



THE SUDD INSTITUTE

RESEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL, JUST AND PROSPEROUS SOUTH SUDAN

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Weekly Review

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Development Assistance versus Humanitarian Aid: Which will Help South Sudan to Move out of its Perennial Crisis Mode

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I. The Problem

International Aid to South Sudan has remained shut since the East African country plunged into a civil war in 2013, a response that has worried the young nation's leaders, expressing concern that they might not be able to implement the peace agreement that has recently ended the war. Recently, South Sudan's President, Salva Kiir Mayardit, went on air to lament over the fact that donor countries had not yet come to the rescue of his war torn country, contrary to what they promised as far as supporting the implementation of the Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (ARCISS).

The peace agreement was mediated by the East Africa regional bloc, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and sponsored by a number of Western Countries, including, but not limited to, what has now become known as the Troika—United States, United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Norway. The President was talking about how these sponsors and the neighboring countries in East Africa had pressured South Sudan's warring parties into signing the ARCISS, ending the country's 21-month civil war and pressing for a transitional unity government's formation as quickly as possible. The agreement was intended to stabilize the country's collapsing economy and to usher in a period of hope for tranquility, all as conditions upon which the world community could re-start engaging with South Sudan once again. He said that the developed world and their multilateral organizations, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), had promised to start a discussion on the possibility of resuming funding to the country once the unity government was established, especially by prioritizing aspects that strengthen the peace agreement, such as major reforms and justice for the victims of the war. The President declared that this promise has not

materialized, not even the meeting that had been suggested to take place between the newly formed government and some of these donors.¹

During the early days the unity government was viewed as having a better disposition to allow South Sudan to start engaging with the world community on how to assist the country to implement the peace agreement and how to start regaining its footing within the community of nations. This possibility had also been mutedly whispered in a few Western Capitals for a while, that if the new government was structured in a way that indicates it would behave differently than GoSS, it could begin to lay a foundation for the resumption of international cooperation and development assistance. The public within South Sudan felt assured at that time as well, that a promising future was afoot, especially with regards to a possible economic relief. It was hoped that help was coming in order to get South Sudan to embark on reforms and to once again function normally, following the destructive two-year period during which a vicious, destructive, and meaningless war was fought.

Two months since the Transitional government of National Unity was formed, however, international development assistance to South Sudan remains shut. The countries that sponsored South Sudan's peace process have suggested that they have not really cut aid to South Sudan, but have simply rechanneled it toward humanitarian programs and away from direct government budget support and public projects. This suspension was effected soon after the war broke out as a form of punishment to the government for escalating the war, a punishment many South Sudanese hoped would end as soon as the peace agreement was implemented. Many steps have been taken by the South Sudanese leaders over the last two months toward this implementation. These efforts are still lacking in major ways, but the promised resumption of aid was not to be. The donor world seems to remain outraged about the inclusion of certain personalities in the unity government, people who had previously been accused of presiding over the near demise of the country, and yet were reinstated. With them sitting at the helm of power, the world community seems to signal that there will be no bailout, out of fear that such assistance would go the same way it did before the war, into the pockets of these same individuals. The current Minister of Finance and Economic Planning, David Deng Athorbei, for instance, has particularly been seen by many in the international circle as someone whose role has been counterproductive to the economic well-being of the distressed nation. His recent reinstatement, therefore, surfaces as disregard to the concerns of those who want to help South Sudan embark on more productive reforms. Complaints about the ineffectiveness of the South Sudan's Central Bank also abound, with many citizens and international friends recommending relieve of the institution's head, Governor Kornelio Koriom Mayik.

In short, the donors have pegged the resumption of aid to a number of specific demands that the leaders of South Sudan must meet in order to build confidence in the government's capacity to address head-on the crises facing the country. These demands include, among many, the establishment of the so-called Transitional Government of

National Unity, followed by major institutional reforms, instituting fiscal and monetary policies that would re-stabilize the national economy, particularly through reduction in public expenditure and to stop the wastage of national resources through mismanagement and diversion. The donors have also suggested that direct financial assistance to government can only happen again through a negotiated process that involves the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and complete with conditions that could be quite painful in the short term but, necessary, for long term recovery.

