Special feature
The crisis in South Sudan

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Editorial

In May 2013 we published an edition of the *Humanitarian Exchange* entitled 'South Sudan at a crossroads'. Despite the challenges facing the world's newest state, the tone was optimistic. Following the outbreak of conflict in December 2013, that sense of hope has turned to shock and despair: more than 3 million people have been displaced and almost 5m are food insecure; the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has failed to stem violence against civilians, and the country has become one of the world's most dangerous places for aid work.

In the lead article in this edition on the South Sudan crisis, Eddie Thomas and Natalia Chan admit that the prospects for 2017 are bleak, but also encourage the international community to identify and nurture 'spaces for hope', such as schools, health centres and civic peace initiatives. Freddie Carver likewise emphasises the need to work with local institutions to build peace. UNMISS is the focus of articles by Julien Schopp, Matt Wells and Caelin Briggs, who look at the unintended consequences of the Level 3 designation applied to the crisis, the mixed record of UN peacekeeping and the impact of Protection of Civilian sites on the protection environment. Tiffany Easthom reflects on Nonviolent Peaceforce's approach to protection, while Lydia Stone highlights the pervasive problem of sexual violence against women and girls.

Lindsay Hamsik analyses the impact of government regulation on NGO activities, and Adele Harmer and Monica Czwarno describe the paralysing effects of violence on aid work. Lydia Tanner and colleagues examine the role of national actors in the humanitarian response, and Jeremiah Young discusses World Vision's experience of scaling up in response to a spike in violence in the capital in July 2016. Laura Jones describes the development and use of Survival Kits to provide short-term assistance to displaced people, Emma van der Meulen and Akuja de Garang report on an innovative approach to promoting girls' education and Andreas Kiaby reflects on the use of cash programming during the conflict. The edition ends with an article by Detlef Barth and Matthias Oesterle on the German government's efforts to promote agricultural production through Lead Farmer Field Schools and voucher provision.

Editorial photos:
Left: A school under a tree in Jamam refugee camp, South Sudan.
© Alun McDonald/Oxfam

Top: A UN Protection of Civilians Site (POC), Malakal, South Sudan.
© IOM/Bannon 2015

Middle: The UN Secretary-General meets with representatives of IDPs, UN agencies and NGOs during a February 2016 visit to Juba.
© UNMISS/Annemieke Vanderploeg

Bottom right: School girls in Bangasi Primary School in Yambio (November 2016). This school has received annual school grants through GESS since 2014.
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As always, we welcome any comments or feedback, which can be sent to **hpn@odi.org.uk** or to the **HPN Coordinator, 203 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8NJ**.

A school under a tree in Jamam refugee camp, South Sudan.

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The crisis in South Sudan

South Sudan: wrong turn at the crossroads?

Eddie Thomas and Natalia Chan

The last issue of the *Humanitarian Exchange* dedicated to South Sudan, published in May 2013, was entitled 'South Sudan at a Crossroads'. Although that edition noted the challenges facing the world's newest state – food insecurity, communal violence, displacement and the slow progress in building state institutions – its tone was upbeat. That optimism has not lasted: the war that began in December 2013 has led the country away from the crossroads and onto a treacherous path.

A political crisis in 2013 led to schisms within the ruling of Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and, in December, to the break-up of the army into factions loyal to President Salva Kiir and former Vice-President Riek Machar. Fighting between soldiers in the Presidential Guard in Juba swiftly escalated into neighbourhood battles and massacres along ethnic lines, triggering the spread of bitter conflict in Greater Upper Nile and, subsequently, across the whole country. The relatively peaceful and prosperous Greater Equatoria was drawn into the war, and there were regular clashes and growing ethnic tensions in Greater Bahr el Ghazal.

The speed of South Sudan's collapse surprised everyone, not least the main protagonists. It exposed many illusions: the legitimacy of those in positions of power; the trust between South Sudan and its foreign backers; the capabilities of peacekeepers; the tick-boxes of international governance experts; the analysis and assumptions of donors and humanitarian and development actors. Disillusionment has been the result, making it difficult for any of these groups to respond adequately to the crisis.

South Sudan was conflict-prone before, but the scale of devastation has shocked most observers. Since December 2013, 1.9 million people have been internally displaced, and 1.3m more have fled to neighbouring countries. Almost 5m are food insecure; in 2016, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) warned that 3.7–4m were severely food insecure – more than a third of the population and a million more than last year. Cholera, measles, guinea worm and kala'azar (leishmaniasis) are rife, and there are nearly 1.9m cases of malaria.

The 2015 peace deal and the widening war

An Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan was signed between the SPLM, SPLM-In Opposi-tion (SPLM-IO) and SPLM-Former Detainees (SPLM-FD) in August 2015, following international and regional pressure (President Kiir submitted a 14-page list of reservations with his signature). When Machar returned to Juba and assum-ed his post of First Vice-President in April 2016, as per the agreement, it appeared that implementation of the peace deal could slowly move forward, though little significant progress was made. In July 2016, on the eve of the fifth anniversary of independence, tensions between SPLA and SPLA-IO soldiers erupted into intense street battles, with heavy artillery, tanks and attack helicopters deployed. Machar and many SPLA-IO soldiers fled the city. His exit and replacement by his deputy Taban Deng (signifying a split in the SPLM-IO) left the whole peace deal in question. As the fighting enters its fourth year, the context is much changed from August 2015: conflict is now widespread, the opposition is fragmented, ethnic hate speech has reached extremely alarming levels and the economy is in a far worse state.

A changed humanitarian environment

South Sudan has become one of the most dangerous places in the world to be an aid worker. National and international staff have faced growing risks on the basis of their ethnicity, nationality and perceived political or organisational affili-ations. The events of July 2016 were a grave marker of how far the humanitarian environment had changed. Humanitarian actors were more prepared than they were in December 2013, but the July violence exposed how vulnerable humanitarian workers were. Gunmen, suspected to be soldiers, looted WFP's main stores in Juba, and government soldiers subjected national and international journalists and aid workers living in the Terrain hotel compound to murder, rape and torture.[1] The violence also exposed the weakness of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). Soldiers raped women and girls near UNMISS bases, at times in full view of peace-keepers, but they failed to intervene. The Terrain incident sent shockwaves through the entire humanitarian community.

Increased hostility towards humanitarian workers is also evident in new operational constraints. Humanitarian space narrowed after December 2013 – marked by denial of access, obstruction of movement of goods and personnel, bureaucratic

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1 See 'Executive Summary of the Independent Special Investigation into the Violence which Occurred in Juba in 2016 and UNMISS Response', 1 November 2016.

impediments, violence against humanitarian staff, extortion and rent-seeking behaviour, looting and seizure of assets, programme interference and general insecurity. Although the 2015 peace agreement contained clear commitments on improving the operational environment for humanitarians, humanitarian space narrowed even more dramatically in the weeks following the events of July 2016. In November 2016, the UN humanitarian coordinator reported 64 incidents of violence against aid workers, and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported 100 access violations, including denial of access to areas outside of Yei town in Central Equatoria and Wau town in Western Bahr El Ghazal, where tens of thousands of people are in need of assistance and protection.[2] In December 2016, the head of one of the largest operational organisations, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), was expelled along with another senior staff member, prompting a statement from the Humanitarian Country Team highlighting the deteriorating operating environment.[3]

Prospects for 2017 are bleak. Planning for humanitarian response is based on the assumption that humanitarian needs will increase across the country. The severe economic decline will exacerbate problems, wide-scale and repeated displacement is likely to continue, food insecurity will remain and chronic and acute needs will all overlap and intersect. In November 2016, the UN's envoy on genocide prevention warned that 'what began as a political conflict has transformed into what could become an outright ethnic war'.[4] The impact of trauma in South Sudan is inescapable – and is compounded by generational experiences of conflict, by the enormity and horror of the more recent human rights abuses, by the daily experience of fear and violence and by a sense of diminishing hope. The longer the conflict continues, the more entrenched and intractable the cycles of revenge and the experience of trauma will become. All of this raises the risk that humanitarians will withdraw further into protective humanitarian hubs, implement remote management or even consider pulling out.

Spaces for hope

What possible future strategies can humanitarians adopt? There is a compelling need to equip ourselves with strong analysis in order to be able to adapt to the changing context and understand the long-term implications of our response. Many confuse the most visible symptoms of the crisis – tribalism, and violence along ethnic lines – with its causes. But the causes are more complex, and in order to understand them we must look to the history that often falls beyond the lens of most practitioners.

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2 OCHA, 'Humanitarian Coordinator Deeply Concerned by Bureaucratic Impediments and Access Constraints', 30 November 2016.

3 OCHA, 'South Sudan: Humanitarian Country Team Statement on the Deteriorating Operating Environment', 14 December 2016.

4 'Risk of "Outright Ethnic War" and Genocide in South Sudan, UN Envoy Warns', UN News Centre, 11 November 2016.

The colonial legacy of violence, repression and uneven development continued into the long wars that began around the time of Sudan's independence in 1956. These wars spread weapons through the country and shaped South Sudan's economy and society very deeply. In both pastoralist and agrarian areas, people have to buy food because they cannot grow enough to feed themselves. But although purchased food is very important, most people in rural South Sudan do not get paid in wages. The consequent crisis in rural livelihoods pushed many young men into armed groups. This process began in pastoralist areas, where armed groups were often structured around the kinship-based herding systems that formed the basis of the pastoralist economy. In the late 1980s, the SPLA was able to unify different ethnic communities from pastoralist areas, but when the SPLA split in 1991 armed groups routinely mobilised around ethnicity. The memories of the ethnic massacres of the early 1990s still shape the crises of today.

Tensions between pastoralist and agrarian communities also have historical roots. There was limited development in the colonial period, and what development there was was concentrated in the relatively accessible and taxable agrarian areas of Equatoria. Most colonial schools were in Equatoria – and most soldiers were recruited there. The first civil war in South Sudan, which lasted from the late 1950s or early 1960s until 1972, was led by Equatorians. In the 1970s, political leaders often used tensions between pastoralist and agrarian peoples to build support, and these tensions developed further in the second civil war, when many pastoralists fled the flood plains and grazed their livestock in agrarian areas. Tensions between farmers and herders were managed locally, but in recent years politicians have begun to exploit them in the service of national political goals.

Another key approach is to identify more positive spaces where civic values still have relevance. The churches may offer one such space. The church in South Sudan has a long and historic role in facilitating dialogue and mediation, using its moral authority and credibility among a wide range of actors. One of the most commonly cited examples of church-supported mediation is the 1999 Wunlit people-to-people dialogue, which adapted traditional methods of truth-telling and consensus-building for change. Working ecumenically, the South Sudan Council of Churches has developed a national agenda for peace and reconciliation (its Action Plan for Peace), and has been working to lay the groundwork for a more visible approach in 2017. Church-supported peace initiatives provide some hope for the future, not only in laying the foundations or providing an appropriate framework for dialogue, but also in informing a broader understanding of the complex context.

Schools, universities and health centres can also function as inclusive, civic spaces. During South Sudan's civil wars, young people left the country or even joined the SPLA to seek education. Enrolment surveys before and after the first and second civil wars suggest that local education systems paradoxically expanded, and a 2015 survey of enrolment

carried out by the Girls Education in South Sudan programme suggests that this trend may have continued. The current conflict has witnessed deliberate attacks on schools, but it has also shown that many teachers and students have worked together to support civic and human values and youth aspirations. Humanitarian actors have sometimes neglected investment in education in the face of more urgent humanitarian needs.[5] But in the coming year, they could plan to support schools and other civic spaces (such as hospitals and health centres) as part of a strategy for protecting civilians and preventing further violence.

Humanitarian actors must accept the limitations of what they can do, but we must not become desensitised to violence and

suffering. South Sudan needs continued engagement based on strong principles, and not just in the humanitarian sense. There is a need to retain institutional memory, to learn from the past, to build strong relationships with local communities, to overcome the tension between short cycles of humanitarian response and the need for long-term engagement, and an overall need for effective conflict analysis and conflict sensitivity. In particular, there has been an increasing recognition that humanitarian response must be more strategic and smarter – 'better not bigger' – but how this will happen will require commitment and dedicated time and space.

Eddie Thomas worked in Sudan and South Sudan for several years as a teacher, human rights worker, researcher and political adviser. **Natalia Chan** is Christian Aid's Senior Advocacy and Policy Officer for East Africa and former Coordinator of the Associate Parliamentary Group for Sudan and South Sudan.

5 OCHA, 'Evaluation of the Common Humanitarian Fund. Country Report: South Sudan', May 2015.

A 'call to peacebuilding': rethinking humanitarian and development activity in South Sudan

Freddie Carver

A common refrain from international staff working in South Sudan is talk of crises: humanitarian crises, economic crises, political crises, violent crises. Even in the period after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which by comparison with recent years seemed relatively stable, the UN still spoke in 2009 of a 'humanitarian perfect storm' resulting from high levels of violence, food insecurity and impending economic collapse. While South Sudan has undoubtedly been beset by extreme external and internal shocks over the last 20 years, too often our perceptions of permanent crisis are shaped by expectations of progress towards stability and growth which bear little relation to the actual situation in the country – or, worse, by a desire to raise profile or funds for our own organisations. The consequence is an international community that struggles to get out of reactive mode.

Not only does this make us less effective, but it is also based on a fundamentally flawed analysis. From the perspective of average South Sudanese citizens in the peripheries of the country, is this characterisation of endless shocks and crises meaningful? For many of them, has all that much really changed in the last 20 years? Violence, food insecurity, the availability of basic services: all have ebbed and flowed in different parts of the country, tied to a range of local, national and international factors, and while the impact of a few major events (notably the December 2013 violence) has been significant for many, as internationals we tend to overstate these effects – while the baseline of extreme vulnerability doesn't change. Most recently, the signing of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Crisis in South Sudan in August 2015 led to a flurry of activity amongst the

international community in Juba based on the 'changed context', but much of this was irrelevant to communities confronting the same challenges they've faced for decades. And while the events of the last six months are undoubtedly having a serious impact in many parts of the country, we can only understand these effects properly if we place them in the context of local trends rather than our perception of a 'national' narrative.

Understanding this perspective better – and introducing it into our thinking about how to support the delivery of humanitarian and development objectives – would help us avoid making the same mistakes again and again. Rather than the endless debates around shifting from a humanitarian mindset to more developmental approaches – and back again – it might help if we engaged with what's really at work in South Sudan. Rather than seeing events in the country as a series of discrete but inter-related crises, we may more easily recognise the fundamental long-term drivers of conflict and think about how we might – in our small way – actually do something about them. In short, we might actually be able to promote peacebuilding in a more sustained and effective way.

Of course, none of this is easy – if it were then we would probably be doing it already. Worse, none of this is new – we have thousands of pages of best practice guides about how to operate in conflict-affected environments, telling us how to move from working in conflict to working on conflict, how to understand and influence conflict dynamics, how to avoid doing harm. We struggle to turn these into practice, but unless

Children play in a child-friendly space in Nyal payam after fleeing fighting in Leer.
© UNMISS

we can do something different, we are doomed to go round in the same circles, and continue to fail the people of South Sudan.

I'd like to propose three actions that all international actors can take as a starting-point for putting peacebuilding at the heart of their work.

1. Fundamentally rethink our timeframes

This is about more than the usual call for project cycles to be more than the standard one, two or three years, or for more continuity in international staff postings – as helpful as these things might be. It is about recognising that there are no quick fixes in a place like South Sudan, and that if we stop looking for them then we might be able to identify opportunities to work with longer-term dynamics in more meaningful ways.

The international approach to peacemaking in South Sudan has too often lined up behind the interests of elites that are focused primarily on themselves and those who stand behind them, with a collective focus on making sure the pie is divided up adequately amongst those able to hold the centre to ransom: talk of increasing the 'inclusivity' of current arrangements is sadly likely to translate into just more of the same. But we now have many years of evidence that such deals are too narrow to improve the lot of the wider population, and that, in the last three years, these elite pacts have not even managed to produce the short-term stability that is generally used to justify this kind of realpolitik approach.

And so a strategy that puts all our efforts on promoting peace at this level seems misguided. Rather than seeking to impose peace from the top down, we should instead ask what building it from the bottom up would look like in practice. Rather than seeing things through the lenses of our own institutions and those that we understand (primarily those of the state), we should take as our starting point the institutions that are really meaningful in people's lives – kin, tribe, agemate sets, the churches – and consider how our interventions can positively work with these institutions to build peace. Such engagements won't lend themselves to time-bound projects with easily measurable milestones, but they do give us an opportunity to build greater resilience into our activities. These are not institutions that are going to suddenly disappear overnight, and this might allow us to think about what 10-, 15- or 20-year interventions to build real social capital and invest in a more peaceful future might look like – whatever happens in the political sphere.

There is experience of this kind of work – for example, the Swiss government's history of seeking to engage with chiefs from across the country, most recently in the form of the Rift Valley Institute's South Sudan Customary Authorities Project, or the support that has been provided over the years to help churches promote peacebuilding efforts – but too often when we do engage with these elements of South Sudanese society it is to instrumentalise these institutions to promote externally driven agendas, rather than providing the individuals involved with the space and time to shape their own. All outside

actors working in South Sudan should be expected to spend more time understanding these complex institutions, which is perfectly feasible given the wealth of relevant research available. For example, on the subject of chieftainship and customary authority, Cherry Leonardi's book *Dealing with Government in South Sudan* is particularly helpful.[1]

2. Reframe the way we think about South Sudanese citizens

At a systemic level, the international community tends to see the South Sudanese population as passive recipients of our assistance, when in reality this couldn't be further from the truth. The body of research demonstrating that dependency on food aid is exaggerated[2] is just one illustration of this. Every South Sudanese person we encounter is faced with a complex set of choices, and their agency to navigate these choices is one of the main assets available to the country if the situation is to improve. Our involvement – if it is meaningful at all – will always have an impact on these choices, and we should be asking ourselves more regularly whether we are expanding or reducing people's agency.

This would present a different way in, for example to thinking about violence reduction. The violence that has affected South Sudan for so long ultimately relies on people being willing to pick up their weapons once again. Have we spent enough time understanding why this is the case, or considered what it means for where we might engage? Undoubtedly, in a country experiencing violence on as large a scale as South Sudan has for so many years, there are a range of environmental or 'pull' factors that enable future violence: the wide availability of weapons, extreme levels of trauma amongst the population, cycles of revenge and counter-revenge and the undermining of cultural norms against violence. But there is also a major 'push' factor: that for a population struggling on the edge of survival, as long as power and resources remain in the hands of military commanders, participating in violence is one of the most sustainable and realistic livelihood options available.

If our policies only increase the resources controlled by the various militarised chains of command, then we are unlikely to do much to change this. If, on the other hand, we can find ways to invest in increasing the resources available to ordinary South Sudanese independently of these authorities, then we might be able to increase their ability to say no the next time they are asked to fight. Livelihoods interventions have been a poor relation of programmes designed to strengthen the state in recent years, but – well-designed – may ultimately have a far greater impact on levels of violence.

Similarly, a concern for people's individual agency might enable us to think differently about how we provide technical assistance, particularly to the government. Such support is almost by definition framed technocratically, seeking to enable the organs of the state to fulfill their functions more effectively. But in South Sudan there is little evidence to back up the basic underlying assumption behind such interventions: that there is a centralised state willing and able to implement a reasonably consistent set of policies. This is a major reason why so many of our capacity-building projects fail.

This isn't to say that government capacity-building programmes are worthless in a context like South Sudan, but it does imply that the logic that underpins them needs to be rethought. We need to recognise that, where there is such a distance between the institutions of the state and the ordinary realities of people's lives, if we want to have an impact on the latter we cannot expect conventional approaches to be enough. It is down to creative and empowered individuals within these institutions to shape change in a way that will work in South Sudan. If we can frame our assistance in this way – supporting these individuals to fight their battles, based on relationships of mutual trust – then we might stand a greater chance of success.

