

Impacts of Development aid to South Sudan 2008 - 2021
Systematic Review of Evaluation Reports

Effects of Development Aid to South Sudan 2008 – 2021

Part I: Summary Paper

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Introduction

In June 2021, the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands (IOB) commissioned two systematic reviews, one on the effects of development aid to South Sudan and one for Mali. Both of these are among the most fragile countries in the world, and there is a need to better understand what works and what does not work in such contexts.

Systematic reviews are exercises in learning. The objective is to identify all existing evidence on a given topic. Systematic reviews rely on a protocol that contains the search strategy and a set of clear and predefined criteria for determining which reports are to be included in the review. The goal is to produce comprehensive and unbiased evidence concerning the topic chosen.

The main objective of these systematic reviews was to identify and synthesise all evaluation reports on aid to Mali and South Sudan that had been produced by a wide range of relevant bilateral and multilateral actors across all aid sectors. Studies that met all predefined inclusion criteria (see Methods below) were identified and summarised with regard to the effects of aid across each of the different aid sectors.

The present report is a summary of the main findings from the systematic review of evaluations of aid to South Sudan. It is based on two underlying, comprehensive reports that offer much more detail than this summary paper. The first of these reports documents detailed findings from 12 country-level evaluations, while the second report documents detailed findings from 58 programme and project evaluations. Both reports provide detailed descriptions of all evaluated interventions, including details on donors, implementers, and budgets. Furthermore, they discuss sustainability of interventions, as well as factors that hindered better implementation and greater effectiveness. Lastly, information is provided on the method used to evaluate the interventions. Findings are structured by aid sector.

Readers are invited to consult these two comprehensive reports for additional information.

Methods

The following section briefly summarises the methodological approach used to select relevant studies. For a full description, see the separate report on methods.

This review collects and summarises the available evidence on the impacts of aid to South Sudan between 2008 and 2021. Searches were conducted in 14 relevant databases using a specifically developed search string. Websites of 17 important bilateral and 24 important multilateral donors were also searched, along with those of 18 major non-governmental development organisations and of 24 important repositories of evaluations in international development. In addition searches were done on google.com and google.fr. Finally, the evaluation departments of multi- and bilateral donors and major NGOs were requested to provide evaluations on aid to South Sudan. The searches were conducted between June and September 2021.

Title and abstract screening was conducted with *Covidence* screening software. Two researchers had to independently agree or disagree on whether a study met all required inclusion criteria. Conflicting cases were resolved by the principal investigator.

The team screened 6296 studies by title and abstract, of which 588 studies also in full text.¹ 70 studies on South Sudan met all the predetermined inclusion criteria.

Studies were included when they met the following criteria:

1. Published in English or French, between 2008 and 2021.
2. Provided an assessment of the outcomes and impacts of projects, programmes, multi-sectoral programmes, and country-level assistance in Mali or South Sudan. Studies that only reported outputs were not included.
3. Studies had to meet one of two thresholds for methodological quality:
 - a. findings based on a logically or statistically measured value for the counterfactual. Studies that met this threshold were deemed to be “**rigorous evaluations**”, or
 - b. findings based on adequate primary data (typically, quantified measures of outcomes, and/or data from interviews) from which it could be demonstrated that

¹ The search string included Mali and South Sudan; these numbers are a combination of studies for the two countries. Studies were sorted by country in a second step.

the data could plausibly permit the observed outcomes to be attributed to the interventions, without necessarily including a measure for the counterfactual.

Studies that met this threshold were deemed to be “**good enough evaluations**”.

4. **Country-level evaluations** of bilateral or multilateral donors were included by default and did not have to meet a threshold for methodological quality.

All included studies were then distributed along 10 predefined aid sectors: women's rights; health; rural development and climate change; rule of law; stabilisation; education; sustainable economic development; nutrition; humanitarian assistance; and good governance. These sectors were defined based on discussion with the IOB. When distributing studies, typically the designations given by the studies themselves were followed. This explains why some types of interventions can be found in more than one sector. For example, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) interventions can be found in humanitarian aid, but also in health; and support for village savings associations (VSLAs) can be found in rural development, humanitarian aid and stabilisation.

Evidence Base

The following table summarises the number of studies included per aid sector.

	Included studies, total	Of which “rigorous”	Of which “good enough”
<i>Included by default:</i>			
Country-level programme evaluations	12	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Included when threshold for methodological quality was met:</i>			
Women's Rights and Gender Equality	4	0	4
Health and Nutrition	13	7	6
Rural development, Climate	7	2	5
Rule of Law	1	0	1
Stabilisation	12	1	11
Education	3	0	3
Sustainable economic development	3	1	2
Humanitarian assistance, refugees, migration	7	2	5
Good Governance	8	0	8
Total	70	13	45

Country background South Sudan

South Sudan came into existence in 2011. It was at birth an extremely fragile state and has remained so ever since. In 2020, South Sudan was the world's third-most fragile state , and it was ranked 185th out of 189 on the Human Development Index. Between 2011 and 2020, South Sudan received USD 11.43 billion in ODA.

South Sudan had been fighting for autonomy from the North since 1983. The violent struggle for independence from the North went hand in hand with violence between political fractions and ethnic groups within the South itself.

In 2005, South Sudan signed a peace agreement with the government in Khartoum. This Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) called for a power-sharing agreement between the North and the South and for the formation of a semi-autonomous government in the South. The leader of the SPLM/A (Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army), Dr John Garang, became president of the semi-autonomous Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS). It was agreed that there would be a transition period of six years, after which the final status of South Sudan would be determined by popular referendum. Donors and the wider international community rushed to provide support for the CPA, as well as for the new institutions of the Government of South Sudan. It was hoped that such support would help to make the fragile peace that had been reached permanent and also to prevent South Sudan from pushing for independence. However, in January 2011, 99 percent of the South Sudanese population voted for independence in a referendum, and South Sudan became an independent country. Donors and the wider international community continued to provide financial and political support for the newly born country, and the UN deployed the United Nations Mission to South Sudan (UNMISS) to provide support for peace consolidation, state-building, and economic development.

Despite high hopes and significant efforts, the peace did not hold. In 2013, internal conflicts within the Sudan People's Liberation Movement led to an acute political crisis. The crisis soon turned into a full-fledged civil war fought along ethnic lines, with soldiers from the Dinka ethnic group aligned with President Kiir and those from the Nuer ethnic group supporting Vice President Machar. After five years of devastating violence, the two parties agreed on a ceasefire and, finally, a peace agreement. The "Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan", signed in 2018, called for a power-sharing structure between the warring factions and reinstated Machar as vice president.

Between 2013 and 2018, the war had displaced four million South Sudanese (of a population of 11 million), either as refugees or internally, and an estimated 400,000 people had been killed.² During the hostilities the economy had collapsed and food shortages were widespread: South Sudan had become a major humanitarian disaster.

In reaction to the civil war within the South, the UN mission to South Sudan, originally deployed to support South Sudan's peaceful transition to an independent state, shifted its mandate from nation building to the protection of civilians, and the number of deployed peacekeepers grew from around 6,000 in 2011 to 13,600 in 2013.

Donor relations with South Sudan also changed. After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, donors provided support for the processes and institutions. The main objective was to “make unity work”, and aid was given to support provisions made in the CPA. After South Sudan became independent in 2011, donors continued to provide support, but with a new emphasis on state-building. Even before independence, donors had generously supported the semi-autonomous government in South Sudan, and they extended that support to the government of the newly independent country. Aid, it was hoped, would bring peace dividends and with them help to increase stability in the new nation.³ Donors cultivated the idea that better delivery of basic services would be a key element for state-building. They also hoped that development gains would mitigate the root causes of the decades-old conflict between South and North and that development and peace would reinforce each other. As a result, ODA almost tripled between 2011 and 2013, increasing from USD 351 million to USD 1,083 million; see Figure 1. Spending for state-building and the provision of social services remained high until 2013.

There were, however, few results to show for this rising level of aid, despite all the efforts. Already back in 2010, a joint multi-donor evaluation had suggested that donors worked with a poor understanding of local power constellations and drivers of conflict, were generally over-optimistic in their prognosis of peace, and had overestimated the capacity of aid to address the

² “Civil War in South Sudan.” Global Conflict Tracker. Accessed April 4, 2022. <https://cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/civil-war-south-sudan>.

