

Impacts of Development Aid to South Sudan 2008–2021

A Systematic Review of Evaluation Reports

## Part II

# A Synthesis of Country-level Bilateral and Multilateral Evaluation Reports

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# The Evidence Base

The following reports (ordered by year) have been included:

**Aiding the Peace 2010.** Bennet, J.S., W. Fenton, A. Vaux, C. Barnett and E. Brusset. 2010. *Aiding the Peace. A Multi-Donor Evaluation of Support to Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities in Southern Sudan 2005–2010*. Final Report – December 2010. IDAT Ltd, United Kingdom.

**Norad 2016.** *South Sudan Country Evaluation Brief*. Report 6/2016. [A synthesis of 28 evaluations published between 2010 and 2015].

**FAO 2016.** *Evaluation of FAO's contribution in South Sudan*. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Office of Evaluation, Country programme evaluation series.

**Idris 2017.** Idris, Iffat. 2017. *Lessons from local governance programmes in South Sudan*. K4D Helpdesk Report 236. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

**START 2017.** *Evaluation of Canada's Development and Stabilization and Reconstruction Taskforce (START) Programming in South Sudan*. Government of Canada 2017. January 2017.

**WFP 2017.** *Country Portfolio Evaluation South Sudan: An evaluation of WFP's Portfolio (2011–2016). Evaluation Report – Volume I*. Prepared by: Nick Maunder (Team Leader), Annemarie Hoogendoorn, David Coombs, George Fenton and Lia Carboni. World Food Programme (WFP), Office of Evaluation. Reports number OEV/2016/013.

**ICF 2018.** Chiwara, Richard M. and Geoffrey Batali. 2018. *Evaluation of South Sudan Interim Cooperation Framework (ICF) 2016–2018*. Evaluation Report (7 July 2018). United Nations South Sudan.

**UN Women 2018.** *UN Women Country Portfolio Evaluation. Final Evaluation Report: volume 1, South Sudan Strategic Note 2014–2018*. June 22, 2018, Version 2.

**UNDP 2018.** Chiwara, Richard M. and Geoffrey Batali. 2018. *Evaluation UNDP South Sudan Country Programme Outcomes: Outcome 1: Core governance and civil service functions are established and operational Outcome 5: Access to justice and the rule of law improves*. Final Report (24 May 2017). UNDP.

**GPE 2019.** *Summative GPE Country Program Evaluation (Batch 4, Country 9: Republic of South Sudan)*. 2019. Universalia, Results for Development and itad. Montreal, Canada.

**Norad 2020.** *Blind Sides and Soft Spots – An Evaluation of Norway's Aid Engagement in South Sudan*. Report 3/2020. Written by Erik Bryld (team leader), Mareike Schomerus, Elling Tjønneland, Erik Toft, Brian C. D'Silva, Charlotte Bonnet, Animu Athiei. Commissioned by the Evaluation Department. Carried out by Tana Copenhagen in association with Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI).

**SDC 2021.** Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC. 2021. *Cooperation Strategy Evaluation South Sudan 2017–2020 – Evaluation and Corporate Controlling Division SDC*. Bern (September 2021).

# Introduction

This report provides an overview of findings from 12 country-level bilateral and multilateral evaluation reports on South Sudan issued between 2008 and 2021. One of these reports is itself a synthesis of 28 evaluation reports. Of the remaining 11, four are bilateral country-level portfolio evaluations, one is a multilateral country-level evaluation and six are sectoral country-level evaluations. All these evaluations were included by default. We have not assessed their quality.

We first provide summaries of the four bilateral country-level portfolio evaluations in chronological order, so that changes in the context are reflected. We then provide summaries of the multilateral and sectoral country-level evaluations. We then extract and present major findings about the ten aid sectors of particular interest to this systematic review: Stabilisation; Good Governance; Rule of Law; Humanitarian Assistance, Refugees and Migration; Women's Rights and Gender Equality; Education; Health; Sustainable Economic Development; Rural Development and Climate; Nutrition.

In the final section, we provide the major findings emerging from this synopsis.

## Summaries of Bilateral Country Portfolio Evaluations

### Norway - Norad (2016)

Norad (2016) provides a synthesis of 28 evaluations and reviews published between 2010 and 2015.<sup>1</sup> The majority of these evaluations refer to the period between 2005 and 2012, that is, before the outbreak of the South–South civil war in 2013. In that period, donors were hoping that their interventions would help to build capacity for the semi-autonomous government of Southern Sudan and, after independence, for the government of the new nation of South Sudan. Aid was also meant to bring rapid peace dividends, which would make unity more attractive, and once it was clear that Southern Sudan would opt for independence, then the peace dividend would at least help to increase stability in the new nations. With hindsight, we know that these hopes were futile. It is nevertheless interesting to quickly review the main findings of this synthesis report, treating it as a sort of knowledge baseline.

The report reconstructs the donor logic prevailing from 2005 to 2012. One element of this logic was the notion of “postwar reconstruction”, with an emphasis on giving support to service delivery. However, donors tended to overestimate the capacity of (the very few) available formal institutions, and they overlooked existing local structures. A second element was the notion that the major cause of conflict was a lack of development: hence, donors focused on delivering

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<sup>1</sup> We do not list here the 28 underlying reports and rely mostly on the synthesis presented in Norad (2016).

“peace dividends”, assuming that peace and development would reinforce each other. Spending on state-building and provision of social services remained high, but success was minimal. Development partners overestimated the government’s capacity to take on responsibility for service delivery. This resulted in programmes that were overambitious and unsustainable.

Donors also supported good governance projects, but although some evaluations found that training and organisational support increased knowledge and awareness of democratic principles and electoral and constitutional processes among civil society organisations and rule of law institutions, ownership remained low, little capacity was built and the sustainability of these projects was questioned.

It became increasingly clear that the new government of South Sudan lacked not only capacity but also the political will to become a partner committed to providing peace dividends. This was especially visible in the case of DDR (Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration), where the government was unwilling to reduce the number of soldiers in the armed forces.

Faced with little capacity to begin with and the absence of political will, the capacity-building programmes for the central government failed. The donor community responded by creating parallel systems and delegating government functionality to external technical advisers. This shift from capacity building to capacity substitution ensured that some projects could still be implemented, but the success of individual projects did not add up to real progress across sectors, and state capacities remained low.

Gender programming became more important after 2011, but although awareness was raised among some civil society organisations and within some sectors of the civil service, real change did not come about because of cultural barriers and the persistence of customary legal practices.

Pooled funding and multi-donor trust funds were important funding channels between 2005 and 2013. The experience in Southern Sudan and then in independent South Sudan showed that pooled funds worked only if they engaged the government. But government is often non-existent in postwar settings, and such funds are not always effective in the absence of solid partner capacity. A case in point is the World Bank administered Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF), a flagship fund with a pledged volume of USD 650m. The government was a major stakeholder in the fund but lacked the capacity to absorb the funds. By the end of 2008, three years after the MDTF’s inception, only about 35 percent of the available funds had been disbursed. After 2008, the MDTF’s importance began to decline; in 2013, the fund was decommissioned. An important conclusion was that for a multi-donor fund for service delivery to be an effective instrument, it is important to have a reasonably strong national government.<sup>2</sup>

Besides the MDTF, there were two UN-managed pooled funds (the Common Humanitarian Fund and the South Sudan Recovery Fund), a Capacity Building Trust Fund managed by the Netherlands, a Basic Services Fund spearheaded by the UK, and a Health Pooled Fund. The

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<sup>2</sup> See also Fafo. 2013. Independent Evaluation of the Multi-Donor Trust Fund – South Sudan (MDTF-SS). Final Report. Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies (25 July 2013).