3. Recognise our own political role

Politics is about the control of power and resources, allowing one set of people to dictate to others – forcefully or voluntarily. In South Sudan, the resource pool has been dominated in the last ten years by the oil revenues flowing from the centre out, providing a means to buy and retain loyalty across the country. But with these revenues severely diminished, the resources that the international community brings with it become increasingly significant from a political perspective. While the prospect of providing centralised budgetary support to the government (under serious consideration in 2013) is off the table for now, this does not mean that our resources do not play a political role in lending support to one or other party. We know from the days of Operation Lifeline Sudan how food assistance and support to basic services has played into local politics, with control over food distribution networks, for example, being a key asset for local commanders.[3]

Recognising that this is the case does not mean giving up on principles of neutrality and impartiality, but it does mean accepting that we have a responsibility to understand the political impact of our assistance, and to think through how we can ensure that this impact promotes peace. We know that these principles bear little relation to how local actors see our inputs – something that is increasingly clear in the trend towards international assistance becoming a target of violence

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1 Cherry Leonardi, *Dealing with Government in South Sudan: Histories of Chiefship, Community and State* (Suffolk: James Currey, 2013).

2 See for example Sarah Bailey and Simon Harrigan, *Food Assistance, Reintegration and Dependency in South Sudan* (London: ODI, 2009).

3 For example, see Daniel Maxwell, Martina Santschi and Rachel Gordon, *Looking Back to Look Ahead? Reviewing Key Lessons from Operation Lifeline Sudan and Past Humanitarian Operations in South Sudan*, Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, 2014.

– and they won't help us engage with the real power dynamics at play. If we aren't willing to look at these issues, we are more likely to make poor decisions that may even contribute to conflict and violence. The majority of humanitarian actors know this reality because they live it every day, engaged in constant, complex political negotiations with local leaders on the ground, but there remains a reluctance to accept it publicly and discuss its implications.

This is not a call for all humanitarian assistance in South Sudan to align under some grand political strategy – this would be both unachievable and spell an end to anything that looks or feels remotely like humanitarian space. But it is to ask all actors to accept that their actions do have a political impact, and be willing to engage in both self-reflection and external dialogue about what that means given the wider political environment they are operating in. Where do we have points of influence with local political systems? How can we maximise these in the interests of peace? Where can we collaborate and coordinate to achieve this? And where should we be cautious about doing anything at all, given the risks of exacerbating violence? Making these questions a central part of decision-making processes for all external actors in South Sudan should help us promote peace in the long term.

Conclusion

As ever, saying what should or needs to happen is the easy bit – much harder is turning any of this into practical reality, particularly because it all requires such deep knowledge and understanding of the context at very localised levels. We tend to throw up our hands at this point and say that we just can't do this, but that isn't good enough – particularly in a country blessed with as rich a body of long-term anthropological and sociological research as South Sudan. Some of the capacity we need does exist, both locally and internationally, and we need to find better ways to make the most of it.

Some are already working on ways to help us think differently, with a number of recent and current initiatives holding out the prospect of improving the international community's overall understanding. The South Sudan Humanitarian Project, launched in 2015, was established to improve the humanitarian community's access to a wide range of contextual information. The South Sudan Peace Portal web-site, to be launched imminently, aims to inform and enhance theory and practice around peacebuilding in South Sudan through sharing experiences and providing a platform for different voices – particularly South Sudanese ones – to debate what a peaceful future looks like. And donors have recently established the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility, which will provide access to in-depth analysis and work with donors and implementing partners on the ground to help them engage with conflict issues. While none of these initiatives is a magic bullet on its own, together they point to a recognition that, unless we find practical ways to improve the way we do business, we – and South Sudan – are indeed doomed to perpetual crisis.

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The South Sudan Level 3 designation: from policy to practice

Julien Schopp

On 11 February 2014, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) declared that the humanitarian situation in South Sudan warranted classification as a system-wide Level 3 (L3) emergency. A little less than two months before, on 15 December 2013, fighting had broken out in the capital Juba between troops loyal to President Salva Kiir and those of the Vice-President, Riek Machar. The fighting quickly spread to other states in the newly independent nation. The sudden conflict caught civilians unprepared and caused the initial displacement of 646,000 people, with 85,000 seeking refuge in UN peacekeeping bases that would soon come to be known as Protection of Civilian (POC) sites. Needs were immense in a country already plagued by endemic food insecurity and very poor health services, and the capacity of the government and the international community, UN and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) was limited. Most actors had shifted their focus to development programmes following independence in 2011. In these circumstances, the declaration of an L3 emergency was supported by everyone operating in South Sudan.

L3: the Original Sin

It is worth noting here that, as with other elements of the second humanitarian reform process[1] that became known as the 'Transformative Agenda',[2] the Level 3 system-wide activation was designed to support humanitarian response in extreme natural disaster responses, such as the 2010 Haiti earthquake and Pakistan floods. In practice, however, of the first four humanitarian crises that were declared L3 – Syria (January 2013), the Philippines (November 2013), the Central African Republic (CAR) (December 2013) and South Sudan (February 2014) – only the response to Typhoon Haiyan in

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1 The first humanitarian reform process was initiated in 2005 and resulted in the 2006 establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), a strengthening of the Humanitarian Coordinator system (leadership) and the implementation of the 'cluster approach' to ensure adequate response capacity, accountability and strong partnerships though enhanced response coordination.

2 https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-transformative-agenda

Box 1 Level 3 Emergencies by the book: a reminder

To define a humanitarian crisis as an L3, members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) review the five criteria put forward by the Transformative Agenda protocols:

1. Scale (either size of affected areas, number of affected/potentially affected, number of countries affected).

2. Urgency (importance of population displacement, intensity of armed conflict, crude mortality rates).

3. Complexity (multi-layered emergency, multiple affected countries, presence of a multitude of actors, lack of humanitarian access, high security risks to staff, etc.).

4. Capacity (low national response capacity, weak/fragile state, needs outweigh the capacity of Country Office and Regional Office to respond).

5. Reputational risk (media and public attention and visibility, expectations on the humanitarian system by donors, the public, national stakeholders and partners).

According to endorsed IASC policies, an L3 system-wide emergency is declared by the Emergency Relief Coordinator once the IASC Principals have discussed and agreed upon:

1. The most appropriate leadership model.

2. The composition of the Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism (IARRM) to be deployed, the period during which the measures triggered by the L3 activation should be in place and assigned responsibility for defining and implementing an exit strategy.

4. The common advocacy priorities for the humanitarian system and common messages that will be at the core of the ERC's communication strategy with regards to the emergency situation.

5. Other context-specific arrangements, as applicable.

the Philippines corresponded to the initial intent of the designation. It is possibly also not a coincidence that Haiyan is considered the most effective humanitarian L3 response, and the only one that was stood down in a timely fashion, six months after the initial declaration.

As with other current conflicts (Syria, Iraq, Yemen), designating the South Sudan response as an L3 and then focusing on the

criteria describing the nature of the conflict as its main qualifier led to the problematic creation of a permanent crisis, a never-ending 'state of emergency'. The scale and urgency of the crisis was always going to produce huge numbers of people affected directly or indirectly by the conflict. The layered complexities linked with access constraints, extreme food insecurity and protection of civilians considerations were always going to argue for the continuation of L3 status and staffing.

In South Sudan, perhaps more acutely than in similar contexts such as CAR, differing interpretations of the importance of the five L3 criteria relative to each other (see text box) led to sharp disagreement on the need to extend the designation, starting as early as six months in. Those in favour of standing down the L3 designation argued that its objective had been reached through the scaling up of response capacity, prioritised recruitment of experienced emergency personnel, strengthened leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator and stronger funding streams. Others, focusing on the scale and complexity of the crisis as the primary rationale, argued that standing down the L3 designation would be perceived by the outside world as a downgrading of the importance of the humanitarian crisis in South Sudan, even though needs continued to escalate. Contrary to its initial intent, L3 thus became a designation of the severity of the humanitarian crisis and of the needs of affected people – not, as originally envisioned, a system-wide tool to force self-reflection and ensure that the humanitarian community at the country level was best equipped to respond effectively.

L3 in South Sudan: too little too long?

Following the L3 designation, a comprehensive response architecture was re-established: the existing Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) was revitalised and started meeting twice a week, and clusters devoted to sector coordination were well-staffed, at least in Juba. In the initial stages, these mechanisms allowed for better strategic alignment of all actors engaged in the response. An all-out effort began to convince agencies, NGOs, the media, donors and the wider diplomatic community that more resources (human, financial, logistical) were needed. The surge capacity of the UN Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism was set in motion, and the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) allocated $30.3 million to the South Sudan response. The inner complexities of a UN integrated mission with political and peacekeeping responsibilities led to the creation of a Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator position to support the humanitarian response. Although it was recognised quickly, as in the Operational Peer Review (OPR), that 'needs outstrip the available capacity of the system', the impact of the immediate L3 humanitarian response was deemed as successful as could reasonably be expected, in terms of basic food security needs and support to civilians sheltering in UN bases.

The indirect consequence of the establishment of such a heavy architecture was a proliferation of meetings to service the

People with their registration cards for a food distribution in Jonglei State, Waat.

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document requirements of the L3 machinery, centring many actors and decisions in the capital and making it more difficult for staff to get to the field, where the needs were.[3] Throughout the response, the consensus was that the humanitarian community was not reaching people in need in less visible and insecure areas. The humanitarian system became absorbed by its own processes and priorities, including cluster funding requirements from the pooled funds mechanism and the production of the Humanitarian Needs Overview and Humanitarian Response Plan, as noted during an InterAction mission in November 2015.

As the L3 designation entered its second year, the initial benefits of the deployment of high-calibre staff on short rotations of three to six months started to be outweighed by the traditional downsides of high staff turnover. This was particularly felt at the cluster coordinator level, where post-holders spent the first month getting to grips with the context, the second understanding their responsibilities and the last implementing, with an eye on their next posting. For both the UN and NGOs, this revolving door of staff made it very difficult to maintain continuity in terms of strategy, style and consistency. In this

sense, while the L3 designation allowed UN agencies to boost their capacity, it also created a fear that revoking L3 status would weaken this capacity, with the best staff being plucked away by other L3 responses such as Syria or Iraq. Rather than consolidating the benefits of the designation, agencies thus began to over-rely on surge capacity, sanctioning a system of high turnover with limited institutional memory.

Despite its aim to reinforce collective action and strategic alignment, another unintended consequence of the L3 designation in South Sudan was that the centrality of bilateral donor investments allowed a couple of UN agencies to grow to the point that they were not accountable to the collective. Controlling most of the financial resources, and more importantly essential logistical assets and information on access, these behemoths became too big to challenge. Under the rubric of assisting populations, they sidestepped the system-wide decision-making structures set up after the L3 designation, often prioritising their own institutional interests over those of the collective. This was particularly noticeable with the implementation by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) of rapid response mechanisms that lacked coordination and transparency in their implementation. This was underscored in the OPR conducted in June 2014: 'concern was expressed that the over-prioritization of large-scale actors and large-scale "life-

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3 Please see the Humanitarian Programme Cycle reference module - https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/hpc_reference_module_2015_final_.pdf - for details.

saving" operations – rightly undertaken in the initial stages of the response – has undermined the quality of aid'.

However, the main fear expressed during discussions on the potential deactivation of the L3 designation were related to funding and the consequences for the resourcing of a very expensive humanitarian operation. While no evidence was available to substantially link an L3 designation with significantly increased funds – for example, the L3 designation in CAR never really produced an increase in funding commensurate with the gravity of the situation, while the Ebola epidemic and Nepal earthquake response, not designated as L3s, both enjoyed robust funding – the argument was raised again and again, eventually prevailing as all agreed that the possible loss of funding was not a risk worth taking. It is important to note that humanitarian donors in Juba themselves strengthened the funding argument by stating that the L3 designation gave them more leverage with their capitals to maintain the highest funding levels possible.

As a result, the L3 designation – interpreted as an indicator of the severity of the humanitarian crisis, rather than as a mechanism to boost the capacity of the collective to respond – became a tool to bolster funding and justify the (unfortunately mostly legitimate) scope and cost of humanitarian funding appeals. The fact that the L3 is not seen as a simple technocratic tool to enhance internal and collective response capacities but an outward-facing communication instrument has also led to unintended consequences in subsequent large-scale humanitarian crises. In 2016, neither the drought in Ethiopia nor the food security and displacement crisis in north-eastern Nigeria were designated as L3 at least partly because of concerns from these two governments about what such a qualification might infer about their own capacity to respond to humanitarian needs.

L3 in South Sudan: deactivation and beyond

The Level 3 designation in South Sudan was finally stood down in May 2016. It is still unclear if this has had any adverse effects on the response to needs in the country. Not being an L3 any longer did not appear to hamper the humanitarian response that followed the resumption of open conflict in Juba in July 2016. The needs of newly displaced and conflict-affected people were tended to swiftly – testament to a humanitarian community that was ready to respond to the unexpected, and which, unlike in 2013, overwhelmingly decided to 'stay and deliver'.

Conclusion

The Level 3 designation was designed to address weaknesses in collective humanitarian response capacity in the face of exceptional circumstances. As demonstrated first and foremost in South Sudan, by becoming the de facto indicator of the severity of a crisis it paradoxically became a desirable designation for Humanitarian Country Teams. L3 became synonymous with global attention and enhanced means to respond to a crisis, possibly something that would look good on a résumé – an acknowledgment of the complexity of the job. Unfortunately, the very legitimate aim of gearing up the collective response through a system-wide designation of a Level 3 emergency has been tarnished by its implementation in extremely complex protracted conflicts such as South Sudan. Many of those working on defining the objectives and realistic impacts of an L3 declaration within the IASC system have attempted to refocus the attention of decision-makers at the global and field level on the necessity to get back to a narrower, operationally focused and time-limited collective mechanism, as originally intended. It appears, however, that the genie will not get back in the bottle, maybe because, in an environment of ever-growing need and scarce financial and human resources, the L3 designation became a convenient moniker that appeared to capture the complexity of current humanitarian interventions, as well as the patchy system built around them.

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The mixed record of UN peacekeeping in South Sudan
Matt Wells

As the armed conflict in South Sudan enters its fourth year, the impact on civilians is staggering, with tens of thousands killed, widespread sexual violence, the displacement of a quarter of the population, and more than four million people facing severe food insecurity. Government and opposition forces have both consistently targeted civilians, putting pressure on the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) to fulfil its mandate to protect civilians under threat of violence and to help create the conditions for delivering humanitarian assistance.

In undertaking 18 months of research on UNMISS while with the Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), two things were clear to me. First, UNMISS has not received the support it needs to meet the challenges it faces. Second, even considering the lack of support, the Mission has often fallen well short in meeting its mandate. Given the potential for conflict-related abuses to worsen further, more proactive protection by UNMISS is essential. Everyone involved in protection work, whether from a human rights or humanitarian perspective, has a deep interest in seeing

improvements in the Mission's performance, and helping to reform UN peacekeeping more generally.

A challenging environment

UNMISS was established in July 2011, as South Sudan and the international community celebrated the country's independence.[1] At the outset, its mandate focused on helping to build the new government's capacity. But soon the situation began to deteriorate, and when conflict broke out in December 2013 the Mission was forced to shift from partnering with the government and its security forces to protecting civilians fleeing abuses by those same forces.

As violence erupted, UNMISS allowed tens of thousands of civilians into its bases, which eventually led to the establishment of Protection of Civilians (POC) sites that today shelter more than 200,000 people. But the positive initial response masked the reality that UNMISS structures and personnel were often ill-placed to deal with the new environment. A civilian unit known as Reintegration, Recovery and Peacebuilding maintained the same acronym, RRP, but changed its name to Relief, Reintegration and Protection as its portfolio went from peace-building to managing the POC sites. Troop-contributing countries (TCCs) were asked to confront state and opposition forces as they targeted civilians.

As UNMISS focused on protection, the government increasingly treated the Mission as an adversary. Although the Mission has sheltered civilians from both sides of the country's political-ethnic divide, the government's far greater control of territory means that the vast majority of people in the POC sites are from the Nuer ethnic group, and are perceived as opposition supporters. In often inflammatory public remarks, government officials have accused UNMISS of taking sides, and UN staff, including civilians, have faced harassment and physical violence. Even before the conflict, South Sudan's government and security forces denied UNMISS free movement when its presence was inconvenient. As government and opposition forces sought to hide their torching of villages and killing of civilians, the restrictions ratcheted up.[2] Despite its robust Chapter VII mandate, UNMISS in effect moves when the parties allow it to.

Movement restrictions are rooted in problems both outside and within the Mission's control. After the downing of several UNMISS helicopters, countries involved in flying UN aircraft demanded a system of Flight Safety Assurances (FSAs).[3] Without permission from the two sides of the conflict, UNMISS cannot fly. This severely hampers its ability to respond rapidly to threats against civilians; to resupply UN bases and the POC sites; and to evacuate injured peacekeepers. UNMISS has compounded these problems, in an effort to avoid confrontation with the parties, by at times seeking approval for river and ground movements as well, and by consistently acquiescing when blocked at checkpoints. A commander of one contingent in Juba said in August that, without permission from the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), his peacekeepers do not leave the base to get water.

Lack of support

Faced with this environment, UNMISS has received inadequate political and material support, particularly from the Security Council. After three years of the parties using weapons, including heavy weapons, against civilians – and after the Council threatened sanctions if the government continued to impede the Mission[4] – there is no arms embargo. During the fighting in Juba in July, SPLA attack helicopters hovered over the main UNMISS base, firing rockets. Artillery fire and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) hit UN buildings and the POC sites, killing civilians and several peacekeepers. By failing to respond to such acts, and to the daily obstruction of UNMISS, the Council has weakened the Mission and peacekeeping as an institution.

The Mission also lacks key equipment. Guard towers around the POC sites are not reinforced with bulletproof material, so peacekeepers have to abandon them during heavy fighting. Despite successive Council resolutions, the government blocked the UN from importing military helicopters and unmanned unarmed aerial vehicles (UUAVs), which would allow the Mission to better identify and respond to protection threats.[5] Again, there has been no consequence for the government's intransigence.

Perhaps most inexcusably, UNMISS troops are asked to put themselves in harm's way without assurances that, should they be wounded, they will receive prompt care. When Chinese peacekeepers were hit by an RPG during the July fighting in Juba, there was no surgical team or blood bank on site at the Mission's biggest base. UNMISS was neither able to secure SPLA support for evacuation, nor willing to transport the casualties without that approval. Two peacekeepers

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1 UNMISS is a successor to the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS). Headquartered in Khartoum, UNMIS had a mandate, among other things, to support the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Despite a new name and mandate, UNMISS carries the mixed legacy and reputation of its predecessor.

2 *Interim Report of the Panel of Experts on South Sudan Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2206 (2015)*, UN SC Doc. S/2016/963, 15 November 2016; *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on South Sudan Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2206 (2015)*, UN SC Doc. S/2016/70, 22 January 2016.

3 Center for Civilians in Conflict, *Within and Beyond the Gates: The Protection of Civilians by the UN Mission in South Sudan*, October 2015.

4 UN Security Council Resolution 2304, 12 August 2016.

5 Agence France-Press, 'South Sudan Opposes Drones for UN Peace Mission', 9 October 2015; Voice of America, 'South Sudan: UN Doesn't Need Drones, Attack Helicopters', 18 June 2015. 6.

Nepalese peacekeepers arrive in Juba from Haiti to reinforce the military component of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

© UN Photo/Isaac Billy

died, at least one of them probably a preventable death.[6] The impact on peacekeepers' morale was devastating.

