

# CONTEXT MONITORING

*Taking the time to listen*



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# Executive Summary

In essence, context monitoring is how you intentionally seek to understand where you are, how the context impacts you and how you can impact the context. This allows you to make proactive decisions, and be less likely to be overtaken by events.

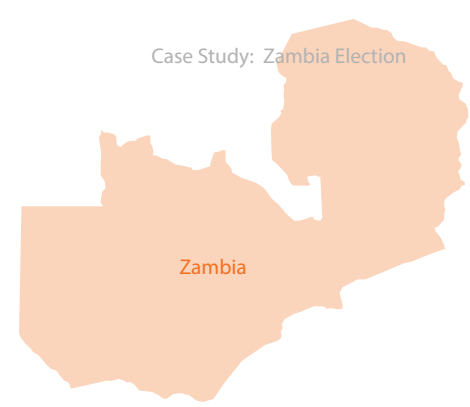
It can be a process, but before it is a process, it is also a culture, mindset and behaviour of anticipating how the context will affect your plans. The vast majority of context monitoring is intuitive and informal; it is a decision to check the weather before going out to see if it will rain, or to call someone to ask how many roadblocks there are between here and there. Sometimes a part of this is recorded as part of a work process or to communicate clearly during a crisis or to a donor. Yet the intangible culture that our staff have, informal networks and cultural insights hardly ever get documented; this knowledge allows World Vision to function in fragile contexts.

The following case studies seek to articulate some of that knowledge and share a few examples of where World Vision has documented and strategically used some of that insight to make big decisions on operations and strategy. It is abundantly clear that not all our insight is captured here, nor will no process ever do justice to the insights our staff possess. This is a key learning from this listening exercise: leaders need to acknowledge that and keep listening to the right people at the right time in ways that make sense in the culture at hand. Good context monitoring acknowledges nuance and uncertainty, and it needs to resist the temptation of claiming certainty where none exists and rather tolerate ambiguity.

Over the last few years, teams in South Sudan, Zambia and DRC translated local insights into intentional and anticipatory decision-making. These case studies show how it was designed and implemented and highlight some lessons learned from the process. Examples include how senior management anticipated significant national events, such as elections, then commissioned context analysis and subsequent monitoring to inform and guide their crisis management plans. They highlight examples of holistic actions based on a shared understanding of the current and anticipated context. They also note the imperative but also the challenge of using soft skills to listen effectively across cultures.



World Vision staff member talking to children in South Sudan. Credit: Scovia Faida



# Case Study: Zambia Election

## 1. Rationale for context monitoring

"Context monitoring had a positive impact in that it helped World Vision Zambia to identify gaps which needed to be addressed in order to mitigate the impact of the uncertainties that could arise before, during and after elections."

- Sylvia Phiri

*Former Security Manager  
World Vision Zambia*

On 12 August 2021, General elections were held in Zambia to elect the President, National Assembly, mayors, council chairs and councilors. Although Zambia is known to have had relatively peaceful elections in the past, the 2016 general elections were characterised by security issues, including political violence, resulting in a number of physical confrontations between the different political parties' followers.

It was highly anticipated that the 2021 elections would also be characterised by electoral violence, affecting the country and the World Vision Zambia operations.

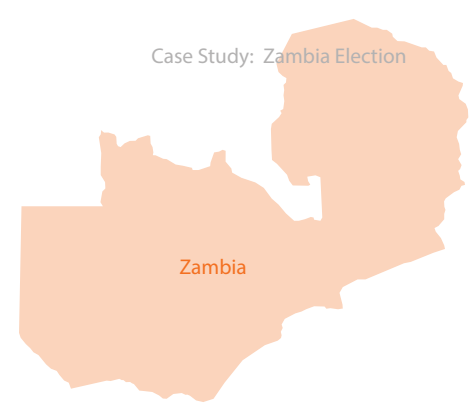
For business continuity as well as for the safety of staff, there was a need to understand the election surroundings well enough to be able to actively make sound and timely decisions before and during the possible security threat. Furthermore, the team took steps to ensure we remained politically neutral and focused purely on the election's impact on humanitarian and development objectives, per our mission.