³ Norad 2016. South Sudan Country Evaluation Brief. Report 6/2016.

underlying causes of conflict, which were, in essence, political and not caused by a lack of development.⁴

Nevertheless, donors 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. Much aid went into capacity building in the public sector, including support for civil servants, developing expertise in the oil sector, and reforms in public finance.

Pooled funding and multi-donor trust funds were important funding channels between 2005 and 2013. A major vehicle in this 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.

Building state capacity in South Sudan was, however, a herculean task. To begin with, there were hardly any institutions in place. On top of that came a lack of political will on the side of the South Sudanese government to engage in the state-building project. A 2020 evaluation of Norway's aid to South Sudan found that the government had 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”.⁵ The lack of political will became clearly visible in the matter of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR): the government was unwilling to reduce the number of soldiers in its armed forces.

The outbreak of the civil war in 2013 marked the beginning of a new phase in donor engagement in South Sudan. Donors changed course to become predominantly engaged in emergency assistance, food security and local-level peacebuilding, hoping to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe and to contribute to stability and – ultimately – peace. Aid to government institutions and for joint-projects was scaled down or discontinued. ODA was still

⁴ Aiding the Peace 2010. Bennet, J., Pantuliano, S., Fenton, W., Vaux, A., Barnett, C. & Brusset, E. 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.

⁵ Norad 2020. Blind Sides and Soft Spots – An Evaluation of Norway's Aid Engagement in South Sudan. Report 3/2020: 7

climbing, from USD 1,083 million in 2013 to USD 1,751 million in 2017, when ODA peaked. But while aid for state-building shrank, humanitarian aid dramatically increased.

In 2011, humanitarian aid amounted to USD 110 million, but by 2017 that figure had risen to USD 1,154 million. Relative to overall ODA, the share of humanitarian aid rose from 31 percent in 2011 to 66 percent in 2017. The reverse trend can be seen for aid to government and civil society (the major purpose code for state-building aid): in 2011 it amounted to USD 111 million, i.e. 32 percent of all ODA, but by 2017 it had shrunken to USD 66 million, 8 percent of total ODA.

Despite all efforts, the international community was not successful in reducing poverty, increasing stability or promoting peace. In 2018, human-rights violations, violence against civilians, numbers of displaced people, and levels of food insecurity had reached higher levels than ever before. Importantly, attempts at assisting the Government of South Sudan to transform itself into an accountable, transparent and democratic government failed. It did not improve its capacities, nor did it show much political will to allocate funds and efforts to development policies and good governance.⁶

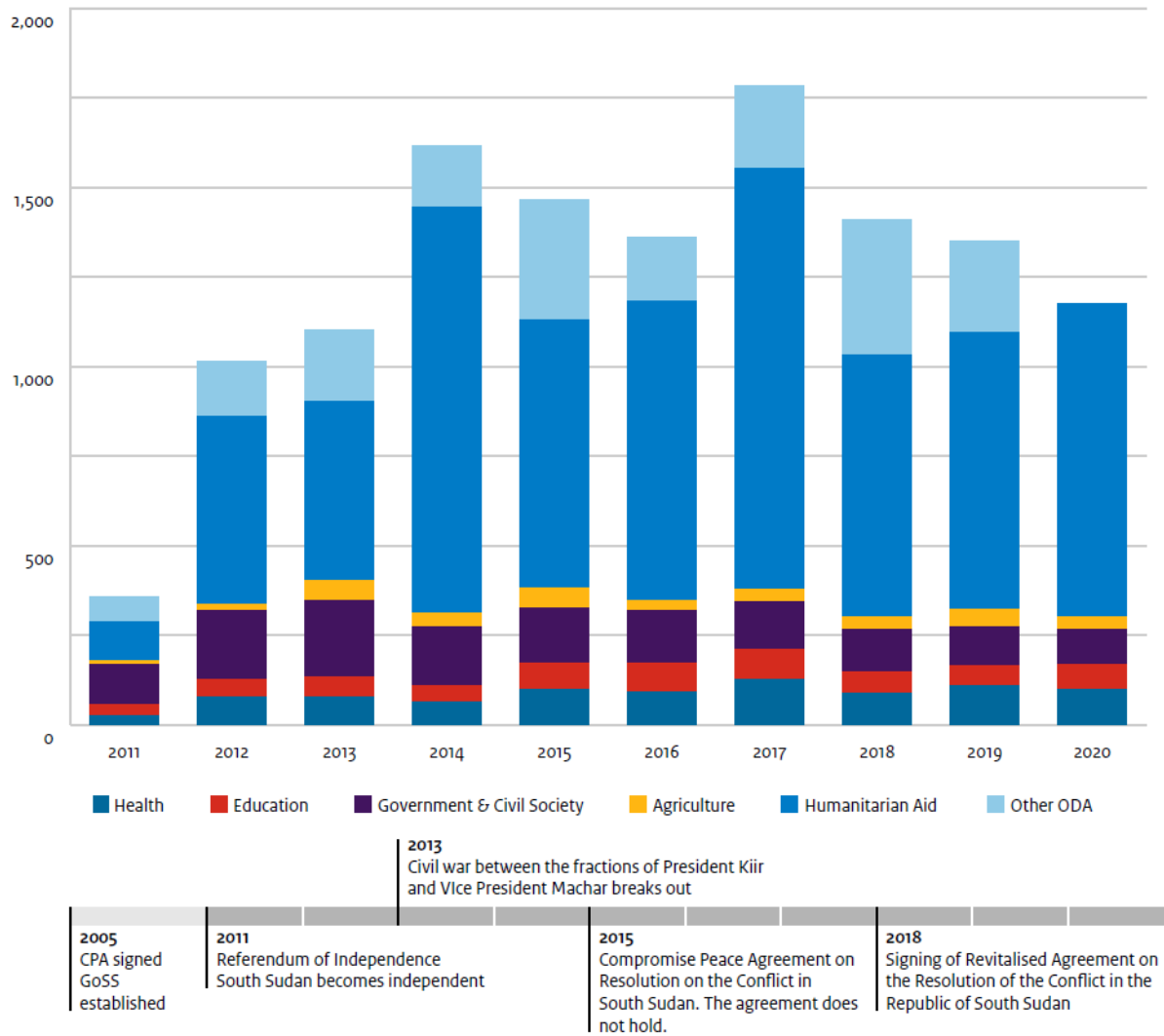
Efforts at supporting democratic practices and good governance were also not effective. There have been no democratic elections since 2011, and the government continues to act without accountability and transparency.

Resource wealth has not helped, either. Up until now, oil has not brought benefits to the people of South Sudan. On the contrary, oil remains a driver of conflict. A recent UN report (September 2021) states that between 2018 and 2021 more than USD 73 million was “diverted”. The report also notes that this figure is only the tip of the iceberg and mentions that President Kiir himself admitted as far back as 2012 that South Sudan’s ruling elites had “diverted” more than USD 4 billion of state revenues.⁷

⁶ Norad 2020. Blind Sides and Soft Spots – An Evaluation of Norway's Aid Engagement in South Sudan. Report 3/2020: 12.

⁷ UNHCR 2021. South Sudanese political elites illicitly diverting millions of US dollars, undermining core human rights and stability – UN experts note.