Under-performance and its impact

Even taking into account the scant support it has received, the Mission has fallen short in protecting civilians and facilitating humanitarian access. While capable early warning mechanisms have been developed, they have often not translated into effective contingency planning and preparation. In February 2016, there were signs that the situation was deteriorating in Malakal, including inside the POC site. Humanitarians asked the Mission's office there to prepare a risk mitigation plan, but UNMISS officials demurred. When communal violence within the POC site degenerated into an attack on the camp by SPLA forces, the Mission was caught ill-prepared and responded weakly and only after a significant delay. In the UN's backyard, at least 30 civilians were killed, and around a third of the camp was set ablaze.[7]

In addition to poor planning, the record of specific contingents is mixed. Certain units, particularly the Mongolians, are respected by aid workers and South Sudanese civilians for their willingness to deploy to high-risk environments and use force when necessary to protect civilians. Others have performed inadequately, some consistently so. As the Malakal violence unfolded, one peacekeeping contingent abandoned its posts along the perimeter, allowing SPLA soldiers to enter.[8] In Juba, peacekeepers failed to respond even when they witnessed a woman's abduction outside the POC site.[9]

Many problems stem from weak command and control, a challenge not unique to UNMISS. UN investigations into Malakal and Juba have shown a recurrence of other issues, including inadequate community engagement; porous POC site fencing; troops' misunderstanding of UNMISS rules of engagement; and commanders' refusal to follow orders. In

6 Matt Wells, 'The UN Has Failed Its Peacekeepers in S. Sudan', *Al Jazeera*, 10 September 2016.

7 Center for Civilians in Conflict, *A Refuge in Flames: The February 17–18 Violence in Malakal POC*, April 2016.

8 *Ibid.; Executive Summary of the United Nations Headquarters Board of Inquiry Report on the Circumstances of the Clashes that Occurred at the United Nations Protection of Civilians Site in Malakal, South Sudan on 17–18 February 2016*, August 2016.

9 *Executive Summary of the Independent Special Investigation into the Violence which Occurred in Juba in 2016 and UNMISS Response*, November 2016; Associated Press, 'Witnesses Say South Sudan Soldiers Raped Dozens Near UN Camp', 27 July 2016.

early November, a task force was established to implement recommendations from the Juba investigation.[10] Progress should be closely monitored.

UNMISS's protection difficulties have affected humanitarian operations. In areas around the POC sites where UNMISS does not patrol, organisations like Nonviolent Peaceforce have had to fill the gap by accompanying women collecting firewood. More generally, the Mission's inability to project force outside the POC sites has increased the need for civilians to seek refuge within. Humanitarian assistance has, in turn, often concentrated disproportionally on these sites, even though the vast majority of displaced people, including the most vulnerable, are elsewhere.

Humanitarian organisations' inability to count on UNMISS was laid bare when, on 11 July, SPLA soldiers stormed the Terrain compound, which housed staff from several organisations. The soldiers proceeded to sexually and physically assault international aid workers and to execute a South Sudanese journalist. A UN-mandated investigation found that UNMISS received information about the attack shortly after it began. Orders were given directing Quick Reaction Forces (QRF) to respond, but no QRF ever left the UNMISS base, despite Terrain's location only a kilometre away.[11] While the reluctance was initially defensible – SPLA tanks blocked the path, and the Mission's medical care and evacuation problems had been exposed – contingents refused to respond even after UNMISS secured SPLA assistance to navigate the road.[12] Worse, UNMISS raised expectations at times that it would intervene, undermining the pursuit of alternatives. The incident deepened divisions between the Mission and humanitarians and forced organisations to overhaul contingency plans.

Key priorities

As conflict spreads to new parts of South Sudan and warnings are issued on the potential for genocide, significant efforts are needed in New York and Juba to improve UNMISS's ability to provide robust protection. On the ground, the Mission needs to communicate better with South Sudanese civilians and humanitarians about what it can and cannot do. Systems should be established such that, when humanitarians request protection, the Mission replies rapidly and with a clear answer, so as to avoid the ambiguity that has proven more harmful than a negative response. UNMISS also needs to involve humanitarians more systematically in contingency planning, given their regular interaction with affected communities.

In return, humanitarians at times need to demonstrate greater sympathy for UNMISS's challenges, which might lessen the Mission's defensiveness and improve collaboration on protection issues. When I have described the Mission's inability to secure prompt medical care for the Chinese peacekeeper casualties in July, many humanitarians have been unmoved; one told me that is what soldiers sign up for. It is not. Soldiers from Western militaries do not operate without reliable medical evacuation, so we should not expect peacekeepers from countries like Rwanda and Nepal to do so either.

There also needs to be a stronger push for the swift deployment of the Security Council-approved Regional Protection Force (RPF), which would add 4,000 peacekeepers. Frustration with the Mission's performance has led many to question whether additional peacekeepers, from some of the same TCCs, would make a difference. The Mission is incredibly overextended, particularly with abuses mounting in areas like Yei, where there is little to no UNMISS presence. The RPF could help alleviate that, if deployed with the necessary equipment and without the restrictions South Sudan's government has tried to impose.[13] It will not resolve the conflict, but that is no reason to avoid providing civilians with even slightly improved protection options.

More generally, the human rights and humanitarian communities should demand greater transparency and accountability around peacekeeping performance – two issues that the new Secretary-General, António Guterres, and the new UNMISS head, David Shearer, should prioritise. The UN investigations into the protection failures in Malakal and Juba led to the publication of executive summaries and recommendations, an improvement from past investigations that tended to be buried within UN headquarters. But a far more open accounting of why failures happen, who is responsible and what needs to change is essential.

On accountability, the UN has taken positive steps, including the repatriation of several commanders deemed to have underperformed in Malakal or Juba. But accountability needs to be far more ingrained across peacekeeping, and include entire units who grossly or consistently underperform. While the Kenyan government was wrong to pull its troops out after UNMISS's Force Commander, a Kenyan general, was sacked over the Juba violence, it was right that problems ran much deeper than him – and that he should not have taken the blame alone.[14] Accountability also needs to look at underperformance among UNMISS's civilian leadership, rather than focusing solely on the military's failures.

10 UN News Centre, 'South Sudan: UN Peacekeeping Chief Sets Up Task Force after Probe into Mission's Performance', 3 November 2016.

11 *Executive Summary of the Independent Special Investigation into the Violence which Occurred in Juba in 2016 and UNMISS Response*, November 2016.

12 *Ibid.* See also Center for Civilians in Conflict, *Under Fire: The July 2016 Violence in Juba and UN Response*, October 2016.

13 Radio Tamazuj, 'UN Has Not Received RPF Details, Denies Lomuro Letter', 28 November 2016. See also Center for Civilians in Conflict, *Challenges and Conditions for Deploying an Effective Regional Protection Force to South Sudan*, October 2016.

14 Al-Jazeera, 'Kenya Withdraws Troops from UN Mission in South Sudan', 3 November 2016.

Conclusion

UNMISS has come under deserved criticism for its performance, but it has too often been a scapegoat as the parties to the conflict, South Sudan's regional neighbours and the Security Council have been unwilling or unable to halt atrocities or hold accountable those responsible. The Juba violence, and UNMISS's inability to move outside its bases during that period, understandably led to deep concern within the humanitarian community about UN peacekeeping. But many civilians in South Sudan would be in a much worse position without the Mission's presence. With ongoing violence against civilians and the potential for further deterioration, the Mission will need both to receive more support and to transparently address its weaknesses.

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Protection of Civilians (POC) sites and their impact on the broader protection environment in South Sudan
Caelin Briggs

In the days following the outbreak of violence in South Sudan on 15 December 2013, tens of thousands of people fled to UN peacekeeping bases across the country seeking protection. While the trend of civilians sheltering in UN bases is by no means unprecedented, what evolved over the next three years was unlike anything humanitarians had experienced previously: the emergence of a new type of protracted displacement site that blends the UN 'safe areas' of the Balkans in the 1990s with the traditional camps found elsewhere in Africa.

These so-called Protection of Civilians (POC) sites came to define the response in South Sudan. With the total population of the sites peaking at over 200,000 in September 2015, protection needs were not only tremendous, but the people taking refuge in the sites were also highly visible and accessible. As a result, much of the humanitarian and peacekeeping effort focused on the POC sites, despite them housing less than 10% of the total displaced population. This imbalance sparked debates about the appropriateness of the response and whether the attention to the POC sites came at the expense of meeting needs elsewhere.

In April 2015, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations made it a global policy that UN missions with a protection of civilians mandate must be prepared to open their gates to civilians in extreme situations of violence. The inclusion of this language, and the precedent set by the experience in South Sudan, make it likely that the POC site model could emerge in other situations of conflict in the future. With this in mind, it is important to take stock of the lessons from South Sudan, and ensure that they are applied going forward.

The impact of the POC sites on protection elsewhere in South Sudan

Ever since it became clear that the POC sites were not a short-term feature of the South Sudan landscape, the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)'s approach to protection of civilians has fundamentally changed. Rather than analysing how civilians could be protected both inside and outside the sites, attention appears to have focused disproportionately on the POC sites alone. Some UNMISS personnel have even indicated to visiting researchers[1] that they believe protecting the POC sites constitutes the entirety of the Mission's responsibilities – despite UNMISS having a Chapter VII mandate which covers the whole country.

One of the biggest challenges has come from the fact that UNMISS has insisted that it is unable to deploy additional troops to other hotspot areas due to the number of troops deployed to protect the POCs. While many humanitarians disagree with this assessment (there have been repeated requests for a critical analysis of current troop deployment locations), the existence of the POCs has certainly been used by UNMISS as a pretext not to deploy elsewhere. As a result, civilians in areas such as southern Unity State have been left on their own to try to escape massacres and horrific acts of violence. Between May and October 2015, the Protection Cluster received reports of over 1,200 deaths in three counties alone, during which time there was no static UNMISS presence in the area.[2]

The protracted nature of the sites has likewise had a stark impact on UNMISS' willingness to respond to violence or open their gates in areas where they do have a presence. In November 2015, after five months of delays, UNMISS set up a Temporary Operating Base in Leer County. During Protection Cluster assessments in April 2016, conflict-affected people

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1 See CIVIC's October 2015 report, *Within and Beyond the Gates: The Protection of Civilians by the UN Mission in South Sudan.*

2 As is always the case, the government of South Sudan has the primary responsibility to protect civilians in South Sudan, but where it is unable or unwilling to do so (for example, in the context of southern Unity State), the mission is assigned with an additional protection role.

A UN Protection of Civilians Site (POC), Malakal, South Sudan.
© IOM/Bannon 2015

reported feeling that their safety was significantly improved as a result of UNMISS' presence.[3] Just two months later, however, UNMISS troops in Leer refused to open their gates or provide any other form of protection to civilians fleeing nearby violence. One group of civilians who were turned away from the base were attacked shortly afterwards and at least eight women were reportedly raped.[4] Had they not lost time approaching UNMISS for protection, they may have run directly to their usual hiding places, and escaped the attack.

This incident is another example of something humanitarians had realised much earlier: despite its mandate, protection of civilians was no longer the priority for the Mission. The first concern was to avoid the creation of new POC sites; everything else (including protecting civilians) came second. In a few instances, this prioritisation was even spelled out by the Mission on paper. In December 2015, UNMISS drafted a concept note entitled 'Prevention of and Response to Civilians Seeking Protection at UNMISS Operating Base in Leer'. The concept note concluded with the following statement: 'Until the joint assessment is completed, [the UNMISS Mongolian Battalion] should continue not to protect civilians inside the operating base', suggesting that, in contravention of the global Protection of Civilians Policy, the default position of UNMISS in this case was to keep the gates closed, even in extreme situations. This has also been observed in other locations in South Sudan, most notably Yambio and Wau, where UNMISS troops actively turned away civilians during outbreaks of violence,[5] and in some cases even told them to ask humanitarian organisations for protection (despite the fact that humanitarians have neither the mandate nor the capacity to provide physical security).

The Leer concept note was particularly concerning as it came prior to any UNMISS strategy for the actual protection of civil-ians in the area. Although the note did include some valuable ideas on steps UNMISS could take to prevent and respond to violence, the priority goal (as clearly stated in the title) was to prevent civilians from entering the base – not to protect them from attack. It was only after the Protection Cluster and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) had insisted that this be the focus did UNMISS decide to develop a Protection of Civilians Response Plan for the area.

3 See *Protection Cluster Situation Update: Leer County, Southern Unity State*, May 2016.

4 It is likely that this number is actually much higher (one humanitarian organisation received secondary reports of over 20 rape cases on the same day), however only eight cases could be confirmed.

5 See Radio Tamazuj article entitled *UN Peacekeepers Turned Away Yambio Civilians Seeking Shelter from Violence*, 3 August 2015, and UNMISS Press Release on Wau from 26 June 2016.

Protection of IDPs inside the sites

While the impact of the POC sites on protection in other areas has been significant, protection of people inside the sites has also been fraught with challenges. Since the start of the crisis in 2013, four POC sites have been overrun or shelled[6] and over 180 IDPs have been killed during attacks on the sites. Although allowing people to enter the sites undoubtedly saved tens of thousands of lives during the first days of the crisis, these repeated, deadly attacks raise the question whether the protective benefits of the sites still outweigh their very tangible risks.

Because the sites are inside UN peacekeeping bases there has been an assumption that the UN will not allow them to be attacked. Unfortunately, much like the 'safe areas' of the Balkans, the capacity of peacekeepers to defend the POC sites is limited, and peacekeepers have repeatedly demonstrated that they are unable (or perhaps unwilling) to respond in the event of a serious incident. Despite having a mandate to use all means necessary to protect civilians, up to and including the use of deadly force, time and again peacekeepers have abandoned their posts as soon as fighting nears. In this context, one must question whether characterising these sites as 'protected' is giving IDPs a false sense of security, and whether they may have been better off relying on their own coping mechanisms and self-protection strategies.

Some IDPs say that, even though they know UNMISS won't protect them, their hope is that potential perpetrators will be less likely to attack them in the presence of international personnel. Unfortunately, each time the international community fails to take decisive action in response to these types of attacks, the effectiveness of 'witnessing' as a deterrent diminishes.

Ultimately, though, IDPs have voted with their feet, and they have voted to stay. Even after repeated attacks on the sites, tens of thousands of families have indicated that they would rather tolerate the security threats inside the sites rather than risk going outside and being faced with their attackers. Humanitarians and peacekeepers have an obligation to respect this, and should focus on how to strengthen protection both within the sites and outside them, rather than prematurely encouraging people to leave before their safety can be ensured.

Lessons for future operations

Although imperfect, POC sites are an important protection model in extreme situations, and in South Sudan they were undoubtedly responsible for saving tens of thousands of lives. Below are some lessons from South Sudan that could help reduce the risks associated with POC sites in the future. While there are many additional steps that can and should

be taken to enhance protection in general, the focus here is specifically on mitigating risks created by the POC sites themselves.

To reduce the negative impact of POC sites on conflict-affected people outside them:

- **Maintain an appropriate balance between protecting IDPs in POC sites and protecting civilians elsewhere.** The assessment of what constitutes an 'appropriate balance' should be based on an analysis of risks across the country, and should be a joint discussion between peacekeepers, humanitarians and affected communities. Steps for achieving this balance should be clearly defined in the Mission's Protection of Civilians Strategy and resourcing plans, as well as in a Humanitarian Country Team Protection Strategy that articulates how humanitarians will independently work towards improving the protection environment.
- **Enhance predictability in opening the gates.** To date, there is still no common understanding (either at global or national level) of what constitutes an 'in extremis' situation that would trigger the opening of the gates. Not knowing whether they will be offered protection at a base (or what other protection they can expect) significantly impairs civilians' ability to plan where to flee in times of crisis. DPKO and individual UN missions should outline the process by which these decisions are made and the criteria that determine when the gates are opened. Troops or leaders who fail to open the gates in contravention of agreed policies should be held accountable.
- **Determine when not to maintain a peacekeeping presence.** If there is a high likelihood that peacekeepers will be unable or unwilling to provide an effective protection response, there is a need to carefully weigh the benefit of maintaining a peacekeeping presence at all. Missions should consult with humanitarians and affected people to discuss whether the benefits of protection by presence are greater than the risks of creating a false sense of security.

To reduce risks to IDPs inside the POC sites:

- **Share information about protection capacities so that families can make informed choices.** People need to be aware of the limits of protection offered in POC sites so that they can determine whether to remain in the site or move to hiding places elsewhere. Sharing accurate information about protection capacities is critical to avoid creating a false sense of security.
- **Strengthen accountability for attacks.** Holding attackers accountable is directly related to the security of IDPs in POC sites. Many IDPs have taken comfort in the belief that, despite the lack of physical protection from the UN, attackers would be less likely to attack them in the presence of foreigners. Each time we fail to speak, respond or take action, even that minimal

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6 Akobo (December 2013), Bor (April 2014), Malakal (February 2016), Juba (July 2016).

deterrent diminishes. Humanitarians, peacekeepers and the international community need to strengthen their condemnations and responses when POC sites are attacked so as to avoid creating the impression that this can be done with impunity.

To reduce risks to IDPs and conflict-affected people both inside and outside the sites:

- **UN missions should develop localised Protection of Civilians Response Plans.** Localised response plans are an important tool to complement the national Protection of Civilians Strategy, and should outline specific risks and actions that will be taken at the in-dividual POC site or county level. Peacekeepers should consult humanitarians and affected people when developing these plans.
- **Ensure accountability for failures in the protection response.** If peacekeepers fail to uphold their protec-tion responsibilities (whether it's protecting the peri-meter of a POC site or responding to threats against civilians in more remote areas), they must be held accountable. Tokenistic investigations and inquiries are counterproductive. The UN must consider at the highest levels how peacekeepers and troop-contri-buting countries can be more effectively held accountable for failing to uphold their mandates.
- **Conduct a rigorous, high-level review of actions and lessons learned from South Sudan.** The experience of the POC sites in South Sudan merits much closer examination. The impact of the sites on the protection of people both inside and outside their gates has been significant, and much greater consideration is needed to assess how protective benefits can be supported and negative impacts reduced. A critical examination, similar to the Internal Review Panel Report on UN Actions in Sri Lanka, would be useful.

Caelin Briggs was the Protection Cluster Co-Coordinator from July 2015 to December 2016. She writes here in a personal capacity.

Broadening the practice of civilian protection
Tiffany Easthom

As violence continues in South Sudan, the protection of civilians has become the central issue. With millions of people displaced from their homes, sheltering in Protection of Civilians (POC) sites on UN bases and in remote villages and swamps across the country, providing effective protection programming is the ultimate Sisyphean challenge. Despite a billion-dollar UN mission with 13,000 armed peacekeepers, ordinary South Sudanese continue to lose their lives at an alarming rate. It is essential to recognise the need to continue to evolve the practice of direct protection, recognising the limitations of what can be done in complex conflict, while assertively looking to scale up what is working and adapt established approaches to address the changing realities of contemporary conflict. This article provides a brief look at one emerging approach to direct protection work, unarmed civilian protection (UCP).

What is UCP?

Unarmed civilian protection (UCP) is an emerging methodology for the direct protection of civilians and for localised violence reduction. UCP provides unarmed, specially trained civilians, recruited from multiple countries and cultures, who live and work with local civil society in areas of violent conflict. It has grown in practice and recognition in the last few decades, with over 50 civil society organisations applying UCP methods in 35 conflict areas since 1990. UCP can be applied at all stages of a conflict, but it can be particularly effective early on, and after conflict has subsided. UCP can work in conflict areas where no UN peacekeepers are present (e.g. Mindanao, Myanmar, Colombia) but also, in a complementary manner, with UN missions (e.g. South Sudan). The concept of UCP contributes to several discourses taking place at the UN and elsewhere, including Women, Peace and Security; Protection of Civilians; Children in Armed Conflict; Mediation; Human Security; and Peacebuilding.