It is quite puzzling to observers, however, that, despite the realization by the unity government that donor aid is not forthcoming, no meaningful actions in search for alternatives are being taken up. There has been no clear reaction from the government to these suggested steps and no way forward has been delineated, perhaps because the new unity government, a coalition of former foes, is handicapped by lack of cohesion within its ranks or by concerns about sovereignty in the face of these unavoidable conditions that are being proposed in return for aid. The result is that the public is left in the dark about what will happen to the peace agreement and the stability of the country, about the dire economic situation in the country, the serious humanitarian conditions, particularly among the internally displaced. There is also a serious public concern about the insecurity that remains rampant throughout the country, as it continues to unnecessarily take lives, threaten livelihoods and create the potential for a return to the same situation the country was in before the war in 2013, all of which would shake any confidence the public may have begun to develop about the peace agreement. What would the potential of such a situation to return the country to war the same way that these factors fanned the fires of war in 2013?ⁱⁱ

All of this is exacerbated by lack of communication between the government and the public, as this provides a milieu in which expectations get heightened and then dashed, rumors spread and the state becomes ever more absent from the everyday life of the citizens. The services the people expected to accrue to mark the advent of peace have not materialized. With the civil servants and army salaries being constantly delayed, the provision of goods and services is not anywhere on the horizon and it is safe to conclude that the government will not be able to respond to any of these needs without a meaningful financial bailout from the West, at least so that the national economy regains traction. What will happen if the donors insist on pegging any financial support to the conditions mentioned above and the government continues to expect help from the donors without offering anything in return in order to build the confidence of the donors?

In this review, we look at the public reactions to the realization that the foreign aid that the South Sudanese expected to resume soon after the return of Riek Machar to take up his post as First Vice President in the unity government has not materialized. Local newspapers, radio programs, online discussion forums and social media platforms have been engaged in discussing these issues since April 28th, 2016, when the government was established. It seems that the public perception was that as soon as the unity government was formed, there was no longer going to be any questions about how good and

responsible that government was going to be before the country begins to receive assistance. Rather, such foreign aid was seen as fundamental to grounding the peace agreement first and then judge the quality of the government based on its subsequent performance. The expectation expressed in many of these discussions is that the donors, especially the Troika, which had already invested so heavily in the peace process, would see the resumption of aid to the government as the quickest way for the peace agreement to mean something for the citizens, even if they insist on new aid management systems that would ensure fiscal responsibility and prevent wastage, diversion and mismanagement. Troika is expected to be more concerned about the cost of non-implementation than anything else, especially given its significant role in supporting the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). But since the support continued to be withheld, an action the donors have justified on the basis that the world community was already heavily focused on relieving and feeding hungry South Sudanese, this review discusses the utility of such a separation between humanitarian aid and direct financial assistance to the unity government.

This review is not intended to bash or lay blame at either the government or the donor community. Instead, it is to suggest that responsibility for the welfare of the South Sudanese lies first and foremost with the national government and that if the donors offer to help they should only intervene where the recipient country desires support. Once that understanding is established, we see this as a shared responsibility, not a tool for settling scores. Otherwise, that relationship better not exists to begin with.

II Direct Assistance or Humanitarian Interventions?

So the people of the fragile country remain waiting for the promises of peace to come to fruition, especially how the unity government intends to rescue the economy from total collapse, mend other wounds of war, restore political stability of the country, address the humanitarian crisis, start providing the badly needed services in health, nutrition, education and safety. Should the national government not start by telling its citizens how it intends to tackle these problems, even if it is uncertain about its success in such an endeavor? Meanwhile, the government itself is also still waiting for that global assistance, without which it claims cannot tackle these transitional challenges. In other words, the unity government is yet to produce its policy priorities and programs of action that are complete with how to confront these challenges from its own national resources, all before it starts to ask for international aid.

