Evaluation Report

South Sudan Early Recovery and Humanitarian NGO Funding Round

INJ734/11A458

EVALUATION REPORT

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Initiative Summary

Initiative Name	South Sudan Early Recovery and Humanitarian NGO Funding Round		
AidWorks initiative number	INJ734/11A458		
Commencement date	30 June 2011	Completion date	30 June 2013
Total Australian $	11,365,008		
Total other $	0		
Delivery organisation(s)	Care Australia Oxfam Australia Save the Children Australia World Vision Australia		
Implementing Partner(s)	Care in South Sudan Intermon in South Sudan Oxfam in South Sudan Save the Children in South Sudan World Vision in South Sudan		
Country/Region	South Sudan		
Primary Sector	**72010 - Material relief assistance and services**		

Acknowledgements

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Contents

Executive summary

This paper presents the findings of an independent review of the performance and outcomes of the *South Sudan NGO Early Recovery and Humanitarian Funding Round* (2011-2013). It measures the extent to which the objectives of the Funding Round have been achieved and assesses the merit of this modality in the South Sudanese context moving forward.

South Sudan is among the poorest, most war-torn, and most underdeveloped places on earth – pockets of conflict, widespread food insecurity and extremely limited basic service provision has resulted in over half of the population being unable to meet basic needs. Decades of civil war, stemming from the historic neglect of the region, is largely to blame from this.

Australia supported the humanitarian operations during conflict, and also provided support following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, which brought the civil war in Sudan to a formal end and paved the way for a referendum process and the subsequent independence of South Sudan from Sudan.

At the signing of the CPA, a United Nations Mission came into being, with a staffing of about 10,000 and a budget of one billion dollars a year. This mission had the dual mandate of humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping. Assistance to the rural areas was overwhelmingly humanitarian, largely delivered through NGOs that had a very long experience with emergency aid. Much of the assistance was food aid, but health and education services also continued to be largely delivered by NGOs and FBOs. In this period most NGOs started to include developmental approaches in the field, funded through the humanitarian window.

Since the 2005 CPA, development action has started, mainly at the central level. Basic roads now connect many of South Sudan's major towns, and municipal water and electricity are appearing in these towns. Governance and judicial systems are now present at central and state level, though capacity remains a problem and county-level structures are largely non-existent. The underdevelopment of the human resource base, with only 16% literacy in adult females, is a serious impediment.

In the run-up to independence more development funding became available, with an emphasis on strengthening the central level. Results were mixed, and evaluations showed better outcomes for donor, UN and government cooperation than for impact in the field. An unintended outcome was that, for example the European Commission Humanitarian Office, could no longer fund developmental components within it's humanitarian grants, as these actions now came under the EC developmental department mandate.

Certain aspects of transition were underfunded. A crucial one was peace *building*. This may have been assumed to be included in peace *keeping,* a key part of the UN mission's mandate, but while the peace was *kept* fairly well in most places, peace was *built* only at central and state level, without addressing root causes of conflict in the periphery. Governance developed at central level and somewhat at State level, but much less in the periphery.

At independence several issues between Sudan and South Sudan were left undecided, one of which related to oil. Most of the oil fields lie in South Sudan's territory, but oil can only be exported through a pipeline controlled by Sudan. In 2012, when no agreement could be reached between the two countries regarding transit fees for use of the pipeline, South Sudan stopped oil exports, precipitating a deep economic crisis in both countries. As a result, many large development projects were frozen in South Sudan because the government could not meet their counterpart obligations. In addition, the austerity measures did not allow the government to transfer the planned devolution funds, leaving the states, especially at the county levels, with very low capacity.

In 2010, AusAID opened a one-off funding window for accredited Australian NGOs with the dual objective of initiating early recovery at community level (including peace-building), and informing AusAID's strategy for South Sudan and post conflict situations elsewhere.

This was an innovative decision, befitting a medium sized donor. At the time, most donors were still working with separated approaches (and departments) for emergency, development and peacekeeping interventions. Whereas early recovery is a relatively new terminology for a holistic intervention, straddling these three domains, for many NGOs this approach was not so much new, but rather a formalisation of the inclusion of developmental work in their humanitarian portfolio - something they had been piloting for years in South Sudan.

International branches of the Australian NGOs, all of whom have long-term emergency experience in South Sudan, implemented the projects. All had been incorporating developmental components in their humanitarian portfolios. Australian NGOs provided technical and management support to their international branches in South Sudan, and accountability and knowledge flow towards AusAID. Formal management requirements of the grant were kept light by AusAID, with reporting only at nine months, and at project end.

Evaluation methods

The core of the evaluation took place in April 2013 over eight days, coinciding with a joint learning event of the four NGOs, which took place in Juba, South Sudan. A team leader with 25 years of experience in transitional states and a humanitarian expert with extensive experience in South Sudan undertook the evaluation. The evaluators interviewed participating NGO staff individually and in groups, and participated in the learning event. As only formal start-up reports were available, the evaluators used the preliminary data for March 2013 as presented by the NGOs at the learning event. The NGOs stress that these data had been collated from routine monitoring systems in great haste. Reports had not been due for several months, and the NGOs had only become aware of the evaluation about two weeks before the start. Internal verification of data had therefore not been possible. The evaluators could not verify these data in person, as AusAID regulations did not allow travel outside Juba. The humanitarian expert interviewed field stakeholders, both directly involved with the projects and opinion leaders outside the projects, by telephone to triangulate the provided data. The contact details of the non-project opinion leaders (priests, teachers, health workers) did not come from the NGOs but from the personal networks of the evaluators. The evaluators further interviewed senior representatives of selected donors, UN bodies and government in Juba, as well as stakeholders in Australia.

The ToR and thus the evaluation report have an emphasis on the modality of this Early Recovery funding round, and details on accountability of the individual NGOs can be found in the annex.

Evaluation Findings

The selection process was well documented and seemed robust, though it is not clear whether the rather dissenting scores of the independent appraiser were sufficiently taken into consideration. The four selected Australian NGOs (Care, Oxfam, Save the Children and World Vision) put forth programs across numerous sectors including livelihood, water, health and education, in five states. The A$11.36 million grant was over two years and was therefore somewhat thinly spread, both sectorally and geographically. The monitoring and evaluation framework was rather output oriented, which is quite standard in emergency interventions. One of the objectives - to inform AusAIDs future strategy - was led by Oxfam. However, it had no specific activities, deliverables, indicators or budget attached to it.

The Quality at Implementation report shows that a regular interaction between AusAID and the NGOs was taking place at that time. The first report at nine-month mark details serious delays across the board. AusAID acknowledged receipt of this report, but provided no feedback and released the second tranche of funding. A personnel change in AusAID, with insufficient handover, seemed to have been a causative factor. According to other donors and implementers interviewed, the majority actors in South Sudan experienced similar and often worse delays. This is largely attributed to the unexpected collapse of the oil export of South Sudan, leading to austerity, and currency and commodity shortages.