Health Pooled Fund had mixed success, and most evaluations question the sustainability of programmes reviewed. The Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) was evaluated in 2015 and found to be instrumental in preventing famines.

It appears that the funds were more effective in the humanitarian sector, somewhat effective in the health sector, and least effective as a tool for achieving government investments in services and infrastructure. The effectiveness of this tool therefore seems to reflect the varying difficulties associated with achieving outcomes. Successful outcomes were easiest to achieve in humanitarian relief and difficult to achieve in government services and infrastructure.

Norad (2016) also reports the findings of a 2010 landmark multi-donor evaluation “Aiding the Peace” (2010). In this report, a group of 15 donors and development organisations sought to evaluate the extent to which aid to Southern Sudan was contributing to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Although the key findings of Aiding the Peace pertain to Southern Sudan between 2005 and 2010, they hold for many other international engagements in conflict-affected states. “Aiding the Peace” stated that donors worked with a poor understanding of local power constellations and drivers of conflict; this created flawed and unsustainable programme designs. Aiding the Peace concluded that donors had been generally overoptimistic in their prognosis for peace and had overestimated the capacity of aid to address underlying causes of conflict, which were, in essence, political and not caused by a lack of development.

## Canada - START (2017)

In 2017, Canada evaluated its international assistance to South Sudan (Start 2017). The report assesses a total of just under CAD 500 million (USD 403m), disbursed between 2009 and 2015.

There were two main funding envelopes. The first one was START (Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force). START, which ran from 2005 to 2013, was Canada's mechanism for filling the funding and operational gap between immediate humanitarian assistance and longer-term development and security sector assistance. START's mandate was to address emerging crises in fragile and conflict-affected states by means of a whole-of-government response. START funding in South Sudan was for stabilisation and peacebuilding, with the largest funding baskets being justice, security forces, arms control, peacebuilding and mine action. From 2009 until 2013 (the year START was terminated), START disbursed CAD 46.5m in Sudan.

Canada's development programming focused primarily on health, sustainable economic growth, food security and advancing democracy, and accounted for CAD 452.3m. The largest funding baskets of Canada's development spending were humanitarian assistance and Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH).

The report notes that some outcomes were achieved in the health sector (through the pooled health fund), in MNCH and in food security. But with regard to other sectors, especially

stabilisation, the report notes that it is doubtful that tangible and sustainable outcomes were achieved.

The report concludes that capacity building failed at both government and community level. Interventions for community-level capacity-building projects (mainly in the communal conflict management sector) were often too short-term. The report concludes that long-term training is far more valuable than short-term training and that training is most effective when accompanied by capital investment, e.g. in office space, equipment and systems (START 2017).

The report also notes that after 2013, capacity building shifted to capacity replacement, without a real strategy for long-term sustainability. Finally, the report notes that Canada's engagement in South Sudan was not based on a long-term, common and documented vision for the country and lacked an analysis of the drivers of conflict. One important recommendation made in the report is to base future engagement in fragile states on a written country strategy.

## Norway - Norad (2020)

Norway's evaluation of its aid to South Sudan (Norad 2020) is by far the most comprehensive of the 12 reports scrutinised. It covers Norway's aid from 2005 to 2018. Aid effectiveness is assessed for the period 2011–2018, after South Sudan became independent. During that period, Norway was among the largest donors: the total amount of assessed aid is NOK 4.2bn, or USD 480m. Norway was also politically influential as a member of the so-called troika of leading donors (the other two members being the US and UK).

The evaluation is based on a reconstructed theory of change. Effectiveness is estimated by comparing de facto observed developments with theoretically predicted changes. In addition, four case studies are used to explore the effectiveness of projects in four “most significant” sectors. These were: a capacity-building project for civil servants within the central government; a project which aimed at capacity building in the natural resources sector in order to make better use for “oil for development”; a peace-making project at the local level; and an agricultural and food security project.

The evaluation identified three phases, each with a distinct theory of change. During the first phase (2005–2011), Norway's engagement sought to provide support to political commitments and institutions outlined in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The main objective was to make unity work, and aid was given to support elections, a census and the referendum. A large MDTF was set up to enable development in all regions of Sudan. Furthermore, support was given to the then semi-autonomous government of South Sudan, in order to strengthen its capacities.

During the second phase (2011–2013), Norway supported the newly independent government of South Sudan, in the hope that external support would help it to become transparent, accountable, democratic and committed to enabling development. Norwegian support to

building capacity in the public sector included support for capacity building for civil servants and support for developing expertise and capacity in the oil sector and in public finance.

The third phase (2014–2018) began with the outbreak of the civil war within South Sudan. Norway changed course again and now predominantly engaged in emergency assistance, food security and local-level peacebuilding, hoping to contribute to stability and, eventually, peace. Support to government institutions was scaled down or terminated. This shift meant increasing support to humanitarian assistance and less support to development projects implemented in collaboration with government institutions.

The evaluation report's findings are sobering. Although some projects were reasonably successful, the report finds that the overall results of Norway's engagement were disappointing, especially when compared to overly optimistic expectations which accompanied the signing of the comprehensive peace agreements in 2005. The international community did not succeed in reducing poverty, increasing stability and promoting peace. In 2018, human rights violations, violence against civilians, the number of displaced people and levels of food insecurity had reached higher levels than ever.

Importantly, attempts to assist the government of South Sudan to become accountable, transparent and democratic failed. The government did not improve its capacity, and it demonstrated little political will to allocate funds and efforts to development policies and to good governance. The report concludes that "at an overall effectiveness level, the evaluation team found that Norway has not been effective in achieving its objectives for an accountable and transparent state working to enhance poverty reduction" (Norad 2020:4). At the project level, the evaluation found that capacity building for government institutions was not effective. No sustainable capacity was built, knowledge transfers remained limited, many South Sudanese civil servants had left because their salaries were delayed or not paid, and appointments at all levels were based rarely on merit but often on clientelism.

Norway was especially active in capacity building in the oil sector, but its "oil for development" project was not effective because the government of South Sudan lacked the political will to ensure transparent and accountable oil management.

Oil has not benefited the people of South Sudan but remains a driver of conflict. A UN report from September 2021 states that more than USD 73 million was diverted between 2018 and 2021. The report also notes that this figure is only the tip of the iceberg and mentions that President Salva Kiir himself admitted as far back as 2012 that South Sudan's ruling elites had diverted more than USD 4bn.<sup>3</sup>

Efforts to support democratic practices and good governance were not effective either. There have been no democratic elections since 2011, and the government has continued to act without accountability and transparency.