This required a systematic collection of information about conditions and external factors relevant to the implementation and performance of World Vision strategy, projects and activities. There was a need to monitor factors outside the control of World Vision Zambia before, during and after the elections that could harm operations and staff. This was done through context monitoring.



World Vision staff engaging with local communities in Zambia. Credit: Tigana Chileshea





## 2. How does context monitoring work?

An Election Incident Management Team comprising staff from different departments was brought together to monitor the elections environment. The team members were strategically selected based on their departments and roles within their group. For example, some departments included Legal, Communications, Supply Chain, Security and Humanitarian Emergency Assistance, and Senior Leadership team members.

### Various indicators and signals were monitored including:

- the number of demonstrations that were taking place.
- causes of past and present demonstrations.
- location of the demonstrations.
- motives for future demonstrations.
- possible disruption of modes of communication and power supply.
- possible shortage of fuel.

The Incident Management Team collected information from various sources such as social media, news platforms, World Vision Zambia staff, other international Non-Governmental Organisations, informants, and State Security agencies.

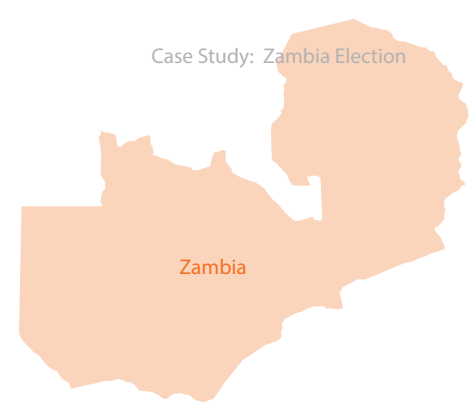
The indicators and signals were monitored by gathering information from past elections and identifying adverse events that had taken place during those election periods.

This was not limited to elections in Zambia only but also looked at events that had taken place in other countries.

The collection of information was also not restricted to past events only, but also from events that were currently taking place. This information helped to anticipate future eventualities which had the potential to adversely affect World Vision Zambia operations.



World Vision Zambia staff engaging with students. Credit: Kambani Phiri



### 3. Examples of impact on decision making

Context monitoring had a positive impact in that it helped World Vision Zambia identify gaps that needed to be addressed to mitigate the impact of the uncertainties that could arise before, during and after elections. It also helped to prioritise the allocation of available resources.

#### It helped the departments involved in the following ways:

- **Legal department:** ensuring actions and decisions made by the team were legally correct.
- **Senior Leadership Team (SLT) members:** ensuring that the SLT was up to date with the activities of the Incident Management team. This also allowed for decisions to be made quickly. As a result of context monitoring, a Business Continuity Plan was developed, which prepared the organisation for the contingencies that could arise. The organisation quickly identified triggers that could lead to adverse events, allowing for timely and informed decisions.
- **Communications department:** ensuring that information could be quickly disseminated to the relevant people. One of the indicators identified was the break in communication during election periods in other countries, such as Uganda, which was a possibility in Zambia as well. This helped World Vision Zambia identify that there was no backup communication plan when the country's communication infrastructure was shut down. To mitigate this gap, satellite phones were purchased and distributed to the different zones across the country, priority being given to areas with potentially higher risk.
- **Supply Chain:** helping with the purchase of the necessary material or equipment needed.
- **Security:** ensuring liaison with contracted security firm as well as other security agencies on the provision of security to World Vision premises. One trigger that was identified after the election was the delay in the announcing of results. In past elections, this had led to electoral violence in which property was damaged and people injured or even killed. This trigger helped the team to make a timely decision to suspend operations as well as to advise staff to hibernate in their homes.
- **Humanitarian Emergency Assistance:** ensuring that relocation and evacuation could be carried out timely if need arose.



# Case Study: Democratic Republic of Congo

## 1. Rationale for context monitoring

"The context monitoring helped the project to make early decisions when the context changed."

