

International engagement in fragile states: lessons from Southern Sudan



Sara Pantuliano

'Transitioning from war to peace is not a technical exercise, but a highly political process'

Southern Sudan has been seen as a testing ground for effective international engagement in fragile states. International efforts on the ground have however been hampered by assumptions that the transition from conflict to peace is linear and logical, and by the lack of creativity in programming for the transition. As a result, the people of Southern Sudan have yet to see the tangible, visible improvements in their lives that are essential to safeguard the already volatile peace process.

It is clear that the conventional aid architecture is ill equipped to cater for a situation that spans humanitarian and development needs. As in many 'post-conflict' countries, Southern Sudan still needs support for direct service delivery, alongside support for the building of government capacity.

A testing ground for aid mechanisms

Sudan is one of nine countries in an OECD/DAC pilot initiative on applying the Principles of Good International Engagement in Fragile States. The Principles aim to ensure coordinated international action in complex situations that encompass emergency and development needs (Haslie and Borchgrevink, 2007). Efforts in Southern Sudan have focused on three main areas: donor coordination mechanisms; international support to state-building and international support to peace-building, with an emphasis on implementing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005.

A mass of aid coordination mechanisms have been tested, including the Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) process, the Multi-Donor Trust Funds and the Joint Donor Team in Juba.

The JAM was a comprehensive assessment of the rehabilitation and transitional recovery for 2005 and 2006. Led by the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Development Group and the World Bank, it saw the active involvement of the two main warring parties, the National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) and many donor countries. It was seen as *the* guiding document (Murphy, 2007) – the framework for the stability and peace divi-

dends that would buttress the peace agreement. In reality, while it did help to bring the warring parties together around a common recovery programme, it has not been an effective framework for action, given its limited ownership by national actors and its growing irrelevance in the face of rapid government and security changes. It erred in trying to provide a blueprint for international engagement rather than a dynamic framework that would respond to changes.

The main mechanisms to implement JAM's findings were two Multi-Donor Trust Funds, one for the Government of National Unity and one for the Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS). These World Bank-administered funds were supposed to ensure coordinated external donor support through to 2011. In practice, they have failed to achieve visible impact (Scanteam, 2007). The rate of disbursement has been excruciatingly slow, with most projects failing to deliver 'tangible goods' to the public even by year two (Fenton 2008). Bureaucratic World Bank procedures, staffing problems and protracted negotiations on who does what hindered initial implementation (Pantuliano et al., 2007). The government's inability to cope with the bureaucratic requirements caused serious delays and inefficiencies. Many donors now bypass these funds, channeling more resources bilaterally or through other pooled funds. The funds' rules and procedures appear more suited to medium-term reconstruction and development than post-conflict recovery. This is not the first time that such an instrument has failed in a post-conflict context, which begs the question: why are such crucial lessons not being learned (Pantuliano et al., 2008)?

Another mechanism has been the establishment by six countries of the Joint Donor Team (JDT) in Juba. A mid-term evaluation concluded that the team helped promote ownership in Southern Sudan and strengthened donor alignment with government policies. But its adherence to the OECD/DAC fragile states principles was less successful (Bennet et al., 2009). The partners failed to develop and operate under a common policy framework, and could not contain the proliferation of bilateral programmes and projects. This proliferation makes it difficult to coordinate aid in Southern Sudan and has limited the ability of the team to contribute to state-building. Like

Overseas Development Institute

ODI is the UK's leading independent think tank on international development and humanitarian issues.

ODI Opinions are signed pieces by ODI researchers on current development and humanitarian topics.

This and other ODI Opinions are available from www.odi.org.uk

many international organisations in Southern Sudan, the JDT has also had difficulty in finding and keeping skilled and experienced staff (ibid).

State-building and security

The establishment of the Government of Southern Sudan has been seen as a chance for Southern Sudan to 'graduate' from passive acceptance of humanitarian assistance to recovery and development programmes that are led by the Government. As a result, donors have reduced humanitarian funding and increased funding for longer-term recovery and development, despite growing humanitarian needs, the Government's lack of capacity and the proven poor delivery of development oriented funding mechanisms.

State-building in Southern Sudan, a key focus of international engagement, is an enormous challenge, as formal government structures must be created from scratch. Although concerted efforts have been made to build the GOSS administrative apparatus, these have been top down. The emphasis has been on building institutions and central government capacity in Juba, with less focus on legitimacy and accountability (Haslie and Borchgrevink, 2007). Some progress has been made in establishing regional and state structures, but the provision of basic services remains limited, and corruption is rampant in many areas (Bennet et al., 2009).