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<sup>3</sup> UNHCR, 2021. South Sudanese political elites illicitly diverting millions of US dollars, undermining core human rights and stability – UN experts note.

Also not effective were efforts to empower women and include them in meaningful ways in issues of security and peace. The evaluation notes that in this field, “few tangible outcomes are documented as of late 2018” (Norad 2020: 9).

Results were better in the education sector. Support for education, especially basic education, became more prominent after 2014, when Norway moved away from supporting the government and shifted much of its aid to humanitarian aid and to direct delivery of basic services. While the report does not systematically assess the effectiveness of Norway’s aid in this sector, it notes that many interviewees expressed confidence that results had been achieved.

After the outbreak of the civil war, humanitarian and emergency aid became the most important sector for Norway's aid, absorbing almost half of total funding between 2014 and 2018. The report notes that humanitarian assistance, both at project level and through Norway's contributions to multilateral funds, especially to the UN-managed Common Humanitarian Fund for South Sudan, was effective and contributed to alleviating the country’s humanitarian needs.

Regarding aid modalities, the report notes that throughout the evaluated period, more than half of Norwegian aid was channelled through multi-donor joint funds. Initially, the major vehicle was the Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Sudan (MDTF National) and its sibling, the Multi-Donor Trust Fund for South Sudan (MDTF-SS), managed by the World Bank. The MDTF-SS was seen as a key instrument for the state-building process of South Sudan. It was set up as a mechanism to finance a coherent government programme and as the primary channel for coordinating national investment and international assistance. The government was a key stakeholder, pledging to contribute to the fund by matching in a 2:1 ratio (Fafo 2013). The five strategic objectives of the MDTF-SS were: (1) building capacity for the public sectors, especially with regard to public finance; (2) improving access to basic services (with a hoped-for positive effect on stabilisation); (3) providing basic infrastructure (roads, electricity and water), education and health; (4) supporting a transition from subsistence-based livelihoods to a development-oriented economy; (5) harmonising international development assistance to South Sudan (Fafo 2013). Projects would be implemented through state institutions, with technical assistance from the World Bank and implementation support from UN agencies and national and international NGOs.

The 2020 Norwegian evaluation is highly critical of the effectiveness of the MDTF, concluding that it did not deliver as expected. According to the report, the two main impediments were the government’s weak capacity, which hindered the effective planning and implementation of programmes financed by the funds, and the government’s lack of political will to invest in development endeavours. Although international donors usually acknowledged that the fund offered a suitable platform for donor coordination, they became disillusioned with the performance of the MDTF and the fund was formally closed at the end of June 2013.

Although the MDTF as a vehicle for state-building failed to achieve its objectives, the Norwegian evaluation points out that multi-donor funds can be a good channel for emergency relief. After 2014, the Sudan Common Humanitarian Fund managed by the UN became the major channel for humanitarian funding (Norad 2020). The report finds that the fund was effective in delivering humanitarian assistance and that it helped to avoid a famine.

The evaluation report offers a number of important lessons. The most sobering is that very little was achieved in return for massive investment. International aid was not a large enough lever to make the Comprehensive Peace Agreement an attractive option for the South; international aid was not effective in bringing some rudimentary state capacity to the government of South Sudan, or in nudging the government towards adopting a less predatory approach to its own population. But international aid was at least effective in providing life support to the population of South Sudan.

Building state capacities in South Sudan was a herculean task. There were hardly any institutions in place to begin with, and the South–South civil war made progress elusive. On top of that came the lack of political will on the part of the South Sudanese government to engage in the state-building project. One of the most important lessons of the report is that a key assumption of Norway – and indeed of all donors – did not hold: the government of South Sudan turned out to have no interest in contributing to the development and welfare of its own people. Rather, it “used the state apparatus for personal enrichment, while donors continued to build the capacity of the same state apparatus to enable state ‘core functions’”. (Norad 2020:7).

The evaluation points out that Norway never explicitly addressed the dilemma which a predatory partner government poses for international state-building. It also noted that there was no analysis of the political economy of South Sudan, which could have led to a frank discussion about the implications for aid: “Norway’s aid engagement was not well informed. The Norwegian aid suffered from the lack of a proper analysis-based strategy guiding its aid intervention” (Norad 2020: 14). The absence of a written strategy, which would have allowed for regular reality checks of key assumptions, is found to be highly problematic.

The report also notes that too little effort was made to keep track of the performance of the individual projects at outcome levels and use this as a basis for funding decisions: **The portfolio was not results-focused, and its shape was guided “primarily by what was feasible in terms of security and logistics, rather than by past results of the individual intervention”** (Norad 2020: 9).

Despite this unusual and helpful candid criticism, the evaluation report remains aware of the gigantic challenges that a context like South Sudan present to development cooperation. The report poses the question whether “statebuilding is appropriate in a post-conflict setting” and acknowledges that “it is possible that no foreign engagement would have prevented the catastrophe that South Sudan became” (Norad 2020:10).

## Switzerland - SDC (2021)

The Swiss evaluation (SDC 2021) assessed the portfolio for the period 2017–2020, with a total disbursement of CHF 76m (USD 75m). The three largest spending baskets were CHF 35m to food security and livelihood (access to life-saving food and resilience), CHF 25m to protection and human rights (communities and civil society empowered to create safe environments, with

special attention given to the prevention of Gender Based Violence (GBV)) and CHF 8m to peace and nation-building (spaces for dialogue and conflict transformation, options towards nation-building, initiatives towards truth, justice and reconciliation, with priority for supporting church action and customary authorities' non-violent conflict transformation and mediation roles).

The evaluation finds that these three domains were highly relevant for South Sudan and notes that the Swiss engagement was informed by a sound context analysis. However, the evaluation also notes that “there is no convincing evidence that the portfolio overall has been particularly effective, although individual projects may suggest so if assessed in isolation. The strategy has set the bar at an unrealistic level” (SCO 2021:ii).

The evaluation also notes that it was difficult to assess to what extent results had been achieved, since baseline and endline data were often not available, indicators unrealistic and in-field monitoring mostly lacking. The report notes that in some instances, third-party monitoring was used, but it does not provide an assessment of whether this was effective. The report calls for “alternatives to data based reporting” (SDC 2021: 28), but remains silent about what that means.

Regarding food security and livelihoods, the evaluation reiterates the relevance of these sectors and suggests that future programming should move towards including resilience measures. It notes that many interviewees said that the Common Humanitarian Fund was an effective vehicle for addressing food security. Less evidence was found for effectiveness at project level. “To actually say what results have been achieved is very difficult by all means for Switzerland and for all other international actors for that matter” (SDC 2021: 29).

The report also recommends cash/voucher programmes as a “more dignified and respectful aid modality” but cautions that inhibiting factors in South Sudan such as dysfunctional markets and lacking infrastructure may prevent a broader roll-out.

Finally, the report warns that humanitarian aid (through blanket distributions of food and non-food items) can be a conflict driver and recommends that all donors consider the risk of humanitarian aid doing harm.