Deploying professionally prepared unarmed civilians before, during or after conflict aims to prevent or reduce violence, provide direct physical protection to civilians under threat and strengthen or build resilient local peace infrastructures that help communities protect themselves and resolve conflict non-violently. Unlike traditional military peacekeeping or armed private security firms, this is done without the use of, or reliance on, weapons; instead, UCP emphasises relationships over military power.

Although different organisations implement UCP in different ways, they usually share key methods, principles (e.g. non-violence, non-partisanship), sources of guidance (e.g. International Humanitarian Law) and skills. UCP practitioners engage with affected communities for varying periods of time, usually ranging from a few months to a few years. The four main methods of UCP are proactive engagement, monitoring and intervening, relationship-building and capacity development. Each of these methods has a number of applications, including protective presence, protective accompaniment and inter-positioning, ceasefire monitoring, rumour control, early warning/early response, confidence-building, multi-track dialogue, local mediation and training and supporting local UCP infrastructures. Each intervention may use a different

Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) Peacekeepers, South Sudan.
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combination of these tools depending on the context and the specific protection needs at the time.

In some situations, UCP can be a better option than armed protection. The absence of guns and uniforms can make it easier for UCPs to be accepted by all parties. It can pose less of a threat to actors that are in conflict with the national government. This strengthens the perception of non-partisanship and reduces the risk of being targeted by rebel groups. All of this can make it easier for civilians to approach UCPs, especially in areas where state and non-state armed actors may be actively fighting. When civilians receive protection from actors perceived as partisan, they can be assumed to be partisan themselves. When non-partisan UCP implementers provide direct protection it can provide the opportunity for civilians to separate themselves from parties to the conflict.

Operationalising UCP in South Sudan

Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) has been implementing UCP programming in South Sudan since 2010. When the conflict began in December 2013, NP was largely focused on strengthening local peace infrastructures, with direct protection programming in Jonglei State, the most restive part of the country at the time. As with other NGOs, the outbreak of the war forced a rapid reorganisation of priorities. Due to immediate insecurity and the rapidly changing environment, NP redeployed the majority of its resources to emergency response in Juba, Bor and Bentiu. However, within months, in response to the spreading crisis, we had expanded to 13 static field teams plus an additional mobile emergency response team. NP's primary purpose has been to contribute to the direct protection of civilians in areas of conflict, and to support conflict prevention and stabilisation in areas on

the periphery. While there have been notable successes, the challenges have been immense.

Protective accompaniment for the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence

Due to overcrowding and limited resources in POC sites in South Sudan, civilians frequently choose to leave. For women, this has often meant moving to surrounding areas to find firewood, livelihood activities and other basic needs. The POC in Bentiu sits in the middle of what has been highly contested territory throughout the war, which has meant the consistent presence of armed actors from all sides of the conflict immediately adjacent to the base. Women reported that they were targeted every time they left the site: harassed, forced to pay a 'tax' to pass, beaten, raped, abducted and killed. Although the risk was high the critical need to collect cooking fuel meant that they had no choice but to venture out, moving in groups and trying to pick areas that appeared less risky.

In response to the threats facing these women, NP started to conduct protective accompaniment (patrols) outside the POC site. In the early stages of the intervention, it was estimated that 65% of violent incidents took place during firewood collection or livelihood activities. To counteract this, NP's team conducted nearly 200 direct protection activities, enabling several thousand women to safely access areas outside the POC site. The team conducted regular patrols for a period of six months. By establishing working relationships with women's groups, prevention strategies were developed to allow groups of women to be accompanied – ranging from 15 to several hundred, as women learned that the patrols directly deterred sexual violence. The NP accompaniment team varied in size according to the size of the group and the assessed risk.

Patrols were suspended and ultimately discontinued when changes in the external context brought in new, unknown personalities within armed actors and it became unclear whether the level of deterrence would be sufficiently high to offset the risk. The team reoriented its activities towards accompaniment and protective presence in other high-risk areas both within the POC and in other locations.

The key outcome of this intervention was the protection of thousands of women and girls at risk of sexual and gender-based violence whilst outside the POC. Women would often wait for hours after collecting firewood so that they could walk back to the POC in the accompaniment group rather than returning alone or in small groups, illustrating a level of trust in the protective impact of this process. However, while this was an effective tool, the scope of the problem is immense and coordination with other actors is essential. Areas where there was a high risk of sexual violence and bush locations where women and girls were specifically exposed due to the concentrated presence of armed actors were mapped, and the NP team's observations were shared with other humanitarian actors and UN personnel

to help inform other interventions, particularly the locations and schedules of UN peacekeeping patrols.

Despite the challenges, protective accompaniment activities like these can have a significant impact in improving safety and security. The correlation was clear. No woman was harmed while within an accompaniment group, although women who moved outside the POC site on their own reported daily violations. NP received messages of appreciation from women themselves, as well as from the acting Governor of Unity State and the UNMISS Human Rights Commission. UCP proved a deterrent to the armed actors that had previously committed acts of sexual violence. Feedback directly from armed actors in the area indicated that they intentionally changed their behaviour when an accompaniment team was present.

Although not in itself the answer to the entire spectrum of protection needs, UCP can and does have a measurable lifesaving, harm-reduction impact, even in intensely volatile situations.

Following renewed fighting in the capital Juba, the response from the UN Security Council and many others has been to push for the deployment of a regional military force. More recently, the UNMISS mandate renewal increases the ceiling of peacekeepers from 13,000 to 17,000. While there is a role to be played by force protection, alternative methods such as UCP need to be studied, developed and scaled up to address the urgent need for civilian protection.

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A continuum of suffering: violence against women and girls in the South Sudan conflict

Lydia Stone

In 2014, the international community commended the government of South Sudan for endorsing the recently established Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, by which it undertook to end the use of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war. However, within months reports emerged of atrocities against South Sudanese women and girls that the UN Special Representative on sexual violence in armed conflict described as the worst she had ever seen.[1] In Unity State, civilians spoke of the systematic enslavement of women and girls in rape camps run by government-aligned militia groups,[2] and both the African Union (AU) and Human Rights Watch produced reports documenting rape and gang rape, beatings, sexual assault and forced labour.[3]

New accounts of sexual violence against women and girls in the South Sudan conflict now emerge weekly, detailing widespread horrors that have rarely been seen since the Rwandan genocide. Some female survivors have lost count of the number of times they have been raped, and in certain parts of the country sexual violence perpetrated by armed men has become so commonplace that it is difficult to find a woman or girl who has not witnessed or experienced it first hand.

The perpetrators of this horrific violence include soldiers on the government payroll, as well as troops from the SPLA In Opposition (SPLA-IO) and aligned and non-aligned militia groups. With the August 2015 peace agreement hanging by a thread and an estimated 3 million people displaced by the conflict, the government's commitment to ending sexual violence in conflict looks like little more than empty rhetoric, and there is scant hope that survivors of atrocities will receive justice.

An enabling environment for sexual violence

The UN's Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide has recently warned that 'genocide is a process. It does not happen overnight'.[4] The same can be said for conflict-related sexual violence. The men committing these atrocities did not appear from nowhere in December 2013: they are the sons of South Sudan and the products of an environment that has gradually and consistently tolerated and normalised violence against the most vulnerable, in particular women and girls. To understand the current violence it is important to understand the environment and social norms that facilitated it.

Violence against women and girls is an accepted practice in many South Sudanese communities. The practice of paying bride price in particular encourages the treatment of women as chattel, and child marriage and intimate partner violence are common. A 2012 study by the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare found that a majority of both women and men believe that a man is justified in hitting a woman if she goes out without telling him, if she neglects the children or if she argues with him.[5] In a separate assessment of attitudes and beliefs towards violence against women and girls in South Sudan,

1 'South Sudan Sexual Violence "Rampant": Two Year Old Raped: UN', Reuters, 21 October 2014.

2 Hannah McNeish, 'South Sudan: Women and Girls Raped as "Wages" for Government-allied Fighters', *The Guardian*, 28 September 2015.

3 Final Report of African Union Commission of Inquiry in South Sudan, October 2014; and '"They Burned It All": Destruction of Villages, Killings, and Sexual Violence in Unity State South Sudan', Human Rights Watch, July 2015.

4 'Risk of "Outright Ethnic War" and Genocide in South Sudan, UN Envoy Warns', UN News Centre, 11 November 2016.

the majority of respondents (68% of women and 63% of men) also agreed that 'there are times when a woman deserves to be beaten'.

The advent of independence in 2011 failed to bring the much-promised fruits of freedom to the ordinary people of South Sudan. While the wealth of the Juba-based elite grew and the 'big men' in power treated themselves to expensive cars and multiple wives, the typical South Sudanese citizen saw no change to their living standards. Rising bride prices put marriage beyond the reach of many frustrated young men, providing the dry tinder for the spark of the December 2013 violence.[6] The horrific violence in 2012 in Jonglei State, in which hundreds of women and girls were raped, mutilated and abducted, was a foreshadowing of the current carnage.[7]

Response and responsibility

National
It is difficult to find an institution in South Sudan that has not issued a 'strong condemnation' of the sexual violence in the country and called for it to stop. On 6 December 2016, Paul Malong Awan, the SPLA's hardline Chief of General Staff, used the national television channel to tell soldiers that there should be no more violence against women.[8] Malong joins the AU, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the United Nations in condemning the violence against women and girls, yet no one seems able to provide solutions.

A large part of the problem with tackling sexual violence committed by SPLA soldiers is the lack of command and control in the army. Since 2005, when it made the transition from a rebel opposition group to the official army of what was then Southern Sudan, the SPLA has borne little resemblance to a coherent, united army with a functioning system of command. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended the 21-year war mandated that all other armed groups be disbanded and integrated into the SPLA, but in reality the SPLA has been little more than a collection of disparate militia groups that happen to be on the same payroll. Over time more and more rebel groups were appeased with the offer of 'integration' into the SPLA and salaries. By the time the conflict broke out in December 2013, the SPLA payroll stood at a massive and unaccountable 210,000.[9]

Within this context, edicts issued by Malong or others within the government have limited impact on soldiers who do not respect the hierarchy within the SPLA. Similarly, although SPLA-IO leader Riek Machar has met with the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence, Zainab Bangura, and has pledged to combat sexual violence and other abuses,[10] the control that he wields over his own troops in the field is limited. This lack of control, far from absolving the leaders of these armed groups, highlights their culpability in stoking discontent and hatred without having the leadership to control the violence they have done much to unleash.

In 2014 South Sudan and the United Nations issued a joint communiqué on the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence.[11] The statement committed the government to working with the UN and others to undertake a number of concrete measures, including developing an action plan specific to the SPLA, with a clear order prohibiting sexual violence and ensuring accountability, addressing sexual violence in security sector reform and improving access to justice for survivors of sexual violence. However, since the communiqué was issued the situation has only worsened.

United Nations
The inaction of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in response to atrocities against civilians, including sexual violence against women and girls, has provoked dismay and anger. Although the mission may have been lauded for opening its bases to civilians in December 2013, this cannot excuse its lack of action in the years leading up to the crisis, nor the failures since. UN soldiers have failed to respond to civilians being attacked in plain sight, including women raped within yards of UN compounds, as well as attacks within the compounds themselves.

The inertia of UNMISS with regard to its protection of civilians mandate only drew the attention that it had long deserved when a group of international aid workers were attacked and raped inside their Juba compound during the violence of July 2016. The Special Investigation commissioned by the UN was damning of the mission's record on protection of civilians, including the 'poor performance by peacekeepers in protecting civilians from sexual violence in the vicinity of the POC [Protection of Civilians] sites'.[12] The Special Investigation's report also noted that, even two

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5 Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, *Comprehensive Country Gender Assessment*, 2012.

6 USIP, *Dowry and Division: Youth and State Building in South Sudan*, 2011.

7 *Women and Armed Violence in South Sudan*, Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment (HSBA), Small Arms Survey, April 2012.

8 'Diplomat Lauds Malong's Anti-rape Remark', http://www.eyeradio.org/diplomat-lauds-malongs-anti-rape-remark, 7 December 2016.

9 It should be noted that this figure is unlikely to represent 210,000 actual soldiers. The SPLA payroll has always lacked accountability and is based on numbers provided by commanders who are known to inflate their payroll requests in order to provide food, fuel and basic necessities, as well as lining their own pockets and providing payments to families of deceased soldiers.

10 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmYb7rM1sZk; and 'South Sudan: UN Special Representative Welcomes SPLA-IO Action Plan to Combat Rape in War and Undertakings by Commanders', Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, 10 November 2015.

11 'Joint Communique of the Republic of South Sudan and the United Nations on the Prevention of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence', Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, 12 October 2014.

12 'Executive Summary of the Independent Special Investigation into the Violence which Occurred in Juba in 2016 and UNMISS Response', 1 November 2016.

Women and children seek protection in a UN Protection of Civilians site.
© IOM/Bannon 2015

months after the July crisis, 'the Force and Police components continued to display a risk-averse posture unsuited to protecting civilians from sexual violence and other opportunistic attacks', and that, on the rare occasions that the mission does conduct patrols around the POC sites, 'its soldiers peer out from the tiny windows of armoured personnel carriers, an approach ill-suited to detecting perpetrators of sexual violence'. Although the report led to the sacking of the UNMISS military commander, the mission's 'chaos and ineffective response' cannot be blamed on one recently appointed individual, and owes much more to the lack of accountability and culture of chronic risk aversion that has permeated the mission since its formation.

Non-governmental organisations
The scale of the crisis has overwhelmed the humanitarian community. While the UN's POC sites have provided shelter and a degree of protection for some of the displaced population, they are inadequate, and many fail to meet basic standards of protection for women and girls, such as separate toilets and bathing facilities, and the cramped conditions mean that workshops to support survivors of sexual violence that should take place in discreet locations are often exposed to the wider camp.[13]

13 Andrew Green, 'Women in South Sudan: "They Attack Us at Toilets or Where We Collect Water"', *The Guardian*, 11 September 2014.

Furthermore, the vast majority of those affected by the conflict are outside the POC sites, often in areas that are difficult, dangerous and expensive to access due to extremely poor infrastructure and lack of roads. When an organisation is awarded funding based on the number of beneficiaries it is able to reach, there is an incentive to provide services to more densely populated communities such as POC sites, where target numbers can be more easily achieved.

Civil society organisations such as the South Sudan Women's Empowerment Network, Eve Organisation and the Smile Again Africa Development Organisation have provided survivors of sexual violence with dignity kits, psycho-social counselling and referral services, but the challenges they face are tremendous. These organisations themselves admit that they lack the technical expertise and resources to provide the full package of care survivors of sexual violence require, and are calling on the international community for more sustained funding and technical help to bolster the skills of their staff and reach the vast numbers who need assistance. Although international organisations including Nonviolent Peaceforce, Care International and World Vision all have effective response programmes, the scale is small in comparison to the enormity of the problem.

Ways forward

In early 2014 the government approved a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. The plan, based on the principles of UN Resolution 1325, was out of date almost as soon as it was published thanks to the advent of the December 2013 crisis. Nevertheless, it represented an important coming together of the international community, the government and civil society groups to mobilise resources in a coherent fashion. Given the radically worsened situation for women and girls in South Sudan over the last three years, it is time for this action plan to be reviewed and reinvigorated.

Donors must work in a coordinated fashion to ensure that national and international humanitarian and development NGOs are receiving sufficient and sustained support to respond to the needs of survivors of sexual violence, including access to health services, justice, livelihood support and psycho-social services. It is essential that the international community continues to engage with the South Sudanese security services, and demands standards that focus on the protection, rather than abuse, of civilians. Finally, and as a matter of urgency, UNMISS must ensure that its protection of civilians mandate is comprehensively understood and followed by all of its forces. The women and girls of South Sudan need a bold and proactive international community that prioritises the protection of the most vulnerable.

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A thousand papercuts: the impact of NGO regulation in South Sudan
Lindsay Hamsik

The regulatory environment in South Sudan presents significant obstacles to the effective delivery of humanitarian aid. Even before the outbreak of the civil war in December 2013, South Sudanese government authorities were tampering with hiring decisions, seizing NGOs' assets and using intimidation and undefined or overly complex procedures to influence where, when and how assistance was delivered. Despite claims that its NGO Law enacted in February 2016 follows regional 'best practice', South Sudan's evolving regulatory landscape mirrors that of its neighbours, where governments play a strong role in coordinating humanitarian aid delivery while also controlling access and using bureaucracy to restrict NGO activities. Insecurity and widespread impunity are further impediments to effective aid delivery: according to a 2016 Aid Worker Security Report, South Sudan has now surpassed Afghanistan as the country with the highest number of attacks on civilian aid operations.[1]

Impediments to access

In 2015, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported more than 900 incidents where humanitarian access was constrained – an increase of more than 55% from 2014. In July 2015 alone, 73 incidents were documented. Access is influenced not only by clear cases of looting or restrictions that hinder the free movement of aid, but also by a complex and often ambiguous system of bureaucratic and security practice. In this context, many major access issues are the result of a compounding series of smaller, often less impactful individual incidents. Most go unreported; many are linked to bureaucracy and regulatory policy that is at times applied in legitimate ways and at others seems arbitrary.

For example, in early 2016, when inflation and currency devaluation made it difficult for the government to sustain its patronage networks and pay salaries, NGOs experienced a spike in requests from local authorities for material support. Humanitarians were approached repeatedly for vehicles, fuel, cash, tyres and phone credit. Predatory rent-seeking activities used existing laws or draft legislation – or even laws that simply didn't exist – to justify commandeering NGO assets, imposing new processes and procedures for humanitarian movement and demanding fees and taxes. As organisations are often able to decline or simply negotiate past such requests, these incidents don't immediately restrict the ability of humanitarians to access people in need. However, as such requests increase in frequency and the intensity of the economic downturn grows, so too does the pressure and implicit risk for geographically isolated and physically vulnerable frontline staff.

The 2016 NGO Act gives the government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) power to develop and set policies and procedures under the guise of regulating and monitoring NGOs. This power is not limited by any specific purpose, guideline or due process. The RRC, formerly known as the South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SSRRA), was established by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) during the previous civil war with Sudan. It served as a liaison office between the army and humanitarians. Following South Sudan's independence, the SSRRC became the RRC and was subsumed under the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, but its genesis remains deeply rooted in the political and military structures of the state. Although the RRC is mandated by the government to facilitate humanitarian aid – an obligation imposed under international law – it in fact acts as a vehicle for the continuation of the state's politico-security objectives.

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1 Humanitarian Outcomes, *Aid Worker Security Database*, 2016, www.aidworkersecurity.org.

Box 1 A wider trend

The regulatory pattern in South Sudan is part of powerful regional and global trends in NGO regulation, characterised by greater restrictions, increased oversight or surveillance of NGOs' work, and more host government power to influence programming. This convergence is transforming the operational landscape for NGOs and creating new challenges for the independent delivery of humanitarian assistance. Uganda's 2015 NGO law grants an executive board sweeping powers to refuse NGO registrations, issue and revoke permits and restrict the number of jobs held by foreign nationals. Ethiopia has always closely monitored NGOs and has equally restrictive laws governing the establishment of charities through mandatory registration. Sudan's Voluntary and Humanitarian Work Organisation Act of 2006 has been used to monitor and scrutinise NGO activities there, and in 2009 Sudan's Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) used the law to expel individual humanitarian workers and their organisations. Sudan's law has been cited by many South Sudanese government officials as a key reference in the drafting of the 2016 NGO Act.

The RRC's application of the NGO law is confusing and administratively draining. NGOs are required to submit extensive reports related to their finances, history, projects and staffing plans to be legally registered. A particularly frustrating element of the law requires NGOs to seek redundant approvals from various entities of the government before securing final permissions from the RRC. A specific component of the registration process requires individual country directors to undergo a criminal background check through the Criminal Investigation Department in the Ministry of Immigration to secure a 'Letter of No Objection' before being eligible to legally register their NGO and operate. Fees are also collected here. Each NGO receives different treatment. For some organisations processes are expedited with few opportunistic requests for additional fees. Others are less fortunate. Delays and requests for additional paperwork and fees can be extensive.

