

Researching livelihoods and  
services affected by conflict

# From post-conflict recovery and state building to a renewed humanitarian emergency: A brief reflection on South Sudan



Discussion Paper 1

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# About us

Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) aims to generate a stronger evidence base on how people in conflict-affected situations make a living, access basic services like health care, education and water, and perceive and engage with governance at local and national levels. Providing better access to basic services, social protection and support to livelihoods matters for the human welfare of people affected by conflict, the achievement of development targets such as the Millennium Development Goals, and international efforts at peace building and state building.

At the centre of SLRC's research are three core themes, developed over the course of an intensive one-year inception phase:

- State legitimacy: experiences, perceptions and expectations of the state and local governance in conflict-affected situations
- State capacity: building effective states that deliver services and social protection in conflict-affected situations
- Livelihood trajectories and economic activity in conflict-affected situations

The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) is the lead organisation. SLRC partners include the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) in Sri Lanka, Feinstein International Center (FIC, Tufts University), Focus1000 in Sierra Leone, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Humanitarian Aid and Reconstruction of Wageningen University (WUR) in the Netherlands, the Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research (NCCR), and the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in Pakistan.

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## 1.1 Introduction

The war between South Sudan's government and opposition forces threatens to escalate into widespread violence, further atrocities and famine. Urgent action is required from the UN Security Council and the region's Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to counter escalation, better delineate roles on the ground, and improve chances for the stuttering peace process by extending it to currently excluded constituencies.

International Crisis Group, 7 July 2014

Since December 2013 – only two and a half years after it became an independent country – South Sudan has been mired in a deep political, military, and humanitarian crisis. Heavy fighting erupted on 15 December between members of armed forces in Juba, the capital. Tensions and power struggles within the leadership ranks of the leading political party of South Sudan – the SPLM (Sudan People's Liberation Movement) – had preceded the fighting. The armed violence quickly spread to other states in South Sudan and has brought human rights violations, death, and destruction to Juba and to Jonglei, Upper Nile, and Unity States.<sup>1</sup> Within a few weeks, several thousand South Sudanese were killed. As of mid-June 2014, about 1.5 million South Sudanese are displaced either within South Sudan or as refugees in neighbouring countries; 94,000 South Sudanese are sheltering in 'Protection of Civilian' locations protected by the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS); and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs projects that around 3.8 million South Sudanese need assistance in 2014 – only half of whom are being reached.<sup>2</sup> A nationwide food security analysis led by the Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GRSS) in collaboration with development partners in June declared large parts of Unity, Jonglei, and Upper Nile States to be in a humanitarian emergency,<sup>3</sup> and the President himself has raised the spectre of famine later in the year.<sup>4</sup>

In response to the crisis, the Inter Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) began in early January to facilitate ceasefire talks between the main parties of conflict: the GRSS, led by the SPLM, and the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO). Since their onset, the Addis Ababa talks have been delayed several times. The GRSS and the SPLM/A-IO signed agreements on cessation of hostilities in January and again in May; but despite these agreements, the fighting continues and the new round of peace talks has been postponed.

This paper does not explore the background of the crisis. Many other reports have offered varying views of the events that led to the spreading violence in South Sudan. This paper is intended as a brief reflection on the current situation in South Sudan, based on meetings with GRSS, donors, humanitarian agencies, and members of South Sudanese civil society during a two-week mission by SLRC<sup>5</sup> members in mid to late June. It outlines a few observations on the current situation; the breakdown of post-conflict mechanisms that were being put in place prior to the outbreak of the current violence in December; the peace process as it currently stands; and the humanitarian response. It concludes with some reflections on the need for better information and analysis, and outlines a short-term research agenda.