A mid-term review by AusAID together with the NGOs, planned for late 2012, did not take place. The NGOs did individual monitoring trips, and took corrective measures to speed up field implementation. These trip reports were shared with the evaluators, but had not been shared with AusAID.

The evaluators had full access to the routine monitoring systems of the NGOs that had provided the data that were presented. These systems were robust, and triangulation by telephone interviews with external field stakeholders the week after showed no discrepancies.

All four agencies appear to be on course to achieve their expected results at field level within the final three months of the project, and a few expected results have already been exceeded. The NGOs made minor variations to activities, as circumstances, beneficiaries or authorities dictated. At field level nearly all expected results are likely to be achieved.

The evaluation and learning event brought out three common strands across all projects: 1) close cooperation with the emerging authorities 2) a strong emphasis on gender and 3) a focus on building peace through sectoral interventions.
Of particular interest was that all four NGOs had independently been developing the beginnings of a theory of change around the role of women in building peace. None of this was properly documented as yet however.
Unfortunately the first time that the four NGOs discussed joint learning was at the formal learning event in April 2013. Had they come together earlier, even over email or Skype, to decide on some common questions and methodologies, the objective of joint learning to inform AusAIDs future strategy, could have given richer results. The NGOs have confidence that the last few months of the implementation will provide an opportunity to produce a paper that will assist AusAID in the strategy process.

The small diaspora component was delayed. It had been difficult to get a selection of the diaspora that was perceived as representative for the wide political spectrum. The training curriculum had been short and perhaps somewhat one-sided, with an emphasis on NGO methods only, to the exclusion of investment.

This funding round through four Australian NGOs, implemented through their international NGO partners and local civil society organisations, was very successful at field level, but so far has performed below expectations on the joint learning component. The sectoral intervention did indeed deliver a peace dividend, but the sectoral interventions were also used to build peace, for example by women of different ethnicities working together to create joint resources, thus limiting competition of their men over disputed resources.

The early recovery approach proved useful and workable in this funding round.
The concept of early recovery is a subject of lively international debate, and it remains to be determined where the concept falls in the continuum between emergency and development. The way the approach worked in this funding round fits well with the "New Deal" and late 2012 South Sudan fragility assessment.

The evaluation of this funding round highlights some strengths of the approach, such as gender and peace, and flexibility in slight shifts of emphasis in a very fluid environment. It also shows that there are some increased demands as compared to an emergency approach, for example in design, monitoring and evaluation, and management capacity and flexibility of both NGOs and donor. Joint learning also proved challenging in this very fluid context, and will require proper planning and resourcing.

Remote management from Australia limited AusAIDs capacity somewhat, while the Australian NGOs benefitted from management capacity very close to the action, provided by their international branches in Juba and in the field in South Sudan.

Some lessons, once further distilled and documented, coming out of this funding round have potential for transfer to other transitional situation. The approach in this round of early recovery did not just deliver peace dividend in very fragile rural areas, but the activities also deliberately used the activities to strengthen the capacities of local authorities and thus build governance. The gender approach, whereby women of different ethnicities created joint resources, was deliberately used to limit the conflicts of their men over still disputed resources. This emerging theory of change is not yet properly distilled and documented nor phrased, but certainly has potential in South Sudan and beyond.

Recommendations

On the early recovery approach

- The early recovery approach, as used in this Funding Round, was effective at field level and will likely remain relevant in the short and medium term in South Sudan. It fits well with the "New Deal" and the priorities of the South Sudan Fragility Assessment. The Early Recovery approach should be considered for scaling up in the fragile context of South Sudan.
- Actions that link gender and peace-building, while at the same time incorporating a strong local governance strengthening component were very successful in this funding round across most sectors. This "gender and peace" approach has high potential and could be expanded.
- Early recovery incorporates humanitarian and development activities, two areas that sit in separate departments within AusAID and follow quite separate procedures. Future Funding Rounds that focus on early recover should develop flexible ways of cooperation within AusAID to try and bridge this gap.

On design, monitoring and evaluation

- The design of early recovery activities involves a comprehensive situational analysis, a sound theory of change and a robust monitoring and evaluation framework with an outcome orientation. This requires a longer proposal design phase and sufficient resource allocation, human and financial, to M&E throughout implementation.

On learning in a fragile environment

- Any learning component must have clear deliverables, activities and budgets, with full clarity of who does what. This requires close donor-NGO interaction and follow-up.
- Early determination of key questions, and decisions on methodologies, should be developed with the involvement of all stakeholders. Involvement of academia might be beneficial to increase rigour, while including South Sudan in a learning framework such as AACES could place the learning in a broader context.

On diaspora involvement

- While training of the diaspora in Australia on establishing an NGO (as done in this funding round) is useful, global experience shows that diaspora investment is a very significant factor in post-conflict countries. Expanding the curricula to also include investment opportunities should be considered.
- Great care should be taken to ensure that any involvement with members of the diaspora is perceived as giving equal access to the whole political spectrum.

On AusAID management

- Bi-annual reporting would be more appropriate for early recovery grant mechanisms in a fluid context to ensure that all actors are aware of changing circumstances, and agree on the required adjustments in the action.
- Early recovery may require switchbacks to emergency or fast-forwards to a more developmental approach. A flexible mechanism is required and a somewhat less formal dialogue between donor and NGO can work well, provided the process is documented and continuity guaranteed.
- Managing a grant such as this one from Canberra is possible, but not ideal. Moving the management to the Nairobi office should be considered future grants, as this will allow better in

country liaison with partners and ensure that AusAID funding is more effectively driven and grounded in the changing context.

- In view of the considerable portfolio of AusAID in South Sudan a light in-country presence should also be explored.
- AusAID should urgently lift the travel ban outside Juba in order to enable field visits. The current UN and NGO security umbrella offers sufficient protection.

On AusAID funding options for South Sudan

- In a fluid context such as South Sudan, providing stand-alone grants through reputable ANGOs is an appropriate approach, and this could be repeated in further actions, provided the capacity of both the NGOs and the donor to accompany the process is assured.
- The complementarity of Australian, international and local NGOs worked well in this funding round, certainly at field level. A consortium of Australian NGOs with one lead agency, and the same INGO/LNGO mix would likely have produced similar results at similar cost. Both options would be suitable for further actions.
- The option of directly funding international NGOs will not automatically lead to cost savings, as the Australian NGOs provide considerable technical support and accountability, and ensure a strong information flow to AusAID. This option needs further investigation.
- As a mid-size governmental donor, AusAID should continue to support selected UN bodies and pooled funding mechanisms following the principles of the "New Deal". Value for money should be carefully considered for these funding options.
- Direct technical assistance to the government in areas where Australia has relevant expertise is relatively low cost and potentially high impact. Australia has already prioritised Mining for Development and inclusion of South Sudan in this initiative could be explored.