The political economy of regulation in conflict

NGO regulation in South Sudan cannot be divorced from the political economy of the war itself. The prioritisation of public revenue for defence spending and the collapse of other revenue streams as a result of widespread economic deterioration have only accelerated competition for control over one of the most lucrative assets remaining in the country – humanitarian assistance. According to the fee schedule outlined in the NGO regulations and based on rough numbers of both international and national NGOs operating in the country, conservative estimates suggest that the RRC netted

approximately $200,000 in the registration of NGOs in August 2016. This may seem like small change in the grand scheme of the war economy in South Sudan. However, some suggest it's only the tip of the iceberg of potential revenue. For example, many NGOs only received a registration validated against their previous year's registration date. This meant that an NGO that had registered the previous year in October received their new registration in August 2016 and would have to undergo the process again two months later, paying an additional round of fees. This appears to be a deliberate and thinly veiled ploy to generate revenue.

The regulations also say that goods imported by NGOs under tax exemption cannot be liquidated or transferred to other projects. Instead, donor-funded assets must now be handed over to the RRC once a project closes. The registration process requires NGOs to list all of their assets in each of their field sites, meaning that the government is now in possession of a complete asset registry for the entire NGO community in South Sudan. This does not bode well for the future given the RRC's record of confiscating NGO assets. NGOs have been coerced into paying fees to the RRC to free confiscated assets, or have been forced to simply forfeit assets or pay fines to avoid more punitive measures.

Another hallmark of the RRC's role, though one not explicitly stated in the regulations, is its function as a gatekeeper for permissions to carry out basic activities. For example, NGOs must secure approval letters from the RRC to carry cash to field sites. With limited if any commercial banking options in the country, hand-carrying cash on flights is often the only way to move cash to pay salaries or purchase local goods. Excessive delays in securing such permissions have in some instances caused NGOs to miss flights. Flying without permission has resulted in staff being denied access to board or programme money being confiscated by airport authorities. The RRC has said that delays are caused by a lack of capacity or of fuel to run the generator and print the necessary documents, but anecdotal reports suggest that delays often appear deliberate.

The RRC is not the only government ministry involved in regulation. According to a 2014 Ministry of Transportation circular, NGOs are required to pay for accommodation, transport and a $200 per diem to designated officials meant to licence NGO vehicles.[2] NGOs work in multiple isolated field sites that are only accessible by air. Paying transportation fees and exorbitant per diems to government authorities to carry out their work is an added financial burden to humanitarian programmes. These fees are prohibitive but unavoidable. The only alternative would be driving with expired licence plates, which would present another set of challenges given the multiple security checkpoints and armed actors in the field.

2 Maurice Rehan Deng, 'Inspector for Vehicles Verifications for Licensing', Letter to all NGOs, UN agencies and diplomatic missions, Ministry of Transport, 7 October 2014.

The UN Secretary-General meets with representatives of IDPs, UN agencies and NGOs during a February 2016 visit to Juba.

© UNMISS/Annemieke Vanderploeg

Regulating NGOs is also linked to controlling and having greater oversight over aid to opposition areas. Essentially, aid is being used to punish opposition and reward loyalty. The RRC has said that it intends to use the law to influence which NGOs provide assistance in certain areas and to limit advocacy and NGO engagement on political issues. In August 2016, the law appeared to be used to silence civil activists when, according to an Associated Press article, the government instructed the Community Empowerment for Progress Organisation (CEPO), a national NGO, to 'shut down within two weeks or be considered illegal'.[3]

Conclusion

When regulation is clear and consistent it can be a power-ful enabler for delivering assistance and saving lives. Unfortunately, that is not the case in South Sudan. The complicated operational reality of conflict and the regulatory landscape present serious challenges for NGOs and other stakeholders. NGO regulation is not a new development. However, thinking on its operational implications and how regulation relates to humanitarian access, programme con-tinuity and an effective response is limited.

Some basic steps can be taken to minimise the negative impacts of NGO regulation. First, it is important to track individual incidents that threaten humanitarian principles. Such incidents may not individually meet the definition of a 'classic' access impediment, but in the aggregate they reflect the constraining trends within the operational environment.

Second, donors and the broader international community must, to the extent possible, aim to increase revenue transparency in any government entity that seeks to regulate the work of NGOs or other providers of humanitarian assistance. The RRC and other government partners should publicly disclose their revenues from NGOs. The RRC should introduce minimum transparency measures linked to other internationally supported transparency and accountability efforts such as those related to the management of the government's oil and natural resources revenue. Donor countries' taxpayers have a right to know how much of their money is not reaching beneficiaries but is being diverted to a government that is fuelling the humanitarian crisis.

Third, NGOs must drive analysis that describes different elements of political and regulatory risk throughout the lifecycle of their programmes. Specific challenges should be incorporated into risk mitigation frameworks. Regulatory events in South Sudan are just as likely as conflict-related

3 Justin Lynch, 'South Sudan Activists Say Intimidated for Meeting Diplomats', Associated Press, 8 September 2016.

events to negatively impact an NGO's beneficiaries, personnel, assets, reputation or strategic objectives. Compliance with some elements of the NGO Act could put NGOs in breach of contractual commitments with donors or their own internal policies. Many of the emerging bureaucratic impediments are not necessarily laws – merely policies – and therefore compliance with new rules that are especially constraining should be creatively managed. Risk management frameworks need to include regulatory scenarios, thresholds and red lines, and alternative operational modalities. Leaders will need to evaluate these measures on an ongoing basis as the context changes and humanitarian needs deepen. Donors must go through a similar exercise to explore ways to manage regulatory risks to their partners and portfolios.

Lastly, as regulation in conflict settings becomes more restrictive, the way humanitarian access is described and the negotiation methods used to secure it must also evolve. Little practical guidance exists that could help NGOs and donors manage and navigate regulatory risk. There is a need for more visible and strategic management of complex regulatory challenges facing humanitarian operations in conflicts. Developing a stronger understanding and dedicated capacity in regulatory risk analysis can enhance communications within and between agencies, potentially reducing the likelihood of mis-

understandings, arbitrary application of laws, and inconsistent compliance and messaging with host government regulators. While the coordination challenges are significant, they are not insurmountable. NGOs must learn to speak with one voice to government regulators and try to adopt common tactics for compliance and, where necessary, non-compliance.

With the passing and implementation of new NGO regulations, South Sudan can be added to the list of other countries – like Sudan and Ethiopia – where bureaucracy increasingly constrains operations and costs lives. The consequence might be a changing focus of the humanitarian response, less driven by the needs of people affected by crisis and more around compliance with inconsistent and often arbitrary policy and procedure. Solutions must be found to manage the disruptive effect of regulatory complexity, otherwise more time and money will be spent on bureaucracy rather than saving lives.

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The effects of insecurity on aid operations in South Sudan

Adele Harmer and Monica Czwarno

In 2015, South Sudan overtook Afghanistan as the country with the highest number of violent attacks against aid workers. Amid a brutal three-year conflict, aid workers have been both caught in the crossfire and directly targeted by state, criminal and militant groups. Notwithstanding the devastating impact the conflict has had on civilians in South Sudan, violence against aid workers has the dual effect of harming victims and their families, as well as the wider response effort.

This article reviews trends in violence against aid workers since South Sudan's independence in 2011 and examines its impact on the humanitarian community's ability to deliver assistance. The data is drawn from the Aid Worker Security Database, which tracks major incidents of violence against aid workers (national and international staff), defined as killings, kidnappings and armed attacks which result in serious injury.[1]

Violence against aid workers in South Sudan

Even before armed conflict broke out at the end of 2013, limited state control and worsening lawlessness had contributed to

The abandoned market in Leer Town, Unity State.
© Layal Horanieh/ICRC

ambient violence as well as the targeting of aid workers and their assets. Each year since 2012 has seen a steady rise in the number of violent incidents against aid workers. A total of 140 major incidents affecting 192 aid workers have taken place since independence. Levels of violence have been highest in Central Equatoria and the capital, Juba.

1 See https://aidworkersecurity.org.

Figure 1 Major attacks on aid workers and numbers of victims, 2011–2016
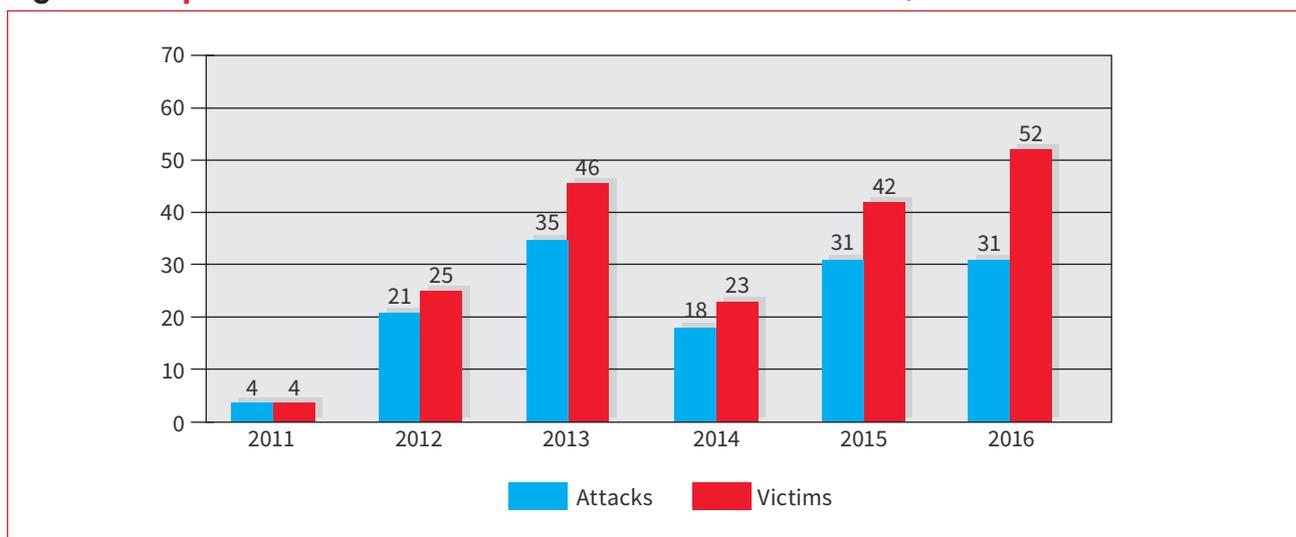
Table 1 Major attacks on aid workers, 2011–2016

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Total killed	2	9	15	11	15	22	74
Total injured	2	10	31	10	25	30	108
Total kidnapped	0	6	0	2	2	0	10
Total affected	4	25	46	23	42	52	192

A total of 74 aid workers have been killed since independence, and 108 seriously injured. Over three-quarters of victims (78%) were national staff, nearly half of whom were killed. Although international NGOs have suffered the highest number of casualties, in contrast to other highly insecure contexts UN agency staff have also suffered a significant number, reflecting the frontline responder work that the UN is engaged in.

Shootings and assault remain the most prevalent types of major violence. Three incidents of violent sexual assault were reported to the AWSD over the period (involving nine female victims). It is likely that there were more incidents than this, but sexual violence is systemically under-reported. There were also 30 incident reports in which the means of attack was not reported or could not be determined.

**Figure 2 Aid worker victims 2011–2015 by agency type**
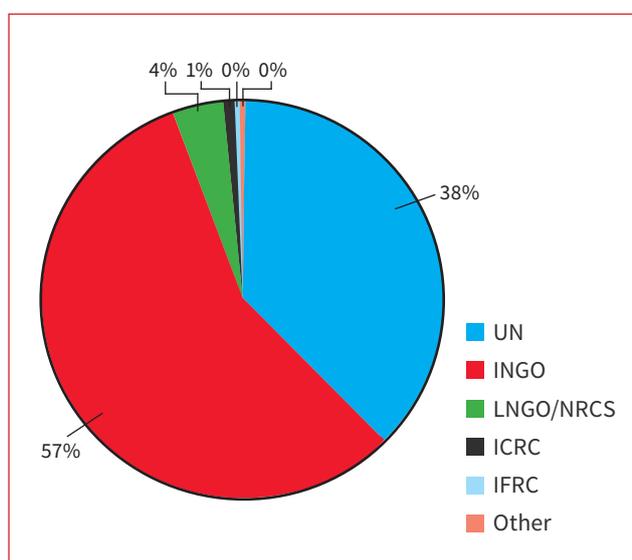
Figure 3 Tactics and types of violence
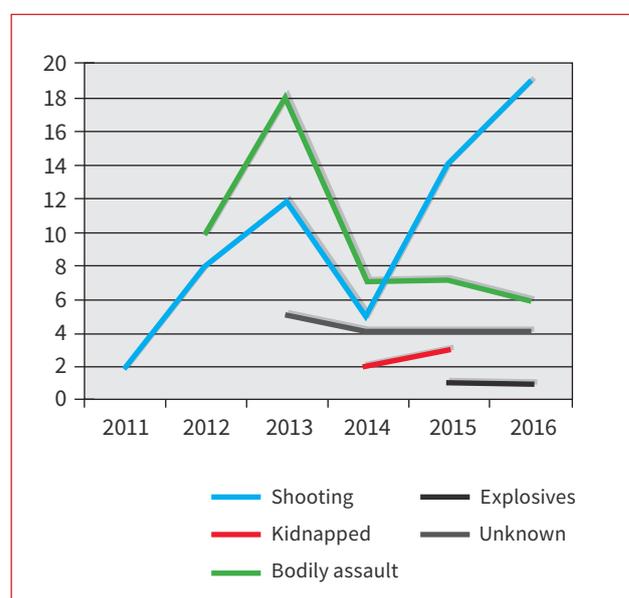
Since the AWSD first began tracking violent incidents (the database dates back to 1997), the clearest and most consistent message from the global data is that most violence occurs in the context of an ambush or roadside attack, and that aid workers are most vulnerable to attack when they are travelling on the road. South Sudan is no different in this respect. A large number of attacks take place on convoys of humanitarian supplies, often in Central Equatoria, and in addition, there is a high number of compound robberies.

The effects of insecurity on presence and coverage

Anecdotal evidence suggests that violence against aid workers affects the quality and quantity of assistance. For example, because of a specific targeted attack or due to an increase in generalised insecurity in an area, an aid organisation will halt programming or change the mode of delivery, or may withdraw from the area completely. But until recently there was a lack of empirical evidence to determine whether this effect was measurable. South Sudan was part of a four-country study, the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme, which endeavoured to answer that question.[2] This is what we found.

Decline in presence and coverage in critical areas
During the initial months of the conflict, aid programming was severely disrupted. Only a handful of organisations continued to run programmes in the primary conflict-affected areas of Greater Upper Nile, with the majority of the humanitarian community confined to Protection of Civilian (POC) camps and peripheral areas. Although the approximately 75,000 inhabitants of POC sites accounted for less than 10% of the displaced and at-risk population, these sites offered aid agencies easier and consistent secure access.

Overall humanitarian field presence in the Greater Upper Nile region declined considerably over 2014 and 2015, with a 12% decrease in operational organisations working there and a 36% decrease in humanitarian projects. The fall was due in part to the withdrawal of development-oriented agencies that have lower thresholds for risk, as well as a shift from in situ programming in field locations to mobile delivery. Staffing numbers and funding increased, but personnel were concentrated mostly in the capital, and a significant percentage of budgets was used to cover the very high costs of airlifts. Only a few organisations with independent funding, robust internal security mechanisms and the ability to deploy mobile response units sustained humanitarian programming in hard-to-reach areas outside the POCs, alongside a small number of national NGOs and church organisations.

The challenges of shifting to remote management
In other high-risk countries such as Somalia, remote management and localisation of programming using national staff and partner organisations is often both a feasible and a widely used alternative in response to insecurity. However, the ethnic nature of the conflict in South Sudan means that South Sudanese staff are at considerably greater risk of being directly targeted than internationals, seemingly precluding the application of a remote management style of operation.

International staff from neighbouring countries in the region have also been limited in where they can work due to their countries' role in the conflict. Ugandans, for example, were often not sent to field locations, and specifically not opposition-held territory due to the Ugandan government's military support for the government. In contrast, the perceived insecurity of Western, or at least non-regional, international staff was for a long period dramatically lower, and these staff had safer access to field locations and more freedom of movement. Of course, they were also far fewer in number than nationals, which is another factor driving the rapid response/mobile delivery approach as the primary modality of programming.

Affected people's perspectives
A majority of the South Sudanese people sampled in a survey conducted during the course of the SAVE research ranked insecurity as the most significant barrier to receiving aid, but they did not perceive aid organisations to be in specific danger of violence, implying that it was generalised insecurity that was the hindrance. Moreover, survey respondents attached risks to the receipt of aid, rather than its provision, as affected people needed to cross lines or expose themselves to opposition groups to access assistance.

In the southern Unity town of Leer, which has been regularly contested during the conflict, the lead researcher for the SAVE study found that many women walked miles to and from humanitarian food distributions.[3] Although they acknowledged the physical burden of carrying heavy food long distances, they maintained that they felt safe making the journey as long as they were within their community and away from outside forces. This was echoed by women who had fled Malakal – where they had been receiving aid at the UN base – because of daily conflict amongst different displaced communities inside the base. But they also consistently asked that food and services be brought closer to them (to the *payam* level). Aid organisations reported that they had considered closer distribution sites, but deemed the areas too insecure. This tension between secure access for recipients and aid actors poses a significant challenge in South Sudan – constant skirmishes, raids and bureaucratic blockages, as well as targeted attacks, have created an environment that is often too unsafe for people to move and too unstable for aid workers to establish a consistent presence.

2 See http://www.saveresearch.net; Abby Stoddard and Shoaib Jillani, *The Effects of Insecurity on Humanitarian Coverage*, Humanitarian Outcomes, forthcoming 2016; and Katherine Haver and William Carter, *What It Takes: Principled Pragmatism to Enable Access and Quality Humanitarian Aid*, Humanitarian Outcomes, 2016.

3 See http://www.saveresearch.net/the-struggle-for-access-in-south-sudan.

Recognising insecurity as the new norm

One of the challenges in South Sudan has been analysing and applying risk management models not just for a spike in violence, but for the long term. South Sudan's extreme poverty and lack of infrastructure mean that humanitarian needs have never been met adequately, and there has been a tendency throughout the conflict for aid actors to point to infrastructure and logistics as the main impediment to the provision of assistance. There's no denying this remains a major challenge, and during lulls in the conflict, when aid agencies felt relatively safe at their programme sites, it is the extreme logistical challenges of unforgiving terrain and remote locations that keep aid from reaching further. As our lead researcher found, 'during these times the focus is on airstrips, road conditions, flooding, the price of airplanes and helicopters, and the prioritisation of locations and supplies'. However, as the AWSD data reveals, violence against aid workers was a growing challenge before the conflict, and is now a constant 'new normal' in South Sudan. This requires more strategic policy attention, both to keep aid workers safe and to ensure that the effects of insecurity do not unnecessarily halt programming for those most affected by the conflict. There is a need for agencies to review longer-term patterns of violence against aid operations and staff, rather than either ignoring the latest incident or phase of violence, or reacting with kneejerk responses. Preventing female international aid staff from working in South Sudan in response to brutal assaults at the Terrain compound in July 2016 is both unsustainable and will have implications for programmes, including those that require interaction on protection issues with South Sudanese women.

The starting-point for addressing the now well-established and deeply worrying trend of targeted attacks in South Sudan is to openly acknowledge, consistently report and collectively analyse what is happening. Decisions not to report or speak out about the violence increase the collective risk. There is a critical need to initiate a dialogue on trends in insecurity for aid operations, as well as to collectively invest in preventive and mitigation measures and engage senior leadership of the UN and donor governments, particularly in calling attention to flagrant abuses and aggression perpetrated by the state.

