South Sudan and Syria that there is a desire for partnership that can assist the churches in developing the necessary skills to provide services that are new to the church, in a way that is professional and well organised.

In both South Sudan and Syria, the local churches have, for the most part, been working tirelessly throughout the respective conflicts to serve their communities and provide for their wide-ranging needs, but they are now very weary. The primary need cited in all cases was therefore for supportive partnership. There is a loss of international support and available funding as conflict goes on indefinitely, as in the case of South Sudan, or draws to a close, as it is appearing to in Syria. Many humanitarian donors turn their attention elsewhere to rapid onset emergencies when the need is still very great. This contributes to a sense of abandonment when the challenges to responding are felt all the more acutely. The mindset of dependency among beneficiaries is hard to change without supplementary development projects, and church leaders themselves are exhausted. The main limitations and obstacles to the church responding that were cited in interviews were therefore a shortage of funding and limited resources, and the absence of partnership, as well as trauma and exhaustion among the leadership. One participant said:

*'We are left with these wounds. Everyone is wounded and people are exhausted. The church is taking care of the traumatised but who is taking care of the church?'*²⁶¹

5.3 Limitations

The main limitations in this research were the broad scope of the study in a relatively short period of time, as well as a lack of quality published written sources addressing the areas of this study. This latter point is particularly true in contexts where the church is subject to persecution or surveillance. There is also an absence of written literature that provides an understanding of the churches' own perspectives on the challenges they face and the opportunities they identify, particularly in minority-Christian contexts. Another significant limitation of the literature review was that the vast majority of sources consulted were in English and were written for a Western readership, some taking into account donor expectations. Reviewing local-level and local-language newspapers or other resources was beyond the scope of this particular research but would be fundamental in developing a richer picture of each particular context. Other possible avenues for research include a deeper exploration of theological responses to conflict and the apparent trend in ecumenical emphasis as a result of conflict, as well as an exploration of gender as both impact and driver of conflict in fragile states.²⁶² Furthermore, research on the role of the churches primarily through the lens of the four humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence would be an interesting examination that may reveal more fully the diversity of these contexts.

In addition, fieldwork was only possible in two of the seven focus countries, and there is a disparity in the depth of fieldwork between South Sudan and Syria. The first field trip in South Sudan was two weeks with two researchers, and the second was just two-and-a-half days in Lebanon and Syria respectively, with just one researcher. Reasons for this are given in chapters 3 and 4 but make fair comparison problematic. In order to take local grassroots perspectives more fully into account, it would be interesting to pursue research such as this in one context. It would also be beneficial to include more input from non-Tearfund partners, as well as observing projects and organising focus group discussions with congregants, which would offer a different perspective from that of leaders only. In the case of Syria this could provide an opportunity for the

260 A Tearfund staff member, interviewed in Syria (08.08.19).

261 Participant from the African Inland Church (20.05.19).

262 Chilvers (2014)

development of potential partnerships and contribute to developing the status and reputation of Tearfund in the Middle East, as has been achieved in South Sudan. Particularly in a country such as Syria that is so fragmented by conflict and fearful of strangers, however, this work should be conducted at an appropriate time and with wisdom and caution.

5.4 Insights from the churches

The primary needs identified in interviews and arising from this research are:

- the need for partnership with donors and the wider world church
- ecumenical unity
- a focus on rebuilding fragmented and scattered communities in a wounded society through reconciliation, peacebuilding and creative livelihoods programmes for young people.

5.4.1 Partnership

The need for partnership was emphasised as vital because 'the church cannot live in isolation'.²⁶³ This was identified as partnership with other churches (see *Ecumenical unity* below) but also in the form of international partnership and support. What was identified as necessary was not only financial support but also capacity building, and tools, training and resources that could develop professional work standards and would maintain the reputation of the church. It was very clear in both contexts that:

'If you can include the churches with support and humanitarian assistance, then it will reach the people in need. We are the people who will stay.'²⁶⁴

As mentioned above, one major felt need was the absence of support for people in leadership who are weary and feel they cannot stop to rest. One participant said:

'If they see I am tired, they will all become desperate.'²⁶⁵

Another stated:

'There is a need to heal the healers. There is no way out but we have to somehow stand.'²⁶⁶

Most of the people who talked of exhaustion were unpaid volunteers who are working for the church alongside paid work if they have it. It was apparent in both South Sudan and Syria that churches yearn for the physical presence of external visitors and see this as crucial to establishing relationships of trust, hearing the local voices, and understanding how better to work in partnership. Such visits can also remind the churches of why they are struggling to do what they do and connect them with the world church through prayer. In both contexts, the need for 'visits of encouragement'²⁶⁷ was repeated, with many saying: 'Pray for us.'²⁶⁸ In Juba, people spoke of the need for initial partnership assessment to be done by a third party (or someone with whom there is not an established relationship) in order to maintain impartiality. For example, it was suggested

263 Participant in a focus group with the Inter-Church Committee in Aweil (15.05.19).

264 St Kizito parish priest, Juba (18.05.19).

265 Participant from an ecumenical youth committee, Syria (09.08.19).

266 Participant from the African Inland Church (20.05.19).

267 Including a participant from the Inter-Church Committee in Aweil (15.05.19).

268 This arose often, particularly in informal conversations between the researcher and church representatives in Damascus.

a Tearfund member of staff from Juba might carry out assessments in Aweil region, and vice versa. In South Sudan, churches expressed a desire for help to meet donor criteria (with the creation of policies, for example). In Syria they highlighted the fact that, due to the presence of many unknown organisations that have entered the country recently, there needs to be a tool with assessment criteria by which the churches could also assess potential donors.



📷 A skills centre in Ituri Province, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Photo: Hannah Maule-ffinck/Tearfund

5.4.2 Ecumenical unity

In both contexts, churches emphasised the need for inter-denominational partnership and unity in order to demonstrate reconciliation. This would also enable them to stand together for peace and justice and to rebuild a broken and fractured society that prioritises the needs of the most vulnerable. In South Sudan, they suggested this might start by including smaller denominations in ecumenical bodies. For example, the Seventh Day Adventist Church is not represented in the ICC (Inter-Church Committee) and feels overlooked. Not only could they benefit from the partnership, it was apparent that they also have much to offer, if theological obstacles can be overcome. It was also evident from conversations in Damascus that unity is vital in the particular case of Syria in order to ensure sustained a Christian presence in the country and in the region; it was emphasised that the youth can take a lead role on this. Although Lebanon is not one of the fragile states that are the focus of this study, it offers important lessons for Syria's recovery from conflict: in particular overcoming the sectarianism and xenophobia that results from conflict. This highlights an important role for the unified church in ecumenical peacebuilding.

5.4.3 Peacebuilding

Perhaps the most urgent need in conflict-affected fragile states, however, is the need to focus on peacebuilding, by means of ecumenical unity, and working towards forgiveness and reconciliation. There is also a strong need for continued humanitarian aid that is shared across ethnic and religious communities, and development programmes that also bring people together. Peace would bring stability, would encourage people to stay in the country, and would allow the possibility of the government forming policies that could

protect the vulnerable. With stability there would also be more investment in the country and that would in turn protect the church itself from falling into the vulnerable state it is in presently; this could also enable it to return to the primary role of providing church services and spiritual support to people, instead of running 'as businesses'.²⁶⁹

5.4.4 Focus on the youth

Although there is incredible need on all levels of society and in all vulnerable groups, and although the churches are working to provide for women, children, the elderly and the sick, the greatest need in both South Sudan and Syria was seen to be the youth.²⁷⁰ These are young people who have never known anything other than war and who have inherited their parents' fears and hatred towards other groups. They have no job prospects, are despondent and hopeless, and have no positive cause to get involved with. There is a need for projects that will encourage the young to stay out of violent crime and not become vulnerable to extremism, and will give them opportunities to develop skills, build a livelihood and have hope. In the Syrian church context, this involves simple things such as encouraging the young to consider marriage, which helps them look to the future. These findings are echoed by Tearfund's report *Youth in fragile states*.²⁷¹