## 1.2 The current situation

July and August are the height of the rainy season and the traditional 'hunger season' in much of South Sudan. Because the rains also make movement of forces harder there has been a reduction in large-scale fighting, but flooding in many of the areas where displaced people are trapped is deepening the humanitarian crisis. Despite the continuing effort to provide seeds and tools to displaced people and

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<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Watch 2014. 'South Sudan: War crimes by both sides' ([www.hrw.org/news/2014/02/26/south-sudan-war-crimes-both-sides](http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/02/26/south-sudan-war-crimes-both-sides)).

<sup>2</sup> UN OCHA 2014. 'South Sudan crisis situation report No. 40' (as of 13 June 2014).

<sup>3</sup> GRSS and FAO 2014. 'Acute Food Security Situation Overview, Integrated Phase Classification.' June 2014.

<sup>4</sup> BBC 2014. 'South Sudan President Salva Kiir warns of 'famine''. 19 May ([www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-27469954](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-27469954)).

<sup>5</sup> The Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) is a five-year research program on livelihoods and basic services in seven fragile and conflict affected states, led by the Overseas Development Institute in London. The South Sudan SLRC team is made up of researchers from the Overseas Development Institute, Tufts University, Swisspeace, the South Sudan National Bureau of Statistics and the University of Juba.

conflict-affected communities, humanitarians fear that the 2014 planting season has been missed in many conflict-affected areas and that will lead to a protracted food security crisis in the coming year. Between the fighting and the annual flooding that makes road transportation impossible for this part of the year, worries are widespread about the short-term food security status of the displaced. In South Sudan, the World Food Programme and the International Committee of the Red Cross are already deploying much of the global capacity for airdropping food aid, but it is not projected to keep up with the amount required. Road transportation of relief supplies cannot be resumed in many of the affected areas until much later in 2014. And needless to say, airdrops are an extraordinarily expensive means of delivering aid.

More generally, the current political and humanitarian crisis in South Sudan is characterised by several factors. First, there is a deep disagreement about who is to blame for the situation. None of the parties to the conflict accept blame for what happened – either for triggering the violence in December, or escalating it since. A second, related, point is that while in the post-independence era the emphasis had been on working with and building the capacity of the GRSS in the post-conflict recovery programmes funded by the international community, a gulf is growing between the international community – especially humanitarian actors – and the government. GRSS officials complain that humanitarian agencies are not accountable to the government; the humanitarians are wary of associating too closely with a party to the conflict. Third, there is a dearth of information, both current and baseline. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification analysis in May and June was starved for up-to-date information on nutritional status and mortality – usually two main pillars of that analysis.<sup>6</sup> Given both physical and political constraints on access, this situation is likely to worsen before it improves. Below the most senior levels, institutional memory in the international humanitarian community is short – staff turnover is high and many agencies report difficulty in recruiting experienced people to work in the humanitarian effort. This is exacerbated by the rift with the government and a relative side-lining of local agencies in the response to the humanitarian crisis.

Views differ widely on how international actors should most appropriately engage. The current situation is most commonly described as an acute humanitarian emergency that requires ‘all hands on deck’ for an emergency response. Many agencies however point to the potential losses in development terms in areas not affected by the conflict, and note that government services are declining in those areas as well. In brief, the conflict – and the response to the displacement caused by it – is concentrating resources away from unaffected areas of the country. *Bloomberg News* recently noted that GRSS has spent at least \$1 billion on armaments to fight the war since December 2013.<sup>7</sup> This is almost as much as the \$1.3 billion required from the international community to contain the humanitarian crisis caused by the war.

### **1.3 The conflict, the New Deal, and other post-conflict development mechanisms**

Up to the onset of the crisis in mid-December 2013, international actors emphasised post-conflict recovery and state building in South Sudan. From the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, large sums of aid were spent in South Sudan to build infrastructure, establish and strengthen government institutions, build capacity, and deliver services.<sup>8</sup> South Sudan was selected as one of the seven pilot countries for the implementation of the five Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs) introduced by the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States. In December 2012, the New Deal Fragility Assessment conducted by GRSS concluded that ‘the Republic of South Sudan (RSS) has made sufficient progress on all five PSGs since the CPA interim period and independence in July 2011

<sup>6</sup> See the IPC’s ‘South Sudan needs to urgently scale up humanitarian interventions to prevent famine’ ([www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-countries/ipcinfo-eastern-middle-africa/south-sudan/en](http://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-countries/ipcinfo-eastern-middle-africa/south-sudan/en)).