At the programming level, the SAVE research found that aid agencies and donors would benefit from a more rigorous framework for assessing the shared risks they are willing to take. These risks are broader than staff security alone, and may also include challenges in ensuring impartial aid or the risk of putting affected people in harm's way. Managing these risks often involves making decisions with ethical consequences, and weighing up these decisions requires understanding the criticality of the intervention (for example, whether it is lifesaving or not) in relation to the risk, rather than the nature of the risk itself.[4] Affected people in South Sudan deserve a more consis-tent response. To ensure this, a more detailed and structured approach to dealing with the effects of insecurity is required.

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4 See also Katherine Haver, *Tug of War: Ethical Decision-making to Enable Humanitarian Access in High-risk Environments*, Network Paper 80, HPN and SAVE, which provides an alternative risk management framework to balance risks with criticality.

National actors in South Sudan
Lydia Tanner, Leben Moro, Hafeez Wani and Zvidzai Maburutse

The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) marked a watershed moment as 15 major donors committed to channel 25% of humanitarian funding to national and local organisations. This 'Grand Bargain' acknowledged that the humanitarian deficit, combined with an increase in the number and severity of crises, requires a new approach to humanitarian response. Yet in protracted conflicts national organisations are often excluded from the humanitarian system. In South Sudan, for example, there is a poor understanding of the capacity of national NGOs. In 2015, we interviewed 17 international and 24 national NGOs in five locations across South Sudan for a research report entitled *Missed Out: The Role of Local Actors in the Humanitarian Response in the South Sudan Conflict*.[1] The research found that the majority of national organisations struggle to access funding, form long-term partnerships or participate in coordination mechanisms. The response in South Sudan therefore offers valuable lessons on the need to create a more collaborative humanitarian culture.

Crisis response in South Sudan

The fighting that broke out in Juba on 15 December 2013 marked the beginning of a violent civil war. At the time, South Sudan already had some of the worst development indicators globally, and NGOs were playing an important role in the delivery of basic services. The conflict took resident international NGOs – many of which were focused on development activities – by surprise. Expatriate staff were out of the country for the holiday, and within hours most of the others had evacuated. National NGOs were badly affected; offices were looted, South Sudanese aid workers were executed, vehicles were taken and borehole machines broken. National NGO staff, feeling abandoned by their international counterparts, describe how they 'woke up one day and everything had changed'.

1 *Missed Out: The Role of Local Actors in the Humanitarian Response in the South Sudan Conflict*, commissioned report by a consortium of international NGOs, April 2016.

In Juba, where the crisis first hit, South Sudanese NGOs and individual aid workers responded when and where they could. Interventions were informal and ad hoc. Theso and Healthlink, for example, put volunteer doctors into the hospitals in Juba, took water tankers to affected communities, collected the wounded and removed dead bodies from the street. In Bor in Jonglei State, one national organisation ran cash distributions for fleeing communities. Across the country, local Red Cross groups began to register missing children and identify bodies. Church leaders sheltered tens of thousands of people in their compounds, sleeping across gateways to prevent the entry of armed soldiers and negotiated food supplies from local business owners and NGOs.

Within days cluster meetings resumed and national NGOs attended to help coordinate the formalised response. The humanitarian priorities were to address food insecurity and malnutrition, prevent the spread of cholera and other communicable diseases, and provide protection. Yet humanitarians struggled to scale up the response, unable to reach many of the worst-affected areas and hampered by a lack of preparedness.

Capacity for what?

In interviews, national organisations felt they were unfairly regarded as having low capacity. They had been contracted to conduct activities for UN organisations and international NGOs, but often felt excluded from funding, coordination and decision-making. Interviewees from international NGOs often believed that capacity was uniform across national organisations, despite the fact that they represent a diverse group of 168 national organisations within the NGO Forum, alongside a plethora of other community-based and faith-based organisations and civil society groups. These groups play different roles within the humanitarian response.

Group 1: National NGOs with funding over $1 million. Seventeen South Sudanese organisations receive funding through the Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF). These are large, 'professional' organisations, such as Nile Hope and Healthlink, which are able to work across multiple states and sectors. They model their operations on those of international NGOs and often employ skilled technical staff from other countries.

Group 2: National NGOs active in the Cluster System. This small group of 20 organisations have projects registered with the clusters, implement projects for international agencies and are striving to professionalise in order to attract funding.

Group 3: Implementing partner national NGOs. A significant cohort of approximately 80–100 organisations do not receive any direct funding, but partner with, or are contracted by, UN agencies and some international NGOs. World Food Programme (WFP) food distributions in particular rely on a broad swathe of national partners able to access remote and inhospitable locations. Prior to 2013 most of the organisations in this group

had experience of development programming, but only limited exposure to humanitarian work. Funding challenges particularly frustrate this group: most aspire to receive CHF funding in order to achieve greater financial security.

Group 4: Community Based Organisations and churches. An estimated 150 organisations operate at the state level. Most are not part of the international humanitarian architecture, and receive limited formal funding, often via small partnerships with international NGOs. They include women's groups, small faith-based groups and civil society organisations addressing human rights issues. In opposition areas, many of these organisations have closed because they are unable to access government registration offices. For example, the number of organisations in Leer fell from 29 in 2013 to four in 2015.

In 2015, the NGOs in Group 1 received 1% of the total funding allocated through the Humanitarian Response Plan.[2] The majority of organisations in Groups 2 and 3 were funded via short-term, activity-based contracts that do not support organisational costs. Without access to predictable funding, these groups struggle to build their own organisational capacity: to recruit good teams, provide staff training, strengthen processes or invest time in coordination activities.

National NGOs have argued for a fixed quota of pooled funds to be channelled directly to national organisations. In two focus groups, they described the major barriers to their participation in the humanitarian system:

1. Inadequate funding opportunities, complex funding proposal formats and the challenge of meeting the conditions attached to funding (such as audits).

2. Funding opportunities too closely linked to attendance at cluster meetings.

3. Competition between national and international organisations and prioritisation of international NGOs in funding proposals.

4. Losing staff to international NGOs that pay higher salaries.

5. Lack of funding for organisational development.

However, as national NGOs professionalise they risk losing their grassroots structures and particular approaches to accountability and access. The national NGO focal point of the South Sudan NGO Forum (one of the authors) is working to build the organisational resilience of the forum's member organisations and reduce dependence on international funding. During 2015–16, the forum created a self-assessment tool to enable organisations to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, including their level of community engagement. So far, 23 national organisations have signed up for the self-assessment. The NGO Forum will use the data to create

2 UN OCHA, *South Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan 2015*, 2014.

A member of the local Red Cross helping distribute much-needed food to vulnerable people, South Sudan.

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Box 1 National NGOs and OCHA

The South Sudan NGO Forum lobbied for OCHA and the NRC to hire a national NGO support person at the Oslo Donor Conference in May 2014. During 2015, OCHA appointed a staff member – seconded to the forum – to build the capacity of member organisations and support their participation in coordination mechanisms. The Senior National NGO Adviser (one of the authors) focused on increasing the number and quality of proposals from national organisations to the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). He wanted to ensure that national organisations would be considered for pooled funding, and that their proposals would be given proper feedback. He targeted medium-sized national organisations for further training on the Cluster System, proposal writing and proposal scoring. As a result of this engagement, CHF allocations to national NGOs increased from 8% in 2014 to 11% in 2015.

The Senior National NGO Adviser also worked to improve coordination with national actors. He accompanied national NGO representatives to cluster meetings, explained the purpose of the meetings, introduced national NGOs to funding peer-reviewers and identified an individual in each cluster to facilitate better inclusion. He identified people in the food security, nutrition and education clusters who could provide technical training and explain the use of SPHERE standards. National NGOs reported an increase in attendance during 2015, although this fell back after the role ended.

better information on organisational capacity. The forum has also convened a peer-support working group to encourage shadowing and mentoring.

Networks and surge capacity

Local networks trained by the Red Cross and Caritas were mobilised for some distributions, but in general local surge capacity was weak. For example, on the second day of the conflict an SMS message was sent (by a local staff member) to all national organisations and national staff, prompting 160 staff to present themselves as volunteers. UN agencies were struggling to manage their response to the crisis and, when given a list of volunteers' contact details, did not have the capacity to engage with or manage them. Local staff interpreted this as a snub, saying 'we felt we were not good enough to help'.

More generally, many international agencies had not prepared for the crisis by investing in strong local partnerships. There were three challenges. First, building partnerships takes time. The research for *Missed Out* found that strong humanitarian partnerships had all benefited from significant investment, including:

- Joint capacity assessments.
- Training targeted at specific staff development needs.
- Development of shared action plans.

- Shared facilities or workplaces.
- Secondment of key staff from the international to the national NGO during the first three months of response.
- Progress tracking against capacity indicators.
- Support for financial and logistical management tasks.

Second, concerns were frequently raised about the implications for humanitarian principles of partnering with local organisations during conflict. Local partners can provide significant benefits in terms of access to otherwise inaccessible communities, as well as understanding of local power structures and risks. The challenges associated with neutrality and independence – perceived or otherwise – arise as a direct consequence of this access. Nevertheless, national NGOs should consider how they can provide assurances of impartial delivery of aid and adherence to the principles, for instance by employing staff from several ethnic groups, as some of the larger national organisations in South Sudan have done. For their part, international NGOs should take greater responsibility for understanding the nuances of the context and the ethnic and sectarian landscape, whilst also building relationships with national partners from a range of interest groups. This takes time and commitment.

Third, although 40 national organisations attended cluster meetings during 2014–15, the majority of those we interviewed felt excluded or unwelcome. In particular, they struggled with the plethora of terminology, abbreviations and acronyms used in meetings. They observed that decisions were made quickly and in a cultural environment that was most comfortable for international staff. Box 1 describes how the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the NGO Forum worked to help national organisations overcome barriers to participation. However, the experience of South Sudanese organisations points to a need to make coordination forums culturally and linguistically inclusive.

Contributions to the humanitarian response

Despite these challenges, national NGOs made significant contributions to the humanitarian response, most notably in terms of:

- Relevance: Local and national organisations benefited from close proximity to disaster-affected communities, their understanding of culture and language and their sensitivity to political and social dynamics. This is especially important in a complex and polarised environment like South Sudan, where the depth of local understanding is limited by high staff turnover.
- Access: There are frequent incidents of harassment and interference, as well as violence towards aid workers, interference with assets, restrictions on movement, looting and theft. During the rainy season, huge parts of the country become impossible to reach by road.

For example, when conflict broke out in Leer in Unity State in February 2014, people fled to the bush. Staff from a national organisation, UNIDO, left with them, taking a generator and other valuable equipment. UNIDO was able to update international aid workers on humanitarian needs and arrange a drop-off point for emergency medicine.

- Trust: Protection of Civilian (POC) sites across the country house over 100,000 people. National NGOs like Nile Hope had immediate access to these sites and, within days, had established trust with at-risk civilians and set up community structures, latrines and rubbish collection.

Conclusion

The World Humanitarian Summit has promoted the local-isation of humanitarian funding. However, South Sudan high-lights the importance of stronger relationships between national and international actors, developed over a longer timeframe. In South Sudan, the most effective humanitarian partnerships are based on complementarity relationships, where the comparative advantages of national organisations are recognised and supported. Localisation of delivery requires that changes in funding be accompanied by greater support for national actors, a commitment to partnership and more inclusive coordination mechanisms.

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Organisational resilience and scaling up during a crisis: World Vision's experience in South Sudan

Jeremiah N. Young

The violence that broke out in the South Sudanese capital Juba in July 2016 resulted in the deaths of hundreds of people and the displacement of close to 40,000 within the city. In addition to the increased insecurity, Juba's strategic location as the primary transit point for all humanitarian and non-humanitarian goods and services into and across the country meant that the violence not only impacted people in Juba, but was also a shock to the country's humanitarian response system, resulting in significant setbacks to the provision of basic services country-wide in what was already considered one of the most urgent humanitarian crises in the world.

Despite the challenges, many humanitarian agencies, includ-ing World Vision (WV), maintained and, where possible, scaled up operations to address both the new needs of Juba's urban population and the needs of people indirectly affected across

the country. On 14 July, WV and its partners began their initial response in Juba, which included providing emergency nutrition screening and treatment to over 1,000 children under five on the first day, as well as other assistance, including the provision of shelter and non-food items, child protection services such as child friendly spaces and, when necessary, family tracing. Two weeks into the response, 40,000 people within urban and peri-urban Juba had been reached with lifesaving interventions, including the 28,000 already seeking shelter in the Juba Protection of Civilians (PoC) site prior to the outbreak of the violence.

This article uses an operational lens to reflect on and share WV's experiences from the July 2016 crisis in Juba. The main reflections focus on an organisation's ability to simultaneously leverage the separate and distinct benefits provided by organis-

World Vision's emergency team responding to the South Sudan crisis.
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ational structure and flexibility, not only to withstand and adapt to new circumstances brought on by a crisis, but also to scale up operations to address new and growing needs. The term 'spontaneous agility' is used to describe this ability, reflecting the links and dynamic interdependences that can be institutionalised prior to the onset of a crisis to equip organisations like WV to respond better in similar circumstances.

Structure and flexibility

WV's response in Juba was in part predetermined by several organisational approaches and structures mandated within the WV Global Partnership. The first was the organisational requirement for staff to undertake hostile environment awareness training (HEAT), and for their activities to be informed by a full-time security manager located in the Juba office. This anticipatory approach to security management meant that informed decisions specific to security could be made by WV management at the national, regional and global level, for example to decide whether or not to evacuate staff. A second example was WV's Emergency Management System (EMS), which provides a uniform, adaptable framework for structuring the functions, roles, responsibilities and performance requirements necessary for an emergency response. In the case of WV's response in July, the EMS was supplemented by sector-specific guidelines such as the Food Resource Manual (FRM), which provided guidance on assessing and responding to food needs with a variety of interventions. Having multiple staff experienced with the

procedures for these interventions, as per the guidance in the FRM, allowed WV and its partners to mount a swifter, multi-location and often multi-sector response within urban Juba. However, this sometimes came at the cost of poorer monitoring and evaluation, including the ability to accurately count beneficiaries due to a lack of staff.

However, WV also found that its global systems, structures and processes can reduce flexibility to address issues that that are context-specific and outside of WV's control, such as increased insecurity, bureaucratic impediments and general logistical challenges associated with working in a conflict zone. It was, for example, difficult to apply global processes and guidelines that had originally been designed for operations in less fragile contexts to mitigate against the risk of fraud, ensure value for money and be accountable to beneficiaries. This was particularly evident with regard to the procurement process, which requires three bids prior to contracting services such as drivers, buying equipment and supplies or chartering flights. However, WV's offices located in the most fragile contexts allow senior management the ability to waive or circumvent some systems and processes which can slow down activities in what are very fluid situations, thus making them more flexible to the changing context.

Spontaneous agility

While recognising the need for both institutionalised struc-ture and flexibility, WV's ability to go beyond withstanding

the July 2016 shock and display the agility to scale up despite having to face new and more difficult circumstances largely emerged organically and, to some degree, spontaneously. WV South Sudan identified four specific aspects that would enable even more agile programming during crisis situations if invested in further.

A holistic approach to emergency programming

WV South Sudan maintained a broad and holistic approach to emergency programming in the lead-up to the July response, allowing the organisation to engage different sector advisors across a large spectrum of needs. At one of WV's first responses, at St. Terresa Kator in urban Juba, the focus was on providing emergency nutrition screening and treatment for under-fives. However, having sector leads for child protection at the National Office provided an opportunity to provide some family tracing services, set up child-friendly spaces and distribute non-food items (NFIs) at the same time, which was more efficient and effective than doing this separately and/or in different locations.

Building and leveraging strategic relationships

For WV one key aspect of the response in Juba was the ability to work with partners with whom the organisation had pre-established, strategic relationships. This included longstanding relationships with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), both in the country and globally. Both WV and WFP had prior knowledge and experience of each other's abilities, systems and processes, enabling quicker access to each other's resources during the crisis. For example, food and nutrition supplies from WFP and UNICEF were more quickly handed to WV as a pre-existing partner, eliminating what would have otherwise been a steep learning curve and contributing to significantly faster response times.

The other key aspect was regular communication between peers, including through regular involvement in the Cluster System. While the national and sub-national Cluster System helped provide a platform for collaboration to some degree ahead of the July violence, the crisis has shown the need for more intentional and strategic bilateral relationship-building with other organisations seeking to improve supplementary and develop complementary interventions.

Similar, but distinct from, the more formal relationships described above were partnerships with the local community, specifically community-based leadership structures and faith leaders. WV's position as a faith-based organisation with pre-existing relationships with churches and community-based groups within Juba provided a level of trust that enabled more efficient and effective interventions during the crisis. As the vast majority of displaced people were in urban Juba, churches and other faith-based and community-based locations were key sites for those seeking shelter. During the early days of the fighting, WV staff remained in close contact with a network of individuals in those locations, which provided key information to track the flow of displaced people. These relationships were again leveraged to expedite the first needs assessments and

organise, plan and carry out interventions at these locations. Relationships with key community stakeholders also helped WV to manage beneficiary expectations; for instance, church leaders understood that WV did not have enough supplies for everyone, and as trusted figures relayed this message on to prospective beneficiaries in order to manage expectations.

Information management for decision-making

The July crisis showed that managing the flow of information is essential, so that all staff, but particularly senior leaders at the national, regional and global levels, were provided the opportunity to make informed decisions as rapidly as possible. An individual dedicated to this task was considered 'essential staff', and was therefore not evacuated. This is important in that, despite having institutionalised this position to some degree, factors outside of WV's control meant that senior leadership had to act outside of the systems and structures in place and create a more ad hoc function when the crisis broke out. Their role was to engage with sources of information, compile needs assessments and provide analysis of the context, which was used first and foremost to keep WV's senior leadership informed of the evolving situation, while also engaging with external stakeholders such as the media and donors. This was a crucial element recognised by the leadership as a low-cost high-impact mechanism for making difficult decisions more quickly and with more confidence, such as decisions regarding who, when and where to evacuate staff from Juba and other field locations, and if, when and where WV could expand operations.

Flexible funding mechanisms

Despite having contingency plans in place, WV's ability to operationalise them and also scale up a response to address new needs in urban Juba had more to do with the organisation's ability to access fast and flexible funding (both internal and external). Several WV National Offices located in the most fragile contexts have access to at least one of two different internal flexible funding mechanisms. The Fragile Context Special Fund provides an annual allocation of funding to cover the higher operational costs associated with an established presence in a fragile context. However, during the violence in Juba this fund was also used to support costs associated with the evacuation of non-essential staff, thereby releasing other funds to cover costs associated with the evolving crisis, including the scaling up of WV's operations.

WV South Sudan was also able to draw on private funding raised from across the WV Global Partnership. This funding was made available quickly, allowing the office to cover unpredictable costs that went beyond existing grants and the Fragile Context Special Fund. This enabled WV's Emergency Response team to move quickly to provide emergency nutrition screening and treatment and food distributions with the resources they had at their disposal at the time, secure in the knowledge that other more restricted funding could be recouped and even leveraged later to acquire additional finance from external sources such as the START fund.

Whilst the internal funding sources available to WV during this and other crises may be unique and often not available to other organisations, the START Fund, managed by the START Network, proved a good example of a 'middle ground' approach to providing flexible funding for rapid emergency response. This multi-donor pooled fund disburses to responding agencies within 72 hours of a crisis alert through a peer reviewed mechanism. Once approved, the fund gave WV South Sudan and other applicants 45 days' worth of funding to carry out emergency nutrition, child protection and NFI interventions.

