# Responding to Refugee Crises

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## Lessons from evaluations in South Sudan as a country of origin



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Cover image: Shortly after dawn, two men cast a net in a shallow, seasonal lake near Yida, South Sudan. Mudfish are in abundance at this time of year (November), sometimes wriggling overland and eventually becoming trapped in small lakes like this one as floodwaters recede.
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## Foreword

The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) has recognised that international co-operation and development assistance in relation to forced displacement, refugees, and migration need greater attention. In 2016, the DAC formed a Temporary Working Group on Refugees and Migration.

This working paper is a case study on South Sudan as an important refugee country of origin. The case study looks at issues of forced displacement in South Sudan and underscores the linkages between internally displaced persons (IDPs) and South Sudanese refugees. The case study highlights the importance of understanding local contexts and root drivers of conflict and displacement. It reviews evaluations of programmes in South Sudan, including past efforts at state building and refugee resettlement to look at learning within the international community. The case study was undertaken as part of a wider research project on learning from evaluations to improve responses to situations of forced displacement.

The study, **Responding to Refugee Crises in Developing Countries: What Can We Learn From Evaluations?** provides evidence from evaluations to feed into guidance on better programming that is being developed through the DAC Temporary Working Group. The main paper and three accompanying case studies draw on evaluation findings to highlight some of the key lessons and recommendations for positive change going forward. The main paper and three case studies (Afghanistan, South Sudan and Ethiopia/Uganda) can be found at: www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/evaluating-refugee-migration.htm.

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| ACTED | Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development |
| CIDA | Canadian International Development Agency (now Global Affairs Canada) |
| CPA | Comprehensive Peace Agreement |
| DAC | Development Assistance Committee |
| GAC | Global Affairs Canada |
| DDR | Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration |
| DFAIT | Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (Canada) |
| IDP | Internally displaced person |
| IGAD | Intergovernmental Authority on Development |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| INGO | International non-governmental organisation |
| IOM | International Organization for Migration |
| NGO | Non-governmental organisation |
| NORAD | Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation |
| OCHA | UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| ODA | Official development assistance |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PoC | Protection of civilian |
| PWG | Protection Working Group |
| REACH | Reach Initative |
| Sida | Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency |
| SPLA | Sudan People's Liberation Army |
| START | Canada's stabilisation and reconstruction task force |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNHCR | UN Refugee Agency |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| UNMIS | United Nations Mission in Sudan (precursor to UNMISS) |
| UNMISS | United Nations Mission in South Sudan |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| WFP | World Food Program |



Refugee carries water for all the family's needs in the UNHCR Camp Doro, Mabaan County, South Sudan.
© UNHCR/Sebastian Rich

## Understanding context and conflict drivers related to forced displacement and conditions for voluntary return

South Sudan became an independent state in 2011, separating from Sudan following decades of armed conflict. High hopes for South Sudan's future were soon dashed when fighting broke out in December 2013, and optimism regarding South Sudan's prospect for peace has now faded. The country is currently facing famine, ongoing conflict, persistent ethnic tensions and severe economic challenges. The humanitarian crisis and continued fighting across the country have led to large-scale forced displacement.

This case study examines conditions within South Sudan as a major country of origin in today's refugee crisis. In 2016, South Sudan became the largest refugee crisis in sub-Saharan Africa, and the world's third largest after Syria and Afghanistan. More importantly, this case study looks at the conditions of South Sudanese who are forcibly displaced. It underscores the linkages between the large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and South Sudanese refugee populations abroad, and reviews past efforts to help returnees resettle back in the country. The case study also highlights the importance of understanding local contexts and root causes of conflict and displacement. Finally, it reviews evaluations of past donor programmes in South Sudan, including past efforts at state building, which suggest that learning within the international community could be significantly improved.

### Understanding local context: Complex development challenges and great humanitarian needs

South Sudan is torn by violent conflict that has been accompanied by "systematic"[1] human rights abuses, rapid and massive displacement, economic uncertainty, and famine. More than 1.4 million South Sudanese refugees were living in neighbouring countries at the end of 2016, according to UNHCR[2] (see Figure 1). During 2016, more than 761 000 new refugees arrived in neighbouring countries.[3] Meanwhile, tens of thousands of people have been killed in South Sudan since renewed fighting broke out in 2013.

The United Nations has reported that one in four people in South Sudan has been displaced by recent fighting, with 1.9 million internally displaced, half of whom are estimated to be children.[4] Many of the South Sudanese refugees had been internally displaced before ultimately fleeing the country.[5]

### Ongoing conflict and human rights abuses

The international community has struggled to understand the complex context and long history of violence in South Sudan.[6] The area emerged from Africa's longest civil war with the signature of a historic Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005. While localised violence continued between 2005 and 2013, the country fell back into wide-spread conflict with a new outbreak of violence in December 2013, which started in the capital Juba and quickly spread. In August 2015, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), led by the country's current president, Salva Kiir, signed a peace agreement with the SPLA in Opposition led by Riek Machar. This agreement resulted from a series of mediation efforts led by the United Nations, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa and the African Union. A transitional government of national unity was then formed in April 2016. However, fighting has continued, leading to increasing rates of forced displacement, with thousands of refugees a month crossing the border into Uganda and Ethiopia in the second half of 2016.

Figure 1. South Sudanese refugees by country of displacement

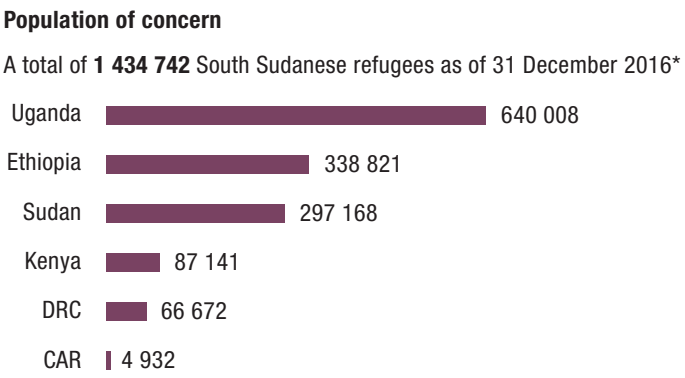



Figure 2. New refugee arrivals from South Sudan in 2016

| New arrivals | Total new arrivals in 2016 |
|---|---|
| Ethiopia | 53 661 |
| Sudan | 134 370 |
| Uganda | 489 234 |
| Kenya | 22 501 |
| DRC | 61 125 |
| CAR | 659 |
| **TOTAL** | **761 550** |

*The population and arrival figures are based on best available information at the time of production. UNHCR continues to verify the numbers in all countries and future updates may vary as new information becomes available. The arrivals into Uganda since July 1 2016 are based on manual emergency registration or head-counts/wrist-banding. Actual population to be confirmed upon biometric registration by the Government.

Source: UNHCR, 2016d, www.refworld.org/country,,UNHCR,,SSD,,5881e39b4,0.html.

There have been relatively few periods of stability throughout much of the territory's recorded history.[7] Fighting in South Sudan, which comprises more than 60 ethnic groups and more than 65 languages, has taken place largely along tribal lines with local conflicts coinciding with ongoing national-level political tensions and conflict among political elites. Tribal conflict, local youth infighting, violent cattle raids and child abduction have a long history and studies have highlighted deep-seated cultural traditions and beliefs that are directly related to violence (both ritualised and actual) and how these have evolved over time.[8] Long-standing tribal tensions have been complicated in recent years by what one report called "a massive proliferation of small arms" [9].

Refugees and IDPs have been displaced by intense fighting and repeated violations of human rights. Actors such as the African Union and the UN Panel of Experts on South Sudan have found that repeated violations of human rights have been taking place across the country. The African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan, which interviewed South Sudanese refugees and IDPs, said refugees reported massive abuses that occurred at the onset of violence in December 2013, and that these "were committed in a systematic manner and in most cases with extreme brutality" [10]. Violations recorded by the African Union Commission include: the mutilation of bodies, torture, sexual violence, targeting of humanitarian workers, forced cannibalism, the abduction and disappearance of women from churches and hospitals, the deliberate burning of bodies, massacres, and forced displacement/removal of populations.[11]

The UN Panel of Experts on South Sudan, created by the UN Security Council Resolution 2206, also reported human rights abuses.[12] Furthermore, it found that the 2015 peace agreement "failed to result in a meaningful reduction of violence", with "both parties consistently violating the 'permanent ceasefire' set out in the peace agreement" [13]. In its 2016 final report, the Panel of Experts determined that "there is clear and convincing evidence that most of the acts of violence committed during the war, including the targeting of civilians and violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, have been directed by or undertaken with the knowledge of senior individuals at the high level of the Government and within the opposition" [14].

