



Lessons from stabilisation, state-building, and development programming in South Sudan

*Siân Herbert
University of Birmingham
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Questions

- *Identify major learning reviews and evaluations on stabilisation, state-building, and development programme in South Sudan since independent. [NB. Particularly interest in reviews of multi-donor trust funds or other pooled development funding arrangements]*
- *Summarise key learnings from these major evaluations/learning reviews*

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The K4D helpdesk service provides brief summaries of current research, evidence, and lessons learned. Helpdesk reports are not rigorous or systematic reviews; they are intended to provide an introduction to the most important evidence related to a research question. They draw on a rapid desk-based review of published literature and consultation with subject specialists.

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1. Summary

This rapid literature review collates lessons from major evaluations and learning reviews from development, state-building and stabilisation programming in South Sudan since independence in 2011.

Key findings include:

- Donors in South Sudan have had to transition from humanitarian to development aid and back and forth a number of times as conflict has broken out. Donors need options to cope with a nonlinear state-building process as South Sudan's political settlement has been, and will remain, very challenging.
- The sustainability of programmes in South Sudan has been limited as typically funding will not continue beyond the project, and as there is a high turnover of donor staff due to the difficult and dangerous living and working conditions. This is a major challenge for donors.
- Many donor programmes are identified as being "relevant" to the context and needs. However, South Sudan's security situation holds back the achievements of many programmes.
- While programme evaluations analyse the relevance of programming, and analyse whether they meet their stated goals, they are often limited in their ability to analyse the impact of the interventions.
- A key area of discussion for South Sudan's programming is the level, success, and mechanisms for coordination and cooperation (across donors, within donors, and across donors and other actors). Coordination tends to be more complex in fragile and conflict affected countries (FCAS) where country volatility can lead towards fragmentation. There are mixed findings, but generally coordination between donors has been insufficient and fragmented in South Sudan.
- Sørnbø, et al. (2016, p.22) explain that while pooled funding is particularly popular in FCAS (including in South Sudan), it only works if it engages with the local government, which is often problematic in FCAS where local government may be non-existent. The successes of pooled funds in South Sudan has been mixed due to this challenge.
- The South Sudan Health Pooled Fund (HPF) evaluation states it to be a highly successful pooled funding model, given the difficult context. Its design and implementation are used as examples of good practice.
- The scarcity of funding and resources for aid in South Sudan is a major challenge – e.g. it is a major cause of inefficiencies in the HPF (such as low staff remuneration, understaffed facilities, unqualified health workers, and insufficient drug supply) (Integrity, 2018).
- The evaluation of Canadian programming, similar to the HPF evaluation, found that while programming was generally aligned with many good practices for engaging in fragile states, more could have been done to integrate these practices in a more structured, formal, and conflict sensitive way.
- Flexibility and persistence in aid programming is important in the face of South Sudan's unstable security situation. Potential positive change will be a long-term process.

- The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) provided immediate and essential physical protection to more than 200,000 people, when conflict spiked in 2013 and 2016 in its Protection of Civilians (PoC) areas. The dilemma now is whether it should reduce its personnel in the PoCs so troops can patrol in conflict-affected areas further afield (where more people live, though more dispersedly) (Day, et al., 2019).
- Sørnbø, et al. (2016, p.12) critique the distribution of development aid as being concentrated in easy-to reach places and slightly more in urban areas (certainly in Juba). This means that vast areas of the country, that are in great need, do not benefit from aid.

Literature base

This rapid literature review found a lot of evaluations and reviews of programming in South Sudan, with many focussed on humanitarian programming (not covered in this query), and development programming, and few focussed on stabilisation. This review has endeavoured to only include evaluations of programmes that occurred after 2011, however where it does include papers that analyse the period before and after 2011, it attempts to separate off only the lessons relevant to the post-2011 period (e.g. it only includes a little bit of information on the Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Southern Sudan (MDTF-SS) as this closed in 2012) (Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies, 2013). The literature is mostly produced by practitioners, policy-makers, and think tanks.