Conclusion

While the 'tyranny of the urgent' almost always takes precedence, not enough time is spent on reflection. The exercise of writing this article has made us within WV consider how we can leverage both structure and flexibility to withstand and bounce back from shocks, for instance by investing in holistic programing, a more centralised mechanism for information management for decision-making, increasing the availability of flexible resources (particularly funding, but also time) and strategic partnerships. All of these steps should be institutionalised so that, in the near- and long-term, WV's staff are better able to maximise their ability to improve the wellbeing of their beneficiaries during times of crisis.

At the same time, operational organisations like WV are significantly affected by other stakeholders, structures and flexibilities – or a lack thereof. For example, our ability to respond would be greatly enhanced if more external, flexible funding mechanisms were built into emergency and relief grants as standard, giving more organisations the capacity to respond and scale up in crises, and thus contributing to a more robust response across the humanitarian community. At the same time, the international donor community seems to be paralysed by bureaucracy and political interests that work against efforts to create more coordinated political and operational responses.

In sum, the humanitarian community in South Sudan did well during the crisis, given the time, funding and staff available in such a fluid and uncertain environment. However, we can do better. By recognising and intentionally addressing the issues identified above, stakeholders will be better equipped to maximise their ability to address the vulnerabilities experienced by children, families and communities in South Sudan, and beyond.

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Survival Kits: finding the balance between risk and reward
Laura Jones

The environment in South Sudan in the spring of 2015 created new protection challenges for both beneficiaries and humanitarians, in turn leading to problems of coordination and information-sharing. The urgent need to launch a response led to the creation of 'Survival Kits', a collection of essential items to help people survive for a week or two until they could move to a safer location where their needs could be met with more robust assistance. While the operation was innovative, the kits were probably most useful in highlighting one of the greatest challenges faced in conflict operations, namely balancing protection risks, and the related confidentiality of information, against the need for intervention. The approach also highlighted key lessons that could be applied in similar contexts, including the need to find a way to share information without compromising confidentiality, and the need to learn both from each other and from the past.

Background

Since the current crisis began in December 2013, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that over two million people have been displaced (1.6 million internally). Many more have faced food insecurity, a lack of basic services and a growing economic crisis. It is indisputable that the people of South Sudan have suffered tremendous

abuse at the hands of both the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the SPLA-In Opposition (SPLA-IO).

Between April and June 2015, the SPLA launched a campaign against the SPLA-IO in central Unity State. Attacks on civilians in central and southern Unity caused widespread displacement in Guit, Rubkhona, Koch, Leer, Panyijar and Mayendit counties, often to remote and isolated island locations. Many of the humanitarian challenges resulting from these events were typical of operations in a conflict setting, including access and how organisations were receiving and sharing critical information. Concerns over protection risks, both for civilians and local humanitarian workers, led many organisations to withdraw from established coordination structures in favour of smaller, more discreet side consultations amongst themselves. Information on what was happening at the field level was vigorously guarded by those with a field presence, for the understandable reason that sharing information could put people on the ground in jeopardy; at the same time, the resulting lack of credible information from these key locations prevented broad-based discussions around risk versus impact and prohibited inclusive operational decision-making.

In practical terms, this meant that the Inter-Cluster Working Group (ICWG), which had been established and mandated to debate overarching issues related to the response as well as

provide guidance to the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), did not have the information that would allow it to weigh the protection risks of delivering assistance against the risks to civilians associated with not doing so, or to offer alternatives to traditional response models that might reduce the risks to humanitarian staff. Instead, decision-making was outsourced to a smaller group of agencies. This group was not officially established or sanctioned and thus did not have to account for the decisions the agencies in it made. Some members of this group felt that the protection risks (as assessed by this same group) associated with intervening were too high and that any humanitarian response should be delayed, while others were frustrated by the lack of action and felt that the situation should be reviewed and discussed more broadly within the ICWG (or within the HCT at the very least), given the dire needs on the ground.

Changing approaches to assistance

The concept of Survival Kits was in many ways seen as a compromise between these two groups. The kits are designed to provide a modicum of assistance to affected people in locations that cannot or should not be reached through existing response models (i.e. rapid, mobile and static responses) due to protection concerns and severe access constraints. The kits contain a combination of loose items, primarily food security and livelihoods assistance, health and non-food items and shelter, nutrition, and water, sanitation and hygiene products.[1] It is a 'drop and go' approach that aims to reach people in volatile areas where security risks are high and there are severe protection concerns for beneficiaries and humanitarian staff.

As the kits were being developed, all the parties concerned agreed that protection had to remain the key determining factor. It was also agreed that some of the risks could be mitigated by keeping assistance packages extremely light – a maximum of 9kg – as larger, heavier kits would mean more delivery helicopters over a longer period of time and thus greater risk for both beneficiaries and humanitarians.[2] Their weight was also kept down so that beneficiaries could carry them easily while on the move to a safer location. Additionally, it was agreed that humanitarians needed to figure out ways to make the most of limited 'windows of opportunity' where access was possible. Given the air assets available, pushing for full packages of assistance would not only increase the risks to beneficiaries but also lead to missed opportunities if, for example, only one sector was able to fly its stock in the limited time period available. Thus, it was agreed that providing a

Survival Kits are offloaded from a UN Humanitarian Air Service helicopter in the Nyakni Highland.
© John Gatwich Kuol/International Rescue Committee

light, integrated package of assistance would be essential to both reducing the potential harm caused to beneficiaries and humanitarians through intervention, and to ensuring that beneficiaries were receiving the most critical items in one go.

Another critical decision was that the kits were not meant to be an exhaustive package of assistance; rather, they were intended to ensure that people had enough to tide themselves over until they could access assistance elsewhere. Concerns were also justifiably raised about distributing assistance without assessment or with very limited community consultation, particularly given the degree of aid saturation in other parts of the country. Ultimately, however, it was agreed that assumptions of need would have to be made given the extreme circumstances. Thus, the kits would be exceptionally 'exempted' from the standard processes of the response cycle, including needs assessments.

Creation and implementation was a highly consultative process, bringing in all the cluster leads, who in turn consulted with their partners on the criteria for using the modality and the contents of the kit. The relevant pipeline agencies, namely the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), were asked to dedicate stock for 30,000 kits, which would be collected and packaged by IOM and delivered to the field by the Logistics Cluster. It was agreed that the kits should only be used as a last resort, and that any request to use them would have to be approved by the ICWG.

It is important to note that similar approaches to assistance (community survival kits) were widely used during Oper-ation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) beginning in the mid-1990s.[3] Humani-

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1 Survival Kits generally consist of a seven-day ration of BP5, 18 high-energy biscuits, one fishing kit, two packs of seeds, oral rehydration salts, Aquatabs, two collapsible jerry cans, two mosquito nets, half a regular kitchen set and a large bag. In special circumstances additional items can be added provided they don't make the kits too bulky or heavy to transport and carry.

2 The Shelter-NFI Cluster and the Logistics Cluster did make an attempt to airdrop the kits, and in one instance, some months after the launch of the effort, were able to pilot the drops. Ultimately, the weight of the items and the need for specialised aircraft made continuing air drops impossible.

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3 Camilla Madsen, *Study of SCF-UK's Community Survival Kits and Their Impact on Displaced Children's Lives in the War-affected South Sudan*, 1997.

tarians on the ground during the 2015 operation were unaware of this, however, highlighting a serious gap in learning and knowledge transfer. While efforts have been made to capture the lessons from OLS, for instance by the Sudan Open Archive and the South Sudan Humanitarian Project, humanitarian staff currently in the field lack knowledge of these resources and access to (or awareness of how to access) practical operational guidance more broadly.

Results

In January 2016, the Shelter Cluster in coordination with OCHA launched a review of the Survival Kits to see if they had met their intended objective. The nature of the intervention understandably made it difficult to track many of the results (though it is worth noting that camp managers in Bentiu consistently observed a large number of arrivals carrying the kits in the aftermath of the events in Unity). Nevertheless, IOM and OCHA were able to analyse the degree to which the operation was able to take advantage of windows of opportunity and, in one case, were able to consult with beneficiaries.

The results were extremely positive. In 69% of the locations served with Survival Kits the window of opportunity to provide assistance closed immediately following the distribution, meaning that if the kits had not been used, these people would not have received basic items necessary for day-to-day survival. In a survey of beneficiaries, 50% said that they would not have had access to essential household and livelihood items had they not received the kits. All of the 67 households interviewed said that the kits had helped them to cope with living in displacement.[4] While there is no data on whether these operations led directly to civilians being targeted on account of receiving the kits, regular protection monitoring did not produce any concerns in this regard.

Lessons

Although providing packages of assistance is certainly not new to humanitarian operations, elements of the Survival Kits operation (not least the weight of the kits and the way the modality was reviewed and agreed) were innovative, and highlighted some critical process issues related to coordination, information and data sharing and knowledge transfer that are particularly relevant in light of the current conflict environments in which many humanitarians are now responding.

Coordination remains critical. Although humanitarians know this in principle, situations such as that which led to the launch of the Survival Kits operation demonstrate that coordination remains a challenging endeavour, particularly in cases where protection concerns are at the forefront of the response. The core challenge is around the need to protect sensitive

information, such as individual identities and the locations of vulnerable groups. Yet at the same time it is essential that, even within sensitive environments, the right organisations have access to the right kind of information to avoid delays in critical responses. The humanitarian community should think carefully about some sort of classification system that applies a level of sensitivity to information and indicates which actors can have access to different levels, in a similar way to government national security classifications. This idea is not new – a friend was telling me the other day about IDP Vulnerability Assessment and Profiling in Pakistan which, while aimed at providing more impartial and targeted assistance, also includes an information ranking system whereby only predetermined individuals had access to certain levels of confidential information. It may be worth examining this case to see whether it is replicable in other contexts.

Sharing information, in whatever limited way, can enhance debate around critical response issues and present more innovative options. In the South Sudan example, the small group of actors that had access to information about what was happening on the ground did not necessarily have expertise in other sectors and thus were not aware of all possible intervention options, some of which could significantly reduce the degree of risk involved. As is so often the case, bringing in multiple perspectives and different areas of expertise across a variety of sectors facilitated the adoption of an innovative yet realistic approach that took into consideration the concerns of all parties involved. While the solution still involved risk, through a more consultative process the group was able to alter the risk/reward calculation to the extent that all felt comfortable moving forward with an intervention.

Lessons should be shared and communicated. Again, humanitarians know that it is good practice to conduct operational reviews, and South Sudan in many ways has done better than most at archiving information, but how can we ensure that future aid workers are aware of its existence and are making proper use of the resources available? How can we improve information exchange across countries and contexts, particularly when it comes to operations?

First, there needs to be more cross-pollination between the humanitarian and academic/policy communities; facilitating presentations by experts at the Rift Valley Institute (RVI) or the South Sudan Humanitarian Project to the ICWG, for example, might be a useful first step in raising awareness about existing resources.[5] It is worth noting that OCHA in South Sudan is currently working on developing briefing packages for incoming humanitarian staff, which in addition to an overview of the current operation could also be used to promote available resources, not only for South Sudan but also for other countries; one example is the Humanitarian Practice Network, which can provide guidance from other

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4 IOM, *Review of Survival Kits – South Sudan 2015*, https://southsudan.iom.int/media-and-reports/other-reports/review-survival-kits-south-sudan-2015.

5 South Sudan Humanitarian Project: http://southsudanhumanitarianproject.com/.

contexts. Another idea might be to create registers of people for key protracted crises (e.g. South Sudan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia) who have worked in these countries and can mentor incoming staff, or at least make themselves available to answer questions about the response and/or sources of information from other countries that might be of use. Some of the global clusters have begun to do this, but the practice does not appear to be consistent. Finally, and this is likely to be most important, more engagement is almost always needed with local staff, many of whom have been involved in humanitarian operations for decades and can share critical information on successes and failures. The critical point is that the mechanisms for information exchange may exist, but we as a community need to take a closer look at how we are utilising them.

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Education development in a fragile environment: lessons from Girls' Education South Sudan

Emma van der Meulen and Akuja de Garang

Girls' Education South Sudan (GESS) was designed in 2012 during a period of great hope and optimism for newly independent South Sudan. The programme represents a significant investment (£60 million) by the UK Aid in increasing girls' enrolment, retention and completion rates, and improving learning outcomes in primary and secondary schools nationwide. South Sudan has some of the lowest educational indicators in the world, in particular when it comes to the education of girls. At independence in 2011, an estimated 90% of women were illiterate (male illiteracy rates were estimated around 70%).

The main barriers to girls' education are poverty, socio-cultural norms and lack of education provision. The GESS programme addresses these barriers through activities designed to increase awareness of, and support for, girls' education; create effective partnerships between the government and local organisations around a community-based school improvement programme; and increase knowledge of what works in promoting girls' education. Activities include local-language radio programmes and community mobilisation, school grants, cash transfers to girls, training for education managers and teachers, research studies and the establishment of the South Sudan School Attendance Monitoring System (SSSAMS).[1]

GESS was officially launched in April 2013. The following December, eight months after the programme began, violence erupted in the capital Juba and quickly spread to other parts of the country. The crisis posed an immediate challenge for GESS implementation. Even so, at the time of writing the programme's management structure is still intact, and the GESS staffing base has grown from 80 to nearly 300 people, working in over 3,000 schools across South Sudan benefiting 570,000 girls and 791,000 boys with school grants, reaching over 180,000 girls with cash transfers and 2 million adults with radio programmes. By contrast, education-oriented programmes funded by USAID and the European Union (EU) have all closed down, prematurely in our view.

Management and monitoring

The GESS programme adopted a decentralised, localised management and implementation structure in recognition of the logistically and demographically diverse nature of South Sudan. The Secretariat based in Juba subcontracted one implementing partner NGO per state in 2013, called 'State Anchors', based on their track record in education programme management.[2] These NGOs in turn established relationships with school managers, teachers and local administrators in their counties, and at state level with ministries of education and finance. Many organisations were already members of the Education Cluster and are participating in Cluster coordination meetings at national and state level.

Data collected by State Anchor staff and education administrators is uploaded on SSSAMS, an online database that enables remote access to information on school enrolment, attendance, capitation grants and cash transfers. Community mobilisation officers and county liaison officers all received training early on in the programme, and were equipped with mobile monitoring tools. The local knowledge of State Anchor staff, coupled with innovative remote management and monitoring technology, has advanced the programme tremendously. Local knowledge and real-time data informed risk assessments and mitigation measures, and planning and implementation at all levels.

Flexible programme strategies

Flexible and adaptable programme strategies have been a core factor in GESS' ability to continue to operate during the

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1 GESS is implemented by a consortium led by Mott MacDonald, and including BBC Media Action, Charlie Goldsmith Associates and Winrock International.

2 In some cases NGOs at state level have formed consortia with other NGOs to enable coverage of all counties in a state. In this article 'states' refers to the (former) ten states of South Sudan.

Schoolgirls in Bangasi Primary School in Yambio (November 2016). This school has received annual school grants through GESS since 2014.
© Paul Black

conflict. As a development programme, GESS was designed to support education systems and structures through a systemic, nationwide approach in partnership with the government, and capacity-building and a high degree of ownership by the government at all levels was envisioned from the start. As the conflict unfolded, it was important for the programme to remain strictly non-political. The programme management team had to manage and mitigate political risks, including the possibility that support to contested areas was opposed or blocked by the programme's government counterparts. This was done by adopting 'Do No Harm' and 'Equity' as main operating principles.

School grants to conflict-affected areas

A critical component of GESS is managing and administering the first publicly funded primary school grants in the history of South Sudan. Engagement with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance at an early stage in the programme secured a commitment to include funding (up to £12m) for all primary school capitation grants in the government's education budget in the financial year 2013/2014, with an agreement in principle to maintain or even increase this funding in future years. Although the outbreak of conflict has put a strain on the government's budget, as a result of close engagement by the donor and programme team the first-ever primary school capitation grants were paid out in April 2014. Secondary schools also received their first grants, funded by UK Aid and paid by GESS directly to their school bank account.

In 2014 the conflict was concentrated in the Greater Upper Nile region. As a nationwide programme, and abiding by the Equity principle, GESS had to find ways of providing support to school communities in the region. Many communities were displaced and a number of schools had been destroyed or were occupied by armed forces. Most banks had closed, which meant that schools in the region could not access grants in the same way as schools elsewhere that had opened bank accounts as one of the criteria to qualify for the grant. The Ministry of Education publicly agreed that all children in South Sudan had an equal right to education, but did not have mechanisms in place to deliver government funds to primary schools in opposition-held areas. Although several options were considered, including in-kind support to schools and girls in areas under opposition control, a uniform approach was finally deemed most appropriate. GESS obtained approval from the Ministry of Education for the temporary funding of primary school grants in opposition areas, with DFID's authorisation.

In Unity State, funds for primary schools in government-held areas had not reached schools due to abrupt governance changes which left a vacuum in state structures. Making payments in opposition areas, while schools in government-controlled areas were deprived of funds, could further aggravate divisions and conflict in the state. Moreover, GESS project staff could be perceived as taking sides in the conflict when delivering funds only to certain counties. GESS therefore suggested, as an exceptional case, funding 58 primary schools grants in government-controlled areas as well, with payments in both government and opposition areas made simultaneously. State Anchor staff played an effective role in the delivery of this support by adopting a conflict-neutral and conflict-sensitive approach in their relations with education officials.

In 2016, the worsening economic crisis required additional adaptations. In early 2016, the effective value of the budget of the Ministry of Education fell drastically as the South Sudanese Pound (SSP) depreciated. The funds for the payment of capitation grants for primary schools were therefore no longer sufficient or unavailable. GESS, with the agreement of DFID and the South Sudan government, agreed to fund grants for all approved primary schools, as well as the secondary schools that had been supported from the start of the programme. In addition, as a response to the inflation that was reducing the effective value of teachers' salaries, schools were allowed to use a higher proportion of their capitation grant to support teacher incentives, for both volunteers and teachers on the government payroll. This has ensured that funds continue to reach schools during an extremely difficult year for South Sudan. Challenges remain: for example, as a result of inflation schools are not able to purchase everything they have budgeted for as market prices continue to rise.

Serving internally displaced people: the case of Mingkaman

Another example of how GESS adapted to deal with the humanitarian crisis is the case of Mingkaman IDP camp in (former) Lakes State. At the height of the crisis humanitarian partners provided extensive support and invested considerable funds to ensure access to basic services. The situation eventually stabilised and funding and attention were directed to areas with more acute and severe needs. This created a gap in service provision for a community likely to remain in displacement for the foreseeable future. GESS therefore worked with humanitarian partners to develop a transition plan to ensure that services transitioned smoothly from humanitarian interventions to longer-term development interventions. These interventions are also done in consultation with and consideration for the host community. These included the possibility of expediting capitation grants to schools in the area to enable them to set up permanent school structures in place of temporary learning places. In addition, existing schools are allowed to use a higher proportion of capitation grants for the construction of additional classrooms to accommodate pupils from the displaced community.

This example demonstrates how the programme worked at the intersection of humanitarian and development aid in conflict-affected areas. Finding short-term solutions to delivering support to schools necessarily required flexibility and adaptation, without compromising too much on the longer-term objectives of supporting and developing a functional education system.

Tailored approaches to behaviour change and outreach

In responding to the particular needs of communities affected by conflict, behavioural change communication activities were also adapted to suit the changed context. The radio programmes

GESS produced normally focused on topics such as the role of parents in their children's education, how to budget for education and how communities can contribute to the effective management of their children's schools. In conflict settings, where communities are displaced and have experienced trauma, these topics were found to be too far removed from their reality and not immediately pertinent. GESS has therefore adapted programmes by including topics such as how to stay motivated to pursue education despite hardship, what parents need to consider when sending their children to school during crisis and how teachers can deal with potential tensions among pupils from different ethnic backgrounds. All programmes are produced with careful sensitivity and consideration for the context and with respect for all South Sudanese equally. Midline research in 2016 showed that the programme has an audience reach of 2m and a regular reach of 1.6m, suggesting that the programme is not only popular, but also engages listeners, who continue to tune in.