UNHCR's South Sudan Regional Response Plan, released in December 2016, stated that the reported incidents "appear to have an ethnic dimension and may indicate wider-scale atrocities, including ethnic cleansing" [15]. A 2015 report from the human rights division of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) suggested that forced displacement may have been a deliberate strategy in some areas.[16]

Sexual and gender-based violence is widespread and a prominent feature of the ongoing violent conflict. A 2017 Global Affairs Canada (GAC) evaluation noted:

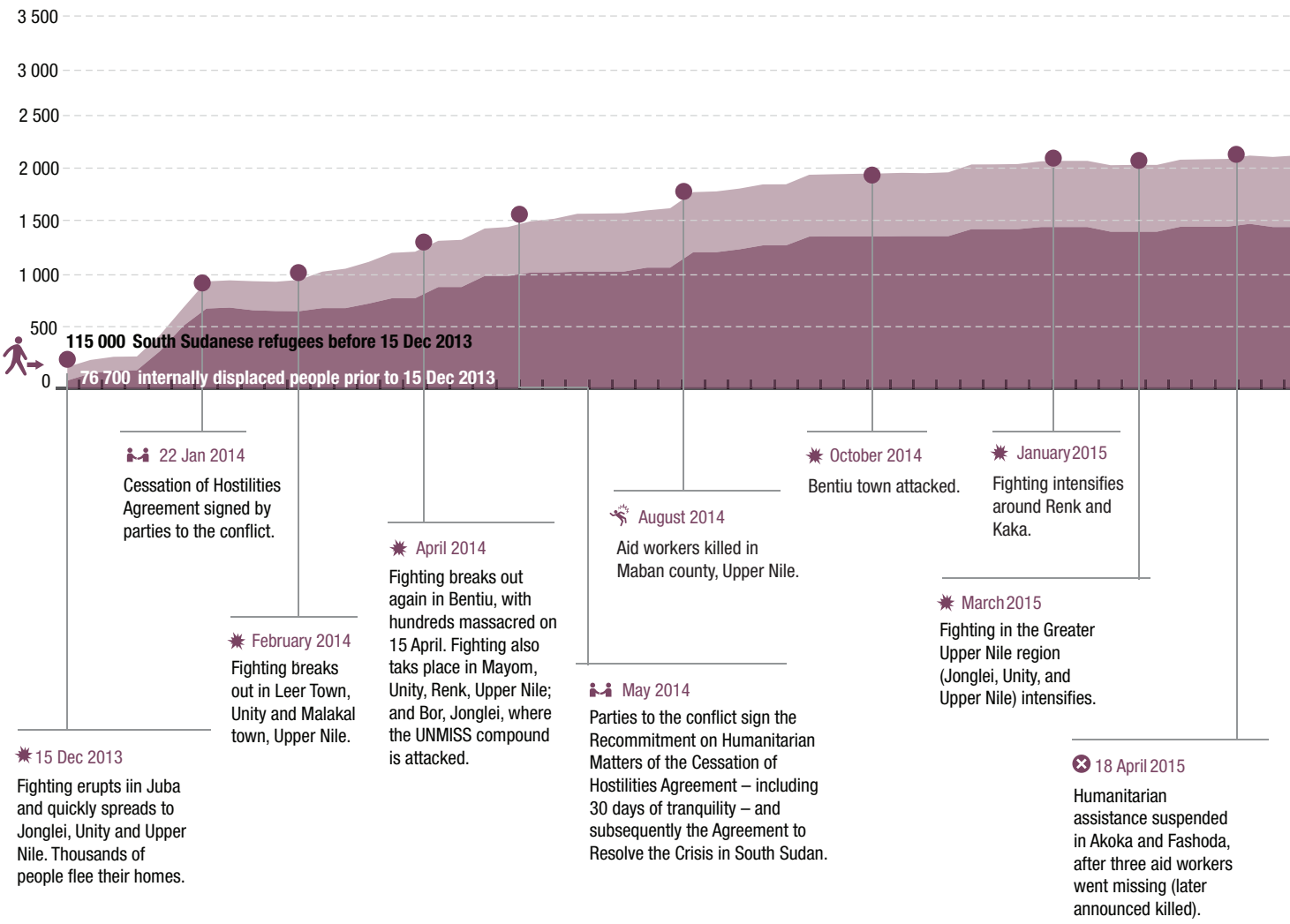
> Violence within the domestic and public spheres has been a continuous presence and has increased with the influx of small arms and light weapons during the Sudanese civil war. Notably, sexual and gender-based violence has affected over half of the population's women and girls aged 15-24. There has been a high prevalence of early, forced child marriage, dowry exchange, and sometimes violent abduction and sexual slavery of women and children. Women and girls have been regularly denied access to education and economic opportunities, and frequently marginalized from decisions that impact them and their families.[17]

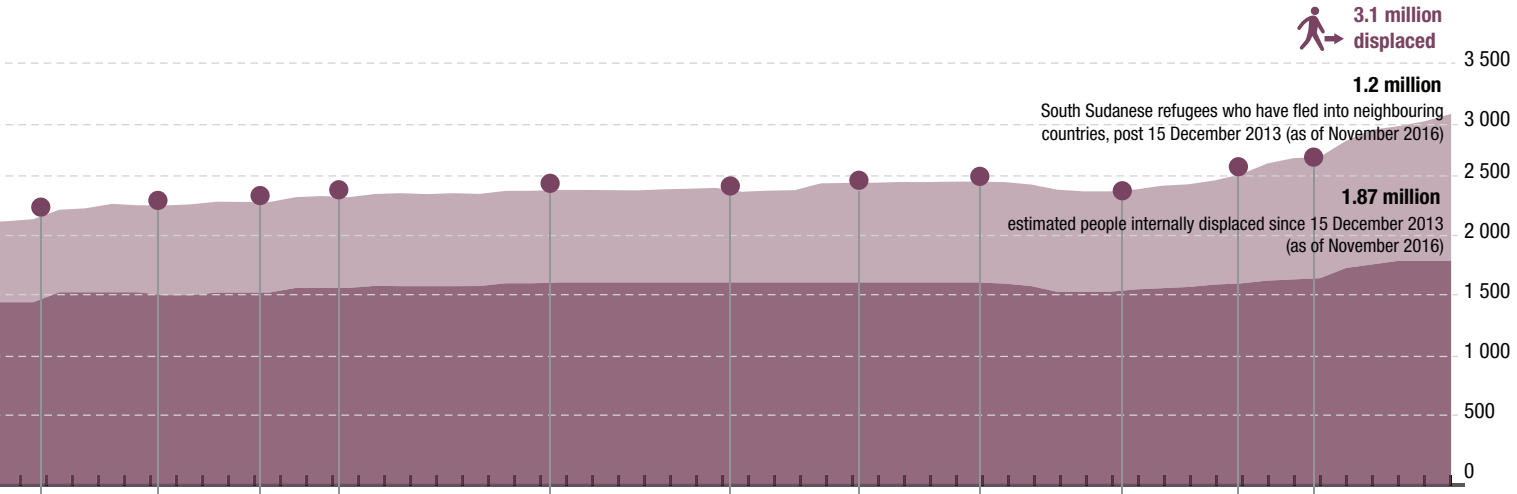


Internally displaced South Sudanese children play in front of abandoned tanks in the town of Leer, South Sudan.
© UNHCR/Andrew McConnell

## Figure 3. Internal and external displacement in South Sudan

*(in thousands of people)*






**May 2015**

Aid workers are forced to relocate from Leer, Ganyiel, Nyal, Mayendit, Koch, Melut and Kodok due to fighting and insecurity, leaving an estimated 750 000 people temporarily cut-off from aid.

**June - July 2015**

Heavy fighting erupts in Malakal town with multiple changes of control. Restrictions on river and air movement hinder delivery of humanitarian aid in Upper Nile.

**August 2015**

Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan signed by parties to the conflict.

**October 2015**

Fighting resumes in central and southern Unity. Humanitarian partners suspend operations and withdraw staff from Leer. Fighting in Western Equatoria State leaves thousands displaced and threatens key humanitarian supply routes.

**February 2016**

Fighting breaks out in Malakal PoC, Pibor, Wau, Yambio and Mundri West causing destruction and displacement.

**April 2016**

Formation of the Transition Government of National Unity of the Republic of South Sudan.

**June 2016**

Renewed conflict in Western Bahr el Ghazal displaces tens of thousands of people.

**July 2016**

Fighting breaks out in Juba and spreads to multiple locations in the Equatorias, as well as Unity. Tens of thousands are displaced.

**August-November 2016**

Tens of thousands flee to Uganda and DRC as fighting escalates in the Equatorias. Clashes in Unity cause thousands to flee to remote swamps and bushes.

**September 2016**

The number of South Sudanese refugees passes the 1M mark. 100 000 people are in need in Yei due to violence and displacement.

Source: OCHA, 2016, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/South_Sudan_2017_Humanitarian_Needs_Overview.pdf

## Severe economic problems and famine

South Sudan is experiencing famine and its economy is in an extremely precarious situation. The South Sudanese pound rapidly lost value against the US dollar,[18] resulting in an acute shortage of currency within the country. This lack of currency, in turn, has affected traders' ability to import foods and other products to supply regional and local markets.[19] Consumer price inflation reached as high as 600% in 2016.[20] The hyperinflation and ongoing fallout from the low world price for oil have greatly weakened the country's economic foundations.

Indeed, South Sudan is the most oil dependent country in the world, according to the World Bank.[21] Most of the current budget for the government of South Sudan comes from oil revenue, which makes up 60% of GDP, [22] and 40% of the national budget is spent on the military and defence.[23] As noted in a 2017 evaluation commissioned by Global Affairs Canada, a dispute between South Sudan and Sudan led to an oil pipeline stoppage in 2012, "causing devastating effects on the economy. Due to this disruption, the country is not in a position to pay its debt of hundreds of billions of dollars to creditors" [24].

