



FINANCING FOOD SECURITY: PROMISES AND PITFALLS OF THE HUMANITARIAN– DEVELOPMENT–PEACE NEXUS IN SOUTH SUDAN

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I. Introduction

Food insecurity is on the rise, driven predominantly by violent conflict and climate change. Resource-poor countries are among the worst affected and many depend on foreign assistance to respond to the growing crisis. At the same time, the vast amounts of assistance have failed to break the vicious circle between food insecurity and violent conflict and there is a growing policy consensus on the need to strengthen the synergies between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding (HDP) assistance. To this end, key donor governments, multilateral agencies and international organizations signed the ‘Grand Bargain: Agenda for Humanity’ at the 2016 United Nations World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), which contained commitments to better align HDP action. However, only a small proportion of foreign aid—estimated at some hundreds of millions of dollars of a possible \$60 billion—genuinely supports harmonized humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts.¹

In South Sudan, protracted violent conflict and the consequences of climate change have driven the majority of the population into poverty and acute food insecurity, generating widespread dependence on humanitarian food aid (see section II). Addressing recurrent humanitarian needs calls for sustainable longer-term interventions that combine HDP approaches. This study identifies four main challenges that donors face in seeking to support successful implementation of the HDP nexus to tackle food insecurity in South Sudan. First, there is ambiguity around concept of the HDP nexus, and the peace-related element in particular. Second, there is too little of the contextual knowledge required for solid context and conflict analyses, which is linked to the limited capacity and flexibility of donors. Third, collaboration and coordination present challenges due to the persistent fragmentation of HDP bodies or administrative units within donor institutions, as well as the lack of accountability of the South Sudanese government which makes working with it highly problematic. Finally, there are problems with enabling

¹ Redvers, L. and Parker, B., ‘Searching for the nexus: It’s all about the money’, New Humanitarian, Special report, 3 Dec. 2019.

SUMMARY

● This study explores the potential for donor governments and institutions to support the operationalization of the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding (HDP) nexus to respond to the food insecurity crisis in South Sudan and the challenges it presents. South Sudan faces one of the worst hunger crises in the world. Violent conflict, climate shocks and widespread economic crisis have left 70 per cent of the population severely food insecure. Donors have provided nearly \$13 billion in official development assistance (ODA) since the country’s independence in 2011, of which a large proportion has been allocated to the food security sector, but the number of food insecure people is higher than ever. Despite commitments to work across the HDP nexus, donor financing remains largely siloed in humanitarian, development and peacebuilding funding streams. Almost all the ODA provided is earmarked, which prevents much-needed collaboration among implementing actors and limits the ability to pool resources and adapt to ever-changing conflict and peacebuilding dynamics.



localization, due to a perceived lack of capacity among local organizations, the risk aversion of donors and unequal power dynamics. The paper suggests ways forward and draws on a positive example of good practice in section IV.

This paper follows on from the Food Systems in Conflict and Peacebuilding Settings policy paper series published in 2021. The series' objectives were to emphasize the urgency of addressing the relationship between conflict and food insecurity, and highlight the existing opportunities to do so. The third and final paper in this series, which focused on ways forward, argued that food security activities in conflict and peacebuilding settings could create conditions conducive to peace. To do so, however, the actors responding to food insecurity in conflict and peacebuilding settings must apply a peacebuilding lens to their interventions, while at the same time peacebuilding actors should ensure that their efforts incorporate a food security lens. This in turn would demand an approach that integrates humanitarian, development and peacebuilding objectives. Donors can play a critical role by providing integrated funding that supports the HDP nexus approach to food systems transformations.

The case study in this paper explores the potential of and the challenges facing donors in supporting a nexus approach in response to the food security crisis in South Sudan. South Sudan is a pertinent case study given the protracted nature of the violent conflict, and the climate shocks and widespread economic crisis that have resulted in 8.3 million people of a total population of 12 million facing severe food insecurity.² Since the country's independence from Sudan in 2011, donors have provided close to \$13 billion in official development assistance (ODA), of which a large proportion has been allocated to responding to the food security crisis. However, the number of food insecure people is higher than ever.³ The paper draws on a review of the secondary literature and interviews with key donors conducted in 2022. Nine donor representatives from the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the German and Swedish governments were interviewed remotely. In addition, three interviews were held with representatives of UN agencies, both of which are direct recipients of ODA funding and support local organizations in cooperation partnerships.

II. A justification of HDP nexus approaches to food security in South Sudan

Complex crisis and aid interventions in South Sudan

Complex crisis and food security

South Sudan is experiencing a complex humanitarian crisis primarily driven by violent conflict and climate change.⁴ The crisis is one of the worst food insecurity crises globally, as crops and productive assets are lost or

² World Food Programme (WFP), WFP South Sudan: Country brief, Sep. 2022.

³ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), OECD.Stat, 'Aid (ODA) disbursements to countries and regions'. Data on aid disbursements in constant prices covers the years 2012 to 2020.

⁴ Concern Worldwide US, 'Hunger in South Sudan: Understanding a decade of food crisis', 27 Jan. 2022.



destroyed, markets disrupted and millions of people displaced. Among those who remain in rural areas, many are unable to access enough land to go beyond subsistence farming, and face serious problems travelling to towns to obtain agricultural inputs and access markets for sales due to persistent levels of violence.⁵ This has led to underdeveloped and poorly functioning food systems, a situation exacerbated by deteriorating macroeconomic conditions.⁶ Repeated and often cyclical exposure to conflict and climate change events is eroding households' coping mechanisms and the resources they need to recover.⁷ As a consequence, far more people face crisis levels of food insecurity and malnourishment now than during the civil war of 2013–16, up from about one million in 2013 to an estimated nine million in 2022.⁸ Between 6.8 million and 7.8 million people—or 54 to 63 per cent of the population—face severe food insecurity or worse and require food assistance. An estimated 55 000 people are facing famine-like conditions.⁹

The World Food Programme (WFP) has been present in South Sudan since the country's independence. It currently supports 4.6 million people through food distribution, cash transfers and resilience building.¹⁰ Some households depend on food assistance to manage recurrent food emergencies during the lean season from May to July, whereas others live in camps and areas where markets no longer function and are therefore totally reliant on food assistance.¹¹

Billions in aid but increasing food insecurity: The need for a nexus approach

Both immediate humanitarian response and longer-term development rely on donor financing. In the period 2011–20, South Sudan received \$7.3 billion in humanitarian assistance, which was mostly allocated to food assistance, and \$541 million in development food aid.¹² Despite this significant volume of aid, as discussed, the prevalence of food insecurity increased.¹³ Most of the food assistance allocated to South Sudan has been used to help communities

⁵ World Bank, 'Directions for reform: A Country Economic Memorandum for recovery and resilience in South Sudan', 15 June 2022.

⁶ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), IPC Analysis Portal, 'South Sudan: Acute Food Insecurity and Acute Malnutrition Analysis for February–March 2022 and Projections for April–July 2022'.

⁷ Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), East Africa, South Sudan, 'Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes spread amid funding shortfalls and assistance delivery constraints', Aug. 2022.

⁸ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), 'South Sudan: IPC Acute Food Insecurity and Malnutrition Snapshot—Acute Food Insecurity: October 2022–July 2023; Acute Malnutrition July 2022–December 2023', 3 Nov. 2022; IPC, 'South Sudan: Acute Food Insecurity and Acute Malnutrition Situation for February–March 2022 and Projections for April–July 2022', 4 May 2022; and IPC, 'Acute Food Insecurity and Acute Malnutrition Analysis. February–July 2022', 9 Apr. 2022.