Adapting to spikes in conflict

Since late 2015 outbreaks of conflict in previously peaceful areas have become increasingly common, posing new challenges to GESS implementation. The programme has responded by relocating staff to follow displaced communities and by adjusting the timing of activities. Since December 2015, a more recent insurgency has affected nearly all rural areas of Wau County in Western Bahr el Ghazal, an area previously less affected by conflict. As a result, 31 schools formally relocated to Wau Town. GESS county-based staff in Wau Town and Wau County supported these schools in the process of formally registering with the county authorities, and the schools started operating from three 'learning centres'. GESS staff also formally relocated to Wau municipality, where they were reassigned to support the displaced schools. The schools therefore continued to benefit from the GESS' School Governance training programme, and support and training for Payam Education Supervisors also continued. The schools were also supported by GESS to follow up on their capitation grants and cash transfers to eligible girls, despite being displaced.

Parts of Western Equatoria were also affected by conflict in late 2015, when payment of cash transfers to girls in upper primary and secondary schools was scheduled. GESS remained in close contact with the State Anchor during this period, and extended the deadline for approval of girls for cash transfers to accommodate delays in collecting data due to the conflict. GESS agreed to payments for these girls at the start of the 2016 academic year, when access had improved. As a result of this flexibility, over 8,000 girls who may otherwise have missed out still received their cash transfer.

Conclusion

Education development remains fundamental to the socio-economic progress of South Sudan. This case study of GESS

is an example of how to preserve long-term objectives in development programming whilst adapting to conflict realities and creating links with humanitarian partners. GESS recognises the importance of linking development and humanitarian interventions to address immediate needs on the one hand, and putting in place systems for lasting impact so that the significant investments that have been made are not lost.

The programme's strength lies in its flexibility and localised approach. This is only becoming more pertinent as the country becomes increasingly fragile. Adapting to conflict, while maintaining an overall systemic approach based on equity, is possible in a multi-year nationwide development programme. Interventions can be scaled up and down in response to changes in the context, while the overall structure and objectives of the programme remain uncompromised. GESS has laid the foundation for a sectoral approach for service delivery in the education sector. The Ministry of Education will reap the benefits of this approach in more peaceful times.

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Cash in conflict: cash programming in South Sudan
Andreas Kiaby

South Sudan is facing increased violence, political chaos and a deepening economic crisis, resulting in widespread hunger and massive displacement. More than 4.8 million people are deemed severely food insecure. In a country that imports 80% of its food, has almost no formal financial institutions, 700% yearly inflation and a deepening crisis in law and order, humanitarian action is facing a true test of strength. Access is curtailed by armed groups, politics and impassable roads. Some areas can only be reached by helicopter or after more than six hours of walking from a landing strip. The hardest-to-reach areas require incredibly expensive food-drop programmes to meet even the most basic needs.

The World Humanitarian Summit pledged that we change people's lives and end humanitarian needs. Ending need requires reinforcing local systems, anticipating crises and transcending the humanitarian–development divide. In the consultations around the Summit, cash transfer programming was highlighted as one of the strongest vehicles for doing this, but more concrete steps were left out of the final report.

In areas where markets are functioning, people say that they prefer cash rather than in-kind support because cash is more flexible and can be used to cover immediate needs to buy food, recover lost assets and prepare for hardship ahead, such as a lean or rainy season. South Sudan brings some clear suggestions on how cash-based programming can put action behind the words and show how local systems can be reinforced and resilience strengthened, while at the same time offering more concrete lifesaving support.

Implementing cash programmes

Cash transfers still constitute a relatively small proportion of humanitarian aid in South Sudan: currently 8% of the total funding of the Food Security and Livelihoods (FSL) Cluster goes through cash and voucher programming, mainly in internal displacement and refugee camps.

DanChurchAid (DCA) has been working with vouchers for food assistance in South Sudan for years, but in 2016 switched to unconditional cash transfers. The motives for doing so are that unconditional/unrestricted cash transfers are faster to set up, respond to a broader set of needs and are better suited to a situation where beneficiaries and traders frequently move. Equally important, unrestricted cash is DCA's default modality as it best supports dignity and offers the greatest range of benefits. In 2017, DCA hopes to reach more than 60,000 people with this form of assistance.

DCA and its partners start cash transfer programmes by defining the needs of target populations together with the community, and then deciding whether people can buy what they need at reasonable prices, in the right quantities, at the right quality and in a safe manner. If the answer is yes, then the programme can move ahead. Community groups are established to help refine vulnerability and targeting criteria, and beneficiaries are identified and registered very much like any other distribution, with the slight addition that beneficiaries should be within an acceptable distance of markets. Regular discussion with key community authorities and traders' unions ensures that traders do not increase prices to unacceptable levels, and that markets are stocked prior to a distribution. After distributions, local staff monitor prices and restocking trends, and check whether beneficiaries were able to spend the cash safely, and in a way that benefited the household. Community consultations determine when, where and over how many rounds the total grant will be distributed. The total grant is calculated as a percentage of the minimum expenditure basket, taking food, education and other expenses into account and adjusting for the target population's existing coping strategies.

DCA and its partners use digital tablets to collect market data and conduct baselines on household food insecurity and how households use markets to meet their needs. In post-distribution monitoring beneficiaries are asked how satisfied

they are with the distribution process, how they used the cash grant and whether it created any tensions or protection risks within the household or community. This data is analysed in near real-time through software such as MagPi, and if needed changes can be made before the next distribution.

In addition to distributing cash, humanitarian agencies are increasingly using vouchers for fishing kits, seeds and tools, shelter materials and other basic items, in part to encourage local traders to procure and move humanitarian assistance items. By agreeing with traders, who often have connections to trader networks in neighboring countries, what, where and when to deliver goods, humanitarian agencies are relying on private entrepreneurship to deliver assistance. This frees up time and resources within humanitarian agencies to concentrate on targeting the most vulnerable, monitoring and community engagement.

People want cash, and spend it wisely when they get it

More than 90% of people asked in DCA surveys in South Sudan clearly said that they preferred cash to in-kind food assistance. Recipients echo many of the global arguments in favour of cash assistance – it allows for more choice; it can be saved and transported more easily during displacement; it can be used for more purposes. Almost all recipients spend their money on food and basic goods (soap, utensils), with smaller amounts going on smaller assets (animals), business investments, paying school fees and medical treatment. As in many global studies, there are very few reports of money being spent on alcohol or other anti-social expenditures, although there are often relatively large expenditures on things that are seen as having great social importance – such as sugar, because who would dream of not having sugar to sweeten a guest's tea?

Markets matter

Markets matter: not in themselves, but because without markets, cash transfers make no sense. Cash transfer programmes are only appropriate if people can buy food, essential goods and services in the right quantities and qualities and in a safe manner. This requires at least a partially functioning market. Food security and livelihood organisations are working with the World Food Programme (WFP) to monitor markets and identify opportunities for a market-based response. Markets are assessed by looking at the number of traders, how often they restock, their ability to move goods between markets, price trends and the availability of key commodities.

Even in the deep bush people come together at established or impromptu marketplaces – sometimes even negotiating temporary ceasefires or crossing conflict lines to go to the market. In one county in Jonglei State, warring factions have agreed that children and women can cross conflict lines safely to shop at local markets. In another area, in Central Equatoria, warring tribes put their weapons aside to attend massive cattle

People queuing with their cash vouchers outside a bank in South Sudan.
© Dauda Koroma/Oxfam

markets. In Upper Nile State, different tribes from Sudan and South Sudan meet to trade and barter crocodile skins, dried fish, soap and grains, using several different currencies. While it is not always the case that markets survive despite conflict, it does show that a market-based approach to assistance can support local social cohesion. In many areas where we work, most households buy more than 60% of the food they eat at market.[1] Markets are absolutely key to whether people have enough to eat, and are also significant places where they can come together peacefully.

Local markets function, but not always according to the standards defined in cash transfer guidance. There are often very few traders and the supply of goods is low or irregular. Traders generally report that the main constraints to increasing inventory include lack of financial capital, compounded by a lack of access to credit; customers' low purchasing power; price variability dependent on seasonality (prices for some goods tend to rise during the rainy season due to reduced supply); and external shocks, such as flooding and conflict. Inflation and the sharp depreciation of the South Sudanese Pound (SSP) are also major concerns, for traders and their customers alike. Since the SSP was unpegged from the US dollar in December 2015 the South Sudan government has reported inflation of over 700%. Transport costs have also increased sharply due to the disruption of trade routes, and the conflict has created considerable difficulties in accessing fuel supplies.

1 Recent market assessments and post-distribution monitoring to be published on http://fscluster.org/south-sudan-rep.

These blockages are preventing traders from stocking up on food and non-food items for their businesses. When traders do manage to stock goods, customers cannot afford the high prices. Although they are aware of demand in the market, traders lack the financial resources to resupply and customers lack purchasing power to buy goods in the market. Nevertheless, traders have shown willingness and creativity in responding to increased demand. By boat, motorcycle, truck or chartered plane, goods are transported or smuggled across national borders and conflict lines, often at night. Sometimes traders manage to deliver goods, at a profit, to places humanitarians often struggle to access, and often at a lower cost.

Direct cash transfers to traders can also support market functionality. In its programmes in Unity State, for example, some organisations have been giving cash grants to traders to help them cover rising transport costs, allowing them to bring more goods to the market. It may also be possible to cushion traders from the crushing effects of inflation by redeeming vouchers in US dollars, which gives traders access to hard currency to buy goods in neighbouring countries where the SSP has become too weak. In some areas, South Sudanese traders have resorted to buying cattle with SSP, and then transporting the animals to neighbouring countries where they are used as currency to buy goods and food. In general, organisations using cash or vouchers try to reduce the time between the exchange from US dollars to SSP and the actual distributions to minimise the amount the SSP drops in value.

Some things money can't buy

Of course, some things cannot be bought with money. In a place like South Sudan, where basic services are few and far between, you cannot really buy access to healthcare or clean water. Money also usually cannot buy you protection from the gunmen and rampant violence that plague South Sudan. So, cash transfer programmes are by no means a silver bullet.

However, livelihoods and cash grants can help people towards better self-protection strategies. Women are using cash to invest in businesses, overwhelmingly in order to escape daily firewood collection. This takes all day from morning to night and can pose a major threat to women's safety as they are forced to venture further into unknown territory. They move away from well-trodden routes and familiar bush into alien land and unknown people, uncertain who or what lies in their path. Based on our experience, many women who collect firewood said that they felt scared travelling further and further into the bush – sometimes for more than three hours from the point of the last collection.

Miriam is 25 years old and heavily pregnant – she doesn't receive as much as the other women for one load of firewood as she cannot carry as much as the others, although she spends just as much time in search of the firewood – 'we need to walk three hours to find fresh firewood, and we are afraid of attacks. We leave at 6am and return home at 9pm'. Miriam relies completely on WFP air drops, and has to go in search of firewood to generate even minimal income as her husband is currently unemployed. She will use the cash transfer to invest in a business to escape firewood collection and generate more money.

Cash transfer programmes, indeed the whole monetary economy, are facing severe challenges. With a worsening economic crisis, there will be increased attempts by powerful elites and people with guns to capture the few resources that are left in the country – whether it is cash or in-kind. This requires increased engagement with community members, armed interlocutors and proximity to people in need to constantly analyse that assistance is not doing more harm than good. DCA and partners do this through regular community discussions as well as by asking specific questions in our post-distribution monitoring around security, access and conflict dynamics.

Local actors and the humanitarian system

Because of the massive logistical challenges and high costs of operating in South Sudan, most national and local actors find themselves as implementing partners of UN organisations or large NGOs. Many local actors find it difficult to access resources directly for their programmes, and do not have the necessary logistical pipelines to deliver assistance. However, they often have greater local access and acceptance in the communities where they work. This tension between those who have resources and those who are close to the people in need of them is not a new one. Cash might, however, be a disruptive power in this hierarchy, as it can be delivered quickly and cheaply by local actors. As an example, it will be much easier for a local church organisation with networks in Juba to transfer money to constituencies in Upper Nile than if the same local organisation were to buy and transport food. We are seeing local groups engage traders in border regions to deliver food using market networks rather than the traditional means of humanitarian assistance. With cash transfer programming picking up in scale and interest, it might be a refreshing question for humanitarian actors to ask 'why not cash, and why not now'?

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Increasing agricultural production and food security in South Sudan: combining Lead Farmer Field Schools and vouchers

Detlef Barth and Matthias Oesterle

The development of productive and sustainable agriculture in South Sudan has been severely constrained by persistent armed conflict, post-harvest losses, livestock diseases, lack of tools and machinery and weak institutions. As a result, the country's agricultural production is far from sufficient to feed the growing population, including the many internally displaced people (IDPs) forced from their homes by armed conflict and violence in recent years.

As part of the Special Initiative Refugees of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) has since November 2014 been implementing a programme for the rehabilitation and stabilisation of livelihoods in the Equatorias and in the Greater Pibor Administrative Area. The programme has been working with small farmers, livestock herders and fishermen to increase production and foster food security. In the so-called 'greenbelt' of the Equatorias – a fertile region with considerable agricultural potential – the programme focuses on Lead Farmer Field Schools, an innovative approach that fits with the local context and promises the best results under the circumstances. Interventions have taken place in Western, Central and Eastern Equatoria in a total of 24 *payams* and 65 *bomas*.

Adapting conventional Farmer Field Schools

The programme first started work with conventional Farmer Field Schools before shifting to Lead Farmer Field Schools. In general, Farmer Field Schools are designed to enable small farmers to acquire agricultural know-how and improved farming techniques. The farmers learn through physical participation, discussion and observation. Training takes place on demonstration plots, and once back on their fields participants are advised by extension workers from government institutions. Agricultural inputs such as seeds, hoes, barbed wire, nails for fencing and watering cans are normally distributed for free.

GIZ had previously worked with conventional Farmer Field Schools in the framework of its Development-oriented Emergency and Transitional Aid (DETA) programme in South Sudan. The focus was on the following standard topics:

- Planting in line along a rope to optimise planting distance, thus increasing the number of plants and yields, and facilitating weeding.
- Sowing only one seed per planting hole to avoid competition for nutrients and provide optimal space and access to nutrients for each seedling. This should result in strong and healthy plants and good yields.

- The introduction of new varieties that are more virus-resistant or mature faster than the usual ones.

In the current GIZ programme in the Equatorias, farmers didn't really adopt the new techniques introduced to them on the demonstration plots, in part because of the poor performance of extension workers and farmers' generally sceptical attitude towards government representatives. Farmers also considered the field schools to be 'owned' by GIZ and the extension workers, not by themselves. Although GIZ provided training for the extension workers they remained largely ineffective.

Lead Farmer Field Schools

Against this background, in 2015 the GIZ programme abandoned the conventional approach in favour of Lead Farmer Field Schools. The new approach focuses on farmer-to-farmer training and does not involve agriculture extension services provided by the government. From the beginning the programme made sure that members of host communities, IDPs, returnees and refugees were involved in the Lead Farmer Field Schools as direct and indirect beneficiaries.

A Lead Farmer Field School is headed by a lead farmer elected by peers in their village on the basis of their experience and proven record of good agricultural practices and results. Instead of working with demonstration plots and extension workers – as in conventional Farmer Field Schools – the lead's farm is the workplace where farmers meet and learn from the lead farmer and from each other.

Cooperation between GIZ, the lead farmers and the community is based on a Letter of Agreement (LoA) defining both the contribution of GIZ and the contribution of the lead farmers. The LoA also specifies the conditions under which the lead farmer passes assistance from GIZ on to the other participants in the field school. GIZ supports the lead farmers mainly with capacity-building measures and agricultural inputs, including seeds, tools and machinery. Lead farmers are trained by GIZ, and in turn train other small farmers. Lead farmers are also obliged to open their fields for project monitoring and to apply improved agricultural practices, such as intercropping.

The training services that GIZ offers are free. However, to strengthen ownership inputs are tied to a contribution (30–50% in cash of the value of the inputs) and/or an exchange, for instance training and agro-services for other farmers in the community. Lead farmers also use the improved equipment they receive for demonstrations, and lend it to other farmers.

Agricultural service provider ploughing the fields of farmers in Morobo County, Central Equatoria.
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The GIZ programme facilitates links between lead farmers and resource providers such as oxen team owners, tractor owners, seed traders, agro-input dealers and transporters. The entire farming community benefits from these links, which are expected to become long-term relationships contributing to a sustainable increase in agricultural production.

Vouchers

In addition to the Lead Farmer Field Schools, GIZ supports farmers in the greenbelt with vouchers for good-quality seeds and agricultural services. The voucher system also strengthens the local private sector and increases purchasing power by creating work opportunities (bush clearance, fencing, ploughing). During the previous DETA intervention, GIZ just distributed seeds and tools. However, due to the large quantities required local traders couldn't participate in the tender, with negative effects for their businesses and local seed production in general. In contrast, the voucher approach deliberately strengthens local businesses and seed production. It also improves the relationship between farmers and seed suppliers and supports customary arrangements, enabling smallholders to increase their farm-land and productivity by building on existing practices and relationships.

In 2015–16, GIZ, in cooperation with Welthungerhilfe, distributed around 10,000 vouchers with a total value of €400,000 to 420 subsistence farmers in the Equatorias. This resulted in 210 hectares of additional cultivated farmland, equivalent to an additional total cereal production of 600–700 metric tons.[1] Voucher recipients belong to small-scale farming households that own less than five *feddans* (one *feddan* = 60m x 70m) of farmland and are food insecure, i.e.

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1 Vouchers were preferred to cash on the assumption that recipients would spend at least a portion of the cash assistance they received for purposes that would not have directly supported their agricultural productivity.

the most vulnerable house-holds. Lead farmers are involved in the selection process, and farmers with more than 2.5ha of farming land are excluded. Vouchers are tailored to the production constraints and barriers of the smallholders. The aim was not to initiate job-creation measures, but rather to provide opportunities for needy small-scale farmers (especially female-headed households) to develop their subsistence farming into more business-oriented production.

Vouchers were provided for a range of purposes, including bush clearance, fencing, ploughing (tractor or oxen) and seeds. In principle, recipients contribute 25–30% of the value of the voucher, although for expensive services like ploughing the contribution is lower. Payments are only made when the service is fully completed in terms of quantity and quality. This has to be confirmed by the beneficiary as well as by the lead farmer or agricultural staff from the programme. Each voucher is registered with a number and the name of the beneficiary, and there is a maximum of two vouchers per recipient per season. Attempts to abuse the system immediately lead to exclusion from any further support. Although a final assessment/evaluation has not been completed yet, it is clear that counterfeiting would need considerable effort, and is very unlikely.

Challenges

Following the recent outbreak of violence in South Sudan the programme is being remotely steered from Germany, as all expatriate staff have been evacuated. Staff in Germany are in regular contact with counterparts in South Sudan via email, skype, telephone and other means, including WhatsApp. Due to insecurity many farmers in the Equatorias have left their homes and villages and sought refuge in other areas of South Sudan or in neighbouring countries. GIZ is currently conducting a situational analysis to assess how many farmers are still in place in the various project locations. Lead farmers are the main contact points for GIZ during this exercise, and are gathering information on farmers' whereabouts and the current status of agricultural production.

Conclusion

While it remains to be seen if the Lead Farmer Field School approach will have the expected positive results and a lasting impact, the approach fits with the local context, and many local stakeholders have acknowledged its effectiveness and suitability. Even under the extremely difficult circumstances that prevail in the Equatorias, activities have continued. Meanwhile, the high rate of redeemed vouchers (95%) indicates the overall success of the voucher approach.

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