<sup>7</sup> *Bloomberg News* 2014. ‘China sells South Sudan arms as its government talks peace’ ([www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-07-08/norinco-sells-south-sudan-arms-as-chinese-government-talks-peace.html](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-07-08/norinco-sells-south-sudan-arms-as-chinese-government-talks-peace.html)).

<sup>8</sup> Between 2006 and 2013 or 2014, donors committed to spend \$7 billion in South Sudan. Government of South Sudan. 2013. ‘Republic of South Sudan Donor Book.’ Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning.

to move beyond the crisis stage of the fragility spectrum'.<sup>9</sup> However, with the outbreak of armed violence in December 2013, South Sudan returned to a crisis stage, a stage of widespread armed conflict.<sup>10</sup> The narrative about South Sudan has changed drastically. The newest state in Africa – celebrated after its independence in July 2011 – is now described as one of the most failed states in the world.

What went wrong? Did the focus on state building and recovery divert attention from the risk of renewed violent conflict? Was the international community 'blinded by optimism' or did the 'development/state building industry' need a success story, as some observers have suggested? It was widely known that tensions and power struggles within the leadership of the SPLM intensified during 2013. Yet, the international community and many South Sudanese seem to have been surprised by the violent nature of the crisis and by the speed with which armed violence spread. Sara Pantuliano has argued that the international community not only ignored evidence of the deteriorating situation before the crisis but had – ever since 2005 – neglected the political dimensions of post-civil war transformation and the complexity of the South Sudanese context. Instead, it focused on technical activities, assuming 'that greater development – improved services, infrastructure, access to food – would lead to stability and lasting peace'.<sup>11</sup> However, long before the events of December 2013, some areas of South Sudan – particularly parts of Jonglei State – had been affected by armed conflict and violence.

With the onset of the widespread, armed violence and the humanitarian crisis, the international community's attention abruptly switched from state building and recovery to protection and relief. Furthermore, the nature of the relationship of donors, international NGOs, and agencies with GRSS has drastically changed. These relationships have become difficult in view of human rights violations allegedly committed by members of the South Sudan armed forces. International actors are also wary of working closely with the SPLM/A-IO, which is also accused of having committed human rights violations. Some external actors try to avoid government institutions altogether. Others try to focus on the local level, avoiding central government as much as possible, while a third group continues to work with the government saying that they do not have a difficult relationship with it.

South Sudanese government employees criticised the practice of avoiding the state and underlined that the GRSS is still a legitimate government. Furthermore, South Sudanese and some expatriate voices warned against the risks of halting cooperation with GRSS, saying that avoiding GRSS further weakens the government and the administration – which have been negatively affected by the crisis – and further destabilises South Sudan. Due to the crisis, the state has become more fragile, oil revenues are declining, and infrastructure has been destroyed. In conclusion, external actors' views about the appropriate nature of relationships with GRSS differ widely. Yet, evidently relationships between GRSS and external actors are being renegotiated. One agency official noted: 'We are renegotiating the relationship with GRSS. We have to make a new deal' (no irony intended).

#### **1.4 The peace process in Addis Ababa**

The peace process led by IGAD has been overshadowed by delays and by violations of the agreements on cessation of hostilities. The agreement to cease hostilities signed by the GRSS and the SPLM/A-IO on 23 January was soon violated and fighting continued. A second round of meetings made little progress as the two parties in conflict disagreed over key issues, including the makeup of an interim government. The third round of meetings began, after delays, at the end of April. Under substantial international pressure, President Salva Kiir and the leader of the SPLM/A-IO, Riek Machar, signed an agreement in

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<sup>9</sup> Government of the Republic of South Sudan, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning Aid Coordination Directorate. 2012. 'Fragility Assessment. Republic of South Sudan 2012.' Draft summary results ([www.newdeal4peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/South-Sudan\\_FA-Summary\\_Draft\\_121212.pdf](http://www.newdeal4peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/South-Sudan_FA-Summary_Draft_121212.pdf)).