5.4.5 Avenues for future research

It would be advisable to pursue these research questions in greater depth over the course of longer visits in which the researcher might observe ecclesial projects and activities and potentially facilitate the development of new partnerships. Where possible, this should be done in the native language of the participants, as evidence from this study has shown that the use of mother tongue deepens and enriches participant contributions and removes one obstacle to trust and openness. It would be valuable to further pursue theological responses to conflict, including theological justification for responding and theological contributions to well-being (for example, spiritual teaching in the area of trauma). Other areas for future research include an exploration of trends in the development of ecumenical unity that is emerging as a means of strength and survival and is taking on new organic forms, with the decline of the ecumenical movement per se. In order to meet fully the objectives of this research, it would be advisable to conduct further study, potentially by Tearfund local staff in difficult-to-access locations. It would also be helpful to involve local churches themselves to participate in and directly inform the kinds of support they feel Tearfund could offer. If they express a desire for creative new forms of support that go beyond financial support, the research would suggest it would be advisable to pursue this with churches only, rather than with development agencies. This will vary from location to location but direct input from those at the grassroots may help to highlight more concrete shared themes as well as suggestions for project development and how to support weary leaders.

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the local church in conflict-affected fragile states, though severely impacted by protracted crisis, is very active. Indeed, it is possibly much stronger than one is given to believe when depending on media reports alone. In fact, in the course of this study, a case has developed for local churches to be considered as important civil society actors in contexts of crisis. It is apparent that they are well established in their communities and, even in contexts where they are the minority population and are rapidly declining in numbers, they are committed to serving the needs of their communities. Furthermore, they are generally recognised by the wider society as one of the few remaining credible institutions, as was mentioned in fieldwork both in South Sudan and Syria. It is clear, therefore, that the local church is potentially a powerful force for good when properly equipped and working in ecumenical unity with the partnership of international support.

269 A Tearfund staff member, interviewed in Syria (08.08.19).

270 The age group referred to as 'youth' depends on the context but is taken here to refer to those aged between 15 and 24.

271 Swart (2017)

It is evident from both a review of literature and fieldwork studies that the impact of conflict on the local church is great and costly in terms of both human life and material resources. The predominant themes emerging are displacement and community disintegration, high levels of need for emergency relief and longer-term development, and the need to respond to increasing numbers of vulnerable people. In addition, it is evident from all cases that protracted crisis contributes to a loss of trust between people, which leads to high levels of fear and, ultimately, fragmentation or isolation. The churches in these diverse, conflict-affected fragile contexts are taking on (or are expected to play) wide-ranging roles, with the shared purpose of contributing to the well-being of their communities. These roles range from stabilising the context itself, such as engaging politically and delivering services in place of the state, to offering direct support for people's physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. The difficulties of constantly changing, unstable and volatile environments, as well as limited resources and funding, are the primary challenges facing the churches. The greatest need identified was that of unity and partnership.

Raising the question of motivation in interviews brought another dimension to conversations and the deeper intentions of the people we were meeting became immediately apparent. Being part of the global church and partnering in the great commission is hugely inspiring to them. So questions about motivation help identify areas of common ground and can break down barriers between international actors and local actors, highlighting the fact that a valuable partnership already exists. Interestingly, the greatest weariness but also the greatest joy was expressed by the lowest-level actors with the fewest resources in both South Sudan and Syria – congregations and those at the forefront, rather than larger, more established organisations. This may not be surprising but might indicate that the lowest-level actors such as parishes and youth groups are worthy of support, particularly in the area of capacity building.

The churches themselves are acutely aware of their limitations and the challenges they face. But they are also very aware of the opportunities that exist and of the goals they are working towards in terms of contributing to the well-being of their communities and rebuilding a society that has been ruptured by conflict. It was also evident in partnering with churches in these contexts to enable them to continue and develop what they already do that these faithful communities have much to offer and share with the wider church. This was particularly clear in the South Sudanese churches' ecumenical commitment to a just and peaceful society where the church has worked intensively to have a voice on all levels of society; it was also clear in Syria, with its long experience of Christian coexistence with Islam. Any engagement with these churches, while recognising and addressing their weaknesses, must begin by celebrating and acknowledging their strengths.

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'Anything that concerns a
human being is of interest
to the church.'

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