Regarding the protection sector (supporting communities to create safe environments, with special attention being given to the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) the report reiterates that there is an overwhelming need for protection in South Sudan. That said, the report cautions against adding new projects before the quality and utility of existing projects have been critically assessed. This caution is driven by a field visit to a project implemented by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), which was found to lack quality and raised doubts about whether it would not do harm (SDC 2021: 14). Specifically, the report questions “if it is ethical to develop awareness-raising in rural areas, if no support services, including support to reach urban centres where services are located, are then made available to survivors. Projects working with SGBV and GBV cases have the potential to cause harm to the beneficiaries, even if inadvertently, if the intervention is not correctly implemented to best practice standards and international guidelines.” (SDC 2021: 14). In general, the evaluation

reminds us that achieving changes to SGBV on the ground needs long-term engagement and will take a long time.

Regarding peace and nation-building, the evaluation reiterates that it is very difficult to pinpoint effectiveness and results. Switzerland supported the South Sudan Council of Churches in establishing spaces for dialogue, tried to create space for discussions between traditional authorities and other stakeholders in the peace process and supported the various peace negotiation processes in South Sudan. These activities “further the perception of Switzerland as a neutral, impartial and trusted actor in the peace process” (SDC 2021: 29).

The report also points out that the challenging context in South Sudan made monitoring projects very difficult. It is unclear to what extent third-party monitoring was able to fill some of the gaps. Given the potential for doing harm (as documented by the report for some interventions relating to SGBV), coupled with the general lack of data on outcomes and the inadequate flow of information from the field to headquarters in Juba, the evaluation recommends that monitoring be strengthened.

The report also notes the tendency of international donors and international NGOs to outsource implementation and monitoring to local NGOs. This trend has been observed in all fragile and conflict states. Often, the local NGOs are unable to cope with the workload. At the same time, international donors often find it hard to assess the capacity of the local partners they rely on. The report recommends giving more attention to capacity building for local NGOs, for example by partnering with international NGOs. International donors would also benefit from a vetting and assessment tool for ascertaining local partners’ capacity.

Looking ahead, the report recommends that the next country strategy should include more sub-national level context so that regions and localities whose stability and governance are “good enough” could be identified and selected for more long-term interventions, and possibly also for interventions which include partnering with local governments.

Finally, the report also recommends basing the next country strategy on “a mapping of what works and what does not work” (SCO 2021: vi). We believe that the report already provides answers to these questions.

# Summaries of Multilateral Country Portfolio Evaluations

## UN – South Sudan Interim Cooperation Framework ICF (2018)

ICH (2018) provides an evaluation of the UN Interim Cooperation Framework (2016–2017). The framework outlined the appropriate strategy for the UN Country Team in South Sudan for its support of the 2015 Agreement on Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS). This evaluation assesses to what extent the strategy was appropriate for the two-year period following the 2015 peace agreement.

Hopes of the 2015 agreement leading to an improvement of the situation were disappointed. By the end of 2017, the UN noted that the humanitarian situation and security had worsened, and that keeping up with the increasing demands on humanitarian relief had become even more difficult. The majority of donors had turned away from development programmes and increased their humanitarian efforts. Furthermore, donors were disillusioned by the South Sudan government's lack of political will to implement the peace agreements. The UN's strategy had centred on supporting the government in order to promote good governance, peace and security and stronger and more resilient relations between state and society. The government's unwillingness to engage in this endeavour made this strategy ineffective.

Furthermore, ICH (2018) notes that the government lacked the capacity to provide social services and that the UN had tried to fill these gaps. Capacity building for the government had not been effective, and donors, disappointed by the government's lack of will, drastically reduced their direct support to the government.

The evaluation suggests that the UN's contribution did have some effect in the humanitarian sectors, but is doubtful whether tangible improvements in resilience were achieved. Progress was made in the health sector, however, especially in maternal, newborn and child health, and in immunisation.

One of the evaluation's recommendations is that the UN should "focus on interventions that provide greater opportunities for impact" (ICF 2018:viii), especially at the intersection of humanitarian and development programming and by relying more on building the capacity of non-state actors. The evaluation also recommends setting up an effective monitoring and evaluation working group. While the evaluation avoids strongly-worded conclusions, the recommendations imply that the UN should reconsider its support for the government and, instead, invest more in resilience, support for non-state actors and monitoring.

# Summaries of Sectoral Programme Evaluations

## Education

### Global Partnership for Education (2019)

GPE (2019) evaluates the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) engagement in South Sudan from 2012–2018, which involved finances totalling USD 36.1m. In the 2012–2017 period, GPE’s grants amounted to six percent of total sector Official Development Assistance (ODA) and 15 percent of non-humanitarian basic education ODA. During that period, ODA to education increased greatly: from USD 49m to USD 129m. However, government spending on education in South Sudan remained very low (less than four percent of total government expenditure for 2011–2017).

The report finds that the GPE programme achieved its targets of improving school supervision, total enrolment in GPE schools, and generating two GPE implementation models for the rest of the sector. However, the GPE grants did not raise learning outcomes, improve school leadership or reduce school dropouts.

What appeared to have been effective were cash transfers for girls, particularly in supporting girls' attendance and retention at the upper primary and secondary levels. Another factor that may have supported gender equality improvements in education was school feeding programmes, which included specific incentives for girls. A large awareness and sensitisation campaign probably further supported girls' education.

The evaluation also notes that the supply of primary schools continued to decline due to conflict-related school closures and because the supply of schools did not keep pace with population growth. This is a stark reminder that high population growth can outpace progress in the basic education sectors.

The report finds that improvements in the education sector were hindered by a very high level of insecurity in the country, resulting in difficulties in providing government services. The weak economy further starved the government of means to increase domestic levels of investment.

One good practice which the report highlights is to allow humanitarian assistance to education everywhere, even in “opposition-held areas”, and to use education as a platform to foster national reconciliation.

# Food Security and Livelihoods

## UN Food and Agriculture Organization (2016)

This is an evaluation of FAO's programme in South Sudan between December 2013 and December 2015. Due to the outbreak of the civil war in 2013, FAO had to quickly adapt its strategy to deal with the emerging humanitarian crisis. It launched the Emergency Livelihood Response Programme (ELRP), which supported 740,000 households during the evaluated period and had a total budget of USD 105m.

The cornerstone of the programme was the distribution of livelihood kits containing staple crop seed kits, vegetable seed kits and fishing kits. Other components included the Input Trade Fairs (ITFs), nutrition vouchers, and animal health through vaccination and the provision of drugs.

The report notes that, in common with the international aid community in general, FAO was insufficiently prepared for the sudden outbreak of conflict in December 2013. Programming was geared towards development and nation-building rather than emergencies. Most donors also withdrew their support to the government, which further reduced the government's capacity.

The evaluation finds that the large-scale distribution of livelihood kits in 2014 and 2015 was effective. The distribution of vegetable seeds and nutrition vouchers resulted in nutritional benefits, and the distribution of fishing kits contributed to fishing becoming an important component of food security. The ITFs also generally delivered positive results, providing vendors with a guaranteed market and beneficiaries with quality seed. The effectiveness of FAO's animal health interventions may have been partially undermined by low herd immunity levels and the irregular supply of small quantities of drugs.

The report also notes that from December 2013, FAO played a positive role in increasing the technical capacity of its implementing partners, many of whom were national NGOs. Most of the training was related to delivery of the ELRP.