⁹ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), IPC Analysis Portal, 'South Sudan: Acute Food Insecurity and Acute Malnutrition Situation for February–March 2022 and Projections for April–July 2022'.

¹⁰ World Food Programme (WFP), 'South Sudan: Situation report no. 305', 30 Sep 2022.

¹¹ Francis, O. and Kleinfeld, P., 'Fighting, flooding and donor fatigue: Unpacking South Sudan's food crisis', *New Humanitarian*, 23 Aug. 2022; Thomas, E., *Moving Towards Markets: Cash, Commodification and Conflict in South Sudan*, Rift Valley Institute et al., [n.d.]; Kaler, A. and Parkins, J. R., 'Food, donors, and dependency syndrome(s) in South Sudan', *Sociology of Development*, vol. 1, no. 3 (2015), pp. 400–16; and Mosel, I. and Henderson, E., 'Markets in crises: South Sudan case study', HPG Working Paper, Oct. 2015.

¹² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (note 3).

¹³ Milante, G. and Lilja, J., 'Chronic crisis financing? Fifty years of humanitarian aid and future prospects', SIPRI Insights, Apr. 2022.

**Box 1. Armed conflict and violence in South Sudan**

South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in 2011 following decades of civil war. Political and military tensions that had been suppressed during the Sudanese civil war and liberation struggle quickly resurfaced, and in 2013 the world's newest country descended into its own civil war. The war between the government forces, led by President Salva Kiir, and opposition forces, led by Vice President Riek Machar, was essentially a power struggle between political elites which manipulated ethnic divisions and grievances.^a Following several attempts at ceasefires and peace talks, the warring parties signed the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in 2018. It is estimated that the civil war cost 400 000 lives, the majority of whom were civilians.^b Around half the casualties can be attributed to the indirect impact of violence on livelihoods, food security and nutrition, as well as health.

The peace agreement has ended fighting between the principal combatants, but violence has spiralled.^c Much of this violence is driven by actors operating predominantly at the sub-national and local levels, although with clear links to the national level political and military elites that fought the civil war.^d State and local agendas can work in concert with, counter to or alongside national agendas.^e Violence might occur when state and local elites seek to demonstrate their value to national elites and their grassroots constituencies. Furthermore, political elites at the national level consistently exploit local rivalries, manipulate historical divisions between communities, and instrumentalize identities in order to marginalize or control populations. Supporters are supplied with military-grade weapons, which makes local community-level conflict more lethal. While community-level violence is often related to competition for water, land and livestock resources, it has become increasingly intertwined with sub-national and national objectives through the manipulation of ethnic and other grievances.^f In this way, organized violence in pursuit of national, state and local political and economic agendas creates negative feedback loops of violence that can quickly deviate from the original motives for the use or threat of violence.^g

Armed conflict has undermined development, and the country was ranked bottom of the Human Development Index in 2021.^h The country lacks functioning and transparent institutions and suffers from entrenched political and economic peripheralization—a legacy of the colonial period.ⁱ This has generated conditions for political patronage and corruption, as is evident from the mismanagement of the country's significant oil reserves from which the government derives over 90 per cent of its revenues. The diversion of oil revenues among politico-military elites deprives the state of much-needed resources, sustains a perpetual state of underdevelopment and raises the stakes of competition for resources.^j

In addition to the vulnerabilities outlined above, South Sudan is also highly vulnerable to the short- and long-term effects of climate change, which at times exacerbate competition for resources and spark further tensions between communities already weakened by decades of violence.^k

^a Martell, P., *First Raise a Flag: How South Sudan Won the Longest War but Lost the Peace* (Oxford University Press: New York, NY, 2018); and Stamnes, E. and de Coning, C., *The Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) FAIR CASE* Brief no. 6 (PRIO: Oslo, 2022).

^b Vertin, Z., *A Rope From the Sky: The Making and Unmaking of the World's Newest State* (Amberley Publishing: Stroud, Gloucs, UK, 2018).

^c United Nations, 'Despite new road map extending South Sudan's democratic transition, increasing violence, food insecurity threaten progress, briefers tell Security Council', Meeting Coverage, Security Council, SC/15033, 16 Sep. 2022; and



International Crisis Group, 'South Sudan's splintered opposition: Preventing more conflict', 25 Feb. 2022.

^d World Food Programme (WFP) and Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF), 'Adjusting terminology for organised violence in South Sudan', Sep. 2020.

^e World Food Programme (WFP) South Sudan, 'Contributions to Peace Strategy (C2P) strategic framework, 2020–2030', April 2022, unpublished internal documents.

^f Quack, M. and Südhoff, R., *The Triple Nexus in South Sudan: Learning from Local Opportunities* (Centre for Humanitarian Action: Berlin, 2020).

^g World Food Programme (WFP) South Sudan (note e).

^h United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World*, Human Development Report, 2021–2022 (UNDP: New York, NY, 2022).

ⁱ Vertin (note b).

^j Martell (note a); and Checci, F. et al., *Estimates of Crisis-attributable Mortality in South Sudan, December 2013–April 2018: A Statistical Analysis* (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine: London, Sep. 2018).

^k de Coning, C. et al., *Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet: South Sudan* (NUPI and SIPRI: Oslo and Stockholm, 7 Mar. 2022); and World Food Programme (WFP), 'WFP South Sudan External Situation Report #302, 30 June 2022', 4 July 2022.

survive recurring food crises and, to a lesser extent, help build their capacity to overcome future food crises or to recover without external assistance.¹⁴ The imbalance between food assistance and development assistance to the food sector has created a situation in which South Sudan has become increasingly reliant on food assistance since 2013.¹⁵

It is clear that in South Sudan the structure of food systems and levels of food insecurity and violent conflict are deeply intertwined—and one cannot be resolved without addressing the others. This makes concerted collaboration and implementation among humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors critical. Humanitarian actors can provide immediate food assistance to communities where food production systems are threatened by climate change and conflict over productive resources (see box 1). At the same time, humanitarian actors can work with communities to increase their food production using local resources, which can reduce the incidence of conflict linked to productive resources.¹⁶ Similarly, development and peacebuilding actors can incorporate elements of humanitarian activities into their work.¹⁷

The way in which donors channel their financing can greatly influence the success of actors that operate in this nexus-promoting way. Implementing actors require flexible, multi-year donor funding that allows them to adapt to changing circumstances. One prevalent funding mechanism is pooled funding, through which donors pool their contributions into single, un earmarked funds to support humanitarian efforts in emergencies.¹⁸

¹⁴ Ulimwengu, J. M. et al., *Determinants of Resilience for Food and Nutrition Security in South Sudan*, International Food Policy Research Institute, Discussion Paper 02117, Apr. 2022.

¹⁵ Ulimwengu et al. (note 14).

¹⁶ Quack, M. and Südhoff, R., *The Triple Nexus in South Sudan: Learning from Local Opportunities* (Centre for Humanitarian Action: Berlin, 2020).

¹⁷ Slim, H., 'Searching for the nexus: How to turn theory into practice', New Humanitarian, 23 Oct 2019.

¹⁸ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), 'Country-based pooled funds', [n.d.].