Meanwhile, the humanitarian interventions seem to forge ahead as the only way the developed world says it can express solidarity with the people of South Sudan during these difficult circumstances. Donors insist that it is about keeping people alive. But whereas humanitarian aid is a necessary endeavor, i.e., capable of saving lives, it is not a solution to the problems that caused the humanitarian situation in the first place. Instead, supporting projects in food production, electricity generation, road construction, piped water in urban centers and other productive sectors, would essentially achieve long-term

development and the immediate jobs creation, rather than food handouts. Such a plan would go a much longer distance toward stabilizing the country. However, it requires a government's agency—a clear national plan to which the government of South Sudan would invite the donors to contribute. This way, the priorities would be set by the national government, aimed at solving problems that are identified by the citizens and the projects would be owned and sustained by South Sudanese. Could it be that the major Western donors are not just insisting on humanitarian interventions for the sake of assisting South Sudanese but also using these interventions as an alibi for both the failure of their political interventions to change the dynamics in the country and a cover for other more sinister motives?

How otherwise could the donors justify their insistence on humanitarian inputs only, even as they are aware of major shortfalls in this field, including wastage of resources comparable to what they accuse the government of? For example, there is no evidence that mortality rates from food deficits are any higher than those from other causes related to political problems to justify such concentration of all resources and efforts on humanitarian programs. On the contrary, there is overwhelming evidence that the non-governmental organizations and other implementing agencies from the global north are also mired in mismanagement but are not subject to monitoring by the host government because they operate on the basis that the host government is the problem and should not be consulted on the priorities and how the donor money is spent. In retrospect, the so-called multi donor trust fund (MDTF), a project that supposedly cost some western nations \$700M to support South Sudan, achieved so little, if any, in terms of impact. Yet, the hypocrisy predominates. Even simple attempts to regulate the humanitarian and non-profit sector by the national government via an NGO Act for more effective results recently caused unnecessary uproar in an industry that is highly characterized by duplication of functions and inefficiency.

This is often referred to as the humanitarian imperative, that regardless of the prevailing political circumstances in a given country, the world community has an obligation to rush to the rescue of those who need assistance. The approach is that the humanitarian crisis is created either directly by government actions or its failure to protect citizens, so the humanitarian intervention of relieving the victims of the consequences should be distinct from government's own effort and involvement. The problem with this approach is that it sets the aid agencies and the host government on a collision course, with the agencies being bent on bypassing the government and the government feeling slighted on account of sovereignty and accountability. The international aid agencies that are active in South Sudan, some 140 plus, appear judgmental towards the country's leadership, rather than collaborative and receptive to the suggestions of the prevailing authority. If the government needs help, it is its responsibility to spell out where and how it needs to be helped, what mechanisms it has put in place to ensure the South Sudanese citizens benefit from such assistance. The same goes for the donors—if they are offering help, the approach should be stated and justified in a dialogic interaction; no need for strong-arming. Often, the aid community criticizes the government for lacking clearly spelled

out priorities and objectives. The government of national unity, albeit being incredibly let down, has been very clear on implementing the agreement and that it needs sufficient funds to make this happen.

Gratefully, the relief programs are currently aimed at keeping the internally displaced persons alive, aid the citizens who have taken refuge in the United Nations protection sites, and assist the ordinary citizens throughout the country to stay nourished until the food from their traditional livelihoods kick in during the next harvest about a few months from now. They have been flowing to the country from the Western world for the past 50 years in varying quantities, propelled by compassion, sympathy, morality, and national interests of the donor countries. But these are not necessarily sustainable. They do not work because they simply keep the country on a life support and bail the country's leadership out from their obligation to provide welfare of their own people. They keep some people alive but to what end? If these interventions do not have a single conception about how to address the issues that cause the crises in the first place; all they will continue to do is feed some people who may end up dying anyway, whether from disease due to lack of health services, from violence and from any number of other things that have obstructed development in this country, including corruption and diversion of resources. Humanitarian supplies act more as alibi for political inaction by donors and a cover for the failure of country's leadership to innovate.