On transferring lessons

- AusAID should make maximum use of the ANGOs involved in this funding round in the development of the new AusAID South Sudan country strategy. This could include ANGO involvement in strategy development workshops, and some modest funding for a further analysis and distillation of the current round.
- Caution should be exercised in transferring the lessons learned in South Sudan to other post-conflict contexts. Some might be adapted with ease, others need a much deeper situational analysis, and the legitimacy and capacity of any existing governance system will be a crucial aspect.
- This funding round shows that sectoral interventions in the periphery can deliver more than just the peace dividend. By having conflicting groups produce sectoral outcomes together, it can also be a tool for additional peace building.
- The emerging theory of change where women of ethnic groups in tension with each other create common economic resources, in order to make their men fight less over disputed resources, is not well distilled yet, but certainly deserves further exploration

Evaluation Criteria Ratings

Evaluation Criteria[1]	Rating (1-6)	Explanation
Relevance	5	The programs were well aligned with the strategies of both AusAID[2] and the government of South Sudan[3]. It was an innovative decision to work, in line with South Sudanese government policy, on early recovery in difficult areas. Many large donors considered these areas as only suitable for emergency interventions - consequently early recovery approaches were hugely underfunded in these areas, home to over 80% of the population. The projects' emphasis on "making peace" was particularly relevant to the post-conflict context of South Sudan. The fragility assessment of South Sudan was published towards the end of the life of the projects. The policy lead of this funding round (Oxfam) was very involved in the consultations for this assessment and some of the experiences of the NGOs in this round were fed into the Fragility Assessment. The programs showed very good alignment with the priorities identified (during the life of the project) in the Fragility Assessment.

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[2] Humanitarian Action Strategy, Child Protection Policy, Civil Society Engagement Framework, Development for All, Making a real difference, Aid Effectiveness Review and Framework for working in fragile and conflict affected states
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[3] South Sudan Development Plan and Aid Strategy for the Government of South Sudan

Evaluation Criteria[1]	Rating (1-6)	Explanation
Effectiveness	4	The linkage of experienced international NGOs (INGO) with local NGOs (LNGO), local government and communities proved very effective – fulfilling the 'implementation component' overarching objective of the program (rated 5). The INGOs all had a long track record in their areas, often over 25 years, the local partners even longer. This allowed a deep understanding and a high level of trust from the community –enabling the INGOs even to assume a stabilising role when local conflict threatened to erupt. The second overarching objective, 'learning for AusAID', however delivered below expectation (rated 3). Much knowledge is available at project level, but it has not yet been "distilled" and documented in a form that is useful for AusAID. An unfortunate series of events led to this underperformance, so it is possible that the grantees will be able to improve this area in the future (following the 3 month no-cost extension). If this happens, it could increase the overall 'effectiveness' rating to 5.
Efficiency	4	The implementing INGOs have extensive experience in South Sudan, globally acceptable management systems and benefit from economies of scale. The LNGOs were also effective partners in the delivery of programs, though they sometimes suffered from inefficiencies (building the capacity of these LNGOs necessarily involves time). Security in particular was enhanced by the partnership with LNGOs, and so less time was lost on project interruptions. From assessing documents and interviewing staff in South Sudan, it appeared that the Australian NGOs provided considerable remote technical and managerial support. This value for money question needs further exploration.

Evaluation Criteria[1]	Rating (1-6)	Explanation
Gender equality	5	Gender, and "making peace" were at the heart of all projects, though were not very well represented in logical and monitoring frameworks. M&E is clearly in transition from emergency mode to development mode. The timeframe for proposal development was very short, and situational analysis was insufficiently documented. Good and innovative gender practices around peace were often included during implementation, but are not yet fully documented. South Sudan has not experienced peace in recent history, entrenching violent attitudes to conflict resolution as well as weapon ownership. Similarly, women have historically experienced very limited education opportunities and early marriage. Gender has so far been low on the development agenda, and only in 2013 gender focal points were appointed in the UN cluster coordination system. A theory of change around gender and peace is slowly emerging from this funding round, but is as yet not very well articulated. AusAID may want to stimulate further work in this important area in further calls for proposals to NGOs.

Evaluation Criteria[1]	Rating (1-6)	Explanation
Design, monitoring and evaluation	3	The design phase was short, making it more suitable to an emergency type intervention. Early Recovery however needs a somewhat deeper situational analysis. The project logic was also more suited to an emergency intervention, with little evidence that the outcomes of the sectoral interventions on key issues such as gender and peace were sufficiently taken into account. The selection committee of AusAID could have highlighted these issues, as well as the lack of information (activities, resources, indicators, and deliverables) attached to the 'learning objective'. The monitoring systems of the NGOs were mature, suitable for emergency interventions, and performed very well, but were fairly output focussed. For Early Recovery one also needs to measure outcomes, in this case outcomes on gender and peace would have been appropriate. If no baseline is available, this can be done in the early phases of the action. This must then be monitored throughout the action, for example through outcome mapping or most significant change methodologies. The NGOs gathered understanding of these changes during implementation, and adapted their approaches very well to achieve more impact, but in the absence of a framework and monitoring methods, their findings were not sufficiently documented.

Rating scale

Satisfactory		Less than satisfactory	
6	Very high quality	3	Less than adequate quality
5	Good quality	2	Poor quality
4	Adequate quality	1	Very poor quality

Introduction

Initiative Background

This initiative was developed as a stand-alone funding mechanism for Australian NGOs (ANGO) in the run-up to independence of South Sudan. It was additional to existing AusAID humanitarian funding to UN bodies, pooled funds and NGOs through established processes during the long conflict and transitional period, and to Australian support to the 2011 referendum on independence.

This funding mechanism was a cautious step from emergency response towards development assistance in a country about to be born. It was a cautious step, but also an innovative step. "Early recovery" was (and still is) the subject of much international debate. Bailey and Pavanello summarise this well in the diagram reproduced below[4]. The authors point out the central place of this approach in a transitional situation from emergency to development, but also note that "early recovery" can lead to confusion and tension within donors and implementers who tend to have separate mandates and desks for development and humanitarian assistance, while stabilisation involves donor defence and law and order ministries, as well as a completely different set of implementing parties.