**Box 2. Localization and local actors**

Localization has been loosely defined as ‘an umbrella term referring to all approaches to working with local actors’ and refers to practices ranging from sub-contracting aid delivery to local partners, to developing locally specific response models. Truly locally led partnerships are defined as ‘work that originates with local actors, or is designed to support locally emerging initiatives’.^a

The category ‘local actor’ is similarly elusive. In pragmatic terms, it is defined as including local and national non-state actors engaged in relief that are headquartered and operate in their own aid-recipient country and not affiliated with an international NGO. These include for example local and national NGOs and CSOs. The term can also refer to national and sub-national state actors in the affected aid recipient country engaged in relief, at either the local or the national level. These include for example national and local government departments and agencies.^b

^a Wall, I. and Hedlund, K., *Localisation and Locally-led Crisis Response: A Literature Review*, Local2Global (L2GP), May 2016, p. 3.

^b Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), ‘Definitions paper: IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team, Localisation Marker Working Group’, 24 Jan. 2018.

Unearmarked funds are fully flexible contributions, whereas earmarked contributions are set aside by the donor for a specific purpose and a specific target group, and cannot be used for another purpose.¹⁹ In recognition of the importance of funding flexibility in complex crisis settings, donors committed to make at least 30 per cent of their funding unearmarked in the 2016 Grand Bargain.²⁰ Between 2013 and 2020, however, 98 per cent of donor funding to South Sudan was earmarked.²¹ Earmarked funding also limits coordination and collaboration between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors, as each actor must ultimately focus on the activities and partnerships that help it meet its donors’ requirements.²²

Financing in support of a nexus approach has become even more critical against the backdrop of a decreasing volume of humanitarian assistance flowing to South Sudan. Humanitarian assistance decreased from \$1.48 billion in 2017 to \$1.30 billion in 2022 at a time when humanitarian needs are at their highest since independence.²³ These decreasing funding flows have further exacerbated food insecurity in South Sudan, as WFP was forced to reduce its programming in both 2021 and 2021 due to funding deficits. Food rations were cut in both years, and in 2022 the number of intended beneficiaries was reduced from 5.6 million to 4.5 million.²⁴ This left

¹⁹ United Nations Environment Programme, ‘Earmarked contributions’, 2021; and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) Services, Financial Tracking Service, ‘Glossary’, [n.d.].

²⁰ Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), ‘The Grand Bargain’ (official website) [n.d.].

²¹ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) Services, Financial Tracking Service, ‘South Sudan 2013’, Country Summary.

²² Wilkinson, O., de Wolf, F. and Alier, M., *The Triple Nexus and Local Faith Actors in South Sudan: Findings from Primary Research* (Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities and DanChurchAid: Washington, DC, and Copenhagen, 2019).

²³ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) Services, Financial Tracking Service, ‘South Sudan Humanitarian Response plan, 2022’; and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) Services, Financial Tracking Service, ‘Republic of South Sudan, 2017’.

²⁴ World Food Programme (note 10); and WFP, ‘Funding gap forces World Food Programme to cut food rations in South Sudan’, 8 Apr. 2021.



over one million people at a greater risk of experiencing higher levels of food insecurity.²⁵ Moreover, there is a risk that reduced food assistance coverage will exacerbate local level conflict. Widespread food insecurity can increase the likelihood of violent conflict at the local level, as the scarcity of food and water, particularly during droughts and floods, increases competition for land, cattle, pasture and water (see box 1).²⁶

The nexus works but needs more funding

In South Sudan, unearmarked pooled funds are managed and channelled to local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) by the South Sudan Humanitarian Fund (SSHF). Supporting local NGOs has made it possible to roll out humanitarian responses in conflict-affected and hard-to-reach areas that international actors find it difficult to access.²⁷ Between 2015 and 2021, the SSHF funded responses to a range of humanitarian crises, from flooding to conflict-related displacement and disease. NGOs provided communities in need with water, food, shelter, and health and protection services.²⁸ The SSHF also supports surgeries that provide legal services to returnees who are reclaiming or contesting property rights. However, NGO operations are limited by the absence of long-term and continuous funding.²⁹ The SSHF needs more unearmarked and pooled funds than the \$55 million it received in 2021, but, as noted above, reductions in funding flows have limited the funds at its disposal.³⁰ In addition, even though the responses incorporated resilience-building and peacebuilding aspects, they were largely implemented by humanitarian actors.³¹ Consequently, development and peacebuilding actors were often not involved in the response, which in practice limited operationalization of the nexus approach.

To operationalize the nexus approach, it is essential for humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors to collaborate and coordinate their responses, particularly in conflict-affected communities. However, this is often difficult to do. In South Sudan, development actors do not operate in conflict-affected areas and many international NGOs subcontract local NGOs to work in less accessible areas.³² In the absence of development actors and international NGOs, the burden of addressing humanitarian needs through a nexus approach falls on local NGOs, which rely on their international partners for the bulk of their funding.³³ The SSHF allocated

²⁵ World Food Programme, 'South Sudan: Food assistance suspended as funding dries up and nation faces hungriest year since independence', 14 June 2022.

²⁶ de Coning, C. et al., *Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet: South Sudan* (NUPI and SIPRI: Oslo and Stockholm, Mar. 2022); and Quack and Südhoff (note 16).

²⁷ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), 'About the SSHF', [n.d.].

²⁸ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) and the Konterra Group, *OCHA Evaluation of Country-Based Pooled Funds: South Sudan Country Report, November 2019* (Konterra Group: Washington, DC, 2019); and UN OCHA, *South Sudan Humanitarian Fund Annual Report, 2021*, 30 June 2022.

²⁹ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Konterra Group (note 28).

³⁰ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (note 28).

³¹ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (note 28).

³² Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP), *Special Report: 2021 FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) to The Republic Of South Sudan* (FAO and WFP: Rome, 2022); and Vallet, M. E. et al., 'Where are the development actors in protracted crises? Refugee livelihood and food security outcomes in South Sudan demonstrate the potential for fragile settings', *World Development Perspectives*, vol. 24 (2021).

³³ Wilkinson, de Wolf and Alier (note 22).



23 per cent of its funding to local NGOs in 2021, but this was an exception. In South Sudan between 2016 and 2020, 88 per cent of humanitarian funding was channelled through the UN and multilateral organizations, while only 10 per cent was allocated to local NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs).³⁴ This is much less than the 25 per cent commitment made in the Grand Bargain in order to improve the delivery of assistance to vulnerable communities.³⁵

The imbalance in power between international and local organizations often forces local organizations to abandon multisectoral approaches, which they have proved can foster local food security, development and peace.³⁶ Instead, the local organizations migrate to more single-focus interventions that respond to funding calls but take less holistic approaches. The Grand Bargain 2.0, a revised framework of the Grand Bargain published five years after the original commitment was made, reiterates the commitment to local actors, but the definition of a local actor is still contested (box 2).³⁷ Working with local actors, however, is further complicated because they are embedded in the communities in which they operate, which can compromise their neutrality or even under certain circumstances lead to aid diversion.³⁸ In addition, their systems often lack the infrastructure to manage large sums of money, and many do not have the staff to support the scale of response that is required. Nevertheless, donors could allocate funds to invest in developing local capacities and systems in order to reduce the gap between international and local organizations, and to increase the likelihood of building more food-secure, resilient and peaceful communities.

This section has shown that even a small volume of unearmarked and pooled funding has the potential to address food security by taking a nexus approach. In addition, more sustainable results could be obtained using pooled funds if more long-term funding was dedicated to humanitarian responses. Despite various successes, donors face several obstacles to supporting successful implementation of the HDP nexus to tackle food insecurity, as shown below.