The result of this is that the government has to make very difficult choices, between relinquishing responsibility for the welfare of its citizens to the humanitarian community and attempting to impose its own approach on the aid agencies. To succumb to the former is to lose the very essence of statehood but to insist on its own priorities is to be seen as uncaring. The government of South Sudan seems to have made that crucial decision and has allowed the aid agencies to operate as they wish, despite the recent passage of the NGO bill into law, which has not really been implemented. The humanitarian community, on the other hand, puts itself in a dilemma. By insisting on a humanitarian program that is not coordinated with the host government, it can only treat the symptoms of a malady year after year without ever being able to contribute to the solution of the crisis that caused the need for aid in the first place. But to coordinate with the government, based on local priorities and clear understanding of the needs of South Sudanese means failure to maintain the humanitarian imperative. The result is that the funding of humanitarian aid by big donor countries has become more of an excuse for their inability to achieve political goals vis-à-vis the government of South Sudan than a solution to anything. In weighing these dilemmas, it is the view of this weekly review that the ball is in the government's court. It has to take charge and soon graduate the citizenry from humanitarian aid dependency.

Keeping the country on a life-support through humanitarian supplies may save a few lives and provide the donors with a feel-good attitude, but concerted donor effort to pressure the government to produce a credible home-grown plan of action, full with priorities, budgets and the requested contribution from the donor countries, would provide an even

greater feel-good moment than feeding people year after year. Otherwise, South Sudan might actually be better off without the donor interventions, as these interventions have only let the leadership of South Sudan and the entire citizenry off the hook of responsibility for their own welfare. When was the last time the South Sudanese were pushed against the wall, when nobody else came for the rescue, so tightly squeezed that they had to think and act for themselves? It has always been, at least in the last 50 years, a saga of crisis, followed by international bailout, followed by another crisis and another rescue in the form of humanitarian assistance, time after time. How long is this humiliation going to continue before the people of this country realize that lasting solutions are only going to be so lasting if they are home-grown? Donors will be so quick to suggest that people would die without the humanitarian aid. But they are dying anyway and will continue to do for the foreseeable future until all the parties concerned, mostly South Sudanese citizens themselves, exercise their citizenship right to demand that their government institutes effective approaches to ending political, economic, financial, developmental and humanitarian crises. This prompts the leadership to start taking responsibility for the mistakes it has made over the years, learn from them, and find ways out of crises from the country's own history. The humanitarian crisis in the country, collapsed economy, insecurity, and human rights abuses are all political issues and nothing short of nationalist commitment to seeking political solutions will bail this country out.

Many of the donor countries which are now pushing for reduction, channeling or withdrawal of aid are actually the ones that have most endured in their solidarity with the people of South Sudan and they are, therefore, the ones whose actions have most shocked the South Sudanese, government and people alike. Though the channeling of aid away from public programs was questioned by many South Sudanese at the time of its announcement, the public blame for the withdrawal of aid was actually laid at the doorsteps of the government than at Norway, US, UK or the Netherlands, for example. When these countries cut aid because of disagreement with the recipient government, it was received as a commentary on relations not just between governments, but also between peoples. Case in point is when the government of the Netherlands made a public announcement about their decision to withdraw funding for South Sudan and turn to humanitarian assistance, the reaction was one of a sense of abandonment during the darkest hour of need. "What did we do to the people and government of the Netherlands?" was how one South Sudanese put it. So when cutting aid due to bilateral relations between governments, caution needs to be exercised to prevent a genuine policy decision becoming a liability for people-to-people relations in the long run. After all, aid is never value free and its role in cementing relations is one of the reasons it is provided in the first place.