2. Lessons

Transitioning from humanitarian to development aid and back, and the dilemmas of working with the state

From 2011 to 2013, much donor programming focussed on state-building and capacity development, but after the 2013 and 2016 outbreaks of conflict, donors dropped many of these programmes, moved back to protection and relief programmes, and isolated the Government of South Sudan (Arregui & Denny, 2018). E.g. Norway ended its Oil for Development (OfD) government-to-government cooperation programme in 2016 (Arregui & Denny, 2018). And Canada ended its stabilisation and reconstruction programming in 2013, transitioning to only development programming and humanitarian assistance (Government of Canada, 2017). Thus South Sudan has become a country where debates focus on the optimal interaction between relief assistance and development aid (Sørnbø, et al., 2016, p.18-19).

An evaluation¹ of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) highlights the dilemmas facing the UN in moving away from its state-building work and mandate in 2014, when providing support to government-led institutions became impossible as the government increasingly posed a major threat to South Sudan's civilians (Day, et al., 2019). "The UN rests on the principle of sovereignty and the primary responsibility of the state for the welfare of its citizens. As the country moves forward in the peace process, the pressure to return to capacity building will grow. How can

¹ The evaluation focuses on UNMISS' work from 2014 to 2018, and draws on secondary data and literature, and interviews with more than 260 people in South Sudan and the region (Day, Hunt, Yin & Kumalo, 2019).

UNMISS balance its support to institutions with the recognition that the government is a party to the conflict and is seen by large portions of the population as a continuing protection threat?" (Day, et al, 2019).

A World Bank (2017, p.11) paper that analyses² donor efforts to strengthen capacity in South Sudan from 2005 to 2016 in PFM and health care finds that donors need to "identify options to cope with a nonlinear state-building process which affects capacity strengthening efforts in multiple ways. Because achieving a political settlement in South Sudan has been and will remain very challenging, capacity-strengthening support needs to find (better) ways to bridge periods of renewed conflict". The dilemma for donors is that the government has not committed to improve governance, but withdrawing support will further weaken institutions (World Bank, 2017, p.12).

Sustainability of programmes, impacts, and building capacity

The lack of sustainability of programmes is widely identified as a major challenge in South Sudan, as typically funding will not continue beyond the project, and as there is a high turnover of donor staff due to the difficult and dangerous living and working conditions (Ecorys, 2016; Idris, 2017; World Bank, 2017). E.g. this is a key issue identified by an evaluation of an EU-funded project - Technical Assistance for Subnational Capacity Building in Payroll and Public Financial Management (PFM) (EU TAPP) (2014-2016).

One way the EU TAPP programme has tried to improve sustainability is through its capacity building approach. It uses state-based teams, and frequent visits by advisers, to build trust and relationships with state officials working on PFM reforms. The teams identify 'champions' among the state officials, who then train other staff members, thereby improving sustainability. Another way is that by using a standardised PFM manual and capacity building approach, it ensures that all staff receive the same training and tools, and therefore knowledge and skills can be transferred more easily as people move around, and it enhances opportunities for coordination with other implementing partners carrying out similar projects (Ecorys, 2016; Idris, 2017).

An evaluation³ of the South Sudan Health Pooled Fund (HPF) (a multi-donor fund for DFID, Canada, EU, Sweden, and USAID) found there to be no long-term sustainability planned into programmes (financial or institutional) (Integrity, 2018). However, some HPF elements of programmes may have lasting effects, including e.g. capacity building, health committees, and good health practices that people have learned (Integrity, 2018).

An evaluation⁴ of the Government of Canada's (2017) development, stabilization and reconstruction (START) programming in South Sudan from 2009/10 to 2015/16 found that while the programming achieved its outcomes in extremely challenging circumstances, it is difficult to know whether the outcomes will be sustainable, given the fragile and changing context. The evaluation found that some initiatives were, at times, "too short-term in vision, too focused on

² Based on primary and secondary data analysis, key stakeholder interviews, and literature review.

³ Based on document review, key stakeholder interviews in Juba, and fieldwork in four counties involving a beneficiary survey, interviews, focus group discussions, and a health facility observation survey.