III. Donors' perspectives on the HDP nexus and financing approaches to food security in South Sudan

Donors could play a critical role in enabling and incentivizing operationalization of the HDP nexus. However, many challenges remain in breaking down the siloes that still characterize the way donors finance humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities.³⁹ Designing inclusive financing strategies in support of operationalizing an HDP nexus approach is particu-

³⁴ Global Network Against Food Crises, '2021 Report on financing flows and food crises', [n.d.].

³⁵ Barakat, S. and Milton, S., 'Localisation across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus', *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, vol. 15, no. 2 (May 2020), pp. 147–63.

³⁶ Wilkinson, de Wolf and Alier (note 22).

³⁷ Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), 'Grand Bargain 2.0: Endorsed Framework and Annexes', June 2021.

International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and Humanitarian Leadership Academy, *Unpacking Localization* (ICVA: Geneva, Oct 2019).

³⁸ Barakat and Milton (note 35).

³⁹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus: Interim Progress Review* (OECD Publishing: Paris, 2022).



larly urgent set against entrenched aid dependency, the protracted nature of armed conflict and the persistently high levels of food insecurity in South Sudan. This research, which draws on a literature review and interviews with representatives of donor governments and international organizations, identifies four main challenges facing donors that seek to support a nexus approach: (a) conceptual ambiguity and a lack of common understanding of the nexus; (b) insufficient engagement with or translation to the local context; (c) problems with collaboration and coordination; and (d) challenges around enabling localization.

Challenges around conceptual ambiguity

Conceptualizing the peace pillar of the HDP nexus presents several challenges.⁴⁰ These stem partly from the lack of a commonly agreed conceptual definition of peace at the theoretical and policy levels but also partly from OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) regulations that prevent the channelling of ODA to certain peacebuilding activities but allow it for others. For example, OECD DAC regulations do not permit donors to allocate ODA to fund armed forces, which includes making direct contributions to UN Peacekeeping Operations, military equipment, counterterrorism activities and most peacekeeping activities. However, donors can class the costs incurred in using military forces to deliver humanitarian aid or provide development services as ODA.⁴¹

Moreover, how the nexus is conceptualized at the theoretical level and in policy debates does not always align with how donors and operational actors working in the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding spheres understand it. What these actors understand as the goals of humanitarian aid, development action or peacebuilding often reflect their own organizational origin, worldview and values system.⁴² The meaning and scope of these three pillars are further determined by the specific context in which these actions occur. Consequently, the three pillars, particularly the peacebuilding pillar, can mean different things to different actors. This makes it more difficult to achieve collaboration, coherence and complementarity, which are core components of working across the nexus.⁴³ It is essential that donors account for such differences and develop a sufficiently flexible understanding to allow for organizational and conceptual differences. At the same time, however, conceptual boundaries are required to avoid the nexus approach becoming too all-encompassing, which would dilute its use and value.

Against these conceptual ambiguities, some donors focus on supporting what have been labelled ‘small p’ activities, which usually refers to promoting societal peace and social cohesion through conflict-sensitive project

⁴⁰ Fitzpatrick, M. et al., *Making the Nexus Real: Moving from Theory to Practice* (Boston, MA: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, 2021).

⁴¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility: Improving Learning for Results*, DAC Guidelines and Reference Series (OECD Publishing: Paris, 2012).

⁴² Weishaupt, S., ‘The humanitarian–development–peace nexus: Towards differentiated configurations’, UNRISD Working Paper 2020–28.

⁴³ Dalrymple, S. and Swithern, S., ‘Key questions and considerations for donors at the triple nexus: Lessons from UK and Sweden, Development Initiatives, 11 Dec. 2019.



activities.⁴⁴ A concrete example of such efforts that many donors support are projects that seek to resolve land use conflicts between farmers and pastoralists. Donors also highlight the support provided to the UN-led Trust Fund for Reconciliation, Stabilization and Resilience (RSRTF) and the projects that this trust fund supports—which bridge peacekeeping and security, humanitarian, and long-term recovery and development efforts.⁴⁵

Small p activities are juxtaposed with ‘Big P’ activities, such as disarmament, demobilization, stabilization and peacekeeping activities, and high-level political dialogue and diplomatic initiatives. Some such expenditure is eligible under OECD DAC regulations but in the South Sudanese context many donors have preferred to support less contentious small p activities because of their focus on local communities. Moreover, support for peacebuilding activities targeted at armed actors in conflict at the national level was considered controversial and ultimately hard to justify to domestic taxpayers. Among the specific controversies referred to by donors were inconsistencies in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process, including one-sided disarmament of opposition armed forces, political manoeuvring and antagonism along ethnic lines, and the related continuation of national level armed conflict through proxy wars at the community level (see box 1).⁴⁶

While it might be practically convenient for donors to distinguish between small p and Big P concepts, and to focus their support on small p efforts, the nexus peace pillar should not be seen as a set of discrete categories of peace that together constitute peace as a desired end-state. Peace is a process that operates on a spectrum that extends from what is often called ‘negative peace’—the absence of violence—to ‘positive peace’, which is an environment where disputes and conflicts can be pursued and resolved without physical violence. Moreover, peace in relation to violent conflict is emergent and non-linear, and characterized by shifting dynamics and intensity over time and space, and across different levels.⁴⁷ To this end, at a minimum, donor support for small p peace activities needs to be coordinated with those donors that support Big P efforts. Funding strategies and mechanisms must be adaptable and reflect the fact that conflict and peace are constantly evolving. Even at the stages of early recovery, where stabilization and peacekeeping efforts dominate, legitimate livelihood options for the conflict-affected population must be available to prevent sliding back into conflict. As the interviews for this research revealed, these aspects are not systematically considered in the HDP nexus approach, where peace in South Sudan revolves around small p activities rather than approaching peace as a spectrum. As one donor noted, while coordination between activities in support of small p and Big P

⁴⁴ Wittkowsky, A. and Böttcher, C., *Give ‘P’ a Chance: Peacebuilding, Peace Operations and the HDP Nexus* (Center for International Peace Operations: Berlin, 2021).

⁴⁵ Remote interview, Donor government representatives (2), Sweden, 21 Apr. 2022.

⁴⁶ McCrone, F. and the Bridge Network, ‘The war(s) in South Sudan: Local dimensions of conflict, governance and the political marketplace’, London School of Economics and Political Science and UKAID, Feb. 2021; Kindersley, N., ‘Military livelihoods and the political economy in South Sudan’, ed. J-N. Bach, *Routledge Handbook of the Horn of Africa* (Routledge: London, 2022), pp. 179–188; and de Waal, A. ‘A political marketplace analysis of South Sudan’s “peace”’, *Justice and Security Research Programme (JSRP)*, Policy Brief no. 2 (Mar. 2016).

⁴⁷ Brusset, E. et al., *Measuring Peace Impact: Challenges and Solutions* (SIPRI: Stockholm, Nov. 2022).



is critical, it is difficult in practice not only because of the lack of a common understanding of the nexus and how to comprehensively integrate the peace component but also due to lack of resources and expertise.