III Diplomatic Standoff and Risk to Peace

In reading press releases by both sides, the government and the donor community, over the past two months, we have observed a serious divergence in thinking and approaches

to South Sudan's crises. The internationals speak of corruption, mismanagement, justice and human rights as stand-alone issues that the government should address more meaningfully before the international community could consider engaging with it as an equal member of the family of nations. The government on the other side speaks of the need for peace, stability, and institutional reforms before it could be expected to deliver on governance as a whole. And it has a point. Unfortunately, this divergence of views has produced only one thing—that the country is unable to forge ahead with the implementation of the ARCISS, as it is now on the verge of collapse as the citizens gradually lose hope over a situation they thought the peace agreement had adequately addressed. More recent violence, especially in major towns like Wau, Kajokeji, and Raga, signifies citizenry hopelessness and the potential for the ARCISS to falter. Should the two sides continue this duel at the risk of losing the peace agreement entirely? Should the donor community continue to hide behind the humanitarian deliveries, even as it is clear it will never solve anything? Or should the government set up its own action plans, a priority list and juxtaposing these with the resources it has or does not have, priorities to which it could invite the world community to either help or rethink the terms of engagement with the country? Addressing the latter question may go a long way in revitalizing the government's image, as well as demonstrating political will towards reforms.

IV Conclusion

If the government of South Sudan has concluded that it cannot manage to revitalize the economy, implement security arrangements, provide basic services to the people or implement any significant aspects of the peace agreement that ended the civil war, and especially that it cannot do any of these without financial support from the international community, it should have a plan on how to engage the world community. There are only two options: to accept the conditions being suggested in exchange for a major assistance from the IMF or design a priority list of projects that it can jointly implement with convinced donors. The government has put itself in a tight corner, expecting assistance from the West while seemingly unwilling to accept any conditionalities that come with such assistance. The things that can test the international community's commitment to helping South Sudan are reforms, particularly a reduction in public spending, especially in the security sector. And there is a point to this: available data show that more spending does not reduce insecurity. Instead, more spending has meant increased insecurity across the nation.

The requirements also include an agreement with the International Monetary Fund that would allow South Sudan to receive a financial bailout in return for a credible program of action that utilizes the national resources of the country to tackle the priorities that the South Sudanese have identified as the most important in the immediate term.

The continued suspension of aid has come as the international community's way of telling the government of South Sudan that its actions, policies and practices in the economy,

the public sector expenditure and the management of national resources are unacceptable to the donors. But for the people of South Sudan, the continued shut down of aid has produced an immense disappointment and anger, both of which are being channeled toward the newly established transitional government of national unity. The lack of financial support has meant that the unity government has not been able to deliver on the promises entailed in the peace agreement. It has also revealed the weakness of the government to exercise its sovereign status by championing its own independent programs that are geared toward its own post-war plans of action, aid or no aid. Furthermore, it has shown the donor world's own double standard—a claim of solidarity with the people of South Sudan through humanitarian activities while fully aware that humanitarian supplies will never become a substitute for the more meaningful investments in development programs that employ people, is sustainable, and more pro-stability.

About Sudd Institute

The Sudd Institute is an independent research organization that conducts and facilitates policy relevant research and training to inform public policy and practice, to create opportunities for discussion and debate, and to improve analytical capacity in South Sudan. The Sudd Institute's intention is to significantly improve the quality, impact, and accountability of local, national, and international policy- and decision-making in South Sudan in order to promote a more peaceful, just and prosperous society.

Author's Biography

Jok Madut Jok is a cofounder of the Sudd Institute. He is the author of three books and numerous articles covering gender, sexuality and reproductive health, humanitarian aid, ethnography of political violence, gender based violence, war and slavery, and the politics of identity in Sudan.

ⁱ The meeting with the IMF did take place a while after the president had made his remarks, the outcome of which is not particularly responsive to the government's requests and expectations.

ⁱⁱ Reports of violent confrontations in Kajo-Keji talk of 20 soldiers dead between the government forces and forces reported to belong to opposition SPLA/IO and a report about an attack on Raja, capital of Lol State, and the most recent fighting in Wau town, are all cases in point.