- Christian Kasereka

*Operations Manager –  
Goma Office, North Kivu  
Province, World Vision DRC*

World Vision implements a context monitoring system at a project level in the Binza area in East Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This is part of its Fragile Context Programming Approach (FCPA), which aims to enable communities to survive, adapt to challenging situations, and thrive, while at the same time ensuring World Vision and other humanitarian / development partners respond quickly and safely in environments that are inherently volatile.

This context monitoring has allowed WVDRC to understand its surroundings well enough (e.g population movement, climate change, the security situation and other risk factors) to then be able to make good and timely decisions regarding this project, including at times whether it needs to adapt.

The project is located in a rural health zone in the Rutshuru territory in the Province of North Kivu (116 km from Goma). It is one of the most fragile provinces in the DRC. The Binza health zone has been particularly affected by two decades of instability and fragility. For example, as it is close to Virunga National Park, the restriction of unauthorised access by the ICCN (Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature) has meant that people can no longer get to what used to be their farmland, crippling their ability to make a living. Loss of lands has also heightened ethnic conflicts and the formation of local armed groups stemming from frustration and hopelessness.

Limited mobility results in limited access to family farms, forced labour, sexual violence and kidnappings. The closure of the border between DRC and Uganda due to the COVID-19 outbreak in the early part of 2020 heavily

impacted the Binza community members, who greatly relied on the border movement for economic opportunities and livelihood means. Their sources of living were heavily disrupted, and their lives and safety were put at stake.

This project-specific context monitoring is also part of a broader context-monitoring effort that is co-lead through security and operations and based upon the regional and national scenarios from World Vision context analysis tools like GECARRs and MSTCs. This broader one includes national/regional-level indicators and signals that inform anticipatory decision-making for management teams. Rutshuru territory benefits from having both of these present at the same time, which helps multiple teams get the information they need at different times. These approaches inform each other mostly informally, as it is often the same people working on both, making it easy to collaborate.

For example, tensions in Rutshuru are often connected to tensions at the border between DRC/Rwanda and DRC/Uganda, as some armed groups profit from these to operate. This has implications for project activities when the situation deteriorates, as staff evacuation routes via Goma and local movement to project activities in Rutshuru can sometimes be suspended. The security daily check, using the community influential focal persons, can sometimes allow project activities to continue even if the situation remains volatile for an extended period. Sometimes changes in analysis methodology and decisions made through it, can take place several times a week or during rapid context changes.



## 2. How does context monitoring work?



### The project context monitoring is done by collecting information regarding the following issues:

- Child protection: report incidents of child recruitment, serious human right violations, sexual and gender based violence (SGBV).
- Conflicts: intercommunity reconciliation initiatives and interethnic conflicts.
- Destabilising events: disrupted mobility of actors and community, humanitarian workers operating in the area, number of security incidents, presence of FARDC (army), police and MONUSCO (UN Peacekeeping force).
- Population displacement: No of IDPs or returnees.
- Economy security: Market operational status.
- Education: School operational status.
- Environment: Drought, heavy rain.
- Health: COVID-19, Ebola, health operating hours.

The above information is collected from the community regarding the situation and what is seen within the community. Some data collection involves weekly meetings or calls with community leaders. Other information is gathered by project staff during the field visits, via questionnaires, interagency or cluster meetings, from government institutions, and/or health zone management meetings. Signals are collected and watched locally in Rutshuru and compared with east zone and national analysis to maintain a dynamic and forward-looking understanding across teams and projects, with some supporting research done by region.

The application Kobo Collect collates information and feeds it into a dashboard set up by the project. It is validated at the project level on a weekly basis in the staff meeting for accuracy, verified by the monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) staff and visualised by the WVI MEAL team using the software, Power BI. The visualisation of data can help show trends that can undermine community livelihoods and project implementation and support the project management team in reviewing interventions or establishing mitigation measures in case of security issues. Many of these same conversations also inform the bigger-picture analysis, as it is the same connections and relationships providing the information.