While oil accounts for most of the resources, the majority of the population work in the agricultural or pastoralist sectors in "non-wage work". [25] In 2016, the IMF found that real income in South Sudan has declined by approximately 50% since 2013.[26] The IMF has warned that South Sudan's "massive economic challenges in the wake of prolonged internal conflict and subdued oil prices" can only be addressed by decisive economic measures to restore macroeconomic stability and by lasting peace to rebuild confidence in the economy. [27]

Fighting and the economic effects of hyperinflation have led to food price increases, food shortages, and alarming levels of hunger and malnutrition across the country, in both urban and rural areas.[28] The urban poor are particularly affected by the exponential increase in the cost of living, with more than half of the population in Juba being food insecure in 2016 – double the proportion in 2015. [29] The effects of fighting on recent harvests and on livestock compound these economic problems. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) estimated in December 2016 that 50% of all harvests were lost in areas affected by violence including in the country's main cereal-producing regions, resulting in a cereal deficit. [30]

On 20 February 2017, the UN officially declared a famine in South Sudan, with 100 000 people facing starvation and up to one million more people on the brink of starvation.[31] The situation of the 3.4 million displaced people has grown increasingly precarious due to food insecurity.[32] UNHCR has said that 4.8 million people in South Sudan, more than one-third of the total population, are "food insecure".[33] More than one million children in South Sudan under the age of five are estimated to be acutely malnourished.[34] These children "are nine times more likely to die" than their non-malnourished peers.[35] The current famine also risks provoking further population movements into neighbouring regions.

## Persistent development challenges

South Sudan faces a number of other ongoing development challenges. These include high rates of youth unemployment, poor healthcare access, and an extremely weak or non-existent education system. South Sudan has some of the lowest literacy rates, lowest percent of children who are fully immunised, and highest maternal and infant mortality rates in the world. A 2017 Global Affairs Canada evaluation called South Sudan "one of the poorest and most unstable countries in the world" [36].

According to the World Bank, only 16% of women and girls over 15 are literate.[37] Outbreaks of cholera, measles and other diseases are reportedly on the rise.[38] The majority of South Sudanese youth do not attend school; with less than half of the population having ever attended school. [39] There is also wide-scale participation of child soldiers in armed groups. According to OCHA, "over 17,000 children are estimated to have been recruited by armed actors in South Sudan" and over 9 000 children have been registered as unaccompanied or missing.[40] Child marriage is also believed to be on the rise.[41] Despite efforts by UNICEF and others, schools are not functioning in most of the country. Lack of access to education and employment opportunities present a significant challenge in a country where almost three-fourths of the population is under the age of 30.[42]

The UN has repeatedly called for increased funding to address the crisis, but its demands for more funding have largely fallen upon deaf ears. The UN has estimated that meeting the needs of millions of South Sudanese facing famine and food insecurity and in need of protection would require USD 1.6 billion, but as of April 2017 only 18% of the Human Response Plan funding appeal has been met.[43]

South Sudan is seen as one of the most challenging environments for humanitarian and development actors to work because of insecure conditions, violent attacks against humanitarian workers, and difficult living conditions.[44] According to the United Nations, at least 79 aid workers have been killed since the start of the conflict in December 2013.[45] The UN has made repeated appeals to the government and to armed groups to allow humanitarian access to all parts of the country. Despite these appeals, access in many areas has been limited and humanitarian organisations have been driven out of several locations or have seen their compounds attacked.[46] Evaluations reviewed for this case study have frequently mentioned the challenges of recruiting and retaining qualified senior international staff and have also highlighted challenges related to local staff being unable to move freely in all parts of the country. It is generally recognised that "unlike other contexts, national staff have been at greater risk than international staff for direct conflict-related violence, due to the ethnic dimensions of the civil war"[47].

> **Fighting and the economic effects of hyperinflation have led to food price increases, food shortages, and alarming levels of hunger and malnutrition across the country, in both urban and rural areas.**

## Civilians fleeing violence and United Nations protection of civilian sites

The United Nations, along with other humanitarian organisations, play a vital role within the country, keeping people alive in the midst of persistent fighting. Thousands of civilians are living in protection of civilian (PoC) sites guarded by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). They are at risk of being killed by members of opposing ethnic groups if they leave the camps. OCHA estimated that, as of December 2016, over 200 000 IDPs had sought refuge in PoC sites. [48]

A 2016 report commissioned by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) found that UNMISS was unprepared for the arrival of thousands of civilians at its military bases when fighting broke out in December 2013, but that its quick decision to "open the gates" saved thousands of lives.[49] At the time, humanitarian staff were being evacuated and humanitarian supplies around the country were being looted, leaving the UN mission to manage support for the immediate needs of those seeking refuge at its bases.[50] Over time, humanitarian actors, although "initially reluctant to be associated with armed actors by providing humanitarian assistance on a military compound", began organising to provide assistance to the thousands of South Sudanese who had taken shelter at UN sites.[51] According to the study for the IOM, "issues of 'humanitarian space' immediately arose as the traditional distinction between military and humanitarian identities became blurred" [52]. As the situation continued to deteriorate across the country, it became clear that the IDPs seeking shelter at UN sites would not be a temporary phenomenon. New waves of IDPs soon joined those already present at many of the PoC sites and over time the provision of services and conditions in the sites were gradually improved.

In May 2014, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2155, formally changing the UNMISS mandate to focus on protection of civilians, human rights monitoring and supporting delivery of humanitarian assistance. Prior to this, the UNMISS mandate was focused on peacekeeping.[53] Despite the change in mandate, there were debates over the division of responsibilities between UN peacekeepers and humanitarian actors within the PoC sites. These debates led to establishment of guidelines to define the roles of various actors in the PoC sites (approved in September 2014). Nevertheless, the role of the UN mission in relation to the PoCs has remained a subject of debate, with some suggesting that existence of the PoC sites hinders the UNMISS protection of civilians mission outside of the PoC sites. Fewer than 10% of IDPs are located in PoCs, but most of the humanitarian response for IDPs has been concentrated in the PoC sites.[54] Providing security for IDPs in the camps and protection for the population in general remains a challenge for UNMISS. The PoC sites have come under attack numerous times, with the UN struggling to protect displaced civilians living in the sites. [55] These have included large organised attacks against PoCs (in Akobo, Bor and Malakal), which have resulted in dozens of deaths when armed attackers have overrun UN bases.[56] There have also been additional economic costs associated with the PoC sites: the UN has estimated that in the first six months of response, expenses for the PoC sites cost the UNMISS mission USD 50 million.[57] Additionally, there has been tension between UNMISS and the government around the presence of combatants or former combatants in the camps. The study for the IOM noted that the line between combatant and civilian is often blurry, as civilians may be mobilised by armed groups against their will and many youth are being recruited as combatants. While UNMISS disarms those who arrive at the camps with weapons, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) was removed from the UNMISS mandate in May 2014, meaning that there are no DDR programmes currently in place to demobilise and reintegrate former combatants.[58]

The UN has recognised that the current situation of thousands of IDPs living in UN bases is unsustainable. Overall, the main challenge now is to find more durable solutions for the thousands of IDPs living in the PoC sites. Proposals to move the IDPs to a camp managed either by UNHCR or IOM outside of the UN bases were rejected on the basis that it would not be possible to ensure the security of the IDPs. Plans to promote voluntary returns of IDPs to more stable areas of the country were blocked by the government, due to fears that the IDPs could potentially be recruited into opposition forces. [59] The issue of return for the IDPs currently in PoC sites is likely to remain a topic of discussion. IOM officials have identified a number of conditions for return including: safety and security; service delivery; livelihood opportunities; community dialogue and reconciliation; and political dynamics.[60] The recommendations in the lessons learned report for the IOM noted: "Since early 2014, there have been several, often overlapping, initiatives aimed at the relocation of displaced persons out of the protection of civilian areas with limited success. UNMISS and humanitarians need to be realistic and pragmatic while engaging IDPs constructively to find solutions to their protracted displacement." [61]



Young boys use canoes to take IDPs and locals to Turiel Island from Thonyor. People move back and forth in search of food and livelihood. South Sudan.
© UNHCR/Rocco Nuri

Population movements in South Sudan, related both to conflict and to traditional agro-pastoralist practices, are recognised factors fuelling local conflict within the country. A relatively large proportion of the population in South Sudan are agro-pastoralists who regularly migrate with their livestock for access to grazing land and other natural resources. These movements often provoke tensions as pastoralists move across and into territories settled by other ethnic groups. Population movements within the country now include traditional seasonal movements, new movements due to conflict and new patterns of seasonal movements (as a result of conflict and climate factors). All of these make tracking internal displacement a particular challenge.[62]

The conflict in South Sudan has particularly affected the most vulnerable individuals who may be left behind when more able-bodied people are able to flee to surrounding countries. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) noted that "many families report having had to abandon young children, aged and infirm family members when fleeing fighting" [63]. The African Union, in its Commission of Inquiry report on South Sudan, acknowledged the effects of the conflict were particularly difficult for women, many of whom find themselves alone and struggling to care for their children.[64] From the point of view of development needs, the international community should likely be as worried about those left behind in South Sudan — those too weak to flee the fighting in the country — as it is about the South Sudanese refugee populations who need assistance abroad. As a consequence, addressing the flow of refugees from South Sudan would likely imply the need to better support and provide protection to people displaced by conflict within the country.