<sup>10</sup> International Crisis Group. 2014. *South Sudan: A civil war by any other name*. April.

<sup>11</sup> Sara Pantuliano. 2014. 'Donor-driven technical fixes failed South Sudan: It's time to get political.' Think Africa Press (<http://thinkafricapress.com/south-sudan/donor-driven-technical-fixes-failed-time-put-politics-heart-nation-building-project-kiir-machar-garang>).

Addis recommitting to the previously signed agreement on cessation of hostilities. The cessation of hostilities is to be monitored by IGAD and a verification team. The new agreement further promises to open 'humanitarian corridors.'

The armed conflict has been less volatile in recent weeks; nevertheless, fighting continues and violations of the cessation of hostilities have been reported.<sup>12</sup> Clashes are mainly concentrated in Greater Upper Nile but other areas are also affected. SPLA and SPLA-IO members have recently fought in Greater Bahr el-Ghazal and tensions have increased in parts of Equatoria as well, fostering fears that other regions of South Sudan might be destabilised.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the agreement signed in May is apparently not recognised by some senior SPLM/A-IO commanders. This raises fears that SPLM/A-IO supporters on the ground do not necessarily follow agreements signed by their leaders because they have differing aims and ambitions. Some respondents warned that violence might spread further if SPLM-IO factions start to fight each other and newly armed community self-defence groups fight among themselves and with the SPLA.

Besides the GRSS and SPLM/A-IO, other groups try to engage in the peace talks. One consists of seven of the eleven former SPLM figures who were detained in connection with the outbreak of the crisis. They did not join the armed opposition of the SPLM-IO but have tried to participate in the talks as a third block, the 'SPLM 7'.<sup>14</sup> Representatives of religious groups, community-based organisations, the 'SPLM 7,' and other political parties were invited to a 'multi-stakeholder symposium' as formal participants. With this step IGAD initiated an inclusive phase of peace talks in June.<sup>15</sup> Views about selection procedures and participation mechanisms differ. IGAD suspended the peace talks when the opposition boycotted the start of a new round in protest over the selection process and issues of inclusivity in June.<sup>16</sup> The SPLM-IO also refused to participate in the current round of peace talks that started in early August. The SPLM-IO demanded direct talks with the government and that other stakeholders including civil society representatives should only have a consultative function. The August 10 deadline - on which the parties of conflict were expected to finalize the peace negotiations and to form a transitional government - elapsed and the peace talks are currently postponed.<sup>17</sup>

The debate on federalism, which recently re-emerged but has a long history in South Sudan, causes tensions.<sup>18</sup> First, ideas about the nature and the benefit of federalism for South Sudan differ. Second, federalism is partly associated with *kokora* – the division of South Sudan in the late 1970s. The association with *kokora* fosters fears among some South Sudanese that Equatorians support federalism 'to get rid' of other South Sudanese, particularly the Dinka, in Equatoria. Third, the SPLM/A-IO took up the debate and supports federalism, whereas senior GRSS officials argue that peace and stability should be restored before adapting the political system.<sup>19</sup>

It is widely agreed that not only peace talks but also healing and reconciliation are needed to overcome the current crisis and the deep divisions that emerged between different ethnic groups. During the interim period (2005-2011), reconciliation was not emphasised strongly; this omission is seen as having fostered the outbreak of violence. The Committee for National Healing, Peace, and Reconciliation in South Sudan was established only recently (in 2013). It is led by the churches. During

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<sup>12</sup> Small Arms Survey 2014. 'Timeline of Recent Intra-Southern Conflict.' Geneva.