Figure 1. ODA provided to South Sudan, in USD million and timeline of significant events affecting conditions for development cooperation, 2011 – 2020



sources: DAC, CRS

Effectiveness per sector

Stabilisation

Evidence base

Type of study	Author	Main Intervention(s) discussed in the study
Rigorous	Pretari & Anguko 2016	Contributing to peace by improving livelihoods Interventions included improving crop diversity, support for small businesses, creation of village savings and loan associations (VSLAs), and delivery of cash grants
Good enough	Spoelder et al. 2016	Reducing inter- and intra-community conflicts Interventions included training, capacity building, livelihood support, dialogue fora, and faith-based activities
	Kimote & Deng 2020	Reducing inter- and intra-community conflicts Interventions included training, capacity building, livelihood support, dialogue fora, and faith-based activities
	New Enlightenment Training & Consultancy 2016	Reducing inter- and intra-community conflicts Interventions included training, capacity building, livelihood support, dialogue fora, and faith-based activities
	IOM; UNDP 2019	Reducing inter- and intra-community conflicts Interventions included training, capacity building, livelihood support, dialogue fora, and faith-based activities
	USAID 2019. "Reconciliation for Peace in South Sudan"	Reconciliation Support to South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC). Activities focused on supporting the capacities of the SSCC for mediation
	Te Velde 2016	Supporting local peace agreements; increasing cooperation among tribes

		Interventions included establishment of peace committees and farmer groups
	ACEPIS 2021	Improved access to public services and strengthening of communities' resilience Interventions included training for civil society organisations and communities; support for a mobile court system, community-awareness campaigns
	Chiwara & Batali 2018	Improving access to public services and strengthening resilience of communities Evaluation of the UN's South Sudan Interim Cooperation Framework (ICF) (2016–2018)
	Mc Gearty & Deng 2017	Improving access to public services and strengthening resilience of communities Interventions included promoting peace and reconciliation by improving government services, reducing proliferation of arms, reducing resource-based conflicts through capacity building for government
	Joint Venture Partnership 2013	Clearing landmines
	Haile & Bararious 2013	Supporting reintegration of former fighters
Discussed in country-level evaluations	Aiding the Peace 2010; Norad 2016; START 2017; Norad 2020; SDC 2021	

➤➤➤ In sum, Interventions in stabilisation were not effective, and such interventions could not prevent a resurgence in violence.

After independence (2011) and up to 2014, donors operated under the assumption that a major cause of conflict was the 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 a lack of political will within the South Sudanese government. The collapse of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the outbreak of the South–South civil war in 2014 swept away those projects aimed at strengthening foundations for peace and democracy.

After the outbreak of the civil war, donors helped to create arenas for dialogue in society and supported the various peace negotiations between the warring parties, but without much effect. 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 evaluation reports reviewed raise doubts about whether local-level 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 levels. As such, they would have had little effect on the major drivers of conflict.

Finally, it must be mentioned that there seems to be a lack of consensus on what “stability” really means. Interventions that were said to contribute to stabilisation included such diverse activities as setting up peace clubs, providing support to civil society organisations and to government institutions, addressing livelihood issues, support for DDR, and mine clearance, to name just a few. None of the reviewed evaluations provides a definition of the concept of stabilisation, a measure for stability. Furthermore, very few of the evaluations spell out a theory of change that would explain why a given activity was assumed to contribute to stability.

Evidence from country-level evaluations

Stabilisation is discussed in five country-level evaluations. The earliest is the 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 contributed to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the period 2005 – 2010. The key findings of “Aiding the Peace” ring true for many other international engagements in conflict-affected states. It stated that donors worked with a poor understanding of local power constellations and drivers of conflict, giving rise to flawed and unsustainable programme designs. “Aiding the Peace” concluded that donors had been generally over-optimistic 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, as many donors had assumed (Norad 2016).

START (2017) evaluated Canadian aid to South Sudan between 2009 and 2015. One large funding envelope was provided by START (Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force), which was at the time Canada's mechanism for filling the funding and operational gap between immediate humanitarian assistance and longer-term development and security assistance. START funding in South Sudan went towards stabilisation and peacebuilding. Specifically, it supported programmes focusing on justice, security forces, arms control, peacebuilding, and mine clearance. START disbursed CAD 46.5 million until the programme's end in 2013.

Canada and other donors also supported conflict management and peacebuilding processes at the local level. Activities consisted of support and training for dispute resolution, peace meetings, livelihood programmes, and local-level justice. START's report expressed doubt that local-level interventions had any long-term effect on peacebuilding, especially since many of the interventions focused on short-term training, such as workshops and seminars (START 2017). Most interventions appear, furthermore, to have been directed at the community level and were not designed to support conflict-management processes at inter-communal or inter-ethnic levels. As such, they would have had little effect on the major drivers of conflict.

In sum, START doubts whether tangible and sustainable outcomes were achieved in stabilisation (START 2017).

Norad (2020) described how Norwegian aid after 2014 increasingly focused on emergency assistance, food security and local-level peacebuilding. The report finds that the overall results of Norway's engagement were disappointing, especially when compared to the overly optimistic expectations that accompanied the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005. The report concludes that Norway and the wider international community were not successful in increasing stability, promoting peace or establishing rudimentary state capacity.

SDC (2021) reports that one contribution of Swiss aid was to support the South Sudan Council of Churches in establishing arenas for dialogue and discussions between traditional authorities and other stakeholders in the peace process. These activities may "further the perception of Switzerland as a neutral, impartial and trusted actor in the peace process", but it is unclear whether they resulted in tangible progress (SDC 2021: 29).

Evidence from project- and programme-level evaluations

Twelve evaluations of projects that sought to contribute to stability were selected. Four of these assessed interventions aimed at preventing or reducing inter- and intra-community conflicts, including resource-based and youth-led conflicts (Spoelder et al. 2016; New Enlightenment Training & Consultancy 2016; Kimote & Deng, 2020; IOM & UNDP, 2019). Other projects were set up to increase stability through strengthening livelihoods (Pretari & Anguko 2016), to promote stability through peace clubs and dialogue fora (IOM & UNDP 2019; Te Velde 2016), to build capacity for civil society organisations engaged in mediation (USAID 2019), or provide support for reintegration of former combatants (Haile & Bararious 2013).

The evaluations analysed do not provide evidence that these interventions brought about the desired results. Overall, these projects did not have a significant, immediate impact on stabilisation, i.e. on a reduction of latent or actual tensions and violence.

A number of projects sought to prevent and reduce inter- and intra-community conflicts. One of the main activities of all of these projects was the establishment of peace clubs, or similar platforms for meetings and discussion (New Enlightenment Training & Consultancy 2016; Kimote & Deng 2020; IOM & UNDP 2019; Spoelder et al. 2016).

None of the evaluations on community peacebuilding provides solid evidence that such interventions contributed effectively to stability. The evaluation reports do, however, consider that some of these interventions may have led to an increased number of such community structures (New Enlightenment Training & Consultancy 2016), to perceptions of increased collaboration among community members (Kimote & Deng, 2020), or even to a perceived reduction of violence within a community (IOM & UNDP 2019). Nevertheless, these results are all based on perception. None of the evaluations offers evidence for behavioural changes or provides an objective measure for a reduction of violence. Furthermore, these interventions targeted conflicts within a community, whereas it is reasonable to argue that the main lines of conflict in South Sudan run between communities, and between ethnic groups.

A USAID evaluation found that support for the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) did little to contribute to a better environment for a sustainable peace, as the project had hoped; USAID helped to strengthen the SSCCs capacity for advocacy and mediation. The evaluation

found that the overall context in South Sudan made it unlikely that mediation efforts would produce any results.

Chiwara & Batali (2018) concluded that the outputs from the United Nations Interim Cooperation Framework (2016 – 2017) did not achieve the desired outcomes for establishing lasting peace and improved security in South Sudan. While the UN framework did contribute to the improved resilience of communities, the authors concluded that little was achieved in promoting stability and peace.

Other evaluation reports also failed to provide evidence that interventions led to more stability. Interventions undertaken include a project designed to increase access to public services and to strengthen the resilience of communities (Africa Center for People, Institutions, and Society 2021); a UNDP project designed to support the South Sudan Peace and Reconciliation Commission (Mc Gearty & Deng 2017), and a large disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) project (Haile & Bara 2013). The latter project failed, according to the evaluation, because the South Sudan government lacked the political will to truly engage in DDR.