## Links between South Sudanese IDPs and refugees

Refugees fleeing South Sudan have often been previously displaced within the country. According to humanitarian organisation reports, some of these refugees have had advance warning of attacks, while many where caught unaware by outbreaks of fighting.[65] Some refugees have reported they had to pay armed groups to allow them to pass borders.[66] According to some non-governmental organisation (NGO) reports, some South Sudanese refugees fleeing to Uganda had to pass checkpoints operated by armed groups where they risked "being robbed, killed, or their children being kidnapped" [67]. Fines to release children were reported to be several thousand South Sudanese pounds, which many families were unable to pay. [68] These findings and other reports suggest that refugees fleeing South Sudan may be those who are better off or better able to move over international borders, while more vulnerable groups stay behind or flee locally.

REACH — a joint initiative of the United Nations Operational Satellite Applications Programme and the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), a French NGO — has piloted new approaches to collect data on internal displacement in hard-to-reach areas of South Sudan [69] including interviews with key informants and examination of push and pull factors for displacement in specific locations. REACH has found, for example, that the top push factors in Jonglei State in February 2017 were lack of food, insecurity and lack of health services. The main pull factors were access to food, security and access to health services.[70] REACH also found that there were significantly more women and children than men in IDP settlements.[71] Findings were similar in Unity State, which hosts the highest number of IDPs. As of February 2017, REACH found, many areas in the state remained inaccessible to humanitarian actors.[72] In the Akobo area at the border with Ethiopia, South Sudanese who had decided to cross the border identified the lack of access to education as the most important reason for choosing to leave the country to settle in Ethiopia.[73]

The REACH project also noted tensions in some areas among local communities, IDPs and Sudanese refugees over access to land and other resources, with new influxes putting pressure on host communities already struggling to cover basic needs.[74] An example was Maban, near the border with Sudan and Ethiopia, where refugee camps are hosting over 90 000 refugees from Sudan.



Two young women who fled their home-town in South Sudan, try to knock fruit down from a palm tree.
© UNHCR/Rocco Nuri

Many South Sudanese families have adopted elaborate survival strategies that include dividing family members among multiple communities and areas (such as different IDP and refugee camps).[75] In some instances, families and communities send members ahead to assess the resources and access to services in various possible settlement areas. Family members also are often separated when fighting breaks out in villages and may seek later to reunite with family members in other camps and locations. South Sudanese IDPs and refugees in surrounding countries come under different statutes and have different legal protections, but, in practice, distinctions between the two groups often become fluid with today's IDPs becoming tomorrow's refugees. In addition, there is evidence that some former refugees who previously returned to South Sudan have again been forced to flee.

South Sudanese refugees living in camps in neighbouring countries often find better living conditions, with greater access to education and to healthcare, than they have ever had in their own country. Nevertheless, many refugees remain deeply tied to their cultural and tribal roots and indicate hopes to return.

## What has the international community learned about addressing drivers of conflict in South Sudan?

Donors have long talked about the need to address the underlying drivers of conflict in South Sudan. Current policy debates continue to stress that the international community should focus efforts on addressing conflict drivers in refugee countries of origin as part of the response to the current refugee crisis. The drivers of conflict in South Sudan, however, are multiple, long-lasting and difficult to address through traditional development or humanitarian programming. The African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan, in its 2014 report, identified a large number of drivers as well as a number of causes for the outbreak of violence in December 2013. These include the political dimensions; competing aspirations of political leaders; the militarisation of politics; long-standing ethnic tensions; failed previous attempts at DDR; weak institutions; and the large number of unemployed youth. The report stated that many of the problems from the previous civil war had not been adequately addressed and these issues, left to fester, created fertile ground for renewed violence. Importantly, these drivers of conflict were identified prior to the late 2013 outbreak of violence.

### Evaluation in 2010 warned of conflict drivers and conflict analysis weaknesses

A major multi-donor evaluation was published in 2010 examining international development assistance efforts and donor support for conflict prevention and peacebuilding in South Sudan after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005. The evaluation was also used to test the OECD Guidance, *Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility*. The evaluation assessed the programmes funded by Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States, the European Commission, the World Bank and some UN activities. The evaluation, *Aiding the Peace: A multi-donor evaluation of support to conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities in Southern Sudan 2005-2010*, was a joint assessment by 15 donors that aimed to look at the collective impact of international assistance using "a 'conflict lens' that asks whether these activities were cognisant of, or responsive to, the dynamics of conflict in the country" [76]. The study also aimed to identify factors driving success or failure "to provide an input into ongoing discussion, future policies and strategies on how to possibly improve the relevance, effectiveness and impact of international engagement in peacebuilding processes in Southern Sudan" [77].

The evaluation said international donors had not sufficiently addressed numerous conflict drivers. It noted that reintegration of demobilised soldiers is insufficient, and identified other factors including: underdeveloped police and justice systems; incomplete disarmament among the population; hardening of ethnic identities; tensions around centralisation and weak structures at state level; migration of armed pastoralists; and the desire of returnees for access to resources, which can destabilise communities. The evaluation found that "donors have commissioned independent studies on conflict in Southern Sudan since 2005 and used these selectively" [78]. The evaluation noted that earlier studies (including studies published as early as 2003) identified key conflict drivers such as "clashes of identities"; "centre-periphery inequality"; "conflict over resources"; "intra-elite competition"; and "brute causes" including "criminality, individual agency and the perpetuation of a cycle of violence" [79]. The multi-donor evaluation also clearly identified many of the drivers of conflict, including the unresolved ethnic and inter-elite tension that would eventually lead to the outbreak of violence in 2013.

The 2010 evaluation is noteworthy in that it identified many tensions that remain unresolved today, and noted that many tribal conflicts began as local conflicts which later escalated. The evaluation suggested that the ability of traditional leaders to successfully mediate local disputes was decreasing and that this was allowing local conflict to escalate.[80] The evaluation also found that "the ability of the State to intervene and control such events through the police and justice system" was rudimentary and that drought (possibly related to climate change) was "putting pressure on farmers and pastoralists". Finally, it noted the numerous problems with civilian disarmament and past failed disarmament attempts leading to a dynamic of "re-arming" [81]. In short, the evaluation foreshadowed many of the current dynamics of conflict seen in South Sudan.

The importance of the 2010 multi-donor evaluation is that it also identified a number of weaknesses in the use of conflict analysis by international actors. The three principal weaknesses around the use of conflict analysis were that most high-level donor meetings and strategies were formed at international conferences "where the particularities of local conflict are lost to more strategic pan-Sudan concerns"; that most joint donor mechanisms "are primarily concerned with harmonising aid around a recovery/development agenda" negotiated with the government; that there was a lack of flexibility that prevented programming to be adapted to changes in the context. [82] The evaluation recommended that donors "ensure that revised and new programmes are always preceded by a conflict analysis that links wider dynamics to those specific to the area of operation" [83]. The evaluation recommended conflict analysis should include a mapping of ethnic and political fault lines, a set of scenarios of likely events in the near future, and their implications for the programme." [84]

Perhaps most importantly, the evaluation found that the main theory of change that donors were using in South Sudan was based on the concept that "lack of development was in itself a cause of conflict" — a theory of change that the evaluation found to be flawed. The evaluation argued that the focus on delivering "a peace dividend" was not supported by evidence:

> The logic seems to be that development is not only a reward for peace (the CPA) but that failure to deliver a 'peace dividend' could lead to conflict. The evidence for such a claim appears to come from studies on conflict prevention and peacebuilding conducted in other parts of the world, but the link between delivering services and abating violence is not found in Southern Sudan, despite this being the dominant paradigm that informs the aid operations. In Southern Sudan a more precise identification of the causes of conflict is needed.[85]

The evaluation recommended that in "the most conflict-affected states measures need to be taken to ensure security before access to basic services can be realised" [86]. The evaluation urged that interventions needed to be focused more on the local level "based on an analysis of the particular drivers of conflict in the region" [87]. It also found that "there has been a dearth of activities focused specifically on supporting young people's livelihoods and/or employment opportunities" [88]. The evaluation found that livelihood programmes were "highly scattered, not sufficiently 'at scale' and not focused specifically at supporting young people's livelihood opportunities" [89]. It concluded that "all evidence suggests that youth employment would have a more direct potential for reducing tensions than any other form of basic services".[89]

The multi-donor evaluation of 2010 also suggested there was not enough donor support for decentralisation of government. It found that governance programmes "have been over-ambitious and over-technical with too much emphasis on formal institutions and not enough attention given to linking this with customary law" [90]. It also found that donors were not well-prepared to address the government's low level of capacity:

> The expectation was that there would be at least a minimum of national institutions with whom to coordinate, despite evidence to the contrary presented in numerous reports and first-hand accounts available to donors. In part, the 'discovery' of a complete lack of capacity led to a concerted effort to build [government of South Sudan] central institutions while largely ignoring the ten State governments.[91]

Finally, the evaluation criticised "an over-use of 'good practice' particularly with respect to ownership and harmonsation, at the expense of field knowledge and engagement" [92]. The study found that programming "requires in-depth knowledge and field presence, and there is no substitute for the continuity and trust built through individuals being on the ground for extended periods of time" [93]. The evaluation further found that "the proliferation of projects has continued to make aid coordination in Southern Sudan difficult" with donors failing to "operate under a coherent political and development strategy with common goals and approaches" [94].