Promoting stability is crucial for the transition to peace, but related strategies and programmes must also contribute to state-building, keeping a balance between the establishment of national security institutions and the role of external actors such as peace-keeping missions. In Southern Sudan the UNMIS peacekeeping mission, mandated to monitor the implementation of the CPA, has been an important part of international engagement. However, despite its massive military presence, UNMIS has proved unacceptably ineffective. Engagement between the military observers and the communities is patchy at best and UNMIS is seen to do little in relation to its massive resources. Indeed, international spending on UNMIS presents a striking contrast to the low level of aid delivery visible to local people (Vaux et al., 2008).

Conclusion

The international community's failure to provide immediate and tangible peace dividends in Southern Sudan is a risk to peace building (Haslie and Borchgrevink, 2007). Delays and gaps in service provision and growing insecurity in some areas have resulted in returnees either congregating in already overcrowded towns and settlements or postponing their return. The confidence of the population in the capacity of GOSS to deliver services and other peace dividends has been undermined.

The complexity of the situation in Southern Sudan poses serious challenges to international engagement. While the OECD/DAC principles are useful, they can be contradictory. Important trade offs may be needed between, say, state-building and donor coordination objectives and the rapid scaling up of basic services as peace dividends. The application of fragile state analysis is only useful, however, if the local causes of fragility are understood. In Southern Sudan, for example, fragility in the Three Areas may differ markedly from fragility in parts of Upper Nile.

Signing a peace agreement often changes little on the ground. Transitioning from war to peace is not a technical exercise but a highly political process in which different principles, priorities and approaches need to come together. This includes a sophisticated analysis of power relations, causes of vulnerability, drivers of conflict and indicators of resilience. In dynamic post-conflict settings, the political economy of the transition needs to be reviewed and revised continuously.

In Southern Sudan, as in other similar contexts, far more effort is needed to find and support national champions for change and reform. The role of such national actors is fundamental, because international engagement can only help to stimulate stability – it cannot drive it.

Written by Sara Pantuliano, ODI Research Fellow (s.pantuliano@odi.org.uk). This Opinion was prepared with support from the European Development Report project.



Overseas Development Institute

111 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7JD

Tel +44 (0)20 7922 0300

Fax +44 (0)20 7922 0399

Email publications@odi.org.uk

Readers are encouraged to quote or reproduce material from ODI Briefing Papers for their own publications, but as copyright holder, ODI requests due acknowledgement and a copy of the publication.

The views presented in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of ODI.

© Overseas Development Institute 2009
ISSN 1756-7629

References

- Bennet, J., Kluyskens, J., Morton, J., Poate, D. (2009) 'Mid-term Evaluation of the Joint Donor Team in Juba, Sudan'. NORAD on behalf of the Governments of Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the UK.
- Fenton, W. (2008) 'Funding Mechanisms in Southern Sudan: NGO Perspectives'. Juba NGO Forum, February.
- Haslie, A., Borchgrevink, A. (2007) 'International Engagement in Sudan after the CPA: Report on the Piloting of OECD/DAC's 'Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States' for the Case of Sudan'. Paper No. 714. Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.
- Murphy, P. (2007) 'Managing the Middle Ground in South Sudan's Recovery from War. Basic service delivery during the transition from relief to development'. Report commissioned by DFID Sudan and the Joint Donor Team, Juba.
- Pantuliano, S., Buchanan-Smith, M., Murphy, P. (2007) 'The Long Road Home. Opportunities and Obstacles to the Reintegration of IDPs and Refugees Returning to Southern Sudan and the Three Areas. Phase I'. London: ODI.
- Pantuliano, S., Buchanan-Smith, M., Murphy, P., Mosel, I. (2008) 'The Long Road Home. Opportunities and Obstacles to the Reintegration of IDPs and Refugees Returning to Southern Sudan and the Three Areas. Phase II. Conflict, Urbanisation and Land'. London: ODI.
- Scanteam, (2007) 'Review, Sudan Multi-Donor Trust Funds Phase 1'. Draft report, October.
- Vaux, T., Pantuliano S. and Srinivasan, S. (2008) 'Stability and Development in the Three Areas, Sudan'. Report for the UK Department for International Development Steering Committee (unpublished).