⁴ The evaluation occurred between 2015 and 2016 and analysed 29 projects through literature review (including project documentation and evaluations), key informant interviews, and focus groups (with partners, government officials, and some local beneficiaries).

filling gaps rather than growing local capacity, and not necessarily linked to building capacity in the longer term” (Government of Canada, 2017). While, in other cases, its programme was an effective mechanism “for beginning to bridge stabilization programming with more long-term development programming” (Government of Canada, 2017).

Programming relevance for the context and needs

Three evaluations highlight that the programming in South Sudan was “relevant” to South Sudan’s context and needs:

- The HPF evaluation found the programme to be highly relevant in that it is generally responding to the health needs of the people, (particularly women and children, who are especially affected by conflict and the socio-economic situation). The HPF is well aligned to the Government of the Republic of South Sudan’s policies and plans. It is meeting many of its targets, and is a major contributor to improved service delivery, supporting the majority of health facilities around the country. It has had some positive effects on strengthening the health system. (Integrity, 2018)
- An evaluation⁵ by the Government of Canada (2017) found that its programming was relevant to South Sudan’s needs (especially for health; youth; governance; and food security) and aligned with Canada’s priorities.
- A paper analysing Norad’s Oil for Development Programme (OfD) (by Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA)), which seeks to strengthen oil and gas sector governance, concludes that its engagement in: (a) state level mobilisation through awareness-raising on relevant legislation among communities and government officials; and (b) on media coverage, were both “highly relevant”. Conversely, its engagement on (c) supporting the sector’s trade union, appears to have only benefited a privileged few (Arregui & Denny, 2018, p.7-8; 29-36).

However, as the OfD evaluation explains, even though local advocacy, stakeholders’ awareness of their rights, media coverage, and parliamentary debates have increased on issues around oil and gas rights and governance, there is still “no evidence that oil is being used for the benefit of the people of South Sudan, rather it appears to be fuelling conflict. The limited project impact is a reflection, above all, of the profound systemic constraints, related to the country’s governance system”. (Arregui & Denny, 2018, p.7-8; 29-36).

All of the literature highlights that South Sudan’s security situation has held back the achievements of many programmes. E.g. Staffing constraints, insecurity, and oil production having stopped in some areas means that some of the OfD’s planned targets have not been met (Arregui & Denny, 2018, p.7-8; 29-36). While the HPF’s achievements are “deemed a substantial success”, when considering the extremely difficult operating environment, and the severe underfunding of service delivery (Integrity, 2018).

⁵ The evaluation is of Canada’s development, stabilization and reconstruction (START) programming in South Sudan from 2009/10 to 2015/16. The evaluation occurred between 2015 and 2016 and analysed 29 projects through literature review (including project documentation and evaluations), key informant interviews, and focus groups (with partners, government officials, and some local beneficiaries).

Assessing impact

While these evaluations analyse the relevance of programming, they are often limited in their ability to analyse the impact of the interventions. A meta-analysis of 30 evaluation reports in South Sudan found that few of these evaluations addressed impact, with most evaluating programmes only on the basis of their stated goals (Sørnbø, et al., 2016).

Most of these evaluations highlight the difficulties in assessing impact due to the paucity and low quality of data. Thus they call for better baseline information and documentation.

“Underdevelopment, violence and political crisis affect both programmes and their evaluations. Rigorous data collection is difficult. Comparison of data sets over time might be meaningless due to these shortcomings. Further, development programmes and evaluations remain centralised in Juba. This affects aid programmes, not least humanitarian aid, which is typically delivered under great time pressure and with very limited baseline data available” (Sørnbø, et al., 2016, p.9).

Coordination and cooperation

A key area of discussion for South Sudan’s programming is the level, success and mechanisms for coordination and cooperation (across donors, within donors, and across donors and other actors). Coordination tends to be more complex in FCAS where country volatility can lead towards fragmentation and “stop-go” provision of development assistance (World Bank, 2017, p.11). E.g. during periods of conflict, government actors are less able to lead on coordination (World Bank, 2017).