Overall, the 2010 multi-donor evaluation found that there was a lack of agreement on what statehood in South Sudan would look like, with the political aspects of the transition from war to peace not having been adequately addressed:

> The transition from war to peace is not a technical exercise but a highly political process. A sophisticated and nuanced analysis of power relations, causes of vulnerability, and drivers of conflict and resilience indicators was largely missing from the design and execution of many aid programmes. In dynamic conflict settings, an analysis of the political economy of the transition must also be continuously revised to be useful. This was not done, as donors have instead tended to focus on administrative delivery and implementation. [95]

## UK parliamentary report: Over-emphasis on "best practice" and state building

A 2015 report on international engagement in South Sudan from 2011-14, prepared by the UK All Party Parliamentary Group for Sudan and South Sudan, also urged the UK and international partners "to learn from past experiences" and "to reconnect with the culture, society and politics of South Sudan to ensure that our support contributes to long-term peace" [96].

The report drew from confidential briefings with South Sudanese policy makers, UK and European Union officials, international non-governmental organisations, and others.[97] It noted that "whilst some international actors have an excellent understanding of the unfolding situation, comprehensive conflict analysis was not properly integrated into donor and development planning and was paid insufficient attention by many, leading to faulty assumptions and missed opportunities" [98]. Echoing other assessments, the 2015 UK report found that failures to address reconciliation from the long and bloody civil war — on the part of "leaders, communities and international partners" — led to the 2013 outbreak of fighting. [99] Furthermore, the report noted "there was a tendency within the international development community to emphasise stabilisation and short-term outcomes over transformation and long-term goals". It added:

> Moving forward, the international community must pursue an approach better tailored to South Sudan's needs by integrating conflict sensitivity into all development and peacebuilding activities, giving greater attention to those at the social and political fringes, and working more closely with South Sudanese staff and analysts. [100]

The UK parliamentary report also addressed the challenges that UNMISS was facing in "sheltering unprecedented numbers of IDPs in its bases" [101]. It commended UNMISS for this effort but also argued "that UNMISS worked too closely with the Government of South Sudan, compromising both its image of neutrality and its ability to protect civilians" [102]. The report said "UNMISS now needs significant support from the international community to improve both the conditions of IDP camps and its ability to successfully protect the 95% of displaced persons living beyond the confines of its bases" [103]. The report also argued that not enough attention has been given to "IDPs living outside of UN bases, the prevention and response to gender-based violence and improving access to education" [104].

The UK report, again echoing observations in the 2010 multi-donor evaluation, warned against over-attention to "international best practice" and state building. Overall, the UK parliamentary group found that there was a disconnect between conflict analysis, research and technical development plans, with a failure to adapt state-building practices to the South Sudanese context:

> [The international community] transferred established state-building practices which had been used elsewhere and pasted them onto South Sudan without enough consideration of the specificity of the situation. Consequently, the international community overemphasised stabilisation programmes and invested in security only to find that this money was used by factions to strengthen themselves against their rivals. A greater focus on dialogue and reconciliation would have begun addressing these divisions, rather than entrenching them.[105]

The report noted as well that "…the New Deal process between the GoSS [government of South Sudan] and the international donor community in 2013 suffered from a pressure to meet milestones and not enough emphasis was placed on including civil society in contentious and difficult debates. The pressure to complete processes and achieve 'outcomes' has resulted in settlements that leave problems unresolved, succeeding in short term pacification but leaving latent tensions intact" [106].

Despite warning signs, the international community failed to anticipate the unresolved issues that ultimately would lead to a new outbreak of violence in 2013. The UK parliamentary group said that "the potential for large-scale violence was known long before the fighting initially broke out. Importantly, in light of the available analyses, the international community should have adapted its approach more significantly to counteract these tensions to respond, for example, to armed rebellion, shrinking political space, corruption or politicisation of Traditional Authority" [107].

In terms of diplomatic engagement, the report argued that the UK and other donors such as the US, Netherlands, Italy and Norway could do more to support South Sudan diplomatically, as these countries were involved in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and are guarantor signatories to the agreement. [108] On the positive side, the report noted significant diplomatic success in averting "full-scale military confrontation" between Sudan and South Sudan over ongoing conflicts.[109] But the report said that "diplomatic capacities should be hugely increased to deal with the number, complexity and scale of the issues", adding that "the complexity of the issues and long chains of diplomatic actors means that the united force of the international community has rarely been brought to bear" [110]. It also called for increased information flows among diplomats, academics, political analysts and development actors.[111]

## Other recent attempts to learn lessons from international efforts in South Sudan

A 2016 evaluation synthesis of South Sudan programming, produced for the Norway Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), said that in general: "Development partners underestimated the state-building challenge in South Sudan, and overestimated the capacity of the government to take on responsibility for service delivery. This resulted in over-ambitious and unsustainable programmes." [112] The report noted that "the donor community became increasingly overwhelmed by the extremely difficult contextual environment in South Sudan" and that the trade-offs between strengthening national ownership versus delivering rapid results were generally also underestimated.[113] It also observed:

> Engaging with the state in complex emergencies where the state itself is a party to the conflict, and where victims also may be perpetrators, is deeply problematic. The use of aid to legitimise non-state actors is also a difficult issue. The literature suggests that, where possible, relying on local authorities rather than non-state actors as the bridge between humanitarian actors and affected communities, leads to better outcomes, though this is not necessarily always the case.[114]

The evaluation also urged donors to build capacity to better co-ordinate and promote flexibility between humanitarian and development modes "including more flexible funding and the ability to engage differently in different parts of a vast country with enormous challenges".[115]

The 2014 African Union inquiry report also addresses the role of donors in the country, and in particular donors' efforts in state-building, which it found to generally not have been successful:




Nyal, South Sudan. Local community and IDPs struggle for access to food and other basic necessities, therefore agencies including World Food Programme have begun distributing assistance.
© WFP/Giulio d'Adamo

> While there is agreement that 'donors certainly achieved a great deal, especially in terms of technical infrastructure and humanitarian assistance — from building roads and schools throughout South Sudan, to reducing poverty and mortality rates — the achievements towards state-building are less readily apparent'. Indeed, to their credit, donors put a lot of money and effort into building institutional infrastructure. As suggested by some commentators, this aspect of state-building, which involves building 'physical stuff', is 'easy'. It is the building of 'capabilities of the human system' (in our case the state) that is hard, which is where, according to the Commission's evaluation, the aspirations of the state-building project in South Sudan have not matched performance and outcomes. Many respondents expressed the view that the state-building process had not resulted in strong, accountable and transparent institutions.[116]

The African Union inquiry report on South Sudan also found that in some cases the international community's eagerness to assist the government may have been counterproductive, as a large number of partners were involved in capacity building, with implementing agencies hiring multiple technical advisors and leaving government of South Sudan officials feeling "overwhelmed".[116]

## Lessons from Canada's whole-of-government approach in South Sudan

Canada's stabilisation and reconstruction taskforce in South Sudan (START) focused mainly on security sector reform, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, mine action, and rule of law. Its development programming focused on securing the lives of children and youth, sustainable economic growth, food security, and democracy promoting activities. [117] A 2017 evaluation praised this programming as relevant and said it achieved outcomes "despite the extreme challenge of working in South Sudan". [118] However, it added, contexts such as South Sudan require a high level of flexibility and Canada's "internal systems designed for more traditional contexts may not have been appropriately tailored to working in a fragile state context" [119]. In particular, "requirements in place to manage fiduciary risks may have hindered the program's ability to be flexible and nimble in a rapidly changing environment" [120]. The evaluation recommended Global Affairs Canada "should ensure that it undertakes efforts to limit delays in project and planning approval through a review and streamlining of processes" [121].

The evaluation also found that, in general, Canada respected "good practice" for working in fragile contexts including "efforts to promote no harm; ensure non-discriminatory programming; prioritize prevention; and avoid pockets of exclusion, among other practices were in line with good practices for engaging in fragile states," but Global Affairs Canada "could have done more to establish stronger linkages between security and development objectives" [122]. The evaluation found that there should have been more emphasis on developing "a common understanding of the root causes of conflict", calling this a "missed opportunity". In relation to state building, "the evaluation found that some initiatives in development and START programming were at times, too short in vision, too focused on filing gaps rather than growing local capacity, and not necessarily well linked to building capacity in the longer term" [123]. The evaluation also suggested that more resources and time could be devoted to cross-cutting issues such as gender, governance, and environment as well as conflict sensitive programming, recommending that the Canadian embassy in South Sudan could have had a specialist assigned to work on these issues.

The main recommendation from the evaluation is that Global Affairs Canada "should ensure that future South Sudan programming is based on an integrated, whole-of-department approach. Specifically, the continuum of programming should be based on:

- A long-term, common and documented vision for the country
- A recognition of the need for responsive, flexible and nimble programming to adapt to rapidly changing contexts
- The effective integration of cross-cutting themes
- An enhanced strategic analysis that addresses the drivers of conflict and is based in the *Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States*.[124]

The evaluation also looked at the whole-of-government approach that the Canadian government used from 2008 to 2013. It found: "This whole-of-government approach focused on three objectives: contain violence and enhance security; reduce vulnerability and save lives; and build longer-term stability and resilience."[125] Table 1 shows how different parts of the Canadian government contributed to the effort.