World Vision, WFP staff and community volunteers working in North Kivu, DRC Credit: Geoffrey Denye

### 3. Examples of impact on decision making

The context monitoring helped the project to make early decisions when the context changed. For example, the nearby Virunga National Park had set up a boundary fence. In August 2021, this started to impact the areas that armed groups occupied. As a result, these armed groups relocated to areas outside the park, surrounding Binza village and occupying the communities' farmland. As a result, communities could not access their fields due to fear of being caught up in violence or having to pay taxes or undertake forced labour.

The project context monitoring picked up this relocation and its impact, and prompted the project to adapt its livelihood activities. The project changed to promoting small farms/kitchen gardens nearer to family homes. It also increased the productivity of previously abandoned land by using composting and manure from livestock rearing and using different seeds. This meant communities would not have to search for other large parcels of land to cultivate in

remote areas but could continue their livelihoods without threat from armed groups. In particular, it helped to safeguard women against rape by armed groups.

In general, the signals identified within this project also allow for preparations for relocation and hibernation of staff, as well as security training and reviews on how to best ensure acceptance for staff and operations. In addition, it has, together with other modes of analysis, helped select the best approach to collaboration with partners such as the UN and when to adapt the organisational public profile. The findings from the 2022 GECARR have informed this context monitoring and the whole of the east zone, the National Office in Kinshasa and the Regional Office.

These forms of analysis have also helped bond the team and staff to learn from each other and understand different perspectives. Those informal and frequent conversations are key for day-to-day implementation across the east zone.



*A community group supported by WV DRC in Rutshuru. Photo Credit: Rodrigue Harakandi*





## Case Study: South Sudan (Upper Nile State)

### 1. Rationale for context monitoring

"World Vision's context monitoring looked at how to guide and direct emergency response activities, fundraise for various sector needs and assist as a mitigating factor against risks, thereby ensuring the safety of staff, assets and equipment."

- Inos Mugabe

*Former Zonal Program Manager  
Greater Upper Nile, World Vision South Sudan*

South Sudan's population in 2022 is estimated to be 12.44 million. According to the [United Nation's 2023 South Sudan Humanitarian Needs Overview](#) (HNO), more than two-thirds of South Sudan's population, or at least 9.4 million people, require humanitarian assistance, higher than the 8.9 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in 2022. In addition, continued conflict and instability in the country, combined with widespread flooding and deepening food insecurity, exacerbate large-scale internal and cross-border displacement. Since the South Sudan crisis in 2013, it is estimated that there have been approximately 2.2 million internally displaced people (IDP) and 2.3 million South Sudanese refugees hosted in neighboring countries. The majority of these displacements were from the Upper Nile State. (HNO, 2023)

Upper Nile State consists of 12 counties with a population of approximately 965,000. It remains the region with the highest number of counties in critical need. The most recent conflicts in Tonga and Fashoda counties in 2022 worsened the situation in Upper Nile, especially in Panyikang and Fashoda, which caused the displacement of over 56,000 people. The conflicts and subsequent displacements disrupted the people's livelihoods, particularly in the settlements along the Sobat and White Nile rivers that depended on cattle rearing and fishing.

Upper Nile currently has one Protection of Civilian (POC) camp housing over 42,000 IDPs in Malakal. It also has 3 IDP settlement sites serving approximately 25,000 IDPs in Melut County. At least 15,000 IDPs are within Kodok town, having escaped from attacks in Fashoda in November 2022. In Maban County, approximately 150,000 refugees

from Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia continue to receive humanitarian assistance from humanitarian partners.

In 2021, humanitarian assistance from different humanitarian organizations reached an estimated 5.3 million people. However, to enable the response to people impacted by flooding, humanitarian organizations were compelled to re-program in-country support, which resulted in a reduction of food assistance to internally displaced people, refugees, and communities in acute food and livelihood crises. These unmet needs increased vulnerability for populations in 2022 and 2023. It is estimated that 8 million people, including refugees, experienced severe food insecurity at the peak of the 2023 lean season between April and July (HNO 2023).