Figure 1: International approaches to conflict and transitional settings
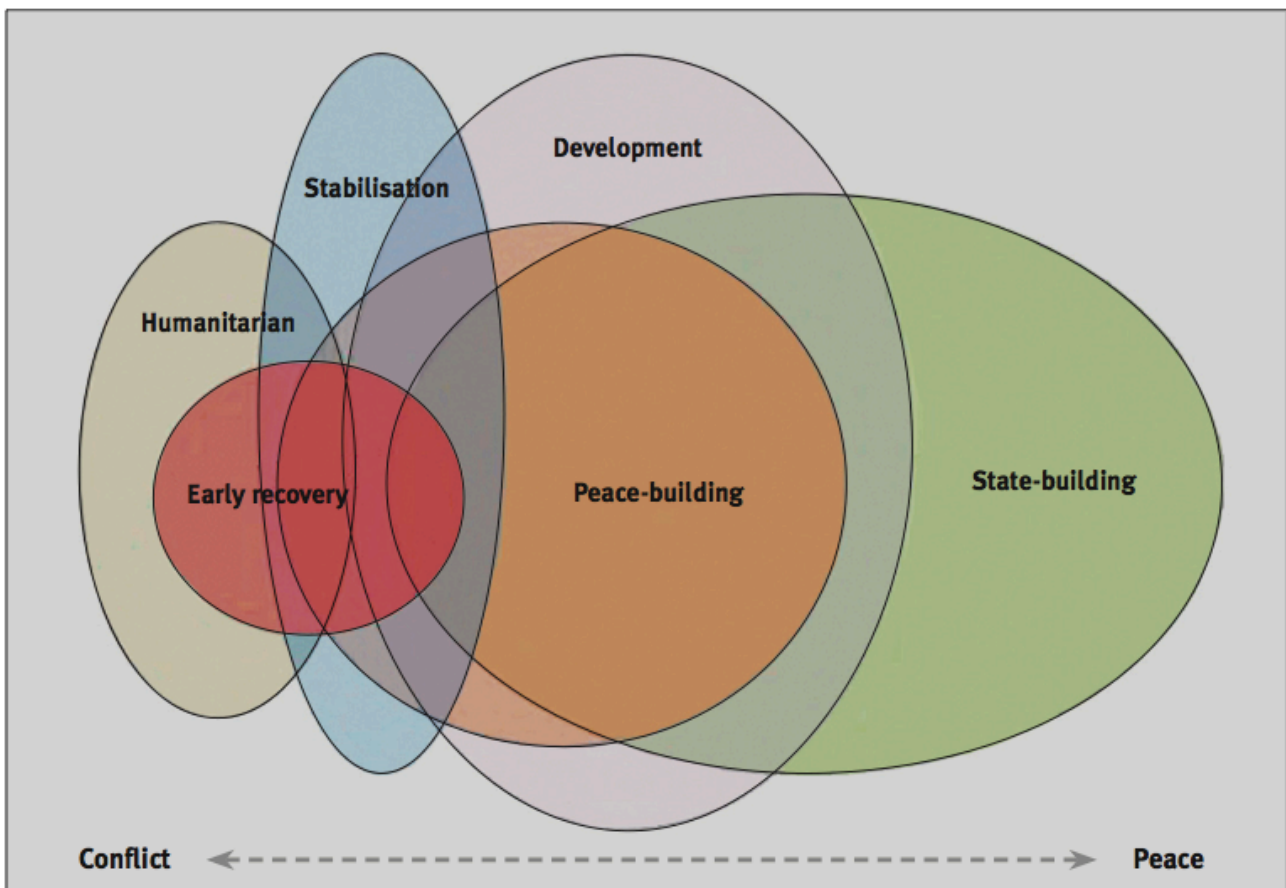

Figure by Samir Elhawary

This diagram will be used throughout in this report to place the evaluated intervention in its context and assist in thinking about the further donor strategies for South Sudan.

[4] *Policy brief 3: Untangling early recovery*, The Humanitarian Policy Group, ODI, UK
<www.odi.org.uk/resources/docs/5309.pdf>

History of South Sudan

South Sudan was deliberately underdeveloped during the colonial era, and has been in more or less continuous civil strife with the Northern government since the independence of Sudan in 1956. The latest war ended in 2005 with the "Comprehensive Peace Agreement" (CPA) (though that was in reality more of a ceasefire). Low-grade conflict continued even after independence in 2011. The border is not yet fully demarcated, and on both sides of the border armed militia are active, opposing their respective governments or simply competing for resources with neighbouring militia. A buffer zone, patrolled by UN Peacekeepers, largely prevents confrontations between the two standing armies, but both states accuse each other of fuelling conflict by supporting militia across their borders.

In 2005, Southern Sudan was one of the least developed territories of the world, and it remains so today. The Khartoum government controlled a small number of heavily defended garrison towns in the south and the Sudan People Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) controlled the countryside, including the roads between the garrison towns. The few roads that existed before the conflict were not maintained, and reverted back to nature. Many of the towns could only be supplied by air or through heavily armed convoys fighting their way through the SPLA controlled bush, and the little urban electricity and water supply that had once existed collapsed due to lack of maintenance.

Perhaps more serious is the under development of the human resource base. At independence in 2011 only 24% of the male and 16% of the female adults was literate. During the conflict the churches and NGOs had maintained some basic education in the SPLA controlled areas, funded by the international community, but almost no funding had been available for further education. Southern Sudanese desiring secondary and higher education had few options. Good education was available in Kenya and Uganda, but was only available at high cost. Modest education was available in the areas controlled by the Khartoum government, but that meant compulsory enrolment in the Khartoum army at age eighteen.

The governance and judicial systems of the SPLA/M controlled areas were very much those of a liberation army. Leadership was often highly motivated, but many had not been able to benefit from advanced educational opportunities. At the local level, governance often had a traditional tribal basis. Each area had its own traditional militia that had been essential in the past to settle territorial and resource conflicts with neighbouring groups. The SPLA/M managed to unite most of these forces most of the time, encouraging them to set aside local conflicts for a while in order to form a united front towards the Northern enemy. At times however local conflicts took precedence, and on several occasions important factions broke away from the SPLA/M and temporarily joined the Khartoum forces. Many other localised historical conflicts of interest remain unsolved up to today, and are root causes of current internal conflict.

The SPLA started as a guerrilla liberation force. It had no resources, human or financial, to provide any services. In the 1980's a combination of conflict and climate disasters created massive famines in Sudan. The few organisations active in SPLA areas, largely faith based, reported horrendous suffering. The international community was very concerned, but not able to intervene in areas that were not under the control of the legitimate Khartoum Government. Under the visionary leadership of James Grant, Director General of UNICEF, Operation Lifeline Sudan was established in 1989 after very lengthy negotiations. OLS had the mandate to assist wherever there was need, and this de facto established the humanitarian imperative: 'human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found'. This opened the way for the UN family to work in all of Southern Sudan, and for the NGOs to access governmental funding. OLS grew to be the largest humanitarian operation ever. No funding could however as yet go through the SPLA/M. The delivery of services such as health, education and food security remained firmly in international hands, with the UN family providing most of the coordination and logistics, and the NGOs delivering in the field. Out of SPLM representation in the sectoral coordination bodies of OLS in Nairobi embryonic ministries of health and education (and others) in exile started to emerge. Only in the early 2000's, when a peace agreement seemed within reach, did these SPLM "departments" begin to receive institutional funding.

At the signing of the CPA in 2005 a United Nations Mission came into being, with a staffing of about 10,000 and a budget of one billion dollars USD a year. This mission had the dual mandate of humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping – or the "stabilisation" portion of the diagram on page 12.