Good Governance and Rule of Law

Evidence base

Type of study	Author	Main Intervention(s) discussed in the study
Rigorous	-	
Good enough	Cox & Robson 2013	Public financial management and budget strengthening
	Foon 2020	Public financial management and budget strengthening
	De Rijck & Gathigi 2018	Free press
	Association of Parliaments	Capacity building for local councils and the National

	with Africa (AWEPA) 2016	Legislative Assembly
	Management Systems International (MSI) 2016	Assistance to the National Legislative Assembly
	Soni & Magidu 2012	Capacity building for central government
	MacLeod et al. 2020	Peacebuilding and education on human rights Community-based Security and Citizens' Rights Dealing with the Past, Protection of Civilians, Natural Resources, Conflict and Human Rights Humanitarian disarmament
	Management Systems International (MSI) 2015	Promotion of democracy and civil society
	Collin & Batali 2018	Access to Justice and Rule of Law Project
Discussed in country-level evaluations	Idris 2017; UNDP 2018; Norad 2016; Norad 2020; START 2017; ICF 2018	

➤➤➤ **In sum, the evidence suggests that little was achieved in the sectors of 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 help build accountable, transparent and democratic governance structures. However, donors generally overestimated South Sudan's state capacity and its political will to actually improve governance, leading to overambitious and little effective programmes.

Evidence from country-level evaluations

Good governance and the rule of law covers a broad area and comprises a wide variety of activities. In the sample of evaluations selected there are interventions for building capacity for

the central and local governments; support for state institutions such as the National Legislative Assembly, the Anti-Corruption Commission, the National Audit Chamber (NAC), and the National Elections Commission (NEC); support for the rule of law, community policing, free media and civil society organisations. Other interventions promoted democracy and education on human rights.

Interventions in good governance and rule of law were discussed in six country-level evaluations. There is broad consensus that, overall, very little was achieved. Prior to the outbreak of the civil war in 2014, donors provided support to the government to help build accountable, transparent and democratic governance structures. However, donors generally overestimated South Sudan's state capacity and its political will to improve governance, which led to overambitious programmes that had little effect.

A 2016 Norad report found that support for governance projects had not been effective, that levels of ownership of such projects by the government remained low, that little capacity was built, and that the sustainability of these projects was questionable (Norad 2016). The report noted further that at the time of the report it had become increasingly clear that the new government of South Sudan not only lacked the capacity, but also the political will to become a committed partner in providing peace dividends. The donor community responded by creating parallel systems and delegating government functionality to external technical advisors. 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, hence state capacities remained low (Norad 2016).

Later reports reached similar conclusions. A Canadian evaluation report found that capacity building had failed, both at government and community levels. The report also noted that after 2013 capacity building shifted to capacity replacement – without a real strategy for long-term sustainability (START 2017).

ICF (2018) noted that that capacity building for the government had not been effective, and that the UN had tried to fill these gaps, in doing so building, in essence, parallel systems.

Idris (2017) provided a synthesis of nine evaluations of local governance programmes, noting that donors generally underestimated the challenging context and overestimated South Sudan's state capacity, leading to overambitious programmes. Already by 2010 (i.e. 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, there was an absence of real change. To compensate for the lack of government capacity, donors responded by creating parallel systems and delegating government functionality to foreign advisors, in an attempt to preserve the successes of their projects. While this may have enabled a project to produce the outputs expected, it nevertheless did not address the underlying issue, i.e. the lack of sector-wide governmental capacity. 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 the dynamics of local conflicts.

UNDP (2018) evaluated various good governance interventions implemented by its country programme (2012 – 2016). UNDP supported capacity building for government institutions such as the National Legislative Assembly, the Anti-Corruption Commission, the National Audit Chamber (NAC), and the National Elections Commission (NEC). Other areas receiving support were decentralisation and intra-governmental coordination processes; capacity building for institutions serving the rule of law, such as a case-management system for the High Court; support for the judiciary sector; training for community policing; and support for civil society organisations. The findings of the evaluation are sobering: most of the planned outputs were not delivered and very few outcomes, if any, were achieved.

A 2020 Norwegian evaluation doubles down on these findings (Norad 2020), stating that attempts at assisting the government of South Sudan to transform itself into an accountable, transparent, and democratic government failed. The government did not improve its capacity, and it showed little political will to allocate funds and effort to development policies and to good governance. The report concluded 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, South Sudanese civil servants often left owing to slow or non-payment of salaries and because appointments at all levels are rarely based on merit, but instead on clientelism (Norad 2020).

Evidence from project- and programme-level evaluations

Eight studies on good governance were included, two of which were concerned with public financial management and budget strengthening (Cox & Robson 2013; Foon 2020); another two focused on capacity building and capacity placement (AWEPA 2016; Soni & Magidu 2012); two on democracy and governance activities (MSI 2015, 2016); one on peacebuilding and human-rights education (MacLeod et al. 2020); and one on establishing a free press (De Rijck and Gathigi 2018). The findings from these programme- and project-level evaluations corroborate the findings recorded in the country-level evaluations.

Projects in the area of capacity building for the government did not produce tangible results. A project that offered training and capacity building to members of local councils and women MPs helped to improve their competence in preparing and enacting legislation. However, according to the report, it is unclear whether the increased human capacity had a lasting impact on local governance, and whether new processes and procedures were sufficiently embedded in the system to have a lasting impact after the project stopped (AWEPA 2016).

A UNDP project dealing with capacity placement (Soni & Magidu 2012) placed UN volunteers with a moderately high level of expertise as resident technical assistants in institutions across South Sudan to enhance service delivery. This gap-filling exercise may have solved the immediate lack of capacity, but according to the report it risked excluding counterpart staff and did not build sustainable capacity.

Two USAID-funded projects (MSI 2015, 2016) were both concerned with strengthening the political process. One project (MSI 2015) aimed to promote the development of a sound political and legal framework that would support civic participation, and one of its main pillars was to educate citizens about the political process. The second project (MSI 2016) was concerned with legislative strengthening and provided technical assistance in support of political parties. Neither evaluation provides strong evidence that the projects contributed to increased meaningful participation of civil society in the political process.

The Freedom from Fear (FFF) programme bundled a number of activities (MacLeod et al. 2020). The overarching theme of FFF's activities was to contribute to transformative change in fragile and conflict-affected situations. Its portfolio was based on rather small-scale peacebuilding and human-rights initiatives. The evaluations do not provide evidence that lasting results were achieved in any of the interventions.

There is one evaluation of a project focusing on the Rule of Law (Colin & Batali 2018). This UNDP-run project aimed to deliver a legal and regulatory framework for the provision of legal-aid services for the South Sudanese population (including internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other vulnerable groups), as well as to improve government capacity for the rule of law. The project's main outputs included a series of activities, including: the establishment of three Justice and Confidence centres to provide mediation and referral services; the establishment of a rule-of-law forum tackling specific issues at the state level; delivery of vocational training in prisons, police training centres, and universities; the development of policy options on alternatives to imprisonment; and technical assistance on the revision of the local governance act. The evaluation provides no evidence of sustainable results.

Despite mostly disappointing results, there were some pockets of “technical success”, but they did not translate into system-wide improvements. An example of such “technical success” was a project aimed at strengthening key elements in the annual budget process; unfortunately, progress was eroded by the disintegration of the government (Cox & Robson 2013). Another example of such “success” is a programme designed to help establish State Revenue Authorities (SRAs), and train tax officers and legislators in public financial management. The project improved the capacity of SRAs and may have increased the collection of taxes in the provinces in which it was rolled out, but it is not clear whether the gains were sustained (Foon 2020).

Radio Tamazuj (De Rijck & Gathigi 2018) is the only project undertaken in the area of media freedom. Radio Tamazuj was set up as a project of the Dutch Free Press Unlimited (FPU), with funding of €2,730,896 being provided by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The project's aims were to enhance freedom of expression and to provide South Sudanese people with access to independent information. In 2015, Radio Tamazuj was forced to operate in exile. Nevertheless, Radio Tamazuj continued to broadcast and, as other media enterprises were being silenced, it became one of the few sources of news and information for many. Political circumstances prevented it from achieving its full potential and making a more substantial and longer-term impact (De Rijck & Gathigi 2018).