One of the report's recommendations is to ascertain to what extent the private sector might be able to provide some of the agricultural services which the government no longer has the capacity to provide.

The report also urges greater attention be paid to differentiating between the most conflict-affected states and the less conflict-affected states where more developmental approaches can be applied.

Finally, the report urges FAO to invest much more in assessing the impact of interventions and to carry out more in-depth research which could challenge or reinforce programming assumptions and ultimately result in more effective livelihood work.

## UN World Food Programme (2017)

WFP (2017) covers the operations of the UN World Food Programme in South Sudan during 2011–2016, which had a total value of USD 2.6 billion (which the UN assessed to be only around 65 percent of the funds required). The WFP's country strategy aimed to meet the emergency food needs of vulnerable groups, to build community resilience and strengthen livelihoods, to enhance market access and food value chains, and to enhance access to basic services in support of good nutrition and learning.

The evaluation finds that the performance in terms of achieving output targets was generally effective. WFP assisted an average of 2.9 million people per year, or 91 percent of targeted beneficiaries. 64 percent of beneficiaries received general food assistance or cash-based transfers, 22 percent received supplementary feeding, and nine percent school feeding

The report credits the emergency general food assistance with preventing severe food insecurity from deteriorating further into widespread famine. The report also notes that cash-based transfers were significantly more cost efficient, predictable and timely than in-kind transfers and had potential secondary benefits for the local economy, but that this modality could not be rolled out in all regions due to the difficult context.

The school feeding programme reached an average of 300,000 children per year – estimated at 20 percent of all primary schoolchildren. Of these children, 44 percent were girls. The school feeding programme repeatedly showed positive results, particularly in retention rates.

With regard to building livelihoods and resilience, the report finds the results were more modest. Beneficiaries valued the assets built (such as dikes, feeder roads) and training, but not all outputs were achieved, and it was difficult to assess outcomes. Livelihood interventions would have benefited from a more predictable and sustained approach rather than annual agreements with cooperating partners. Progress in enhancing market access and value chains was also limited.

The report notes that a particular challenge was that both the government and opposition forces repeatedly denied aid organisations access. The report does not further discuss the implications of this political interference for the overall effectiveness of emergency aid. It does note, however, that given the sheer volume of WFP's food assistance in South Sudan's economy, there was a significant risk of humanitarian aid fuelling the conflict.

Given what we have learned about humanitarian aid as a possible cause for conflict, it is surprising that this evaluation of USD 2.6bn worth of aid does not go more deeply into the issue of do no harm. All 12 evaluation reports of humanitarian and emergency aid considered for this review seem to have this shortcoming.

# Good Governance

## Lessons from local governance programmes in South Sudan (2017)

Idris (2017) provides a synthesis of nine evaluations and reviews published between 2010 and 2016 that assess the impacts of local governance programmes. Four reviews refer to UNDP programmes. Of the remaining five, one refers to OXFAM's programming, one refers to EU programming, one is an academic research paper, one is a multi-donor evaluation of peace support and one is an overview of 30 evaluations, compiled by Norad. The main lessons that Idris (2017) provide are discussed below.

A common thread running through all the reports is that donors generally underestimated the challenging context and overestimated South Sudan's state capacity, leading to overambitious programmes. Already by 2010 (that is, before independence) governance programming was overly ambitious and technical. Despite countless trainings, workshops, reforms and a large corps of foreign technical assistants embedded within state ministries, no real change was achieved.

In order to compensate for the lack of government capacities, donors responded by creating parallel systems and delegating government functionality to foreign advisers, in an attempt to achieve success with their projects. While this may have enabled a project to produce the expected outputs, it nevertheless did not address the underlying issue of inadequate sector-wide and government capacities.

Idris (2017) points to a dilemma but does not offer a solution. The dilemma is that capacity building failed, but bypassing the government resulted in creating parallel systems which were not sustainable and did not address the underlying issues of inadequate state capacity. The dilemma was accentuated after 2013, when it became clear that the government was not interested in a "pro-peace pro-development" agenda.

There is no simple solution to the dilemma. Some donors avoided government institutions altogether, due to documented human rights abuses and atrocities by government forces. Other donors remained engaged with sub-national government but avoided the central government as much as possible. And some donors kept some working relations with the government.

Idris (2017) also stressed the importance of having an on-ground presence for project implementation and the need for better contextual analysis, especially with regard to local conflict dynamics.

Finally, Idris (2017) points out that monitoring and evaluation were generally weak, baseline and endline data was rarely available, and donors very rarely invested resources in rigorous impact evaluations.

## UNDP - South Sudan Country Programme Outcomes (2018)

UNDP (2018) evaluates two outcomes of UNDP's country programme (2012–2016): outcome 1, defined as “core governance and civil service functions are established and operational”, and outcome 5, defined as “access to justice and the rule of law improves”. Total funding for these outcomes was USD 91m over the evaluated period.

The findings of the evaluation are sobering. Most of the planned outputs were not delivered due to changes in the operational context and to lack of resources. Very few, if any, outcomes were achieved.

UNDP supported capacity building for government institutions such as the South Sudan National Legislative Assembly, the South Sudan Anti-Corruption Commission, the National Audit Chambers (NAC) and the National Elections Commission (NEC). However, donors withdrew funding after the outbreak of the December 2013 conflict, and most of the interventions were stopped. As a result, even though some of these institutions may have been established, they were not operational.

UNDP also supported decentralisation and intra-government coordination processes, but neither the strategy nor the implementation of real decentralisation improved.

UNDP also supported rule of law institutions in various ways. Examples are: a case management system for the High Court; the creation of discussion fora where state and non-state actors could discuss access to justice for vulnerable groups; support for the judiciary sector by creating a partner programme in which external experts from other African countries were partnered with South Sudan government officials; the provision of training for community policing, and an emergency call centre. The report notes that capacity was not improved to the level expected, and that the sustainability of these initiatives appears to be very poor.

UNDP also collaborated with civil society organisations (CSO)s. However, most of the projects did not have specific sustainability plans and exit strategies, and it remained doubtful whether CSOs would be able to sustain the interventions without funding support. Overall, the evaluation found that expected outcomes were not achieved, and it attributed this mainly to the civil war, diminishing funding and a lack of government capacities.

## Gender

### UN Women Country Portfolio Evaluation (2018)

UN Women (2018) assesses the UN Women South Sudan portfolio and the UN Women country strategy for 2014–2018. UN Women's mandate includes coordinating the UN system in the country with regard to gender equality, supporting South Sudanese implementing partners in government and civil society to implement activities that strengthen gender equality, and

implementing programmes and projects aiming at women's empowerment. The total budget for the period was USD 20.79m.