Assistance in state building started at the central level, with support to line ministries and the judiciary, but was only extended to state level in 2011. Development action in the interim period was largely at the higher and infrastructural level, such as major roads, electricity and water. Assistance to the rural areas was overwhelmingly humanitarian assistance, and still largely delivered through NGOs that had a very long local experience and a proven track record. Much of the assistance was food aid, but NGOs also remained the main providers of health and education services. In the run-up to independence, efforts were made to transition the health and education sectors to a more 'developmental approach' by channelling funding through government and line ministries. The Multi Donor Trust Fund for South Sudan (MDTF), led by the Government of South Sudan and administered by the World Bank, was the most visible with a budget of USD 870 million. Expectations were high, but evaluations showed marginal impact on service delivery in the field, even while donor coordination was improved through a joint mechanism.

The transition to state building and development was very expensive, and certain aspects of this transition were clearly underfunded. Assistance for state building and governance was largely directed to the central government, to the near exclusion of rural areas and state governments. A crucial underfunded issue was peace *building*. This seems to have been assumed to be included in peace *keeping,* (the stabilisation in the diagram). While the peace was *kept* fairly well, as evidenced by the fact that security for aid workers is now fairly well assured under the UN umbrella, peace was *built* only at central and state level, without addressing root causes of conflict in the periphery. The regular flare up of localised violence is evidence of this unfortunate reality.

At independence several issues were left undecided, and oil export was a crucial one. South Sudan had most of the oil fields, but could only export through the pipeline controlled by Sudan. When no agreement could be reached with Sudan, South Sudan stopped oil exports, precipitating a deep economic crisis in both countries. Many large development projects were frozen because the government could not meet their counterpart obligations, and the austerity measures did not allow the government to fund its own planned devolution, leaving the states, and especially the county levels with very low capacity. The highly anticipated peace dividend did not materialise, and the state was often not even able to provide security to the population.

When the idea of this funding round was conceived in 2010 it was an innovative step towards development in the rural areas in order to deliver this highly anticipated peace dividend. Most major donors considered these areas to be still in a state of emergency, and opted for the well-known humanitarian approach. AusAID realised that the situation had changed, and wanted to learn what was possible in this grey area between emergency and development. AusAID invited its accredited Australian NGO partners to submit proposals for a funding round with a dual objective: starting early recovery, and learning what was possible in this context. This grant was additional to existing humanitarian grants to the same NGOs working in South Sudan.

Concurrently, AusAID was developing an innovative Africa-wide initiative with Australian NGOs in a highly participatory manner. This programme, called "AACES"(Australia Africa Community Engagement Scheme), was strongly oriented to "doing and learning" in development practice. While the inclusion of South Sudan in AACES was contemplated, it did not eventuate – possibly because of the division of responsibilities, affecting both AusAID and the NGOs, between "humanitarian" (where South Sudan still resided) and "development" departments.

The funding round was managed from Australia, not Nairobi. This left the funding round as rather stand-alone: being outside the management arrangements for AusAID's emergency grants, and one of the few rural early recovery/development grants in the country. Furthermore, it was not embedded in a learning environment such as AACES.

Evaluation Purpose and Questions

Purpose of the review

The purpose of the review is to appraise the performance and outcomes of the South Sudan NGO Early Recovery and Humanitarian Funding Round 2010-2012, measure the extent to which the objectives of the Funding Round have been achieved and assess the merit of this modality in the South Sudanese context in the future. The review will be used as a tool to ensure the accountability of the four non-government organisations (NGOs), their partners and AusAID. The findings will also inform AusAID's future engagement in South Sudan and Africa.   The review findings will also inform AusAID strategies on how best to engage with and support NGOs to work in the changing aid environment of South Sudan, and other fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Finally, the review assesses the optimal modalities, mechanisms and approaches for supporting early recovery in Africa more broadly.

The overarching objective of this funding round was to '*support communities and community-led early recovery activities and thereby assist in laying a foundation for the Australian Government's longer-term development programming in South Sudan'*.

"Specifically, this round will support early recovery - and may also address emerging humanitarian needs - including through the following activity-level objectives:
1.   improving access to basic services including safe water, sanitation and hygiene; and health services and facilities
2.   supporting the creation of livelihood opportunities, including for women and youth
3.   supporting the reconstruction of basic infrastructure to help facilitate resettlement and reintegration
4.   reducing community-led armed violence and promoting reconciliation to facilitate recovery and development
5.   improving *policy analysis and distillation of lessons learned* from ANGO engagement in South Sudan, to inform future AusAID programming and funding prioritisation."

In order to have a logical progression in the evaluation report the questions of the ToR (in the annex) will be answered from the field to the national level to the Australian level i.e. iii, ii, iv, i, v.

Evaluation Scope and Methods

The evaluation consisted of:

- A document review.
- Attendance and part facilitation of a learning event involving implementing actors.
- Group interviews of South Sudan based implementers.
- Group Interviews with diaspora members.
- Individual interviews with Australian based implementers.
- Interview with AusAID employees in Canberra and at post.
- At Juba level, the lead evaluator interviewed five senior donor representatives (ECHO, Swiss, US, UK, Dutch), four senior UN staff (UNDP, OCHA, UN WOMEN) and the head of the NGO coordinating body

A semi structured question list was developed in advance for each target group. The core of the evaluation took place over a period of 8 days, including travel, in Juba.

Field visits were not possible due to AusAID security regulations. To triangulate the findings at report and Juba level, the evaluators held phone interviews with external stakeholders in the operational area of the projects, during the week after the Juba visit. The NGOs provided the contacts of stakeholders with a direct project involvement, the co-evaluator used his pre-existing list of opinion leaders who had not been directly involved with the projects, such as a parish priest, teacher, health worker or head of a women's group. For each location the co-evaluator interviewed at least one government official, one community or

civil society member that was involved with the project, and one civil society voice that had not been involved with the project.

Constraints

The formal project documentation was rather limited. The progress reports of the Australian NGOs were one year old, and described only the start-up phase. Due to miscommunication, the Australian NGOs and the implementing[5] NGOs at South Sudan level only became aware of the evaluation a short time before it commenced. They all updated and collated routine monitoring field data at very short notice, noting that full internal verification had not been possible in the timeframe. With these reservations, the data was presented to the evaluators during the learning event/evaluation. Field verification by the evaluation team was not possible due to the AusAID security ban on travel outside Juba.

The evaluators had full access to the field monitoring systems, and these were universally sound, though as with all field data, small errors inevitably must have been present, and time for verification had not been available to the NGOs.

Telephone interviews with the field, held in local languages, made triangulation possible. While there is no indication that the data has been manipulated, the evaluators agree with the NGO implementers that a degree of caution is required where numbers are concerned.

In consultation with AusAID, the main body of this report has an emphasis on the intervention modality of 'early recovery', while details on project implementation can be found in the annex.