**Table 1. Government of Canada's Sudan Task Force 2009 to 2013**

| | |
|---|---|
| Sudan Task Force | Oversaw policy, operational support and programming coordination of Canada's whole-of-government approach for Sudan and South Sudan. |
| Stabilization and Reconstruction Program (START xDFAIT) | Through the Global Peace and Security Fund, START provided for the following activities: security sector development and reform, support to the constitutional development process, support to community-level conflict resolution initiatives, reduction of explosive remnants of war, and strenthening of the capacity of peace support operations. |
| Department of National Defence | The Department of National Defence contributed personnel and equipment to the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) and later to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). |
| Royal Canadian Mounted Police – International Police Peacekeeping Program | The Royal Canadian Mounted Police contributed officers to the UNMIS and UNMISS to train and mentor local police officers serving in South Sudan. |
| Development and Humanitarian Assistance (xCIDA) | Africa Branch, Multilateral Branch and Partnerships for Development Innovation Branch focused on strengthening enabling conditions for peace and prosperity, including a stronger, more legitimate state; access to emergency and basic services by vulnerable people; and more resilient and productive citizens (particularly at-risk youth) with improved livelihoods. |

Source: Global Affairs Canada (2017), international.gc.ca/gac-amc/publications/evaluation/2017/sudan_development-evaluation-soudan_developpement.aspx?lang=eng.g

Related to the whole-of-government approach, Canada's Sudan Task Force met weekly and was led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (now Global Affairs Canada). The meetings were meant to share information on security and share information on activities "but were not intended to coordinate programming between the member departments".[126] According to the evaluation:

> The common perception from [Global Affairs Canada] interviewees in this evaluation was that, while information-sharing helped to avoid duplication, there remained the tendency to act independently on programming objectives. According to the interviewees for this evaluation, integration between the GAC programs was perceived to be constrained by corporate culture, with each delivery channel guarding its space. In addition, each program was responsible for the management of results towards separate and independent logic models that reflected different timeframes, and different approval channels. [126]

Between 2010 and 2013, Canada implemented 37 START initiatives with CAD 46.5 million spent. Most of these initiatives were focused on improving governance and improving peace and security at the community level. The evaluation found that "Canada's continued engagement in South Sudan's foreign policy priorities (i.e. freedom, human rights and the rule of law) were closely aligned with Canadian security interests". Furthermore, the START programme included support for the implementation of the 2005 North-South Comprehensive Peace Agreement and 2011 Referendum on the country's independence, "both were foreign policy goals of the Government of Canada in South Sudan". [127] In regards to stabilization programming, Canada worked closely with the United Kingdom and the United States in the Joint Donor Team Stabilization Working Group.

The START programme ended in March 2013 when the mandate of the Canadian government's South Sudan Task Force ended. The Canadian evaluation found that the closure left a gap, as the programme was seen as being "especially relevant in the post-2013 context", and was recognised for "launching cutting edge initiatives in response to crisis and conflict situations" [128].

The Canada evaluation found that long-term involvement in South Sudan remains relevant, but that donors may need to aim to work more outside of traditional frameworks:

> Long-term involvement from donor countries in South Sudan remained relevant in promoting progress toward stability and recovery for social justice purposes. Long-term involvement also remained relevant because South Sudan and other fragile states represented potential threats to international peace and security. While there were no easy and standard recipes for working in a fragile context, donor countries could have created opportunities to work outside the traditional frameworks which drew a distinction between: stabilization, peace-building, development and humanitarian approaches; formal and informal structures; center and the periphery; state and civil society; and macro- and micro-level approaches. Simple contexts do not exist among fragile states, only situations simplified by donor countries. [129]




Refugees from Sudan and IDPs from South Sudan fish for mudfish in a lake formed by floodwater near the town of Yida, South Sudan.
© UNHCR/Andrew McConnell

## South Sudanese returning to their country: Lessons from the past

The return of refugees to South Sudan has long been a priority and donors have supported international organisations such as UNHCR to manage large voluntary return programmes and assist refugees choosing to resettle in the country. UNHCR has clearly stated that the current conditions in South Sudan do not favour return and that it opposes all forced returns. Nevertheless, a very limited number of voluntary returns is occurring and likely will continue. If the situation improves, there would be higher interest in voluntary returns. [130] Numerous reports and evaluations highlighted tensions and potential conflict associated with the return of both IDPs and refugees.

UNHCR has long supported return and reintegration programmes in southern Sudan. [131] A 2008 evaluation of UNHCR's voluntary return programme found a number of shortcomings and made recommendations that organisations and donors can still learn from today. Overall, the evaluation found that UNHCR was doing the best that could be expected given the challenges and funding gaps it faced. These findings are worth bearing in mind today, as the international community may consider supporting voluntary refugee returns in the future. Importantly, the 2008 UNHCR evaluation argued that "protection should be brought more decisively to the centre of the reintegration operation" in a country like South Sudan where fighting and conflict has been prolonged and often widespread. [132]

The evaluation noted that programme decisions had generally favoured physical return over reintegration (economic and social) and recommended "a shift of focus, with a significantly higher proportion of resources allocated to the reintegration programme" [133]. It also recommended more consideration "to alternative methods for assisting returns, for example, through a more extensive use of cash grants for transport where feasible and appropriate" [134]. The evaluation also underscored the "highly politicized" nature of the return of IDPs and refugees, noting the attention that was being paid at that time to population figures and how they may impact future elections or resource allocations. [135] The evaluation cautioned strongly against "measuring the success of the operation through the number of UNHCR assisted returns" as the numbers alone were less important than the sustainable reintegration of returnees. [136]

At the time the evaluation was being conducted, in 2008, UNHCR was working to open local "return corridors" as security improved in those areas. The evaluation noted that the presence of the Lord's Resistance Army and other armed groups required "a high degree of flexibility" [137]. UNHCR staff at the time raised concerns that the high rate of return may have been an unrealistic objective due to the lack of greater attention and funding for protection components. [138] The evaluation found that most community-based training, livelihood support and other activities consisted in practice primarily of infrastructure construction (such as the construction of new boreholes and medical facilities) with less focus on supporting ongoing operating costs. [139] The evaluation noted that school attendance and the improvement of health facilities had benefited both returnees and host communities. But the evaluation also raised serious concerns about the sustainability of these improvements due to the "lack of government capacity", noting that the government would be unable to guarantee the continuity of school and health services following the end of the programme.[140]

The UNHCR evaluation also noted that many of the returns of both refugees and IDPs in South Sudan (at that time) were unassisted and this had resulted in "unplanned and often chaotic urbanisation" [141]. The evaluation noted many of the unaddressed issues around return and protection are related to land and land tenure rights, particularly in urban areas. [142] It also identified the general lack of legal documentation as a challenge. Few South Sudanese have any form of identification (ID card, passport or other evidence of identity), birth certificates or any documents showing proof of age. The evaluation recommended that

UNHCR work to help improve access to ID documents and recognise foreign educational certificate for returnees, as it noted these documents were often needed for access to livelihoods other than that of day labourer. [143] It also found that there was not enough "research and analysis of the dynamics of return and reintegration", particularly not enough attention to gender dimensions. [144]

The most important findings in the 2008 evaluation relate to the complex co-ordination environment. In the area of protection, return and reintegration of refugees, the United Nations is meant to play a key role. The evaluation noted that more than a dozen specialist sections within the UN mission "roughly overlap with the mandates and competences of the specialist UN agencies" in both operational and non-operational areas. [145] The evaluation said the "duplication of roles and names is widely seen as significantly multiplying coordination problems and demands while clouding lines of responsibility and adding little to the efficiency of the operation". [146] It noted that the Protection Working Group (PWG), which prioritised protection work plans and projects for funding from the Common Humanitarian Fund, was led in some locations by UNMIS (the predecessor to UNMISS) and in others by UNHCR. This meant that the role was exercised "unevenly" throughout South Sudan. [147] The evaluation recommended that UNHCR reaffirm its leadership role and that to do so, UNHCR would need to ensure appropriate staffing. [148] In terms of co-ordination, the evaluation also recommended that DDR strategies be better linked with refugee return and reintegration strategies. It noted overlaps in areas of ex-combatant returns and refugee returns, and the need for greater coherence between the two strategies. [149] In general, the evaluation found that co-ordination activities were often centred in Juba and were "top heavy", and suffered from "lack of expertise, time and funding" [150]. Despite the challenges and numerous constraints, UNHCR managed to make solid contributions to the reintegration of returnees, navigating the difficulties of translating "aspirational policy objectives into realities on the ground" [151].