The evaluation is quite upbeat but provides little evidence of achieved outcomes. It mentions that UN Women provided inputs to national policies and policy plans, e.g. for a national development plan, but it is unclear what these inputs consisted of, and to what extent any policies were implemented. It notes that UN Women engaged with the Ministry of Agriculture and Development, but it is unclear whether this resulted in any implemented policies. UN Women provided support to the promotion of laws and policies for preventing violence against women and girls, but it is unclear whether this was translated into new or changed laws and policies (the report notes that given the current context, it was unlikely that any such laws would be implemented; see UN Women 2018: 38). UN Women supported NGOs to develop capacity to promote peace work, but the evaluation does not assess outputs or outcomes. The report also notes that “UNW has been absolutely pivotal in supporting women's genuine participation in the peace negotiations and laying the foundations for more gender-equal peace building and eventual reconciliation efforts” (UN Women 2018: vii), but it is unclear whether that support led to any outcomes. Likewise, the report notes that “the depth of women's leadership and participation in the peace process has been noteworthy” (UN Women 2018: vii), but it is again unclear whether any outcomes resulted.

The positive assessment of women's participation in the peace process in UN Women (2018) contrasts with many other reports, which note that support for women's participation in South Sudan's many failed peace processes rarely yielded results (Norad 2020: 9, 20). Likewise, an academic research paper states that women were mainly excluded from the peace process in South Sudan and that peace processes in the region tended to reinforce existing power structures and dynamics. Even if women had been included in meaningful ways, they would have been unlikely to have influenced the nature and outcomes of the process.<sup>4</sup>

UN Women also implemented projects aimed at women's empowerment. One such project supported the establishment of Women's Empowerment Centres, which provided support for Village Savings and Loan Associations. Other projects aimed at supporting the establishment of local markets. The report is generally quite optimistic about the results of these projects, but the evidence for positive outcomes is anecdotal.

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<sup>4</sup> Westendorf, Jasmine-Kim. 2018. “Peace Negotiations in the Political Marketplace: The Implications of Women's Exclusion in the SudanSouth Sudan Peace Process.” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 72 (5): 433–54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2018.1510895>.

# Findings per Sector

## Stabilisation

Because of the enduring violence in South Sudan, the objectives in this sector were not achieved. For the period up to 2014, when the South–South civil war broke out, donors operated under the assumption that a major cause of conflict was a lack of development, and hence they focused on delivering “peace dividends”, assuming that peace and development would reinforce each other (Norad 2016, 2020). However, donors worked with a poor understanding of local power constellations and drivers of conflict, were generally overoptimistic in their prognosis for peace, and they overestimated the capacity of aid to address underlying causes of conflict. Most importantly, donors failed to understand that the causes of conflict were mainly political and were not attributable to a lack of development (Aiding the Peace 2010).

The evaluation reports find that support for various high-level peace negotiations during the South–South civil war was relevant. International support helped to create spaces for dialogue in society and spaces for discussions between traditional authorities and other stakeholders in the peace process; it also supported various peace negotiation processes in South Sudan. Although these activities were relevant and were effective in terms of output, ultimately they did not result in better outcomes.

One factor accounting for the failure was that the new government of South Sudan lacked not only the capacity but also the political will to become a committed partner for providing peace dividends. This was especially visible in DDR, where the government was unwilling to reduce the number of soldiers in the armed forces, which made it futile to support DDR. Capacity building for government organisations involved in small arms control and mine clearing was not effective either.

Donors also supported conflict management and peacebuilding processes at the local level, including dispute resolution, peace meetings, livelihood programmes and local-level justice support, but these initiatives led to very limited improvements in peace and security, and the few achievements were eroded because of the resurgence of violence (START 2017). The reviewed evaluation reports all doubt whether local-level interventions had any long-term effect on peacebuilding, especially since many of the interventions were focused on short-term training, such as workshops and seminars. Furthermore, most interventions appear to have been directed at community level and were not designed to support conflict management processes at inter-communal or inter-ethnic level. As such, they would have had little effect on the major drivers of conflict.

## Good Governance and Rule of Law

All 12 reviewed evaluation reports generally conclude that promoting good governance, including strengthening the capacities of the government and of civil society and civil society organisations, failed. Prior to the outbreak of the civil war in 2014, donors provided support to the government in order to promote good governance, peace and security, and stronger and more resilient relations between state and society. However, donors generally underestimated the challenging context and overestimated South Sudan's state capacity, leading to overambitious and poorly effective programmes. The government did not improve its capacity, and it showed little political will to allocate funds and efforts to development policies or to good governance. By 2013, the prevailing perception among donors was that the South Sudanese government was no longer committed to projects in the governance sector and often rejected donors' governance initiatives.

Whereas some evaluations found that training and organisational support increased knowledge and awareness of democratic principles and electoral and constitutional processes among civil society organisations and rule of law institutions, ownership remained low, little capacity was built, and the sustainability of governance projects appeared to be poor. Support to government institutions such as the South Sudan National Legislative Assembly, the South Sudan Anti-Corruption Commission, the NAC and the NEC appeared to have had little effect, as did support for decentralisation, intra-government coordination processes, rule of law institutions and community policing. Most of these initiatives came to an end in 2014, when in reaction to the resumption of violence, donors withdrew funding.

Donors also supported capacity building for CSO organisations, but most of them remained organisationally weak and fully dependent on external aid. Furthermore, local NGOs' capacity was strengthened primarily to enable them to deliver services, but not necessarily as part of a longer-term strategy to improve civil society as a whole.

## Humanitarian Assistance, Refugees and Migration

Most donors were insufficiently prepared for the sudden outbreak of conflict in December 2013. Programming was geared towards development and nation-building rather than to responding to emergencies. By early 2014, most donors had begun to pivot their aid towards humanitarian assistance and emergency aid. A substantial part of this aid was channelled through multilateral pooled funds.

The evaluation reports suggest that multilateral funds, especially the UN-managed Common Humanitarian Fund for South Sudan, were effective and contributed to alleviating the country's humanitarian needs. The fund was commended for its capacity to absorb large grants and to use contributions in a strategic yet flexible way. Other multilateral funds which were found to be relatively effective were the Emergency Livelihood Response Programme in South Sudan (ELRP) run by FAO, and the UN World Food Programme (WFP).

Among the measures implemented were general food assistance, cash-based transfers, school feeding and large-scale distribution of livelihood kits. Although there is no benchmark against which it can be generally judged which of these measures were most effective, the reports note that cash-based transfers were more cost efficient and timely than in-kind transfers, but that this modality could not be rolled out in all regions due to the difficult context. The school feeding programme had the additional benefit of increasing retention rates.

While humanitarian and emergency aid appears to have been mostly effective in alleviating immediate needs, it was less effective in helping to build more resilience. Livelihood and resilience components often had only modest outcomes. For example, some targets such as road construction or seed and vaccination provision were often not met. Progress in enhancing market access and value chains was also limited.

Regarding food security and livelihoods, the evaluation reports reiterate the relevance of these sectors and suggest that future programming move towards including resilience measures.

## Women's Rights and Gender Equality

Interventions in the sector of Women's Rights and Gender Equality appeared to have been rarely effective. The Norwegian evaluation (Norad 2020) found that interventions under the Women Peace and Security (WPS) umbrella produced few tangible outcomes. Norway was the lead donor in WPS and supported UN Women and local NGOs for activities to enhance women's leadership in the peace process, and it politically advocated for women's inclusion in peace negotiations. However, the effectiveness at the outcome level was low: "Beyond women's participation at the talks, it is unclear what this has led to in practice...many see South Sudan as a failure from a WPS perspective" (Norad 2020: 60).