Donors also need to grapple with differing understandings of peace and how peace is understood within the HDP nexus framing of implementing actors. This challenge was echoed by donor representatives in this study, who noted that the lack of a common understanding risks generating friction between donors and implementing actors. Some of the larger international NGOs and UN agencies at times appeared to be presenting their interventions as fostering a nexus approach in order to gain access to donor funds but without changing their approach. At least one donor saw this as a mere repackaging of activities, as the organization or agency could not articulate the nexus contribution when asked. In some cases, the donor discontinued its funding.⁴⁸

However, UN agency representatives countered that some donors require applicants to outline how their interventions align with the nexus approach while continuing to maintain separate funding streams for emergency response and development.⁴⁹ Such siloed funding mechanisms were seen as a hindrance to advancing a nexus approach. Another UN representative also perceived that donors and steering committees sometimes push them to adapt their interventions to meet donors' specific interests.⁵⁰ This limits flexibility and the ability of actors to apply for funding to support both short-term emergency and medium- to long-term resilience activities.⁵¹

Challenges around collaboration and coordination

The second set of challenges facing donors in their efforts to finance the nexus is related to collaboration and coordination. Collaboration and coordination must occur within and between donor governments and institutions. The institutional set-up can be crucial to collaboration and coordination, particularly for donor governments. For example, both Sweden and Germany face difficulties linked to ODA being administered by different ministries, in particular as within these entities humanitarian and development assistance are handled in largely separate processes.⁵² In Germany, two federal ministries, each with different funds and mechanisms, administer Germany's engagement with crisis contexts. The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, BMZ) provides funds for development cooperation, while the Federal Foreign Office provides funds for humanitarian assistance. Swedish ODA to South Sudan is channelled by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) and, to a lesser degree, other agencies. Moreover, ODA that aims to contribute to peacebuilding in countries affected by armed

⁴⁸ Remote interview, Sweden donor government representative, 6 May 2022.

⁴⁹ Remote interview, Representative of UN agency, 22 June 2021.

⁵⁰ Remote interview, Representative of UN agency, 10 June 2022.

⁵¹ Remote interview, Representative of UN agency, 22 June 2021.

⁵² This outline of different government departments and their role in ODA is based on five remote interviews that took place on the following dates: Donor government representatives, Sweden, 10 Mar. 2022, 20 Apr. 2022, 21 Apr. 2022 and 6 May 2022; and Donor government representative, Germany, 9 June 2022.



conflict or transitioning from war to peace is channelled through a third agency, the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA). ODA to South Sudan is further complicated by the division between humanitarian aid administered from SIDA headquarters in Stockholm and development aid administered in Juba.

The aforementioned OECD DAC regulations mean that certain peace-related activities cannot be funded by ODA. Consequently, support to peacekeeping and stabilization missions is often administered by different ministries, departments and financing bodies to those that handle ODA. This generates an additional layer of coordination challenges and, at times, missed opportunities for donors to support organizations that work on aspects that fall between small p and Big P activities, such as DDR-related activities. For example, supporting ex-combatants and their families with in-kind food aid or broader livelihood support as they progress through the various DDR processes can play a critical role in preventing them from resorting to negative coping strategies to provide for themselves and their families.⁵³

Donors also need to collaborate and coordinate with the government in South Sudan. Donors are encouraged to channel part of their support directly to governments, as governments play a critical role in ensuring a nexus approach.⁵⁴ Like any other government, the South Sudan government has primary responsibility for responding to disasters and protecting its population, and should be driving work on achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The government should also be playing a critical role in articulating and operationalizing collective outcomes wherever possible.⁵⁵ Donor representatives noted specific challenges related to working with the South Sudan government, which seriously restricts effective operationalization of the HDP nexus.

Several of the respondents consulted for this study highlighted entrenched corruption and the predatory nature of the state system, particularly at the higher levels of government. Aid dependency has become the preferred mode of governance of the elites, which trade political loyalties and services for material reward.⁵⁶ Several respondents discussed how conflict is sometimes artificially ignited to keep the money flowing. While it is not known how much of this aid is lost to corruption, one way through which corruption occurs is by the extortion of food aid at military checkpoints. The most critical concern, however, is the manipulation of food aid as a weapon of war. The UN has condemned government forces for systematically denying humanitarian actors access to severely food-insecure populations in opposition-controlled areas while authorizing soldiers to reward themselves by pillaging what is indispensable to the survival of these rural populations, such as harvests and livestock.⁵⁷

Many donors are therefore reluctant to provide budget support to the government. To respond to the dire humanitarian needs of the South Sudan-

⁵³ Inter-Agency Standing Committee (note 20); and Delgado, C., *The World Food Programme's Contribution to Improving the Prospects for Peace in Colombia* (SIPRI: Stockholm, 2020).

⁵⁴ Inter-Agency Standing Committee (note 20).

⁵⁵ Inter-Agency Standing Committee (note 20).

⁵⁶ Hutton, L. and the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRFF), 'Aid and government: Conflict sensitivity and the state in South Sudan', 7 Dec. 2018; Kindersley (note 46); and de Waal (note 46).

⁵⁷ Human Rights Council, Forty-fifth session, "There is nothing left for us": Starvation as a method of warfare in South Sudan', Conference room paper, 5 Oct. 2020.



ese population, most bilateral and some multilateral donors channel funds through the UN system, with a clear preference for humanitarian funds rather than development funds. Bypassing the government limits its access to resources, which plays a vital role in the patronage system that characterizes politics and governance in South Sudan. An unintended consequence of prioritizing humanitarian funding is that it creates further incentives for the government to increase its control over humanitarian resource flows in the absence of development aid being redirected to the state.⁵⁸

Moreover, minimal or no contact with the government limits the degree to which donors can hold the government accountable. This generates a paradox that was highlighted by one donor representative: donors invest a lot of money in the country, but the funding generates few sustainable results since there is no accountability at the national level, as the state is not involved.⁵⁹ As the same donor representative remarked, however, donors are unwilling to work directly with the government until it has greater institutional capacity that would allow it to be accountable.

Responding to challenges around coordination and conceptualization

In response to conceptual ambiguities, many donors promote internal and external consultation to provide a shared understanding of the nexus and its different components. Among the various initiatives, the Nexus Academy, an outcome of the UN–DAC Dialogue, is an innovative approach supported by Germany. The academy seeks to facilitate joint learning and knowledge exchange to accelerate nexus approaches and promote complementary humanitarian, development and peace activities that tackle the root causes of crises and end need.⁶⁰ Through cross-institutional learning between crucial actors from all pillars of the nexus and from the headquarters to the country programme level, the academy aims to bridge the global policy discourse on the HDP nexus and its concrete implementation at the national level.

Donors have also made considerable efforts in the past four years to enhance internal coordination, ensure joined-up analysis and complement the different funding streams through a nexus approach. Germany, which like Sweden has a division between ministries, has gone further and established a nexus tool for NGOs—the Nexus-Chapeau approach—which it has piloted in South Sudan and 11 other countries. Through this approach, the two ministries enable joint financing of one humanitarian and one development project by the same NGO, which pursues collective outcomes sequentially, in parallel and according to context. Two Nexus-Chapeau projects are currently being implemented in South Sudan. Such an approach has the potential to support organizations that assist conflict-affected populations by providing life-saving food aid, while at the same time leveraging their access, relations and the trust built up through humanitarian work to support broader peacebuilding efforts. The latter efforts could include restoration of

⁵⁸ Hutton and the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (note 56).

⁵⁹ Remote interview, Donor government representatives, Sweden, 20 Apr. 2022.

⁶⁰ Nexus Academy, 'Learning, community and capacity for HDP solutions', Nexus Academy Explainer, [n.d.].



traditional conflict resolution mechanisms that have been eroded over the decades of armed conflict.⁶¹

Challenges around local context

The nexus approach seeks to capitalize on the comparative advantage of each nexus pillar in a specific setting.⁶² To do so requires a deep understanding of context. Donors must be able to support the required response to the challenges that shape conflict and affect the prospects for peace in that context while also recognizing the drivers of those challenges.⁶³ This demands a nuanced understanding of diverse sub-national conflict dynamics and drivers, and how these interact with broader political processes.