Humanitarian Assistance

Evidence base

Type of study	Author	Main Intervention(s) discussed in the study
Rigorous	Julius et al. 2018	Food security and resilience
	Sulaiman 2010	Food assistance
Good enough		
	Bell 2019	Multi-purpose cash transfers, food security, WASH, protection
	Frankenberger et al. 2020	Provision of basic needs and providing access to opportunities to improve livelihood and food security for refugees
	Nguka et al. 2018	WASH, child protection, nutrition
	O'Hagan 2011	Community-based reintegration program, access to basic services for refugees
	UNIDO Evaluation Group 2014	Vocational training for development of livelihoods
Discussed in country-level evaluations	Norad 2016; Norad 2020; SDC 2021; UN – South Sudan Interim Cooperation Framework (ICF) 2018; UN – Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) 2016; UN – World Food Programme 2017	General food assistance, cash-based transfers, school feeding, distribution of livelihood kits.

➤➤➤ In sum, humanitarian assistance, which became the dominant aid sector by 2014,

appears to have been effective. Donors were able to quickly redirect their aid to the humanitarian sector. Multi-donor pooled funding proved to be an effective instrument. However, while general food aid helped to prevent more suffering, donors were not successful in improving resilience and livelihoods.

Evidence from country-level evaluations

Humanitarian assistance, which became the dominant aid sector by 2014, appears to have been **effective in preventing the bad from getting worse**, even if most donors appeared to have been taken by surprise by the resurgence of violence and were not prepared to quickly switch from “aid for state-building” to “emergency aid”. But, by early 2014, most donors began to refocus their aid towards humanitarian assistance and emergency aid. A substantial part of this aid was channeled through multi-donor pooled funds.

The evaluation reports suggest that such multilateral funds, especially the UN-managed South Sudan Humanitarian Fund (SSHF), have been effective and have contributed to alleviating humanitarian needs in the country (Norad 2016, 2020; SDC 2021). The fund was commended for its capacity to absorb large grants and to use contributions in a strategic, yet flexible, manner.

Measures implemented through the fund included general food assistance, cash-based transfers, school feeding and large-scale distribution of livelihood kits. The reports note that cash-based transfers were often more cost-efficient and timely than in-kind transfers, but that this form of aid could not be rolled out in all regions owing to their difficult context.

Other multilateral funds that were found to be relatively effective were the Emergency Livelihood Response Programme in South Sudan (ELRP) run by FAO, and the UN’s World Food Programme (WFP). The cornerstone of the FAO programme was the distribution of livelihood kits, containing staple-crop seed kits, vegetable seed kits, and fishing kits. Other components of aid included Input Trade Fairs (ITFs), nutrition vouchers, and animal health through vaccination and the provision of veterinary drugs.

The World Food Programme was assessed for the period 2011 – 2016 and had a total value of USD 2.6 billion. Its objectives were 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 found that the performance against output targets was generally effective (UN World Food Programme 2017).

For example, 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 programme repeatedly showed positive results, particularly with regard to enrolment retention rates.

For the building of livelihoods and resilience, results were more modest. Beneficiaries valued the hard assets built (e.g. dikes and feeder roads) and training, but not all goals were achieved. Progress in enhancing market access and value chains was also limited.

The reports noted that a particular challenge was that both the government and opposition forces repeatedly denied aid organisations access to areas. They also noted that the risk of humanitarian aid fueling the conflict was significant, given the sheer volume of food assistance in South Sudan's economy.

It is surprising that these evaluation reports do not systematically assess the potential of humanitarian aid doing harm. This appears to be a general shortcoming of the evaluation of humanitarian and emergency aid.

Evidence from project- and programme-level evaluations

We included seven programme and project evaluations, all of which were classified by the donors themselves as humanitarian. The interventions focused on various combinations of food security and livelihoods (FSL); water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); social protection; and nutrition. Additional interventions included cash transfers; food assistance for training; education; and, in those interventions that deal specifically with refugees, returnees and IDPs, community-based reintegration, the development of infrastructure, and promotion of self-reliance.

Evidence from project- and programme-level evaluations corroborates that found in country-level evaluations. The reports cite a number of interventions with positive impacts. Nutrition projects had a positive impact on the health of malnourished children (Nguka et al. 2018); clean-water delivery projects and other WASH activities improved the health and wellbeing of thousands of people (UNIDO Evaluation Group 2014); village savings and loan associations (VSLAs) were reported to have had a positive effect on coping strategies and on investment in small businesses (Bell 2019); cash transfers were used to enable the purchase of small livestock (e.g. poultry) or inputs such as seed, tools or fishing kits. The cash transfers were also associated with increases in self-respect and dignity, particularly for the most vulnerable; innovative crop diversification and improved community structures had a positive impact on

reducing food insecurity; and climate-smart agriculture increased production (Frankenberger et al. 2019).

Two UNHCR interventions focused on support for refugees, returnees, and IDPs. These programmes were designed to address basic needs, to provide access to livelihood opportunities, and to support the socio-economic self-reliance of refugee households through improved agricultural production, micro-enterprise development, and skills training. According to the evaluations, most outputs were met and the programmes played an important role in helping returnees to settle and become self-supporting.

Despite these achievements, many evaluations of humanitarian programmes noted that effects on long-term resilience were small. Furthermore, many humanitarian interventions took place within a limited time frame and with many groups of beneficiaries simultaneously, which may have reduced effectiveness because donors were often overwhelmed and could not follow up with long-term sustained cooperation.

Rural Development

Evidence base

Type of study	Author	Main Intervention(s) discussed in the study
Rigorous	Pretari & Anguko 2016	Improving food security and livelihoods Interventions: food-for-training, small-business workshops, enhanced agricultural cultivation methods and fishing techniques
Good enough	Sulaiman 2010	Improving food security and livelihoods Interventions: food-for-training, small-business workshops, enhanced agricultural cultivation methods and fishing techniques
	CDP 2019	Improving food security and livelihoods Interventions: food-for-training, small-business workshops, enhanced agricultural cultivation methods and fishing techniques
	Schneider et al. 2019	Improving food security and livelihoods Interventions: food-for-training, small-business workshops, enhanced agricultural cultivation methods and fishing techniques

	Balina et al. 2015	Improving agriculture-based economic opportunities through enhancement of infrastructure
	NRC 2013	Improving water infrastructure and water management policy
	PEMConsult 2020	Improving water infrastructure and water management policy
Discussed in country-level evaluations	-	The included country-level evaluations provide no information on interventions in rural development

➤➤➤ In sum, projects on rural development and climate in South Sudan, including those related to food security, livelihoods, water and sanitation, and small-scale infrastructure proved to be reasonably effective at improving coping strategies and resilience. However, these projects only dealt with resilience and coping within the boundaries of what is mostly subsistence agriculture. There is no evidence available on interventions in rural development that would have succeeded at improving productivity beyond subsistence levels.

Evidence from country-level evaluations

The included country level evaluations provide no information on interventions in rural development.

Evidence from project- and programme-level evaluations

We included seven evaluations referring to interventions in rural development and agriculture. Four reports assessed projects aimed at improving food security and livelihoods, including food-for-training programmes, small-business workshops, enhanced agricultural cultivation methods for mitigating climate change, and fishing techniques (Pretari & Anguko 2016; Sulaiman 2010; Schneider et al. 2019; NRC 2013). Two reports evaluated projects designed to improve water and sanitation through improved water infrastructure and water management policies (CDP 2019; PEMConsult 2020). One report evaluated a project designed to improve agriculture-based economic opportunities through enhanced infrastructure (Balina et al. 2015).

Overall, the available evidence suggests that projects in rural development were reasonably effective.

Projects aiming at improving food security and livelihoods supported a variety of activities, including food transfer combined with skills development and financial services, small-business workshops, new agricultural methods, the introduction of new crops, VSLAs, cash grants, and training focusing on income-oriented opportunities (cf. Pretari & Anguko 2016; Schneider et al. 2019; NRC 2013; Sulaiman 2010). All of these projects were to some extent effective and improved the livelihoods of beneficiaries. Effective projects successfully leveraged the communities' willingness to learn through training in agricultural methods and crop diversification. Beneficiary communities were able to diversify their income-generating activities and improve their food security. Other projects led to increased cultivation of staple foods and vegetables and increased income from a marketable surplus of crops and vegetables, as well as introducing new income-generating activities (Schneider et al. 2019). Water and sanitation projects led to improved water supply, which had a positive impact on health and food security (CDP 2019).