Similarly, projects aimed at enhancing women's empowerment produced few tangible outcomes (Norad 2020: 9) It was found that gender projects with an economic empowerment component had broader acceptance and reach, since the "effect is seen as positive by men, who now encourage their wives to take part as well" (Norad 2020: 60).

The Swiss evaluation noted that changes in the field of SGBV need long-term engagement and will take a long time to come about. It also warned that projects working with SGBV had the potential to cause harm to the beneficiaries if the intervention was not correctly implemented. (SDC 2021: 14).

In stark contrast to these sobering finding, the abovementioned evaluation by UN Women on its South Sudan portfolio (2014–2018) is somewhat upbeat and notes that "depth of women's leadership and participation in the peace process has been noteworthy" (UN Women 2018: vii) The report also lists inputs provided by UN Women to national policies and policy plans, mentions UN Women's support to the promotion of laws and policies for preventing violence against women and girls, and its support to capacity development for NGOs for promoting

peace work. However, the evaluation focuses mainly on inputs and provides little information on outcomes or impacts.

## Education

Although Norway's evaluations (Norad 2016, 2020) did not formally assess the impacts of aid in the education sector, they noted that interviewees described Norway's support to education (initially higher education, and then, increasingly, basic education) as quite effective (Norad 2020).

A comprehensive evaluation of the Global Fund for Education (GPE 2019) found that GPE programmes achieved their target for improving school supervision and for increasing total enrolment. However, the GPE grants did not raise learning outcomes, improve school leadership or reduce school dropouts.

Cash transfers for girls and school feeding both appeared to have been effective in supporting girls' attendance and retention at the upper primary and secondary levels. An awareness and sensitisation campaign likely further supported girls' education.

Overall improvements in the education sector were hindered by a high level of insecurity in the country, resulting in difficulties in providing government services.

One good practice mentioned by GPE (2019) was to allow humanitarian assistance to education everywhere, even in "opposition-held areas", and to use education as a platform to foster national reconciliation.

## Health

The evaluation reports provide some evidence about progress in the health sector, especially in maternal newborn and child health and immunisation (ICF 2018), even during the civil war.

Canada's 2017 evaluation found that the Health Pooled Fund (HPF<sup>5</sup>) a multi-donor initiative designed to deliver health care services, particularly to mothers, children and newborns, and to build the capacity of government health services, was reasonably effective. Notable outputs included the support for 563 primary health care facilities and 15 hospitals in six out of ten

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<sup>5</sup> See HPF 2018 - *Evaluation of the South Sudan Health Pooled Fund*. Final Version, July 2018. Submitted to the Department for International Development (DFID) and Global Affairs Canada. Integrity, London. For a 2012 mid-term evaluation of the fund, see HEART. 2015. "Health Pooled Fund: South Sudan. Mid-Term Review Report: Draft for Submission". Available at <https://www.oecd.org/countries/sudan/42682206.pdf>. Accessed Oct. 26, 2021.

states. The flagship initiative of Canada's health sector supported through the HPF was the Strengthening Midwifery Services project, but the evaluation report does not assess whether support for midwifery was more or less effective than other interventions in the health sector (START 2017).

This rather upbeat assessment of the HPF contrasts with a 2016 Norwegian evaluation, which concluded on the basis of a synopsis of 28 evaluations that many of the programmes supported by the HPF may have been unsustainable (Norad 2016).

## Sustainable Economic Development

The evaluations provide no information on interventions in the sector of sustainable economic development, which suggests that this was not an important component of the portfolios of major donors.

## Rural Development and Climate

The evaluations provide no information on interventions in the sector of rural development and climate in general. Some interventions in food security and livelihoods are discussed under the heading of humanitarian assistance; see above.

## Capacity Building as a Cross-Cutting Issue

Prior to 2013, donors hoped that their interventions would help build capacity for the semi-autonomous government of Southern Sudan and, after independence in 2011, for the government of the new independent nation.

There is broad consensus across all evaluations that capacity-building measures for the South Sudanese government were not effective. Donors overestimated both the existing state capacity and as the government's political will for reforms. As a result, programming for capacity building was overambitious, unsustainable and ineffective. The hope that the government would become a partner for service delivery was never fulfilled.

Despite massive efforts, no sustainable capacity was built, knowledge transfers remained limited, many South Sudanese civil servants left the civil service due to slow or non-payment of salaries, and appointments at all levels were based rarely on merit but often on clientelism.

Support for capacity building for government institutions such as the South Sudan National Legislative Assembly, the South Sudan Anti-Corruption Commission, the NAC and the NEC had scant success and came to an end in 2013. As a result, these institutions remained in place as barely more than facades with little actual capacity.

Similarly disappointing results were reported for capacity building at community level. Projects in the sector of communal conflict management were often based on short-term training and had little impact. Likewise, capacity building for CSO appears to have had little effect. One of the rare exceptions appears to be capacity building in the healthcare sectors, which, according to Canada's evaluation, improved capacity in MNCH (START 2017). However, it should be noted that Norway's evaluation did not come to the same conclusion (Norad 2016).

Faced with little capacities to begin with and no political will, capacity-building programmes for the central government failed. The donor community responded by creating parallel systems and delegating government functionality to external technical advisers. This shift from capacity building to capacity substitution ensured that some projects could still be implemented, but the success of individual projects did not add up to real progress across sectors, and state capacity remained low.

By around 2013 it had become increasingly apparent that the new government of South Sudan lacked not only the capacity but also the political will to become a committed partner for service delivery and for providing peace dividends. This was especially visible in DDR, where the government was unwilling to reduce the number of soldiers in the armed forces. Another sector where lack of political will was clearly visible was natural resource governance. Norway was especially active in capacity building in the oil sector, but its "oil for development" project was not effective, due to a lack of political will from the government to ensure transparent and accountable oil management.

The lack of government capacity also had a negative impact on the functioning of the MDTF for South Sudan, the flagship funding vehicle of the donor community. Pooled funding and multi-donor trust funds were important funding channels between 2005 and 2013, but the MDTF was an effective modality. The government was a major stakeholder but lacked the capacity to absorb the funds. The fund was decommissioned in 2013. An important conclusion was that for a multi-donor fund for service delivery to be an effective instrument, it is important to have a reasonably strong national government.

# Summary of Main Findings

## Effectiveness per Sector

The reviewed evaluations paint a sobering picture. Very few tangible and sustainable outcomes were achieved in South Sudan.

**Humanitarian assistance**, which became the dominant aid sector by 2014, appears to have been **effective in preventing the bad from getting worse**. However, most donors appeared to have been taken by surprise by the resurgence of violence and were not prepared to quickly pivot from “aid for state-building” to “emergency aid”. Furthermore, although general food aid helped to prevent more suffering, donors were not successful in improving resilience and livelihoods.

Some **modest impacts were also achieved in education**, leading to improved enrolment and retention. School feeding programmes had a positive impact on both nutrition and retention. Notably, cash transfers for girls and school feeding programmes which included specific incentives for girls contributed to higher retention rates for girls.

