

Getting it Right from the Start

Priorities for Action in the New Republic of South Sudan

This report presents the views of 38 aid agencies working on peace-building, development, and humanitarian assistance in South Sudan.

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06 SEPTEMBER 2011**



Girl getting water in Rumbek, 2010. © Carolyn Gluck for Oxfam.

Amidst jubilant celebration, the new Republic of South Sudan entered the international stage in July 2011 albeit as one of the least developed countries in the world. The challenges and opportunities are enormous, and donors, the government, implementing agencies and most importantly the people of South Sudan have a lot at stake – but much more to gain. This paper presents ten areas for action based on the experience of NGOs operating in South Sudan and lessons learnt during the Comprehensive Peace Agreement interim period. Donors must prioritise them in the first years of the country's independence so as to ensure the best possible results for the people of South Sudan.



Executive Summary

Amidst jubilant celebration in July 2011, the new Republic of South Sudan entered the international stage albeit as one of the least developed countries in the world. One in eight children die before their fifth birthday, the maternal mortality rate is one of the highest in the world and more than half the population lives below the poverty line. Against a backdrop of chronic under-development, the country is acutely vulnerable to recurring conflict and climatic shocks. More than 220,000 people were displaced last year due to conflict and more than 100,000 were affected by floods; and already this year, fighting in the disputed border areas, clashes between the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and militia groups, disputes over land and cattle, and attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army, have forced nearly 300,000 people from their homes. The situation is exacerbated by a continuing influx of returnees, restricted movement across the northern border, high fuel prices and regional shortages in food stocks. South Sudan is a context that challenges normal development paradigms and fits awkwardly in the humanitarian relief–recovery–post-conflict development continuum. This complexity has not always been reflected in the strategies of either donors or implementing agencies.

Following sustained international attention since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, the humanitarian situation has improved. As explained by one county government authority, 'now there are boreholes, some *bomas* have schools, ... and basic services are starting to reach to the outlying areas.' Many communities share the sentiment across the country.

But enormous challenges remain, and humanitarian and development actors face multiple, competing priorities: meeting emergency humanitarian needs; strengthening community resilience; addressing the underlying drivers of conflict; promoting the development of sustainable livelihoods; ensuring that humanitarian and development assistance promote equitable development; supporting the government to protect vulnerable groups; strengthening civil society; and ensuring uninterrupted service delivery while simultaneously strengthening national institutions and ultimately empowering the government to assume responsibility for meeting the needs of its citizens.

Over the coming years, donors have a window of opportunity to support the fledgling government to tackle chronic poverty and insecurity and make meaningful progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. This paper highlights ten priority areas for action that, in the view of NGOs operating in South Sudan and based on lessons learnt during the CPA interim period, must be prioritised by donors in the first years of the country's independence so as to ensure the best possible results for the people of South Sudan.

Recommendations

1. **Balance development assistance with continued support for emergency humanitarian needs.** Recognise that there will be substantial humanitarian needs for years to come, and ensure that humanitarian response capacity is adequately resourced. Continue to support international humanitarian response institutions; strengthen efforts to build government emergency preparedness and disaster management capacity; explore innovative mechanisms for enabling faster, more effective response; and support initiatives aimed at strengthening the ability of communities to prevent, mitigate and recover from humanitarian crises.
2. **Understand conflict dynamics.** Commit to rigorous and systematic conflict analysis and to adapting development strategies accordingly. Ensure that funding strategies reflect the criticality of the link between security and development – meaning that adequate funding must be provided for humanitarian protection programmes, basic services and development, and security sector reform. In decisions regarding the geographical allocation of international and national security personnel, ensure that the need to protect community livelihoods and food security is prioritised.
3. **Involve communities and strengthen civil society.** Provide more substantial support for initiatives that promote community participation in humanitarian and development assistance; support initiatives aimed at strengthening civil society; and facilitate access by national NGOs and civil society organisations to international funds.
4. **Ensure an equitable distribution of assistance.** Ensure that international assistance is appropriately targeted so as to promote equitable social and economic development. Avoid unintentional exclusionary effects when determining geographic focus areas, and support the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning to develop a system for a more equitable and transparent distribution of wealth between and within the states.
5. **Prioritise the most vulnerable and ensure social protection.** Support the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) to develop and introduce social protection policies, and build the capacity of key ministries in the design and implementation of social protection programs. Advocate with the GoSS to increase its budget allocation to the social sectors, ensure that donor support for social protection does not result in a reduction of support for essential services, and provide greater support for programs targeting vulnerable groups.

6. **Promote pro-poor, sustainable livelihoods.** Provide more substantial support for small-scale agricultural (and pastoral/piscicultural) production, and better targeted livelihoods support in areas hosting large numbers of returnees. Promote access to and ownership of land for returnees, internally displaced persons and vulnerable groups, and provide technical support for the Sudan/South Sudan border cooperation policy. And recognising that livelihoods will be constrained so long as communities continue to live in fear of violence, continue to support initiatives aimed at improving local security.
7. **Strengthen government capacity, from the bottom up.** Support the GoSS in its commitment to decentralisation, provide more targeted support for initiatives aimed at addressing key capacity gaps at the county level, and continue to explore innovative solutions for increasing the number of qualified staff throughout the country.
8. **Allow sufficient time for transition towards government management of international aid.** Build government capacity to manage aid funds, and build civil society capacity to engage in the budget development and monitoring process. Support the GoSS to establish benchmarks for determining whether national systems and institutions provide sufficient assurance that government-managed aid brings maximum possible benefit to the people of South Sudan; ensure that funding mechanisms are designed so as to facilitate transition to government management; and ensure that there is no interruption in basic service delivery while new funding mechanisms are being designed. And as a critical part of the transition process, support the GoSS to develop and implement an appropriate regulatory framework to facilitate the work of NGOs.
9. **Provide timely, predictable funds.** Recognise that effective response requires a range of funding mechanisms, and that this should include substantial bilateral funds channelled directly to implementing agencies. Ensure that key issues experienced with the Common Humanitarian Fund (the delayed disbursement of funds, short implementation periods and lack of synchronisation with the seasonal calendar) are addressed in the design of any new such fund for South Sudan; that all new pooled funds are designed so as to facilitate timely response; and that South Sudan's new aid architecture includes long-term (multi-year) development funding.
10. **Ensure integrated programming.** Ensure that funding mechanisms are broad and flexible enough to support holistic, integrated programming – meaning programming that is based on needs assessments, multi-sectoral, and that allows for appropriate transition from relief to development. Recognise that this will require substantially improved donor coordination: between donors operating in different sectors, and between humanitarian relief and development donors (including between humanitarian and development offices within the same donor).

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This paper was written by Rebecca Barber on behalf of Action Against Hunger, ACTED, ADRA South Sudan, American Refugee Committee, Association for Aid and Relief, Japan, AVSI, CARE, Caritas Luxembourg and Switzerland, CHF International, Cordaid, DanChurchAid, Danish Refugee Council, GOAL Ireland, Handicap International, HealthNet TPO, Humane Development Council, International Aid Services, ICCO, International Medical Corps, International Rescue Committee, JEN, Malaria Consortium, Malteser International, Medair, Mennonite Central Committee, Mercy Corps, Merlin, Mission Aviation Fellowship International, Norwegian Refugee Council, Oxfam, Pact, Plan South Sudan, Population Services International, Relief International, Saferworld, Save the Children, South Sudan Law Society, and World Vision. The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of all of those who contributed throughout the drafting process – who are too numerous to name individually.

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The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

Published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International under
978-1-84814-946-5 in September 2011.

Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.