Two projects (Schneider et al. 2019; NCR 2013) demonstrated that community resilience could be improved by adaptation of agricultural cultivation methods.

Education

Evidence base

Type of study	Author	Main Intervention(s) discussed in the study
Rigorous	–	
Good enough	USAID 2012	Improving equitable access to quality education
	USAID 2020	Improving education for children in emergency situations
	O'Hagan 2013	Improving education for children in emergency situations
Discussed in country-level evaluations	Norad 2016, 2020; GPE 2019	

➤➤➤ In sum, the impact of education projects in South Sudan appears to be relatively low, with only one project report offering a successful intervention. At the macro-level, it appears that donors did contribute to some improvements in infrastructure for education and higher student retention rates, but not necessarily in the quality of learning.

Evidence from country-level evaluations

Some positive impacts were achieved in education. Support for education, especially basic education, became slightly more prominent after 2014 as donors shifted some of their aid away from state-building to basic services. Two Norwegian evaluations (Norad 2016, 2020) note that many interviewees expressed confidence that some positive results had been achieved in basic education. However, these reports contain no systematic assessment of the effectiveness of aid in the education sector.

A thorough and comprehensive evaluation of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) found that GPE programmes in South Sudan achieved their target of improving school supervision and increasing total enrolments. However, according to GPE's report, the interventions did not improve learning outcomes or school leadership, nor did they reduce school dropout rates. GPE supported the education sector to the amount of USD 36.1 million between 2012 and 2018 (representing six percent of total sector ODA and 15 percent of non-humanitarian basic education ODA in the period 2012–2017).

One good practice mentioned by GPE (2019) was the allowance of humanitarian assistance for education everywhere, even in “opposition-held areas”, and to use education as a platform for fostering national reconciliation.

Cash transfers for girls, as well as school feeding, appeared to have been effective in supporting girls' attendance and their retention at upper primary and secondary levels. An awareness and social sensitisation campaign is likely to have supported girls' education further (GPE 2019).

These reports also note that improvements in the education sector were hindered by a high level of insecurity in the country, making it difficult to provide basic services outside of relatively safe urbane regions.

Evidence from project- and programme-level evaluations

Only three project- and programme-level evaluations were available, none of which shows that significant results were achieved. One evaluation on the impact of education in emergency situations (EiE) makes positive statements about the project: it kept children safe and occupied; and EiE was considered lifesaving by beneficiaries. Nonetheless, no conclusive evidence on impacts is presented (O’Hagan 2013).

Another evaluation on education in emergency situations also failed to show that results in terms of learning were achieved (USAID 2012).

A third project (USAID 2020) sought to improve children’s psycho-social and social-emotional learning skills in a context of emergency. The evaluation found that the psycho-social component of the interventions had positive impacts on student wellbeing and academic performance.

Women’s Rights and Gender Equality

Evidence base

Type of study	Author	Main Intervention(s) discussed in the study
Rigorous	–	
Good enough	Dziewanski 2020	Addressing Gender-based violence (GBV)
	Allen 2018	Addressing Gender-based violence (GBV)
	Epstein et al. 2012	Education: providing incentives to girls and disadvantaged boys to complete secondary school
	Munene & Wambiya 2019	Education: providing incentives to girls and disadvantaged boys to complete secondary school
Discussed in country-level evaluations	UN Women Country Portfolio Evaluation 2018; Norad 2016; SDC 2021; Norad 2020	UN Women (2018) assesses the UN Women South Sudan portfolio and the UN Women country strategy for 2014 – 2018. Norad (2016, 2018) discusses in general terms Norway's support for gender-oriented projects, specifically the support for women’s inclusion in peace processes

➤➤➤ In sum, interventions in women’s rights and gender equality were not very effective.

Where gender-equality policies were revised or newly introduced, they were rarely

implemented. Furthermore, women's participation in the many unsuccessful peace negotiations continued to be tokenism. Project evaluations suggest that interventions aiming to reduce GBV were not effective.

Pockets of success can be found in projects in the education sector. Targeted interventions helped increase female enrolment and retention. Notably, some results concerning women's economic empowerment were also reached in other aid sectors (e.g. rural development or emergency aid). While community-level projects aimed at enhancing women's social or political empowerment produced few tangible outcomes, gender projects with an economic component, specifically targeting women's economic situation, fared better as they had broader acceptance and reach.

Evidence from country-level evaluations

Programmes for women's rights and gender equality are discussed in four country-level evaluations. UN Women (2018) assessed its South Sudan portfolio for period 2014 – 2018. An important part of UN Women's mandate was to coordinate the UN system for gender equality in the country; to support South Sudanese implementation partners in implementing activities for strengthening gender equality; and to implement programmes and projects aimed at women's empowerment. The total budget for the sector in this period was USD 20.79 million.

Although the evaluation (UN Women 2018) is quite positive in tone, it provides barely any evidence of achieved outcomes. For example, the evaluation mentions that UN Women provided inputs to national policies and policy plans such as the National Development Plan, but it is unclear what these inputs consisted of and to what extent any policies were implemented. UN Women engaged with the Ministry of Agriculture and Development, but it is unclear whether this resulted in the implementation of any policies. Similarly, UN Women also provided support for the promotion of laws and policies to prevent violence against women and girls, but it is unclear whether this was translated into new or changed laws and policies; the report notes that it was unlikely that in South Sudan's current context any such laws would be implemented (see UN Women 2018: 38). UN Women supported NGOs developing capacity to promote peace work, but no assessment of outputs or outcomes are given in their report. The report did note that "UNW has been absolutely pivotal in supporting women's genuine participation in the peace negotiations and laying the foundations for more gender-equal peacebuilding and eventual reconciliation efforts" (UN Women 2018: vii), but it is unclear whether that support led to any

outcomes. Similarly, the report noted 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 this created any outcome whatsoever.

Other reports are far more critical than UN Women. Norad (2016) noted that gender programming became more important after 2011, but while awareness was raised among some civil society organisations and within some sectors of the civil service, cultural barriers and the persistence of customary legal practices prevented real change (Norad 2016).

A Swiss evaluation noted that changes in the areas of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) will need long-term engagement and changes will take a long time. It also warned that projects working with SGBV had the potential to bring harm to the beneficiaries if the intervention was not correctly implemented. (SDC 2021: 14).

A 2020 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 in 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). However, 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).

Evidence from project- and programme-level evaluations

Four evaluations were identified that address projects on gender inequality. Two of these describe interventions aimed at reducing GBV; the other two assess the same education project. The evaluations corroborate the impression that gender programming was not effective in South Sudan.

Dziewanski (2020) evaluated a project that aimed to transform conflict in communities, and reduce the prevalence and impact of GBV. Allen (2018) evaluated a project that sought to

improve prevention of GBV for vulnerable women and girls, mainly among IDPs. Neither of these reports provide evidence that the intervention resulted in a reduction of GBV..

The two reports on education (Epstein et al. 2012 and Munene & Wambiya 2019) find some positive impacts. Both evaluations assess a USAID programme that aimed to provide incentives to girls and disadvantaged boys to complete secondary school, and to mentor women to enter the teaching profession, by reducing financial, infrastructural, social and institutional barriers. Epstein et al. (2012) and Munene & Wambiya (2019) found an increase in female enrolment and school completion in beneficiary secondary schools, as well as higher retention and enrolment rates of female teachers in teachers' training colleges. Munene & Wambiya (2019) also observed improvements in attitude towards female education over the course of the programme, but they also noted the persistence of significant differences in attitude towards female education and gender roles in society.