<sup>13</sup> International Crisis Group 2014. 'Conflict alert: Halting South Sudan's spreading civil war.'

<sup>14</sup> International Crisis Group 2014. *South Sudan: A civil war by any other name*.

<sup>15</sup> Jérôme Tubiana 2014. 'Civil society and the South Sudan crisis'.

<sup>16</sup> Sudan Tribune 2014. 'Machar writes to UN chief over stalled S. Sudan peace process'.

<sup>17</sup> Sudan Tribune 2014. 'US condemns S. Sudan's warring parties for failing to reach peace deal'.

<sup>18</sup> Sudan Tribune 2014. 'Renowned historian offers insight on demands for federalism in S. Sudan'.

<sup>19</sup> Sudan Tribune 2014. 'Greater Akobo students express support for federal system'.

the first two years of the reconciliation process broad consultations are planned based on which a national agenda for reconciliation will be developed.<sup>20</sup>

South Sudanese and expatriate observers alike express the view that the transition from relief to development should be discussed and prepared for as soon as possible. IDPs and returnees are expected to return as soon as it is safe to do so. Yet there is no sign that the conflict is coming to an end – and hence no indication that now is the time to transition away from protection and humanitarian assistance.

## **1.5 The humanitarian response**

After several years of international engagement aimed predominantly at post-conflict recovery in South Sudan, the transition back to humanitarian programming has been rapid, though not complete. But, even prior to the outbreak of violent conflict in December, many key humanitarian trends were already headed in the wrong direction. The number of people requiring food assistance had doubled from 2012 to 2013 and has since doubled again – to nearly 4.4 million in the revised plan.<sup>21</sup> Support from some donors is still split between humanitarian and development assistance, though spending on much of the latter was suspended for the first half of 2014. Other donors have emphasised mainly the humanitarian response. Prior to the outbreak of violent conflict, the UN Consolidated Appeal (CAP) had transitioned to a three-year (2014-2016) more-recovery-oriented plan, with emphasis on building resilience and developing social safety nets. The response since December has been slow to catch up with the need. The 2014 CAP of \$1.1 billion was 70% funded in December, but the expanded Crisis Response Plan of \$1.8 billion in mid-2014 still has a funding gap of nearly a billion dollars.<sup>22</sup> Whereas the pre-December 15 plan focused on rehabilitation, recovery, and resilience building, the current plan is nearly 100% focused on protecting human lives, preventing famine, and ‘averting the loss of a generation’.

Views differ widely on the likelihood of famine. The IPC analysis did not predict a famine in the coming months – the traditional ‘hunger gap’ period during the rains when neither market mechanisms nor the humanitarian effort can deliver adequate amounts of food. However, while some observers believe that at least some areas of Unity and Upper Nile would likely see famine conditions by August, others equally confidently believe that even the June IPC analysis overstated the risks. Both views underline the dearth of hard data about malnutrition and mortality in the conflict-affected areas. Efforts are underway to address the shortfall in assessment data, but are being severely hampered by both the rains and the conflict.

Even if human life can be protected in the short term – a Herculean task under current circumstances – the damage done to livelihoods systems, particularly among pastoral groups in Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile, remains unmeasured but no doubt vast. Many groups in these areas are pastoralists first, and farmers only secondarily. The extent of livestock losses is unknown, but few of the displaced have been able to keep their livestock. It isn’t known how many of the displaced have someone looking after their animals somewhere else.

There are a few bright spots – anecdotal evidence of markets that continue to function across ethnic and even battle lines to the mutual advantage of people on both sides, and a peace deal in Pibor County may enable some Murle who were displaced to Central and Eastern Equatoria and abroad to return home. Some of the larger agencies have developed an Integrated Rapid Response Mechanism that allows assessment and distribution in multiple sectors for the same populations at the same time. But the challenges are manifold. The funding situation for the response is relatively stagnant; hard

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<sup>20</sup> The committee for national healing, peace and reconciliation 2013. ‘Comprehensive strategic dimensions for healing, peace and reconciliation for all South Sudanese’. Working paper, July. Juba.