Canada’s evaluation finds that Canada worked effectively with other donors, with active participation in policy dialogue, especially through the valuable platforms provided by the pooled funds. However, it critiques the lack of integration across Canada’s own programming streams, with a lack of integrated and linked priorities and the absence of a common understanding of the root causes of conflict resulting in missed opportunities for Canada to be more effective, efficient and responsive (Government of Canada, 2017).

The Sørnbø, et al. (2016, p.9) meta-analysis across donor programmes makes a more critical conclusion, finding: insufficient coordination of international aid efforts; a lack of an overall strategy for recovery and development; a lack of a joint diplomatic and developmental approach; and a failure by donors to adapt interventions to the highly volatile and fragile local context. It highlights that “diplomats, politicians and development practitioners did not collaborate closely enough to develop joint approaches” (Sørnbø, et al., 2016, p.30).

The HPF evaluation finds mixed results for coordination at all HPF levels. E.g. it finds that coordination through government led bodies, and separately through the HPF Steering Committee, have considerable scope for improvement (mostly due to the lack of terms of reference, unclear responsibilities and little clarity on expected outputs). It finds that the wider coordination body for development partners does not seem to be fully functioning. And that the humanitarian Health Cluster (which HPF attends) appears to be working well, although the development and humanitarian actors lack coordination. (Integrity, 2018)

The World Bank (2017, p.4) paper finds that aid interventions and coordination were initially “guided by ‘New Deal’ principles, but rapidly became more fragmented. Concerns about pooled arrangements, low coordination capacity on the government side, as well as overoptimistic initial assumptions made it difficult to implement a ‘New Deal’ arrangement in practice”. Increased

efforts for a more coordinated and effective approach were made from 2011 to 2013, with the South Sudan Development Plan (on the government side), and a Medium-Term Capacity Development Strategy (MTCDS) (on the donors' side), however the 2013 outbreak of conflict meant that these plans were not implemented (World Bank, 2017).

Pooled funding mechanisms

Sørnbø, et al. (2016, p.22) explain that while pooled funding is particularly popular in FCAS (including South Sudan), it only works if it engages with the local government, which is often problematic in FCAS where local government may be non-existent. "The record of pooled funds in South Sudan has been mixed due to this conundrum" (Sørnbø, et al., 2016, p.22).

The HPF evaluation states it to be a highly successful pooled funding model, given the difficult context; and its design and implementation are used as examples of good practice. The structure supports constructive engagement with the government at the sector level through Ministry of Health technical staff, and decentralised structures, even when the donor community has conflicts with the country's leadership. (Integrity, 2018). Other key lessons from the HPF include:

- Considerable efforts have been made to mainstream gender issues in the HPF programme, and there has been improved knowledge and awareness of gender issues among the implementing partners, and some gender focused interventions in the communities and health facilities. However, there is a need to address social inclusion, and to improve service delivery of sexual and reproductive health.
- HPF provides value for money in terms of staffing, drug supplies, and support for key strategies, including community engagement, and more recently, on gender equality. Addressing social inclusion issues has so far been lacking.
- Contributing to VFM is the effective management of HPF, and an implementation model appropriate for the South Sudan context.
- Tendering procedures and financial management are strong.
- HPF supports cost-effective outreach activities as a way of addressing the severe lack of health facility coverage – e.g. community-based structures have increased efficiency through increasing demand and encouraging positive behaviour change.

Scarcity of funding and resources

Development actors in South Sudan have "significantly less resources available than during the [Comprehensive Peace Agreement] CPA period and the government is facing extreme austerity in the short and medium term", finds the World Bank (2017, p.12). The HPF evaluation highlights that the underfunding of this pooled fund is a major cause of inefficiency contributing to low staff remuneration, understaffed facilities led by unqualified health workers, and insufficient drug supply (Integrity, 2018). Financial shocks and South Sudan's fiscal crisis in 2012 undermined the scope and quality of MDTF-SS outputs (Fafu Institute for Applied International Studies, 2013).