Health and Nutrition

Evidence base

Type of study	Author	Main Intervention(s) discussed in the study
Rigorous	Inambao 2010	Malaria control by distributing insecticide-treated nets, training, and awareness
	Palmer et al. 2014	Management of sleeping sickness through training of healthcare providers
	Tongun et al. 2019	Reproductive healthcare and maternal health, through health education and training of healthcare providers
	Rosales et al. 2015	Reproductive healthcare and maternal health, through health education and training of healthcare providers
	Izudi 2019	Reproductive healthcare and maternal health, through health education and training of healthcare providers
	Malel et al. 2020	Reproductive healthcare and maternal health, through health education and training of healthcare providers
	Valadez et al. 2020	Reproductive healthcare and maternal health

		An assessment of overall investments in maternal, newborn, child, and reproductive health services in areas of protracted conflict
Good enough	Kisanga et al. 2019	Reproductive healthcare and maternal health, through health education and training of healthcare providers
	Anderson 2014	Reproductive healthcare and maternal health, through health education and training of healthcare providers
	Doocy et al. 2013	Reproductive healthcare and maternal health, through health education and training of healthcare providers
	Alwar et al. 2016	Support for better health policies and management Provision of infrastructural support, training and management of the health sector, provided through the Global Fund, Round 9, Health System Strengthening Project for South Sudan
	Hughes & Mohammed 2012	Support for better health policies and management Improving the healthcare management system: training village health committees, promoting health awareness
	Integrity 2018	Support for better health policies and management Investments in the public health system via a multi-donor trust fund
Discussed in country-level evaluations	ICF 2018; START 2017; Norad 2016	Delivering of services for maternal, newborn and child health and immunisation: strengthening midwifery services through the Health Pooled Fund (HPF)

➤➤➤ In sum, there were some positive outcomes in the health sector, especially with regard to maternal, newborn, and child health. The Health Pooled Fund (HPF) was credited with

significant results in improving health services, and one evaluation even suggested that this form of aid should be implemented in other fragile contexts (Integrity 2018). However, it is unclear to what extent domestic capacities in South Sudan's health system were improved and whether the outcomes achieved are sustainable without continued donor engagement.

Evidence from country-level evaluations

The country-level evaluations provide only sparse evidence for interventions in the health sector. Two reports suggest that there was tangible progress, especially in maternal, newborn and child health and immunisation (ICF 2018; START 2017), even during the civil war. Canada's 2017 evaluation found that the Health Pooled Fund⁸, a multi-donor initiative designed to deliver healthcare services, particularly to mothers, newborns and children, and to build the capacity of government health services, was reasonably effective (START 2017). This rather positive assessment is, however, in contrast with a 2016 Norwegian evaluation that was based on a synopsis of 28 evaluations. It concluded that many of the programmes supported by the HPF may have been unsustainable (Norad 2016).

Evidence from project- and programme-level evaluations

Thirteen evaluations of health interventions were chosen. One was for infectious-disease control (in this case, malaria), five were in reproductive healthcare, and seven were in health policy and administrative management. Seven of the 13 evaluations were classed as rigorous..

The study on malaria control suggests that the intervention (the distribution of insecticide-treated nets to children and pregnant women, combined with an array of supporting programmes) performed well (Inambao 2010).

All five reports on interventions in reproductive healthcare (Izudi 2019; Tongun et al. 2019; Malel et al. 2020 Anderson 2014; and Doocy et al. 2013) suggest that the various educational and capacity-building programmes had positive impacts by improving access to healthcare services for mothers and children. For example, health education on birth preparedness and

⁸ See HPS 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.

complication readiness improved the level of skills available at birth attendance. One report found that training of newly appointed community health workers increased coverage of various types of healthcare (e.g. antenatal, malaria prevention).

There are seven evaluations on strengthening the health system (Palmer et al. 2014; Rosales et al. 2015; Valadez et al. 2020; Kisanga et al. 2019; Alwar et al. 2016; Hughes & Mohammed 2012; and Integrity 2018). The interventions focused on service delivery, capacity building of healthcare professionals, infrastructural improvements, and development of the health-information system. All evaluations report positive results in terms of achieving outputs and having positive impacts on service delivery.

Notably, the Health Pooled Fund was credited with significant results in improving healthcare services. The evaluation suggests that the HPF is a success story and that this form of aid should be implemented in other fragile contexts (Integrity 2018).

There were also smaller projects that proved to be reasonably effective. For example, one project was reported to have increase services (some of which were women- and children-specific) by improving the management system of country health departments; establishing and training village health committees and engaging community organisations; providing formal training, on-the-job coaching and mentoring for health workers. Another example involved a community-based surveillance system for reporting acute flaccid paralysis, which led to significant increases in reporting of disease-afflicted cases.

The evaluation (Integrity 2018) noted that better outcomes were prevented by a lack of guidance from the Ministry of Health, a lack of skilled staff and health workers, limited local capacity for routine (preventive) maintenance of medical equipment, logistical difficulties, and endemic violence.

Integrity (2018) also reported that many women were refused access specific services because the health-service providers were men. Its report mentions that in fragile contexts where gender roles are specifically defined \, addressing sexual health needs and issues around sexuality becomes a critical issue. In many communities, unfavourable gender roles and societal norms continue to be a barrier for access to healthcare, particularly in areas with poor literacy and high poverty rates. The “rigid roles” of men and women were highlighted as one of the greatest barriers to providing healthcare to women.

Sustainable economic development

Evidence base

Type of study	Author	Main Intervention(s) discussed in the study
Rigorous	Collins et al. 2017	Cash transfers to women as incentives to participate in a micro-enterprise
Good enough	Chowdhury et al. 2017	Cash transfers to women as incentives to participate in a micro-enterprise
	Chiwara 2012	Creating employment opportunities for youth
Discussed in country-level evaluations		The selected evaluations provided no information on interventions in the sector of sustainable economic development, suggesting that this was not an important component of the major donors' portfolios

➤➤➤ There is not enough evidence available to be able to assess the effectiveness of aid to this sector

Evidence from country-level evaluations

The country-level evaluations selected provided no information on interventions in sustainable economic development.

Evidence from project- and programme-level evaluations

Only three project- and programme-level evaluations were available. Two of these refer to a pilot project implemented and funded by BRAC International (Chowdhury et al. 2017; Collins and Ligon 2017). Women in very poor households were provided with physical assets, appropriate training and small cash grants to encourage their participation in a micro-enterprise.

They then received training specific to the assets provided and were given periodic food support. The programme led to modest increases in food consumption and economic assets, but these effects had disappeared after 18 months.

The third study (Chiwara 2012) assessed a large UN and Government of Southern Sudan programme aimed at creating employment opportunities for youth. This was a complex programme involving many activities. The programme appears to have made a contribution to mainstreaming youth issues into the national policy and strategy frameworks. However, the evaluation does not provide robust evidence of tangible outcomes, i.e. increased employment of youth.

Other findings

Capacity building as cross-cutting aid

➤➤➤ In sum, capacity-building efforts for the government of South Sudan were by and large not effective and did not lead to an increase in institutional strength. Similarly, capacity building for civil society organisations appears to have had little effect, as many of them remained donor-driven and are therefore not sustainable. The health sector is, however, an exception: skills training and capacity building appears, at least to some extent, to have contributed to greater institutional capacity and better outcomes. Similarly, to some extent transfer of skills to individuals or communities for activities such as agriculture or home gardening was also effective.

Capacity building is an important cross-cutting aid form. Most aid interventions include activities aimed at building capacities of beneficiaries and implementing partners, and many evaluation reports include at least some information on capacity building. Unfortunately, very few of these

seek to investigate in a systematic way the effectiveness of the capacity-building measures undertaken. Despite this sparsity of robust evidence, some patterns can be identified.⁹

There is broad consensus in the evaluation reports on South Sudan that capacity-building measures for the government were rarely effective. Donors overestimated both existing state capacity and, as well, the government's political will for reform. As a result, programming for capacity building was overambitious, unsustainable and ineffective. The hope that the government would become a partner in service delivery never materialised. A common thread in the available country-level evaluations is that support for state-building and capacity building of central government institutions did not achieve the expected results (see, for example, Norad 2016, 2020; START 2017).

Least effective were capacity-building measures in "politicised" areas offering opportunities for lucrative corruption and which are, therefore, vital for maintaining the rentier- and patronage-based state. Norway's support to the natural resources sector, for example, did not lead to greater accountability and transparency since there was no political will for change.