The 2010 multi-donor evaluation identified cases of conflict related to the return and resettlement of previously displaced South Sudanese IDPs and refugees, which it called a potential "flashpoint". This evaluation said the issue deserved more attention from the international community. According to this 2010 evaluation, between 2005 and 2010, over two million people returned to South Sudan and an estimated 10% of them experienced further displacement after the return. [152] The evaluation noted that while the reintegration of IDPs and refugees was identified as a priority, "the large-scale and logistically demanding organised return process" meant that less attention was paid in practice to reintegration. [153] Importantly, the evaluation estimated that fewer than 13% of returns happened through "organised channels" such as the UN, with the vast number of returns being "spontaneous returnees who arranged their own transport and resources". [154] The evaluation found that efforts to maintain large return programmes "overshadowed more nuanced and relevant reintegration work". [155]

The evaluation noted that the government strategy at that time was to facilitate rapid returns "based on an implicit assumption that relatives and local communities would be able to carry the burden of reintegration, an assumption that has proved ill-founded" [156]. The evaluation said that the top priority for returnees was security, but also found that reintegration programmes had focused more on service provision rather than protection. [157] It noted the "immediate needs of returnees were intended to be addressed through a 'reintegration package'" that included three months of food aid supplied by the World Food Programme; seeds and tools provided by the Food and Agricultural Organization; and household items from UNHCR, UNICEF and the UN Joint Logistics Centre. However, it found the assistance was not based on assessed needs and was not provided in a timely and predictable manner. Additionally, IDPs received such packages "by different agencies at different times using different targeting methodologies" with some of the food assistance lost to diversion and corruption in some instances. [158]

The 2010 multi-donor evaluation found that land issues associated with the return of large number of returnees were "a major problem", with no clear agenda for action, nor translation into appropriate programming. This evaluation noted a "lack of coordination amongst UN agencies" on this issue. [159] "With returning IDPs and refugees, uncertainties over customary practice in the settlement of land disputes, and the lack of codified title to land have led to many local disputes, some of which have escalated into wider conflict." [160] Disputes over access to water (used for both herding and agriculture) were also identified as important factors for conflict. The evaluation noted cases of "displaced ethnic groups refusing to return to their areas of origin … and forcefully occupying the territories of other communities, with the support of senior government members" [161]. The evaluation said that this so-called "land grabbing" by returning populations and disputes over land "linked to ethnic diversity" make the process of return inherently political.[162]

The evaluation found that in addition to returnees coming home, "new waves of IDPs and refugees are arriving in various communities. Although these groups are transient for differing reasons, they all increase the pressure on local resources such as land, water and social services".[163] The evaluation concluded that donors have not done enough to work with and support local governments and their communities to address the growing pressures building up around land issues as a factor of conflict:

> Technical advice on land policy and the resolution of land disputes has been particularly uncoordinated and often conflicting. The hope is that the consolidation of policy and law will reduce land conflicts, yet little is known about what is actually going on at the local level. There is concern that both traditional authority and customary practices are being disregarded as major channels for mediating rural land rights disputes, and that the effectiveness of large-scale farming in boosting productivity is being overrated. [164]

Returnees often preferred to return to urban areas due to poor service delivery elsewhere. The 2010 evaluation identified rapid urbanisation following the return of IDPs and refugees as a problem, despite the government's official policy of channelling returnees to rural towns. The evaluation found that "the inevitable process of rapid urbanisation, especially in Juba, suggests that international donors should help transform it into an opportunity for economic growth and development rather than exclusively focussing on rural areas". [165] Moreover, this evaluation found that the return and reintegration process revealed dichotomies between humanitarian and development principles, with relief assistance continuing to be based more on supply side factors. It noted "the emphasis on organised return versus reintegration programming in part played to the strength of the actors on the ground — logistics and short-term humanitarian inputs" [166].

The multi-donor evaluation further addressed some of the challenges relating to host communities and schooling. It said that the mixing of internally displaced South Sudanese who were fleeing the Lord's Resistance Army "put extra pressure" on community facilities, especially schools. IDPs, it noted, cannot afford to pay school fees. The evaluation cited notable successes when the needs of host communities, IDPs and returnees were taken into account. One example noted in the evaluation was a World Vision cash-for-work programme focusing on IDPs, returnees and demobilised soldiers. The result was that "conflict with the host communities was avoided" because the programme "alleviated the hosts' burden". In another example, the evaluation noted: "The easing of tensions between IDPs, refugees and host communities in Makpandu (Western Equatoria), for example, has been helped by allowing access by host communities and IDPs to the primary health care units initially set up for the refugee settlement." [167]

At the same time, the evaluation noted other areas in which education programming was less successful, saying that the multi-donor trust fund had only managed to construct ten schools by 2010, less than 25% of the target. [168]

A 2011 evaluation of UNHCR's community-based reintegration programme over the 2005-10 period noted refugees returning from out of the country after the CPA often had high expectations that were hard to meet. "While there have been undeniable improvements especially for those who remained in Southern Sudan during the war, for those who went into exile they have often returned with higher expectations than what local conditions and capacities have been able to meet". [169] This evaluation largely supported the findings of the 2008 evaluation of UNHCR in South Sudan.

The 2011 evaluation of the reintegration programme also noted the trend of returnees wanting to settle in urban areas where there are more services, such as schools, health care and clean water. The evaluation found that many returnees were frustrated, in particular by not being able to find work upon returning, and it expressed concern that this frustration could lead to future conflict. Returnees, it added, had "had access to better educational opportunities" than those who stayed. [170] There was also frustration that educated returned refugees were not able to access government jobs. [171]

The 2011 evaluation, echoing concerns raised in earlier evaluations, found that "localised conflict over land and other resources are severely hampering progress for many people". [172] The evaluation highlighted the complexity of the various disputes over land. The land disputes often involved returning refugees attempting to reclaim their land, which was often times being used by IDPs or had been settled by other South Sudanese in their absence. Meanwhile, some IDPs wanted to stay on the land where they had sought refuge during years of fighting, rather than returning to their areas of origin.

UN programmes continued to work to address the problem of youth unemployment including for returnees. A 2012 evaluation of a joint UN programme to create opportunities for youth employment in South Sudan (including for IDPs, returnees and ex-combatants) found evidence of some success, despite co-ordination weaknesses within the UN system. The evaluation also found that the UN had contracted a substantial part of the programme to NGOs who further subcontracted activities, leading to a greater potential for inefficiencies.

The evaluation also found that joint planning and implementation were missing, although the programme was designed as a joint endeavour of nine different UN organisations. This lack meant that the joint programme "missed some opportunities for building synergy between different UN agency outputs". [173] The evaluation concluded that the high number of partnering UN agencies did not result in better inter-agency collaboration or more effective implementation. [174] Despite the co-ordination problems, however, the programme included innovative approaches for youth employment that the evaluation recommended to be scaled up. These included "targeted vocational training"; a "mobile training program for pastoralist youth in cattle camps"; farmer field schools; functional literacy; and a "youth peer education network". However, the evaluation suggested that many of these initiatives lacked national ownership and that the UN needed to develop a more "long-term strategy for sustainable employment creation" [175].

A 2013 evaluation of the South Sudan Education Cluster found that education was the second priority, after security, for returning refugees and IDPs. Communities often cited access to education as their greatest challenge, with returnees who had become accustomed to education services feeling particular frustration over the lack of education services offered. [176] The evaluation, which focused on "education in emergencies," found that providing education also promoted child protection.

Another recent evaluation of an education project, which USAID funded, highlighted many of the challenges of providing education in South Sudan. The education programme, Room to Learn, was one of the first USAID programmes to be implemented under the USAID 2011-15 Education Strategy. It was designed to promote education in all ten states of South Sudan, but due to the ongoing conflict it had to be suspended and ultimately was ended early. Even before the actual closure of the project, the evaluation noted, the programme struggled to deliver educational results with challenges around security (including issues around managing logistics and human resources given the insecurity). It also identified practical barriers such as lack of consensus on the language of instruction and lack of existing educational material and low level of teacher capacity, which limited the ability of the programme to achieve results or implement activities as planned. Overall, the evaluation found that the programme was "too ambitious in relation to context" and not well suited to the context, particularly as security deteriorated. [177] The programme also faced obstacles because it could not meet many of the basic needs of students and communities (such as food and basic security). The evaluation concluded that the programme, as designed, was unsuited for such a volatile context.



Internally displaced South Sudanese women in PoC Site/Sierra 11 in Bentiu.
© UNHCR/Petterick Wiggers

## Evaluations provide reminders of the difficulties of effectively addressing South Sudan's conflict and displacement

This case study highlights the complexity of conditions and context in South Sudan and how international development and humanitarian actors struggle to implement programmes. The country continues to face massive security and state-building challenges, with deeply rooted drivers of conflict persisting over decades. Millions are currently displaced in South Sudan and abroad due to conflict. A trajectory towards peace has not yet emerged and the path towards peace will undoubtedly be long. As of early 2017, famine and forced displacement have created a humanitarian emergency, with the UN warning that millions of people are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance.

This case study also demonstrates that short-term efforts to address the root causes of conflict in refugee countries of origin, such as South Sudan, are unlikely to change the underlying conditions driving displacement in the near future. Past efforts to address root causes have tended to underestimate the timescale needed for change and the challenges of state building in the South Sudanese context. The challenges of "creating" a new South Sudanese state capable of delivering basic services, particularly when the government is also a party to the conflict, cannot be underestimated. The immediate challenge for the international community is how to support life-saving emergency relief while at the same time working towards long-term solutions. Once greater stability is achieved and the security situation allows IDPs and refugees to return, the return process will need to be carefully managed with many returnees and local communities likely needing high levels of support to ensure successful reintegration.