While there are clear connections between violent conflict and food insecurity in South Sudan, there are also critical contextual differences. These primarily relate to the different types of conflict in the country involving various actors, grievances and conflict dynamics (see box 1) that affect food systems and household food security in different ways. In addition, the labels and narrative frames that are commonly used to describe or explain violent conflict in South Sudan are often incomplete.⁶⁴ Terms such as cattle raiding, revenge, inter-communal violence, ethnic or tribal violence and their associated armed groups are widely employed in a highly generalized way. Such narratives neglect how violence varies greatly across South Sudan, including within ethnic groups and livelihood systems. At worst, they serve to deflect attention away from, prevent an understanding of, and diminish accountability for organized violence.

Donors, including those based in South Sudan, often lack sufficient contextual knowledge of the role of the nexus to capture these nuances and ensure that funding reflects changing circumstances and dynamics.⁶⁵ Donors do not have the financial and staffing resources or the mobility required to carry out solid contextual and conflict analyses. This is a critical limitation since the lack of solid contextual understanding can affect funding decisions and decisions on which actors donors prefer to engage with. This risks cementing approaches where a donor chooses to continue to focus on aspects they are familiar with in specific areas rather than repurpose or trial more innovative approaches.⁶⁶ More significant concerns are the aforementioned risks that the commonly accepted explanations for violence in South Sudan deflect attention away from, prevent an understanding of, and diminish accountability for ongoing organized violence.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Bedigen, W., 'Significance of societal customs in the South Sudan civil war resolution', *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2020), pp. 3–17.

⁶² OECD (note 39).

⁶³ Fitzpatrick et al. (note 40).

⁶⁴ Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility and WFP, 'Adjusting terminology for organized violence in South Sudan', 10 Nov. 2020.

⁶⁵ Remote interview, Sweden donor government representative, 6 May 2022; Remote interview, international financial institution, 8 Apr. 2022; and Interview, UN representative, Juba, 15 Feb. 2022.

⁶⁶ Remote interview, Sweden donor government representative, 6 May 2022.

⁶⁷ Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility and WFP (note 64).



Responding to challenges around contextual realities

Implementing a nexus approach requires flexible funding arrangements with donors that are willing and able to adapt to changing circumstances and adapt programming appropriately. Flexible funding arrangements should support a mixture of responsive and preventative activities.⁶⁸ The Covid-19 pandemic enhanced the ability of donors to promptly reprogramme—as donors referred to it—aid to meet new and changing circumstances. One outcome of the pandemic in terms of funding mechanisms is that more tools are now available to facilitate adapting or repurposing aid according to changing contextual realities. For example, SIDA now seeks to reprogramme development aid when a crisis occurs, rather than pause support as it used to do in the past. However, as a donor representative noted, while donors have become better at reprogramming when there is a large-scale crisis, they are less forthcoming in supporting preventative action, including funding responses to slow-onset crises.

Challenges around enabling localization

Breaking the vicious circle between violent conflict and food insecurity in South Sudan and the aid dependency this perpetuates requires the involvement of both government and local actors. While longer-term development and sustainable peace can only be achieved with the involvement and commitment of the state, organizations are achieving tangible results at the local level. The capacities of local actors must be strengthened to maximize transformative potential at the local community level and lock in any development gains and contributions to peace. If local actors are to participate more meaningfully, donors must consider channelling funding directly to them. To this end, donors should promote the localization of aid.

Local organizations have long worked on problems and issues they see and experience in the context where they are embedded, and often work on humanitarian, development and peace issues in parallel.⁶⁹ In South Sudan, local CSOs have been working across the nexus for many years, seeking to respond to the interconnected needs of the communities in which they work with a long-term vision and in a peace-integrated way.⁷⁰

However, while donors and international agencies committed to the Grand Bargain might see merit in providing, and the need to provide, more funding to local organizations, direct funding to South Sudanese local organizations was often described as ‘difficult’ or even ‘impossible’, for reasons linked to capacity, risk and power.⁷¹ These challenges interlink and must all be

⁶⁸ Rohwerder, B., ‘Flexibility in funding mechanisms to respond to shock’, GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1412, 28 July 2017.

⁶⁹ Tötterman Andorff, P., ‘Overcoming financial barriers to women’s climate security action’, Presentation to the Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development, 25 May 2022; and Wilkinson, de Wolf and Alier (note 22).

⁷⁰ Quack and Südhoff (note 16); Wilkinson, de Wolf and Alier (note 22); Robinson, A., ‘Localisation and conflict sensitivity: Lessons on good practice from South Sudan’, *Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRFF) Better Aid Forum Briefing Paper*, Dec. 2021; and Remote interview, Donor government representative, 30 Mar. 2022.

⁷¹ Remote interview, Swedish government representative, 30 Mar. 2022; and Remote interview, German government representative, 9 June 2022.



addressed in order to ensure that local organizations can successfully and efficiently continue to contribute to integration across the HDP nexus.

Capacity

Globally, not channelling funding directly from the donor to local organizations is partly a result of perceived capacity gaps in local organizations to meet donor requirements in terms of, for instance, proposal and report writing and accountability measures.⁷² In South Sudan, local organizations vary significantly in their capacity to meet donor requirements.⁷³ Donors therefore rely on intermediaries—international NGOs and UN agencies—to provide funding to their local partners.⁷⁴

Capacity can be understood in managerial terms (as management, governance or decision making) or operational terms as the delivery of programmes and projects, but these are interrelated.⁷⁵ Often, the main focus of donors is on the managerial aspect. Such a narrow focus tends to consistently undervalue local contributions to alleviating the suffering of local populations. It also risks creating inequalities by overlooking local organizations when selecting partners.⁷⁶ The resulting lack of resources can reduce the operational capacity of local organizations, for instance, to conduct appropriate analyses to make aid conflict-sensitive. This risks losing the potential for conflict-sensitive and integrated HDP work.

In South Sudan, these processes result in an overreliance on Juba-based organizations with charismatic founders who are able to navigate the international humanitarian system and have pre-existing economic capital.⁷⁷ This means that many South Sudanese organizations are potentially overlooked, including women-led NGOs that grapple with deeply entrenched gender inequalities and are less likely to have access to the same economic and social capital but nonetheless have tremendous potential to drive integrative humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the current funding landscape in South Sudan means that local organizations sometimes have to shift the geographical focus of the activities they undertake. Others turn down funding under such circumstances, arguing that working in a new location would not be feasible because they lack an existing network. Entering new areas risks generating tensions with other local organizations already working there, while setting up a new office would require substantial resources. Furthermore, agreeing to work on activities outside their areas of expertise could damage organizations' reputations if

⁷² Barbelet, V., *As Local as Possible, as International as Necessary: Understanding Capacity and Complementarity in Humanitarian Action*, HPG Working Paper (Overseas Development Institute (ODI): London, 2018); Fast, L. and Bennett, C., *From the Ground Up: It's About Time for Local Humanitarian Action* (ODI: London, 2020); and Barakat and Milton (note 35).

⁷³ Robinson (note 70).

⁷⁴ Remote interview, Donor government representative, 30 Mar. 2022; and Willits-King, B. et al., *Funding to Local Humanitarian Actors: Evidence from Somalia and South Sudan*, Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) Policy brief no. 73 (Overseas Development Institute: London, Oct 2018).

⁷⁵ Barbelet (note 72); and Baguios, A., 'Localisation re-imagined: Localising the sector vs supporting local solutions', ALNAP, 15 Oct. 2021.