The evaluations agree that there were **some positive outcomes in the health sector**, especially with regard to maternal, newborn and child health. However, it is unclear to what extent capacity in the health sector was improved and whether these outcomes are sustainable.

There is broad consensus that **little was achieved in good governance and rule of law**. Prior to the outbreak of the civil war in 2014, donors provided support to the government in order to promote good governance. However, donors generally overestimated South Sudan's state capacity and its political will to actually improve governance, leading to programmes that were overambitious and poorly effective.

**Interventions in women's rights and gender equality were not effective** either. There were few tangible results. If policies were revised or introduced, they were rarely implemented. Women's participation in the many unsuccessful peace negotiations was, at best, token. Community projects aimed at enhancing women's empowerment produced few tangible outcomes. Empowerment projects with an economic component fared better, since they had broader acceptance and reach.

**Interventions in stabilisation could not prevent a resurgence in violence**. Between 2005 and 2011, international aid was used to “make unity attractive”. After independence and up to 2014, donors operated under the assumption that a major cause of conflict was a lack of development; hence they focused on delivering “peace dividends”, assuming that peace and development would reinforce each other. They also supported DDR measures and provided incentives for military organisations to transform themselves into political parties. These endeavours failed because of the South Sudanese government's lack of political will. After civil war broke out, donors helped to create spaces for dialogue in society and supported the various peace negotiations between the warring parties. Although these efforts did not succeed either, the evaluations agree that such support for political processes remains important.

Donors also supported **conflict management and peacebuilding processes at the local level**, including dispute resolution, peace meetings, livelihood programmes and local-level justice support. The reviewed evaluation reports are **doubtful that such local interventions had any long-term effect on peace and stability**. Furthermore, most interventions appear to have been directed at the community level and were not designed to support conflict management processes at inter-communal or inter-ethnic level. As such, they would have had little effect on the major drivers of conflict.

Finally, there is broad consensus that **capacity-building measures were not effective**. Donors overestimated existing state capacity as well as the government's political will for reforms. As a result, programming for capacity building was overambitious, unsustainable and ineffective. The hope that the government would become a partner for service delivery was never fulfilled. Similarly disappointing results were reported for capacity building at societal and community levels. Capacity building for CSO appears to have had little effect.

In order to compensate for the lack of government capacities, donors responded by creating parallel systems which helped to provide outputs but were not sustainable and did not address the underlying issues of lacking state capacity.

The reviewed evaluations clearly point out that many programmes were not effective and were guided by wrong assumptions, but they seem to have seen every programme across every sector as **relevant**. From this, we infer that “relevance” is assessed by donors according to needs. In a country like South Sudan, where the needs of the population are boundless, every development programme therefore seems relevant. This leads us to question whether the criterion of “relevance” should be based solely on needs. We believe **“relevance” should be assessed by considering needs and the probability of having a positive impact**, given the conditions under which a programme is being or has been implemented. Adopting such a definition would lead us to qualify programmes based on wrong assumptions as not relevant.

With regard to sustainability, the reviewed evaluations suggest **impacts were rarely sustainable**. By definition, humanitarian aid – the most effective sector – does not set out to be sustainable. In all other sectors, sustainability appears to have been very low.

The main **barriers** to more effectiveness were the government's lack of capacity and of political will, as well as the endemic violence. A lack of infrastructure, especially of all-season roads, contributed to the many logistical challenges.

**Pooled funding and multi-donor trust funds were an important aid modality** between 2005 and 2013. The results are mixed. It appears that the funds were reasonably effective in the humanitarian sector, somewhat effective in the health sector and least effective as a tool for stimulating government investment in services and infrastructure. The effectiveness of this aid modality therefore seems to reflect the varying difficulties associated with producing outcomes. It is easiest to produce outcomes in humanitarian relief; producing outcomes in government services and infrastructure is more difficult, because this requires the government to be a reliable and capable partner, which was not the case in South Sudan. It would be useful for

future research to explore which institutional set-up of pooled funds is most effective in various contexts and across various sectors.<sup>6</sup>

Surprisingly, **the evaluations rarely mention do no harm**. Exceptions are the Swiss evaluation, which refers to the possibility of doing harm in the fields of SGBV and humanitarian aid (SCO 2021), and a WFP report, which warns that humanitarian aid can be a conflict driver (WFP 2017). We think that in a context like South Sudan there is a very high risk of doing harm and that **donors and evaluators should invest much more effort in identifying and reducing ways by which aid can be misused by parties in the conflict**.

Many evaluations stressed that **monitoring and evaluation should be improved**, despite the considerable challenges posed by a context like South Sudan. Evaluators noted that it was difficult to assess to what extent results had been achieved, since baseline and endline data was often not available, indicators unrealistic and in-field monitoring mostly lacking. In some instances, third-party monitoring was used, but it is unclear to what extent this (or indeed any alternative approach to monitoring and evaluation) was effective. It appears that most programmes operated with very little feedback from the field. Given the potential for doing harm, there is a clear need to improve monitoring and evaluation.

Many of the reviewed evaluations point to the **importance of a sound contextual analysis**. The guiding assumptions on which a programme or even a country-level strategy are based should be critically examined against the backdrop of analyses of the context, local power constellations and the political economy. A recurrent theme in the evaluation reports is that donors time and again overestimated the government's capacity and political will and the prospects for peace and therefore designed overambitious programmes. The evaluations also urge donors to set down their **contextual analysis and their main assumptions in writing, for example in a country strategy**, which could then serve as a basis for a frank discussion about how the context and the political economy would influence the prospect for effective aid, and as a **tool for regularly assessing whether guiding assumptions are still valid**.

Related to this is the **need for more localised approaches**, which requires that donors have a better understanding of the situation on the ground in different sub-national contexts or even communities. That would enable donors to **fine-tune their interventions to the local context**. For example, some locations may have good enough governance and good enough security, and therefore interventions which require cooperation with local governments can be effective, whereas in other locations the risk that aid will be misused by local power brokers is too high.

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<sup>6</sup> A good start is provided by a 2012 review. See Barakat, Sultan, Kathryn Rzeszut and Nick Martin. 2012. *What is the Track Record of Multi Donor Trust Funds in Improving Aid Effectiveness? An Assessment of the Available Evidence*. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London. That review suggests that "further studies are needed of the effectiveness of MDTFs as an aid modality. These must examine MDTFs as a whole, rather than simply tracking the progress of individual projects that the funds support." Another recommendation made by the review is that "expectations for MDTF scope and effectiveness should be realistic and should consider the context and operating environment. In addition, future MDTFs should be based on clearly defined and agreed goals, and on realistic evaluations of donor, fund administrator, and recipient government will and capacities" (pp.2-3).

Ideally, donors would then choose approaches and modalities which are appropriate for the given context, thereby maximising effectiveness and minimising the risk of doing harm.

**Donors' increasing reliance on local NGOs** as implementing partners or as third-party evaluators – a trend which can be observed in all fragile and conflict states – **can create an overload on local NGOs**, which are often not in a position to absorb the workload. At the same time, international donors often find it hard to assess an NGO's quality. In contexts like South Sudan, it might be useful for donors to invest in building capacity for local implementing partners and to develop a shared vetting system.