Evaluation calendar

Sunday April 21: Flight, work with workshop facilitator linking the learning event to the evaluation
Monday 22, preparation and preliminary meetings with 3 ANGOs,
Tuesday 23, learning event, interviews diaspora, CARE, USAID and OCHA
Wednesday 24, learning event, Swiss Development Corporation
Thursday 25, learning event, Oxfam, Intermon, World Vision, PS Labour
Friday 26, Save the Children, NGO Forum, Netherlands Embassy, UNFEM, OCHA, UNDP
Saturday 27, consolidation data
Sunday April 28, draft Aide memoire, prepare verification questionnaires, flight

Post field visit:
Interviews by telephone with external stakeholders in South Sudan
Interviews by telephone with Australian stakeholders

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[5] The implementing NGOs were the international branches of the Australian NGOs.

Evaluation Findings

Did the funding round holistically meet the objectives set out in the call for proposals?
(Key question iii)

Even preliminary data indicate that this funding round has clearly succeeded in the first of its overarching objectives: *support communities and community-led early recovery activities.* Nearly all of the expected results of the individual projects are likely to be met by project end, in some cases expectations have already been exceeded, with three more months to go.

It has also assisted in the second overarching objective: *assist in laying a foundation for the Australian Government's longer-term development programming in South Sudan*, although AusAID never documented what questions it needed answered and no expected results were ever formulated. It would have helped if AusAID had worked together with the implementers at an early stage to formulate some key questions of relevance to AusAID, jointly design a methodology to answer these, and agree on clearly defined output formats. Such an approach is known to work in the African context. For example, in the experience of the lead evaluator a donor wanted to compare conditional to unconditional cash transfer for social protection in pregnancy. A research methodology, mainly consisting of a dedicated M&E framework, was developed with three partners in the African countries, with light support from academia. No approach proved to be superior to the other, but a lot was learned about what approach to use in what circumstances, and about the respective delivery costs. The M&E framework of the projects did not attempt to measure higher level outcomes, and inclusion of a proper baseline of governance, peace and gender, and some form of outcome/change mapping would already have provided a sound basis for learning in this round, and should be included in further early recovery project designs.

The evaluators are of the opinion that so far the learning component has delivered below its potential, and that all stakeholders, including the donor, must accept a share of the responsibility for this. We trust however that the last phase of the projects, including a three months no cost extension, will produce a condensation of field experiences. The learning event brought out some common key issues, harvested in this evaluation and in the learning event report, and lateral links have been made between the NGOs to produce useful final reports that answer some key questions that the NGOs have encountered in their field work.

A key common question that was emerging in the learning event was around the role of women in building peace. Any answers will however be of a retrospective nature, rather than researched pro-actively and jointly, with a more robust methodology.

The AusAID selection process[6] determined the division of the delivery objectives for the projects:

1. *Improving access to basic services including safe water, sanitation and hygiene; and health services and facilities* : The CARE project in Jonglei addressed water, sanitation, health, livelihood and reconciliation and is likely to meet most of its targets, and has already exceeded some.
   World Vision International (WVI) worked on Water, Sanitation and Maternal and Child Health in Western Equatoria in an area affected by the extreme violence of "The Lord's Resistance Army" and the subsequent population displacement. WVI did an external midterm evaluation (on their own initiative) and expects to meet or exceed their targets, as part of a multi-sectoral, multi-donor regional integrated project.

   Save the Children (SC) addressed education and watsan in Unity State and will, according to their own preliminary and unverified data, likely undershoot their enrolment target by about 25% as conflict made one of the implementation areas inaccessible. SC responded, in consultation with local authorities and beneficiaries, by shifting the focus somewhat from quantity to quality

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[6] Whereas the sectoral focus was clear in the selection criteria and completely sensible for early recovery, the choice of areas that were still conflict affected was reasonable, but the reason for the rather broad geographical spread was not clear.

improvement and strengthening local education governance, so that local authorities could act once the inaccessible areas became sufficiently secure. SC also increased its efforts to enrol females in this programme, resulting in an unprecedented female enrolment of 35%. This may seem very low in comparison to other African countries, but in South Sudan, where 48% of the 15 to 19 year old girls are already married (DHS 2006) and 84% of the women illiterate, it is an enormous achievement to get this percentage of young women up to 25 years enrolled in accelerated daytime primary education.

2.   *Supporting the creation of livelihood opportunities, including for women and youth*
     Oxfam supported agricultural livelihoods strengthening in Lakes State and Western Bahr el Ghazal and expects to meet its targets. They pioneered cooperation with the emerging commercial banks, and strengthened governmental extension work. Oxfam applied an interesting gender approach to its livelihoods work, by having agriculturalist women engage pastoralist men to break in the oxen - something that had not been done before. This created a common interest in the harvest, and reduced the age-old conflicts between pastoralists and agriculturalists. Care addressed livelihoods in Jonglei, as part of a multi-sectoral action, meeting and exceeding targets with unprecedented cross ethnic, mainly female, savings and loans groups that now already have developed a capital base of over USD 200,000.

3.   *Supporting the reconstruction of basic infrastructure to help facilitate resettlement and reintegration*
     This was done throughout the four NGOs, and was small scale, low tech, and focused on appropriate technology for the rural areas, as budgets were thinly spread. Minor variations to construction plans were often requested by communities, - these were appropriate to the participatory approaches used in early recovery. WVI completed a fairly major infrastructure project: the provision of solar piped water to 10,000 + people. Save the Children had initially planned more school construction,[7] but partly changed this to furniture and equipment acquisition, based on the request of the beneficiaries and the need to achieve the greatest impact.

4.   *Reducing community-led armed violence and promoting reconciliation to facilitate recovery and development:*
     Care was most explicit in this, with cross ethnic saving groups, and cattle drinking troughs placed on the boundaries of competing grazing areas, all done in close consultation with the competing communities. Save's emphasis on young and unemployed people was explicit in giving them a chance to get education and become employable, as an alternative to joining a militia. Oxfam used the experience of male pastoralists to introduce ox-ploughs in female oriented projects in agriculturalist communities. The pastoralist and the agriculturalist communities have historically been in violent conflict over resources, and this simple inducement to work together was an elegant example of including gender and peace-building in a livelihood project.

     The process did not go without tensions, but nobody was killed, and the communities and genders found ways of better working together, as expressed by some of the women beneficiaries interviewed by telephone.[8] World Vision operated in an environment that had been severely affected by the Lord's Resistance Army, causing initial displacement and a greatly accelerated

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[7] The central education ministry issued an edict forbidding the construction of semi-permanent buildings as planned, so SC supplied community constructed schools instead, and successfully lobbied to have this ban lifted towards the end of the project.

[8] The project unfortunately mainly documented outputs. This is a typical example where an upfront question like: "What is the role of women in building peace" could have been of great value. The addition of the "most significant change" method would have cost very little, and could have provided significant pointers.

villagisation and urbanisation. In close cooperation with the civil authorities World Vision managed to use the water supply system to settle conflicts over land rights and even manage to ensure some land rights for female headed households.[9]

5. *Improving policy analysis and distillation of lessons learned from ANGO engagement in South Sudan, to inform future AusAID programming and funding prioritisation*. The evaluators found in their interviews that many useful lessons had been learned at field level, but the harvesting and distillation was seriously delayed, and has only just started. There is however reasonable confidence that the final phase, including the No Cost Extension, will produce material that will be of use for AusAID.