Meanwhile, the Canadian evaluation found that the effectiveness of the integration of some programme requirements were restricted by the limited resources and time available. This was particularly so for cross-cutting themes (e.g. environment, gender and governance), drivers of conflict, conflict-sensitive programming, and the principles for engagement in fragile states. E.g. the embassy would have benefitted if it could have had rapid and consistent access to specialists to assist with conflict-sensitive programming. (Government of Canada, 2017)

Do no harm and conflict sensitivity

The evaluation of Canadian programming found that while it was generally aligned with many good practices for engaging in fragile states, more could have been done to: integrate these practices in a more structured and formal way; to establish stronger links between security and development objectives; to articulate and specify more predictable commitments to development sectors; and to promote no harm, ensure non-discriminatory programming, prioritise prevention; and avoid pockets of exclusion. (Government of Canada, 2017)

The HPF evaluation similarly found that while the HPF is thought “most likely” to be conflict sensitive, as its local implementing partners have an in-depth understanding of the context, there is almost no documentation or clear strategy around conflict sensitivity. The evaluation identifies one area of concern – that the harmonisation of salaries and incentives may not be conflict sensitive (Integrity, 2018).

Flexibility and persistence

Perhaps the most important lesson for a FCAS like South Sudan, is the importance of being flexible and persistent. E.g. The EU-TAPP team was flexible in its approach to improving PFM systems, so when conflict started, the team decided to work with state-based teams in the non-affected states, and a roving advisor attended to the three conflict states. In these contexts it is important to work with what works, as well as with who wants to work. In the trainings not all staff members were equally enthusiastic. In order to ensure results, the teams focused on working with the people that were willing to learn, engaging them as champions for reform to activate their peers. Most of all it is important to persist. In FCAS setbacks will ensue frequently, shown here in the cases of civil war, or little political will. The EU-TAPP project shows, however, that by persisting, concrete outputs and outcomes can be achieved. The team deems further follow-up of the workshops and on-job-training (OJT) will be necessary to ensure sustainability of the results. (Ecorys, 2016; Idris, 2017).

The paper analysing Norad’s OfD programme also highlights that while the outcomes of the programme have been very limited, the programme has “built a modest but solid reputation for its work on the oil sector”, and bringing about positive change will be a long-term process (Integrity, 2018).

How and who to protect: Protection of Civilians (PoC)

UNMISS provided immediate and essential physical protection to more than 200,000 people, when conflict spiked in 2013 and 2016. This is considered to have: saved tens of thousands of people’s lives; isolated the polarised communities from one another at a time when they may have engaged in violence against each other; and potentially prevented a genocide. The UNMISS evaluation highlights its dilemma of whether its troops should continue to protect those people who have made it to the limited UN PoC areas (around 200,000 people), or whether it should now patrol in conflict affected areas (where more people live, though more dispersedly). (Day, et al., 2019)

Key challenges to effective PoC by the UN include the: physical terrain, obstructions to freedom of movement by the Government and other actors; limited resources for increasing the number of troops; continuing reports of under-performance by some parts of UNMISS; and a lack of data and information about the context. E.g. there is little evidence that patrolling more broadly

necessarily deters violence or reduces threats in conflict-prone areas, however the mission has very limited data, and what they have may go out of date quickly due to the quickly changing circumstances in FCAS. (Day, et al., 2019)

Limited geographical coverage of programming

Sørnbø, et al. (2016, p.12) critique the distribution of development aid as being concentrated in easy-to reach places and slightly more in urban areas (certainly in Juba). This means that vast areas of the country, that are in great need, do not benefit from aid, and that funds for basic services have been disbursed unreliably to local governments (Sørnbø, et al., 2016). This echoes the dilemma raised in the last sub-section, of how to decide where to focus limited resources (in regards to PoC areas) (Day, et. al., 2019).

Day, et. al. (2019) highlight how South Sudan's large and often inaccessible operating environment is extremely challenging for UNMISS. UNMISS' protection mandate has often been limited by the combination of this challenging environment with explicit obstructs by the Government and other forces in the country (Day, et al., 2019). Over time, there has also been a reduction in the number of civilian staff in field offices, partly as some bases have closed (Day, et al., 2019).

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