Donor support for the legislative and judicial sector (good governance) also appears to have had little effect, since there is no sign of improvement in this sector. While it may have been possible to provide skills to individuals, this did not translate into more effective and more accepted political institutions. For example, a project by the Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa (AWEPA) provided capacity-building interventions for the elected members of the national assembly and local councils. The evaluation found that the intervention helped to improve the competence of MPs and councils in preparing and enacting legislation (AWEPA 2016). It is, however, unclear to what extent the role of national and local parliaments in South Sudan's political process was actually strengthened by the intervention.

To compensate for the lack of government capacity, donors created parallel systems, which helped to provide outputs, but were not sustainable and did not address the underlying issue of lacking state capacity; the practice was widespread between 2008 and 2013. For example, a UNDP project placed international technical experts in institutions across the country to

⁹ To distill information on capacity building from the 70 included studies, the qualitative data-analysis software ATLAS.ti was used. In all included studies searches were carried out to locate paragraphs that contained the words "capacity" and "impact" and their synonyms (e.g. result, effect, outcome, consequence). All paragraphs were retained that contained a statement about the effects, or lack thereof, of capacity building. Coding and searches were done per sector, to keep the information about effectiveness in a given sector separate from the other sectors.

enhance service delivery. This gap-filling exercise may have solved the immediate lack of capacity but risked excluding counterpart staff and created a culture of dependency on external support (Soni & Magidu 2012).

Similarly disappointing results were reported for capacity building at societal and communal levels. Capacity building for civil society organisations appears to have had little effect. A 2016 meta-review found that little capacity had been built and the sustainability of many civil society organisations beyond international support was thus questionable (Norad 2016). In some cases, training and organisational support may have increased knowledge, awareness and the organisational capacities of civil society organisations, but weak ownership and heavy dependence on donors remained. Many civil society organisations may, therefore, be donor-driven and not sustainable.

Some positive results were found in the health sector, where donor support did help to increase individual and institutional capacity, leading to better treatment of malaria, diarrhea and pneumonia, as well as better healthcare provision for mothers and children. For example, Canada's 2017 evaluation found that the Health Pooled Fund¹⁰ a multi-donor initiative designed to deliver healthcare services and build the capacity of government health services, was reasonably effective (START 2017).

Other pockets of success could be found in very technical and not overly politicised areas, such as use of geophysical equipment, water-monitoring systems, borehole construction, and the use of innovative methods in agriculture. Training improved the capacity of farmers to apply better agricultural practices, to help diversify their income-generating activities, improve natural-resource management and generate income (Schneider et al. 2019).

One lesson learned stands out: capacity building will most likely fail in areas that affect political processes and the political economy, especially the rentier economy. Obstacles are smaller in strictly technical fields, which are in general not overly politicised and where there is less opportunity for rent seeking. Also, as START (2017) reminds us, capacity building needs to be

¹⁰ See HPS 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.

sustained in the long term: there are no quick wins, and a focus on short-term training, such as workshops and seminars, will not be effective.

Sustainability

The reviewed evaluations suggest that results were rarely sustainable. The sector that produced the most tangible results – humanitarian aid – is by definition not meant to be sustainable. In all other sectors, levels of sustainability appear to have been low, for which there are many reasons. The collapse of the ruling coalition in 2013 and the subsequent new wave of violence eroded many of the gains that had been made. Endemic insecurity, war and massive population movements made it almost impossible for development aid to have lasting impacts. And a lack of human capital only added to these difficulties. For example, one of the greatest barriers in the health sector was a lack of skilled workers. In order to be able to continue implementing programmes despite the lack of a partner capacity, donors often turned to capacity substitution. The parallel systems that arose did produce some results, but these were by default not sustainable. The institutional weakness and withdrawal of funding for government institutions after 2013 reduced sustainability further. Ultimately, the government lacked the political will to truly engage in state-building activities, which made it unlikely that technical gains could lead to institutional gains.

There were pockets of success, however. The evaluations suggest that some capacities were built in the health sector, leading to better healthcare practices. Similarly, some capacity was built in the livelihood sector, resulting in greater levels of skill in farming or more income-generating activities. These gains were mainly achieved “in the heads” of people, in the form of skills, knowledge and practices. Institutional gains, on the other hand, were rare. For projects at the community level, factors that were identified as helpful for achieving sustainable results were the buy-in and ownership of communities and their leaders, as well as connectedness and collaboration with other NGOs, and, above all, with the government and local NGOs, since it is they who will ensure a project continues to have an impact after international donors have left.

Barriers

The main barriers to greater effectiveness were a lack of capacity and of political will of the government, as well as endemic violence. A lack of infrastructure, especially all-weather roads, contributed to the many logistical challenges.

In the sector of humanitarian aid, the barriers most often mentioned were logistical difficulties, ongoing insecurity and frequent population movements. Furthermore, a significant barrier noted in several reports is that demand for aid exceeded capacity as a result of budget and/or time constraints, resulting in restricted programme coverage.

In the health sector, several evaluations mention that the greatest barrier to the provision of healthcare was a lack of skilled human resources. Weak government capacities amplified the weaknesses of the sector.

Gender roles also act as barriers. For example, access to healthcare services is difficult for traditional women when the service providers are men. A lack of specific interventions around sexual health affects the healthcare for women. The issue of SGBV is amplified by a lack of access to appropriate healthcare and psychological support, as well as insufficient, appropriate security, redress, and access to justice for women.

The lack of capacity of the government of South Sudan affected all programmes depending on cooperation with government agencies. Examples are reported from sectors such as education, water, infrastructure and health, and for programmes for refugees and IDPs.

As for interventions in stabilisation and peace, easy access to small arms and light weapons made it difficult to sustain peace at the local level, as peace agreements, signed after community mediation and dialogue, were often violated. In addition, there was a lack of political will by the government to engage in local and national peace processes. Instead, it pursued ethnic politics, favouring one ethnic group over others, thereby alienating these other groups and undermining government credibility with the international community. The lack of political will was most evident in the government's refusal to work seriously on DDR and reducing the numbers of men bearing arms.

Appendix 1: Data sources for the search

Data sources

Databases	Bilateral donors	Multilateral and International Organisations	Repositories of impact evaluations in international development	Major developmental NGOs
Academic Search Complete	US / USAID (Development Experience Clearinghouse)	African Development Bank (AfDB)	3ie RIDIE (Registry for International Development Impact Evaluations)	ACTED
AfricaBib.org	UK (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, formerly DFID)	African Union	3ie Development Evidence Portal	ActionAid
Cairn	Canada (GAC)	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)	AgEcon	Aga Khan Development Network
EconLit	Australia (DFAT)	European Investment Bank	AGRIS	CARE International
Érudit	New Zealand (MFAT)	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)	BREAD	Catholic Relief Services
GenderWatch	Germany (KfW, GIZ and BMZ)	European Investment Bank	Center for Effective Global Action (CEGA)	Danish Refugee Council
Global Health	France (Agence française de développement (AFD))	European Union	CGIAR: Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research	International rescue Committee (IRC)
International Political Science Abstracts	Italy (Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS))	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD; part of the World Bank Group)	DEval	Médecins sans Frontières
MEDLINE	Sweden (Sida)	International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)	GEF (Global Environmental Facility)	Mercy Corp

PAIS Index	Norway (Norad)	International Monetary Fund (IMF)	Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery:	Oxfam International
Pascal (up to 2015)	Denmark (Danida)	International Organization for Migration (IOM)	ICNL Research Centre	Plan International
RePEc / IDEAS	Finland (Finnida)	UNMAS, United Nations Mine Action Service	IFPRI	Samuel Hall
Web of Science	Belgium (Enabel)	United Nations (UN)	Independent Development Evaluation, AfDB	Save the Children
Worldwide Political Science Abstracts	Netherlands (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)	United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)	J-Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL)	Welthungerhilfe
	Switzerland (DEZA)	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)	Millennium Challenge Cooperation	World Vision
	Japan (JICA)	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Evaluation Resource Centre	RePEc / IDEAS	HALO Trust
	China (China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA))	United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)		Oxfam Novib
		United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)		Save the Children NL
		United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)		
		World Bank Group (esp. World Bank e-library), CAS Completion Report Review, Country Performance Portfolio Review, IEG Evaluations, Impact Evaluation		
		World Food Programme (WFP), Evaluation Library		
		World Health Organization (WHO)		

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