As a result of the AusAID call and selection process the field operations part of this funding round was rather thinly spread over four sectors and five states, with each bringing something new and useful to the table.

Three common threads are evident throughout all projects:

1.   A very strong emphasis on gender,
2.   Strong collaboration with the emerging local authorities,
3.   Deliberate efforts to use the sectoral intervention to build peace. All projects were affected by conflict, but dealt with it and "made peace". This went well beyond "do no harm".

These three common threads are essential elements of early recovery in the South Sudan context. To have these integrated in every sectoral intervention of this funding round is a remarkable, holistic success, and a credit to the NGOs concerned. The evaluators were particularly impressed by the deep understanding of the national staff, which was based on their long experience. These are however development practitioners, and not academics. The three strands could have been documented better if all partners had worked more together in an early stage to define robust joint questions and methodologies and a more outcome oriented M&E framework.

Cross cutting issues

Gender

Gender was strong throughout at the activity level as described in under the previous heading. It is noteworthy that all projects linked gender with very practical peace-building at the local level. This came out very clear at the learning event. However analysis and documentation of this gender-peace work has proved more difficult to locate. This may be because the issue lacked specific mechanisms, without academic support, without a gender specialist, and without a plan or a budget. Some linking with, for example, the Center for Gender and Peace Building[10] could have helped the development of an analytical framework.

This absence of robust documentation made it difficult to translate good gender practice from the field level to the policy level in Juba. Nevertheless some good examples were from the Care project, where gender is the main driver of the portfolio of Care's work in South Sudan, with many projects and multiple donors, which are used at the Juba level to move gender (though not yet gender and peace) higher on the agenda.

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[9] Under the South Sudan constitution women can hold land, but until very recently even war widows would be chased from their land in the local context. This multi-donor long-term integrated development project will be evaluated by WV in mid 2013, and results shared with AusAID.

[10] http://www.usip.org/programs/centers/center-gender-and-peacebuilding

Save the Children had a very focussed objective in their project, based on changing the law so that over-age children who have completed accelerated primary education will be allowed to take examinations. By facilitating the recognition of their qualifications, Save the Children is working to increase the number of women in education, and by doing so, increase their employment prospects.

Gender and peace is clearly an issue that could have benefitted from early joint learning and documentation by the ANGOs, and it should have a dedicated chapter in the final learning document to be produced by Oxfam.

Environment

The environment was touched upon in some small-scale instances of good practice, such as through encouraging vegetable gardening by both pastoralists and agriculturalists, using the waste run-off from boreholes that were constructed to provide drinking water for human and animal consumption. The harvesting of tree plantations by "unscrupulous officials" was criticized repeatedly during the learning event, however clearing forest for increased agricultural production was integral to the project, but the unintended environmental outcome of deforestation does not seem to have been taken into account in the project design.

As a further example, one project placed an emphasis on organic farming, which might be healthier and more environmentally friendly, but the proven potential of micro-dosing fertiliser (which gives more produce per acre and thus less forest loss) was not explored. The vastness of the terrain, combined with the urgent need to increase food production, makes long-term environmental thinking inherently difficult in early recovery projects.

Environment is as yet rarely mainstreamed in humanitarian interventions, but arguably at least an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) should have a place in early recovery. It would be good if the final learning document included a discussion on how this EIA could be incorporated in early recovery work.

Disability

In all projects vulnerability was carefully assessed in beneficiary selection. Disability was part of that assessment, but the evaluators were repeatedly told that disability did not automatically mean vulnerability.[11] This clear approach provides some evidence that disability is indeed mainstreamed in a way suitable for an early recovery context. However it is important that disability is documented, to ensure that disability rights are not overlooked. In the experience of both evaluators, outside the context of this evaluation, mental disability is an issue that is often neglected in South Sudan.

HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS was however not mainstreamed. It is of some concern that no challenge emerged from the group when one learning event participant stated that any HIV awareness work needed dedicated large budget lines. There was attention to HIV where projects supported health facilities, but there was no evidence that the guidelines of the Inter Agency Standing Committee on HIV in emergencies were integrated with the projects.[12] Lack of attention to HIV is unfortunately still rather common in the high needs context of acute emergencies, but it deserves serious attention in future early recovery action. The final learning report

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[11] An example was given of a double amputee who said: "I make more money repairing mobile phones than I will ever make with your farming plan"

[12] http://www.unicef.org/aids/files/IASC-Guideline_09_En.pdf

needs a frank discussion of why this important issue was relatively ignored, and come up with suggestions to remedy this.

Child protection

Child protection on the other hand was high on the agenda throughout. The AusAID requirement to roll out, and enforce policies and guidance applying to local partners had clearly not been easy in a context where abject poverty makes child labour an almost inevitable fact of life.

The strong emphasis of the AusAID policy on sexual abuse under the age of 18 is also difficult to enforce in a society where early marriage is the norm. Awareness is clearly increasing, local partners are beginning to comply, and societal change will follow, and this is thus a successful beginning of mainstreaming - though it will need perseverance.

Disaster Risk Reduction

In Disaster Risk Reduction the emphasis was not so much on defence against environmental disasters, but on reducing socio-economic vulnerabilities to such disasters. This is at the heart of all 4 projects, whether it is increasing physical capital through tools and crops, financial capital through village loans and savings, or social capital through education and skills. Participants in the learning event did not put much emphasis on mainstreaming conventional DRR concepts. They were however very clear that the main disaster risk facing South Sudan is conflict, and all projects had "making peace" as an important aspect, though articulation of this was not always explicit. This aspect of the programs requires some additional distillation. This issue should be addressed in the final learning report. In view of the potential importance of these emerging ideas, one of the ANGOs may wish to include a dedicated research component on conflict management as an essential element of DRR in their portfolio.

Delivery against expected outcomes

All four NGOs experienced similar challenges, particularly in the first year, and this lead to a slow start.

1) External conflict leading to displacement (except Wau)
2) Greater frequency than expected of internal conflict leading to displacement, and still on-going access problems
3) Closure of the Northern border, creating procurement problems[13]
4) Austerity caused by the severe reduction of oil exports, leading to hard currency shortages, decreased government capacity and inflation in local procurement
5) A sharp decrease in work permit availability creating forced, increased turnover from regional staff to national staff. This led to the insufficient availability of qualified South Sudanese staff.
6) Lack of clarity on the government devolution process lead to arbitrary policies, procedures and levies and duplicated local taxes at state and county levels
7) Unusually heavy rainy seasons in 2011 and 2012, led to access problems

The reports up to March 2012 across the board show a slow start and serious underspend of about 50%.

All other actors in South Sudan experienced the same challenges, and according to both UNOCHA and the NGO coordination forum nearly all projects across agencies had serious delays and underspends. It is commendable that the 4 ANGOs and their partners overcame these challenges, and are now well on their way to achieving their expected outcomes with only a three month extension from AusAID.
The pressure to catch-up and achieve activity and output targets may however have played a role in a relative lack of attention to the learning objective of the funding round.