<sup>21</sup> OCHA 2014. ‘Crisis response plan.’ Juba: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, South Sudan.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.



choices were made between pre-positioning for the rainy season and meeting current demand before the rains set in, and there is still a very short-term time horizon for planning. Aid workers on the ground complain that as the humanitarian industry has professionalised, the growth of globalised standards, globalised analytical and programmatic frameworks, and globalised indicators have squeezed out the possibility for good context analysis and context-specific responses – and are at least partially implicated in the analytical ‘blind spot’ regarding the widespread outbreak of violence.

The nature of engagement between humanitarian actors and the GRSS is fraught with difficulties – only some of which are new. The history of politicisation and diversion of humanitarian assistance in South Sudan is extensive – a state of affairs that was long recognised as the status quo during the civil war and tolerated by the donors.<sup>23</sup> One observer described the relationship between western donors and the SPLA during the Sudan civil war as one of ‘you fight; we’ll look after the people’. That perspective – even if perhaps somewhat overstated in retrospect – is definitely no longer operative. Several donors have pulled back from direct engagement with the GRSS (and the armed opposition) in response to the atrocities alleged to have been committed against civilians. The GRSS is in some disarray over the response, with some denying that their ‘side’ had anything to do with the atrocities, placing the blame solely on the opposition, and some denying that the ‘rules of the game’ with donors have changed dramatically.

Yet the abrupt change with respect to accountability for assistance is notable, with some current donor field representatives blaming their predecessors for the previous lack of accountability. On the other hand, GRSS officials complain equally bitterly of a return to state-avoiding behaviour by NGOs and humanitarian agencies more generally and of lack of transparency regarding the use of donors’ funds. (Representatives of local NGOs and the church also complain that they have been largely side-lined by the humanitarian response.) Clearly, even the few international resources for social services and disaster response that had been channelled through the GRSS up to 2013 have mostly been reprogrammed through NGO or UN agencies, and the GRSS is not happy with this situation. A new NGO Bill, reportedly modelled on the Civil Society Law in Ethiopia, is on the table and has been read in Parliament several times. No one in the NGO community (international and South Sudanese) is certain of what the current version of the bill includes.

GRSS services are declining – whether because they have been starved of international resources or because GRSS budget allocations, as its oil revenues diminish, are increasingly devoted to defence, or some combination of the two.<sup>24</sup> Some international NGOs informally report an increase in demand for health and nutrition services even in areas not affected by conflict and displacement – at least in part because of a decline in government services. Nevertheless, there is still good reason for liaison and coordination efforts to be GRSS-led: the government’s humanitarian agencies (the South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission and the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management), though part of government, had nothing to do with atrocities allegedly committed; and in the meantime, poor communication is leading to yet further breakdowns in relations. If, as seems increasingly likely, the situation evolves into a protracted crisis, humanitarian agencies and the government will have to work together. Identifying and bolstering positive linkages – even while making clear the dismay over violations of human rights – is both essential and possible: the collaborative analytical exercise for the IPC being one positive example. It was led by technical offices within the government, but had substantial UN and NGO involvement.

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<sup>23</sup> Long-time Sudan analyst and activist John Prendergast noted in a 1996 book, ‘Diversion [of aid] was so blatant and wide scale that one official speculated off the record that Garang himself must have been told by U.S. officials that indirect support of him (at that time) would come in the form of plentiful food assistance, which is easily diverted and bartered.’ *Frontline Diplomacy Humanitarian Aid and Conflict in Africa* (Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner) p. 23. Later, in 2000, the Clinton Administration floated the plan of simply turning all US food assistance over directly to the SPLA – a proposal that was vigorously opposed by humanitarian agencies, and ultimately shelved.