⁷⁶ Barbelet (note 72); Fast and Bennett (note 72); and Howe, K. and Stites, E., 'Partners under pressure: Humanitarian action for the Syria crisis', *Disasters*, vol. 43, no. 1 (Jan. 2019), pp. 3–23.

⁷⁷ Moro, L. et al., *Localising Humanitarian Aid During Armed Conflict: Learning from the Histories and Creativity of South Sudanese NGOs* (London School of Economics: London, 2020).

⁷⁸ Moro et al. (note 77).



they fail to deliver, which in turn would affect their ability to attract future funding.⁷⁹

Donors and international partners should commit to build on existing operational strengths and to build local organizations' managerial capacity. The latter is particularly important given the accountability requirements that donors have towards their taxpayers.⁸⁰ In South Sudan, some unrestricted overhead funding is passed on. However, the amount is usually insufficient to cover local organizations' real costs.⁸¹ In the long term, direct funding of local organizations by donors, including of essential overheads, will be necessary for local organizations to grow and prosper.⁸² If funding is provided directly to local organizations without strengthening their managerial capacity, however, it could result in poor management and donors restricting their localization ambitions.⁸³ An 'accompaniment approach' in which international organizations closely and continuously follow and mentor local organizations, and that is marked by joint decision making, advice and training, including support to build up managerial and specifically financial capacity, could help to sustain local action over time and make local organizations more acceptable to external donors.⁸⁴

Risk

Another reason for the failure to channel funding directly from the donor to local organizations is the risk-aversion of donors. Donors justify the emphasis on fiduciary risk, or 'losing money', as an accountability issue, or the need to account for taxpayers' money, which is important.⁸⁵ Like the emphasis on managerial capacity, however, the emphasis on fiduciary risk obscures the risk that a lack of direct funding to local organizations poses to the ability to respond to crises in an effective, conflict-sensitive, peace-positive and efficient way.

The emphasis on fiduciary risk is justified in South Sudan, where there is a lack of trust in the ability of South Sudanese organizations to manage international funds, work according to humanitarian principles or manage the risk of corruption. The perception is widespread that funding local organizations is inherently high-risk.⁸⁶ As outlined, diversion and corruption are important issues to consider for all aid actors in South Sudan, and local organizations need to be equipped with systems and protocols to

⁷⁹ Moro et al. (note 77).

⁸⁰ Moro et al. (note 77).

⁸¹ Willits-King et al. (note 74); and Moro et al. (note 77).

⁸² Dijkzeul, D., 'Making localization work: The everyday practice of three NGOs in South Sudan and northern Uganda', *Frontiers in Political Science*, vol. 3 (Oct. 2021); and Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict and the Life and Peace Institute, 'Principles for quality financing for peacebuilding and conflict prevention', 27 Apr. 2022.

⁸³ Gibbons, P. and Otioku-Boadu, C., 'The question is not "if to localise?" but rather "how to localise?": Perspectives from Irish humanitarian INGOs', *Frontiers in Political Science*, vol. 3 (2021).

⁸⁴ Lilja, J. and Höglund, K., 'The role of the external in local peacebuilding: Enabling action, managing risk', *Global Governance*, vol. 24 (2018), pp. 411–30; and Van Brabant, K. and Patel, S., *Localisation in Practice: Emerging Indicators & Practical Recommendations* (Global Mentoring Initiative, 2018).

⁸⁵ Tötterman Andorff (note 69).

⁸⁶ Moro et al. (note 77); Robillard, S., Atim, T. and Maxwell, D., *Localization: A 'Landscape' Report*, Final Report to USAID, Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (Feinstein International Center: Boston, MA, 2021); and Stoddard, A. et al., 'Efficiency and inefficiency in humanitarian financing', *Humanitarian Outcomes*, Dec. 2017.



ensure transparency and financial accountability. However, they cannot be expected to put these in place without external support.⁸⁷ This goes back to the importance of managerial capacity building through, for instance, accompaniment approaches between international and local organizations.

Power

Localization is a relational concept and a political process, and funding processes and decisions around it are also inherently a matter of power. With little direct funding and core funds, local organizations often find themselves in sub-contracts with international organizations to implement projects defined by international organizations.⁸⁸ This form of partnership often denies equal and meaningful participation in decision making. This merely logistical view of partnerships represents a lost opportunity to leverage local organizations' knowledge and networks to improve programme design, develop conflict-sensitive responses and enhance accountability to affected populations and programme sustainability.⁸⁹ Equal partnerships that emphasize joint programming between local and international organizations, where each maintains financial independence, are extremely rare. Between the subcontracting and equal partnership models, a variety of arrangements can be found that have varying degrees of strategic and programmatic input opportunities by local organizations.⁹⁰

In South Sudan, relationships between international and local organizations are still largely experienced as prescriptive, transactional and deeply unbalanced.⁹¹ More participatory and egalitarian partnerships can be built into funding decisions, but short funding timeframes present challenges for this endeavour.⁹² Funding cycles in South Sudan and elsewhere are typically short and focused on service provision, leaving little room for organizational development.⁹³ These funding structures offer few incentives for international organizations to share responsibility with local actors and engage in medium- to long-term initiatives to prepare local partners for steering the response.⁹⁴

The analysis shows that allocating funding is not just a logistical exercise; funding decisions reflect power, albeit not always consciously. The criteria for funding decisions, including the norms that have been accepted as the gold standard for decisions around funding, reflect unstated preferences and constrain local organizations from developing their full potential to successfully implement integrative ways of working across the HDP nexus. To change this and to improve working in ways that link the humanitarian with the development and peace pillars, these funding criteria must change.

⁸⁷ Robinson (note 70).

⁸⁸ Fröjmark, H. and Carstensen, N., 'Localisation in numbers: Funding flows and local leadership in South Sudan', *Local to Global Protection*, Nov. 2020; and Stoddard et al. (note 86).

⁸⁹ Robillard, Atim and Maxwell (note 86).

⁹⁰ Stoddard et al. (note 86).

⁹¹ Robinson (note 70).

⁹² Spehar, E., 'Overcoming financial barriers to women's climate security action', Presentation to the Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development, 25 May 2022; and Robinson (note 70).

⁹³ Kiewied T., Soremekun, O. and Jok J. M., *Towards Principled Humanitarian Action in Conflict Contexts: Understanding the Role of Partnerships, Voices from Nigeria and South Sudan*, Caritas, Norway et al., 18 Dec. 2020.

⁹⁴ Bennett, C. and Foley, M., *Time to Let Go: Remaking Humanitarian Action for the Modern Era* (Overseas Development Institute: London: 2016).



Responding to the challenges around enabling localization

For meaningful localization to occur and to harvest the potential that local actors have to work in integrative ways across the HDP nexus, the research identified core funding for local organizations as a key issue. Global best practice shows that it is possible to incorporate core funds into local organizations. For example, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has standardized a 4 per cent allowance in the budgets of implementing partner agreements as overhead costs, and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) provides around 7 per cent on average to local partners as support costs. Donors can make such allocations mandatory for their international partners, as was done by the United Kingdom when the Rapid Response Facility (RRF) allocation of £18 million for Covid-19 response in 2020 required international partners to pass on the same percentage of overhead costs that they had received to their local implementing partners.⁹⁵

In response to the issue of risk, donors see the emphasis on fiduciary compliance as non-negotiable and here to stay.⁹⁶ International partners are increasingly aware of and try to mitigate the heightened risks and pressures that local organizations face in terms of the effect of conflict and polarization.⁹⁷ Mitigation measures include sharing the risk between different organizations—for example, one distributes ration cards and the other distributes the food—and aiming to protect local staff members from accusations of diversion and manipulation by highlighting that sensitive decisions are taken by senior staff in Juba rather than in the field or by bringing in staff from other areas to engage on sensitive issues.⁹⁸ However, while such pragmatic steps are useful in managing fiduciary risk and some of the additional pressures that local actors face, there must be a balance with other conceptualizations of interlinked risk such as the risk of losing potential. The perspective on risk needs to be holistic and contextual, and to find ways to accept that a certain amount of risk is necessary to advance the HDP approach rather than impede it due to risk aversion.