The international community has been involved in South Sudan for decades and continues to search for approaches to support the South Sudanese people. International support for life-saving humanitarian operations in South Sudan has undoubtedly saved a countless number of lives. Humanitarian needs are likely to remain high and donors should not expect short-term projects to be able to adequately address long-term structural conflict drivers.

Despite the challenges, there are examples of some successes in South Sudan. The UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and humanitarian actors have worked together since 2013 to address the needs of IDPs. They have had some success, notably for IDPs taking shelter in UN bases. Previous UNHCR voluntary return programmes also have shown some success despite challenges, and cash-based and livelihood interventions are providing immediate relief to programme beneficiaries. The international community should continue efforts to learn more about what works in order to better support South Sudanese forcibly displaced by fighting in the short and long term. The international community can learn from past efforts and evaluations.

**Past efforts to address root causes have tended to underestimate the timescale needed for change and the challenges of state building in the South Sudanese context. The challenges of "creating" a new South Sudanese state capable of delivering basic services, particularly when the government is also a party to the conflict, cannot be underestimated.**

## Research notes and citations

1 African Union, 2014

2 UNHCR, 2016d

3 Ibid.

4 OCHA, 2016:2

5 Bennett et al., 2010: 89

6 Ibid.: 31

7 Ibid.: 1

8 In-depth studies of tribes within the territory that is now South Sudan contributed to the development of modern social anthropology in the last century. Today, the South Sudan Humanitarian Project gathers anthropological studies and others resources on drivers of conflict. See www.southsudanhumanitarianproject com.

9 All Party Parliamentary Group for Sudan and South Sudan, 2015: 13

10 African Union, 2014: 112

11 Ibid.: 112 and 118

12 UN Security Council, 2016: 2. The documented human rights abuses included "forced disappearances, extra judicial killings and conflict-related sexual violence, massive population displacements, the destruction of livelihoods and food crops".

13 United Nations Security Council, 2016: 2

14 Ibid.: 4

15 UNHCR, 2016a

16 UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), 2015: 14

17 Global Affairs Canada, 2017

18 The 90% devaluation of the South Sudanese pound against the US dollar has forced the government of South Sudan to abandon the currency peg to the dollar and adopt the parallel market rate. When the pound was pegged to the dollar, the black market rate was as much as five times the official rate, leading to manipulation of foreign exchange markets. The World Bank in 2017 noted the South Sudanese pound (SSP) depreciated on the parallel market to almost SSP 80 per USD by the end of September 2016, from SSP 18.5 per USD in December 2015. See www.worldbank.org/en/country/southsudan/overview.

19 This impact is related to the fact that South Sudan's central bank did not have the currency reserves required to back the move to a free-floating currency.

20 This inflation rate is based on end-of-period consumer prices percentage change data from the World Economic Outlook. See IMF, 2016.

21 World Bank, 2016

22 Ibid.

23 African Union, 2014: 62

24 Global Affairs Canada, 2017

25 World Bank, 2016

26 IMF, 2016a

27 Ibid.

28 World Bank, 2017

29 OCHA, 2016: 2

30 Ibid.: 6

31 UN, 2017

32 Ibid.

33 UNHCR, 2016a: 6

34 OCHA, 2016

35 OCHA, 2016: 7

36 Global Affairs Canada, 2017

37 CMI, 2016

38 OCHA, 2016

39 Southern Sudan Centre for Census, Statistics and Evaluation, 2010. The National Baseline Household Survey conducted in 2009 noted that "only 37% of the population above the age of six has ever attended school".

40 OCHA, 2016: 2

41 Ibid.

42 Southern Sudan Centre for Census, Statistics and Evaluation, 2010

43 OCHA, 2017b

44 Duffield et al., 2008: 41

45 OCHA, 2017a

46 Ibid.

47 Stoddard and Jillani, 2016: 43

48 OCHA, 2016 : 5

49 Arensen, 2016: 19

50 Ibid.: 19-24

51 Ibid.: 24

52 Ibid.: 24

53 Ibid.: 26. See also https://unmiss.unmissions.org/mandate.

54 Stoddard and Jillani, 2016: 43

55 Arensen, 2016: 33-34.

56 Notable attacks include an attack in Akobo in December 2013 when 2 000 armed Nuer youth overran the base, killing at least 27 Dinka civilians; an attack against the PoC in Bor in April 2014 in which 47 Nuer were killed, with many more injured; and an attack in the Malakal PoC site in February 2016 which killed 25 and resulted in many shelters being burned to the ground. See Arensen, 2016: 34-46.

57 Arensen, 2016: 26

58 Ibid.: 58

59 Arensen, 2016: 61

60 Ibid.: 66

61 Ibid.: 12

62 See for example Bennett et al., 2010: 89

63 OCHA, 2016: 5

64 African Union, 2014: 30

65 REACH, 2017a: 2

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 REACH, 2017b: 1

70 Ibid.: 2

72 Ibid.

72 REACH, 2017c: 1

73 REACH, 2017d: 1

74 REACH, 2017c: 3

75 Duffield et al., 2008: 9

76 Bennett et al., 2010: 2

77 Ibid.: vii

78 Ibid.: xiv

79 Ibid.: 31

80 bid.: 40

81 Ibid.: 40-41

82 "Flexible localised responses can rarely be accommodated by aid programmes build around relatively rigid three to five-year plans. The predictability of funding makes longer-term programmes attractive, but the execution of these programmes can entail a long, drawn out process of procurement and capacity building that ultimately inhibits rapid changes in approach, or indeed, in geographical location". See Bennett et al., 2010: xiv.

83 Bennett et al., 2010: xx-xxi
84 Ibid.: xx-xxi
85 Ibid.: xv
86 Ibid.: xvii
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.: 88
90 Ibid.: xvii
91 bid.: 69
92 Ibid.: xx
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.: 75
95 Ibid.: xviii
96 All Party Parliamentary Group for Sudan and South Sudan, 2015: 4
97 Ibid.: 6
98 Ibid.: 7
99 Ibid.: 17
100 Ibid.: 7-8
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.: 13
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.: 14-15
109 Ibid.: 15
110 Ibid.: 16
111 Ibid.
112 CMI, 2016: 31
113 Ibid.
114 CMI, 2016: 32.
115 Ibid.
116 African Union, 2014: 106 and 108
117 Global Affairs Canada, 2017
118 Ibid.
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
130 UNHCR, 2015
131 Duffield et al., 2008
132 Duffield et al., 2008: 4
133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid.: 8
136 Ibid.: 12
137 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
139 Ibid.: 13
140 Ibid.: 13-14
141 Ibid.: 16
142 Ibid.: 23
143 Ibid.: 26
144 Ibid.: 30
145 Ibid.: 33
146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid.: 34
149 Ibid.: 37
150 Ibid.: 34
151 Ibid.: 43
152 Bennett et al., 2010: 80
153 Ibid.
154 Ibid.
155 Bennett et al., 2010: 81
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid.
158 Ibid.
159 "Much analysis of land programming issues was conducted pre-CPA; but given the large numbers of returnees expected, the various studies were not complemented by a clear agenda for action, nor were they translated into appropriate programming. This is mainly because of a lack of coordination amongst UN agencies (particularly UN-Habitat, UNDP and FAO). A number of studies on urban planning that preceded the CPA were similarly not acted upon." See Bennett et al., 2008.
160 Bennett et al., 2010: 88
161 Ibid.
162 Ibid.
163 Bennett et al., 2010: 89
164 Ibid.: 90
165 Ibid.: 82
166 Ibid.
167 Bennett et al., 2009: 83
168 Ibid.: 86
169 O'Hagan, 2011: 12
170 Ibid.: 23
171 Ibid.: 30-32
172 Ibid.: 15
173 Chiwara, 2012
174 Ibid.
175 Ibid.
176 O'Hagan, 2013
177 Winrock International, 2017

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## Responding to Refugee Crises : Lessons from evaluations in South Sudan as a country of origin

The OECD **DAC Network on Development Evaluation** is an international forum that brings together evaluation managers and specialists from development co-operation ministries and agencies in OECD DAC member countries and multilateral development insitutions. The network has been instrumental in developing key international norms and standards for evaluation.

**Responding to Refugee Crises in Developing Countries: What Can We Learn From Evaluations?** provides evidence from evaluations to feed into guidance on better programming that is being developed through the DAC Temporary Working Group on Refugees and Migration. The main working paper draws on evaluation findings to highlight key lessons and recommendations for positive change going forward. It is complemented by three case studies that look at how policy objectives have been implemented in specific country contexts. The working papers highlight the evaluation work of DAC members and aim to strengthen the evidence base to help improve responses to situations of displacement in developing countries.

Key topics covered in the working papers include: lessons on bridging the gap between humanitarian and development programming; efforts to strengthen international response to protracted crises; lessons on whole-of-government approaches in refugee contexts; learning from work in urban settings; improving access to employment and quality education; new financing mechanisms for refugee crises in middle income countries; and lessons on financing in response to the Syria crisis.

Working paper and case studies on Afghanistan, South Sudan and Ethiopia/Uganda can be found at: http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/evaluating-refugee-migration.htm.




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