<sup>24</sup> GRSS revenues decreased after 15 December (United Press International 2014: ‘Finance Minister: South Sudan suffering from lost oil revenues’ 11 January.)

A donor conference in Oslo in May 2014 had over 300 attendees from 41 countries and resulted in promises of more than \$600 million in additional funds to help meet dire humanitarian needs and prevent famine.<sup>25</sup> Donors had already pledged \$536 million in prior meetings; such support is higher than any previous aid totals, but still well below the \$1.8 billion the UN estimates to be an adequate response to the crisis,<sup>26</sup> and to be useful it must be disbursed quickly.<sup>27</sup> The proceedings and outcomes of subsequent donor meetings in Brussels in mid-June have been kept quiet due to the sensitivity of political negotiations with the GRSS and other actors.

As the humanitarian response ramps up there is much discussion about not repeating the mistakes of Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) in the civil war era, although there is no strong consensus on what the 'lessons of OLS' actually are. Only a handful of the current generation of humanitarian workers had direct experience in South Sudan during OLS, and much of the discourse is generic in nature, revolving around the presumed links between aid and dependence, aid and conflict, and the politicisation of aid.

The current crisis – which as one GRSS employee stated was neither wanted nor expected by anybody – took many South Sudanese and the international community by surprise. Since December, agencies have been caught up in a rapid and overwhelming transition from post-conflict recovery to relief in a context affected by armed violence. In view of this transition they have been forced to adapt their work plans, to readjust their approach, and to renegotiate relations with other important stakeholders. At the same time they have been forced to come up with plans for how to foster peace, stability and the transition back to recovery.

## **1.6 Possible areas for research**

Two obvious post-OLS lessons are about the imperatives of strengthening information systems and broadening hazard analysis. The lack of rigorous and reliable current-status information has already been highlighted, making both assessment and targeting of resources difficult. Many observers interpret the very fact that so few analysts foresaw anything like the spike in violence that followed the events of 15 December as an analytical blind spot in relation to the risk of renewed large-scale violent conflict. (This, of course, is easy to say in hindsight – but has obvious implications for future monitoring and analysis.)

Humanitarian agencies have expressed a strong need for better information about the unintended consequences of a rapidly scaled-up response in the context of a war that no one was prepared for, and which shows no immediate sign of ending. They have also called for more research about the best ways to protect livelihoods beyond immediate humanitarian response and about how to protect longer-term investments in non-conflict areas that may not be receiving any attention at the moment. Beyond this, changes in the nature of international engagement with the GRSS are also well worth tracking.

Likewise, it will be important to learn lessons from the OLS era and from the post-CPA humanitarian realm more broadly about the unintended consequences of large-scale aid operations in the context of violent conflict and about background observations on the changing nature of international engagement and specifically the state–humanitarian agency relationship. The SLRC is currently proposing some real-time research into these areas.

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<sup>25</sup> See 'Final outcome document, Oslo Conference on South Sudan, 19-20 May 2014,' (<http://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-outcome-document-oslo-conference-south-sudan-19-20-may-2014>).

<sup>26</sup> See Reuters 2014. 'U.N. warns of South Sudan famine as donors pledge more aid,' 20 May ([www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/20/us-southsudan-aid-idUSKBN0E022J20140520](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/20/us-southsudan-aid-idUSKBN0E022J20140520)).

<sup>27</sup> See *The Guardian* 2014. 'The South Sudan Conference explained' 21 May ([www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2014/may/21/the-south-sudan-conference-explained](http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2014/may/21/the-south-sudan-conference-explained)). See also Oxfam, 'Oxfam reaction to South Sudan Donor Conference in Oslo: today's promises must swiftly translate into concrete contributions,' May 2014 ([www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/reactions/south-sudan-donor-conference-oslo-todays-promises-must-swiftly-translate-contributions](http://www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/reactions/south-sudan-donor-conference-oslo-todays-promises-must-swiftly-translate-contributions)).



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