IV. Ways forward for ensuring food security

The protracted conflict in South Sudan has led to alarming levels of food insecurity. Past research has found a vicious circle of violent conflict and food insecurity, in which violent conflict directly drives food insecurity and food insecurity can contribute to the emergence and duration of violent conflict.⁹⁹ Conversely, equitable and sustainable food systems can generate

⁹⁵ Metcalfe-Hough, V. et al., *The Grand Bargain at Five Years: An Independent Review*. HPG report (Overseas Development Institute: London, 2021).

⁹⁶ Barbelet (note 72).

⁹⁷ Santschi, M. and Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRf), 'Caught between two cultures: When aid in South Sudan is pulled between local norms and western systems', CSRf, 2018.

⁹⁸ Santschi and Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (note 97).

⁹⁹ Delgado, C., Murugani, V. and Tschunkert, K., *Food Systems in Conflict and Peacebuilding Settings: Pathways and Interconnections* (SIPRI: Stockholm, 2021); Rudolfsen, I., 'Food insecurity and domestic instability: A review of the literature', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 32, no. 5 (2020); Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, 'Peace through food: Ending the hunger–instability nexus', Georgetown University, Washington, DC, 2021; Brück, T. et al., 'The relationship between food security and violent conflict', Report to FAO, International Security and Development Center (ISDC), 22 Dec. 2016; and Brinkman, H.-J. and Hendrix, C. S., 'Food insecurity and violent conflict:



conditions conducive to peace. To promote the latter, it is important to apply a peacebuilding lens to food security interventions and a food security lens to peacebuilding efforts. These lenses can be integrated by taking an approach that harmonizes the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding elements.¹⁰⁰

Despite the considerable challenges to more integrated HDP activities identified above, there are positive initiatives that can be built on and replicated. The UN-led Trust Fund for Reconciliation, Stabilization and Resilience is an innovative funding mechanism supported by many donors in South Sudan that addresses many of these challenges. The consortium of donors that supports the fund comprises Canada, the European Union (EU), Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, South Korea, Sweden and Switzerland. It provides strategic financing to integrated programmes that together lessen the destructive drivers of conflict and create more stable conditions in which development and resilience objectives can be achieved. Drawing on the comparative advantage of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), UN agencies and NGOs, the RSRTF promotes integrated programming across the HDP nexus. The fund's cornerstone is its area-based programming approach, which concentrates resources in conflict hotspots to comprehensively address the underlying drivers of conflict and overcome the fundamental obstacles to a sustainable peace. The RSRTF is a strong example of donors coming together to find new and innovative ways to finance development and peacebuilding. It builds on the momentum of global commitments and frameworks to deliver better and more flexible financing across the nexus and enable implementation of more collaborative, coherent and complementary programmes.¹⁰¹

On localization, the RSRTF has introduced processes that address the challenge of insufficient donor capacity to manage the funding of, engagement with and support for small, local organizations, which has been described as 'administratively burdensome'.¹⁰² To strategically drive meaningful localization through more direct funding, the RSRTF in South Sudan, for instance, distributes its calls for funding proposals to international and local organizations. It is also expanding its staff to strengthen its own administrative and managerial capacity to work with and support local organizations on their bids for funding.¹⁰³ These efforts successfully challenge the notion, rooted in power imbalances, that lack of capacity is only a problem for local organizations. However, this still assumes that 'capacity, capability and expertise flow in a single direction: from international to national organizations'.¹⁰⁴ The shift in thinking needs to include a definition of capacity, for instance, that celebrates contextually

Causes, consequences, and addressing the challenges', *World Food Programme Occasional Paper* no. 24 (2011).

¹⁰⁰ Tschunkert, K. and Delgado, C., *Food Systems in Conflict and Peacebuilding Settings: Ways Forward* (SIPRI: Stockholm, 2022).

¹⁰¹ UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Reconciliation, Stabilization and Resilience in South Sudan, 'RSRTF draft strategy paper, 2022', unpublished internal documents.

¹⁰² Remote interview, Donor government representative, 6 May 2022; Willits-King et al. (note 74); Robillard, Atim and Maxwell (note 86); and Wilkinson, de Wolf and Alier (note 22).

¹⁰³ Remote interview, Trust fund representative, 10 Mar. 2022.

¹⁰⁴ Fast and Bennett (note 72).



relevant skills and therefore engages in capacity sharing rather than building Western-defined managerial capacity.¹⁰⁵

In attempting to shift the discourse, level the playing field between international organizations and their local partners, and empower the latter, the RSRTF has made it mandatory for all international applications for corporate funding to include a local actor. Local partners must not just be implementation partners but rather partners involved at all stages from the strategic design of programmes to implementation and evaluation.¹⁰⁶

As the RSRTF demonstrates, donors can play a pivotal role in creating an enabling environment for operationalizing the HDP approach. Each pillar of the HDP nexus has a role to play, and initiatives under each pillar must be implemented in parallel in an integrated and concerted effort to maximize results. Humanitarian food security interventions save lives while development projects build resilience to future shocks. To ensure sustainability, measures under each of these pillars need to be underpinned by peacebuilding initiatives that address the underlying root causes of food insecurity and violent conflict. Therefore, humanitarian, development and peacebuilding initiatives need to go hand in hand as integrated and concerted efforts that are supported by an enabling funding environment.

This research has found four ways in which donors could facilitate this. First, set against the identified conceptual ambiguities, donors can approach peace as a dynamic process that extends from ‘negative peace’ to ‘positive peace’ and varies over space and time, rather than approaching peace as a set of activities in support of small p and Big P projects. Second, in terms of the specific coordination and collaboration challenges, donors can ensure timely, efficient and effective engagement between the various government departments and institutions providing aid, particularly aid for various peacebuilding activities. Third, with regard to the contextual challenges, donors should ensure that funding mechanisms are sensitive to shifting temporal and spatial conflict dynamics. Fourth, to support meaningful localization by incorporating more direct and core funding to local organizations, donors can consider the existing operational capacities of local organizations to work across the HDP nexus. Linked to this, donors must ensure that any integrated funding provided to international partners is passed on to local organizations.

¹⁰⁵ Wilkinson, de Wolf and Alier (note 22).

¹⁰⁶ Remote interview, Trust fund representative, 10 Mar. 2022.



Abbreviations

CSO	Civil society organization
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
HDP	Humanitarian, development and peacebuilding
NGO	Non-governmental organization
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECD DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Development Assistance Committee
RSRTF	Trust Fund for Reconciliation, Stabilization and Resilience
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SSHF	South Sudan Humanitarian Fund
WFP	World Food Programme



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SIPRI RESEARCH POLICY PAPER

FINANCING FOOD SECURITY: PROMISES AND PITFALLS OF THE HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT- PEACE NEXUS IN SOUTH SUDAN

KRISTINA TSCHUNKERT, CAROLINE DELGADO, VONGAI MURUGANI AND
MARIE RIQUIER

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