World Vision has been working in Upper Nile for many years with various projects. In light of the complexity of the situation, there is a need for continual context monitoring. World Vision South Sudan's context monitoring looks at the general humanitarian landscape in Upper Nile, specifically how to guide and direct emergency response activities and fundraise for various sector needs that included the provision of food security, water, sanitation and hygiene (WaSH), health and nutrition, protection, education, and shelter services. It also assists as a mitigating factor against risks, ensuring the safety of staff, assets, and equipment. For instance, staff were not sent to the field when there was an impending attack in that location and on several occasions, World Vision has been forced to withdraw staff and halt operations from affected locations.



## 2. How does context monitoring work?

### World Vision South Sudan looks at the following humanitarian landscape for most of the context monitoring:

- Population movements (temporary and permanent displacements).
- Inadequate access to essential services (health, nutrition, education).
- High levels of food insecurity.
- Natural/man-made disasters (insecurity, flooding, fall army worm affecting harvests etc.)
- Post COVID-19 pandemic.
- Insecurity due to episodes of clashes between the government forces and armed groups, including intercommunal violence.
- Community returnees from where they had settled (could be outside of South Sudan, or other areas internally).
- Population dynamics that are ethnic oriented, for example fighting over land and property rights.
- Intercommunal violence caused by cattle raiding between tribes, or same tribes but from different villages resulting in revenge killings, displacements and disruption of livelihoods.
- Government support to service delivery and infrastructural development in the state, county and the country.

### Context monitoring was conducted through various initiatives:

- Stakeholder engagement, especially with government counterparts and local leaders, sheds light on a number of security matters affecting World Vision's operations.
- The security team works with the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) to check and triangulate the security status of the county. The team gets forecasts of what the situation might be like in a current period, bearing in mind various analyses that would have been conducted by security institutions (UNDSS, World Vision security, observations, and also the use of early warning systems).
- Security risk assessments and monitoring, which support operations and inform expansion of operations.
- Coordination with inter-agencies, such as UN OCHA-led meetings, briefings, and updates, and initial rapid needs assessments enable more efficient planning and implementation of emergency responses. When the conflict broke anew in Tonga in Panyikang County in August 2022 and resulted in massive displacements of people, the series of coordination meetings led by UN OCHA proved to be helpful in conducting a coordinated humanitarian response with other humanitarian organizations working in South Sudan.
- General country-specific observations and communication from World Vision staff at all levels (field teams, cleaners, drivers, MEAL etc.) since they also have different sources of information and are in different projects sites (Ulanga, Nasir, Melut, Baliet, Fashoda and Malakal).
- Early warning systems are advised by previous historical events - for instance, in the case of cattle rustling, inter-communal violence, and at times focus group discussion during protection outreaches.
- Intention surveys
- Input from various coordination fora in Upper Nile, including weekly Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) meetings, Upper Nile Coordination Forum, and various cluster-specific meetings. Security issues, gaps, needs, disasters, and other updates were shared.





### 3. Examples of impact on decision making

- In 2021, the government, via the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), updated World Vision on ethnic challenges between the four main communities in Upper Nile. This included tensions about land and property rights and how the organization should avoid specific routes, engagements or topics in its discussions when implementing activities. For World Vision, this resulted in employing managerial staff from other regions (Equatoria region). They were deemed neutral in the crisis by warring communities and could access all locations regardless of which tribe was predominant in that county.
- An intention survey advised programming when some residents in the Melut IDP settlement preferred to move out of the Melut camps to return to Baliet county. World Vision immediately looked for additional funding to expand current programming to take on board the added population caseload.
- As a result of work with UNDSS, World Vision was able to check for any conflict between the warring parties before teams departed for different field activities. If the analysis predicted a likelihood of fighting, World Vision did not send teams to implement any activity until it was deemed safe for them to move. In some instances, projects were affected due to a lack of access to conduct programming, and donors were advised ahead of time. In other cases, adjustments to programming were made (e.g., no cost extension or budget realignment, etc.)
- Input from various coordination fora into context monitoring resulted in various needs assessments conducted to advise what response would be required.



World Vision staff engaging with local communities in Greater Upper Nile, South Sudan. Credit: Cecil Laguardia