The funding agreements between the ANGOs and AusAID required reporting up to March 31, 2012 and a final report. Reporting between the implementing branch of the International NGO in South Sudan and the Australian NGO was done on a quarterly or biannual basis. Some of these reports were made available to the evaluators. This provided additional information up to end 2012 in one case, and up to end September 2012 in the other three cases. Reports up to end March 2013 are due soon, but were not yet available at the time of the evaluation in April 2013. In addition one ANGO (World Vision) commissioned an external evaluation in late 2012 and made the report available. Two ANGOs shared reports of backstopping field visits that discussed achievements and challenges with utmost professionalism. It is in the experience of the evaluators by no means common practice that such very frank, and clearly internal, reports are shared with an evaluation team – this measure enhanced the credibility of the implementing partners.

The NGOs presented their progress during the learning event in April 2013. The data of these presentations largely came from routine monitoring systems and internal reports that were in the process of being drafted and verified, and the presenters made clear that these were non-verified data. These data are used in this report, with the reservation that these were interim data, collated at very short notice, and not fully internally verified.

Overarching activities: The Learning Component

"Improving *policy analysis and distillation of lessons learned* from ANGO engagement in South Sudan, to inform future AusAID programming and funding prioritisation" was both one of the overarching objectives, and the fifth activity level objective of the funding round under evaluation. This activity has so far performed below expectations.

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[13] The projects were implemented close to the new border. Many items such as cement and exercise books used to come from Sudan. With the closure of the Northern border, these had to be imported from Kenya or Uganda, along much longer supply lines, and obviously higher cost.

At field level, a degree of somewhat informal situational and issue analysis took place and this was distilled through the respective individual implementing NGOs into state and federal coordination mechanisms. Until the learning event in April 2013 there was no joint "distillation of lessons learned" by the four ANGOs. At this event it became clear to the evaluators that the implementing teams were hardly aware of each other. Many common issues were identified, good and bad, and the consensus was that cooperative learning should have taken place earlier.

 These issues will be pulled together in a report by the ANGOs, but an important opportunity for joint and focussed learning was clearly missing earlier in the life of the funding. Early identification of some key issues, development of some robust documentation methods, and lateral networking, could have given a stronger outcome.

All stakeholders underperformed in achieving this objective.
In the initial proposals Oxfam agreed to take on a lead role on 'learning', but this was contained in a short and imprecise paragraph, without a corresponding budget line, activities or deliverables. The AusAID selection report mentions that Oxfam is well placed for this lead but did not remark that neither activities nor budgets were linked to this objective. A concept note and Australian NGO discussion round of late 2011 mentions several issue papers and both an interim and a final report to be developed jointly, again without mention of specific activities and budget, and it is not clear how far this intention was communicated to (and recognised as an obligation by) the field teams in South Sudan. The AusAID Quality at Implementation report of February 2012 again only mentions that the learning was planned, while the interim report from Oxfam to AusAID does not mention the learning lead at all.

The deliverables in the field had clear activities, budgets and targets and this quite understandably became the focus of attention. This emphasis on doing rather than learning became even stronger, because of the large delays in the start-up phase. A learning event was planned alongside the AusAID midterm review, but that review did not happen, and nor was the interim learning report produced. In early 2013 the learning component of the program resurfaced via a single learning event.

Had the teams come together, even electronically, at an early stage to identify a few common opportunities and challenges, and sharpened those into focussed questions or hypotheses, then more effective learning collaboration could have taken place, with a proper harvesting and distilling process of that information. This is not to say that the learning component was ignored. There were examples where learning from implementation was indeed fed into the policy process by individuals NGOs. The issue was that it could have been more effective, and more useful to AusAID, if it had been implemented collaboratively from the very start of the program.

Part of the issue is that Oxfam agreed to a policy and learning coordinating role, without a corresponding budget allocation, and then failed to deliver as an effective lead on the component.
An important lesson relearned: A deliverable is rarely realised without dedicated activities and budgets (or even time budgets).

During the learning event, lateral connections were developed between the South Sudan branches of the NGOs. The evaluators hope that this will lead to deeper analysis, and indeed a distillation of some essentials out of the fascinating field experience that was presented at the learning event and in interviews with the evaluators.

There seems to be little doubt that this early recovery approach was successful in the field in this instance. To a large degree this was likely thanks to the extensive emergency experience of the implementing NGOs, who had already been working with "developmental approaches within an emergency", though it was not called 'early recovery' at that point. It is important to document why their approaches worked on this occasion, what they exactly did (or stopped doing), and how it was done.

In view of the lively global debate of the concept of "early recovery" the final learning report is potentially important, though this evaluation suggests that the report might not fully meet expectations. Oxfam should consider commissioning an additional piece of operational research to harvest this experience more fully, and AusAID could consider facilitating the funding of (modest) resources to make this possible.

Monitoring and Evaluation mechanisms

M&E of both the implementing INGOs and the ANGOs was satisfactory in quality and detail for emergency interventions and in line with the globally agreed SPHERE standards for emergencies and the OECD/DAC standards, which also form the basis of the AusAID M&E standards. All four implementing INGOs used their global M&E systems. The INGOs of US origin, CARE and World Visions were more oriented towards the requirements of USAID, while the Save the Children and Oxfam systems show more orientation towards the UK/EC requirements *for emergencies*.

M&E of *emergency* interventions tend to focus on activities and outputs, while M&E of *development* tends to look more at process, outcome and impact. The new "early recovery" approach is still finding its way and no globally agreed M&E standards for early recovery assist as yet. These will likely develop somewhere between emergency and development, but with additional elements of building peace.

Despite this challenge, the evaluators consider the internal verification mechanisms that were presented to be sufficient. These were mainly at available at the INGO level. One ANGO (World Vision) shared an external mid-term evaluation, and two ANGOs shared reports of monitoring trips from Australia. All four provided quantitative data in a sex-disaggregated manner. Save the Children's monitoring was rather output oriented, while Care stood out in its efforts to begin to assess outcomes, the others were in between.

The M&E systems of the NGOs in South Sudan are still in transition. This is not surprising in view of the long humanitarian history, and the fact that even in 2013 most of the actions of these NGOs (outside this grant) involve emergency assistance. Transition of organisational culture from emergency mode to development thinking has clearly started, but is a slow process, especially when emergency needs remain high. This is reflected in the M&E frameworks. A gradual transition towards measuring outcomes is noticeable. Whereas emergency interventions report, for example, on the number of households that received agricultural inputs, in development we want to know that these input were of the right kind, were delivered at the right time in the agricultural calendar, and above all that these inputs created the desired outcome in the form of increased production. We would also want to know what the impact was on gender, and what happened to conflict over resources. The NGOs are planning to measure this to a variable degree, though scant data is available as yet. The trend in this is encouraging.

Setting up "new" M&E systems is time consuming and requires human resource development. Collecting developmental baselines and setting up outcome and impact assessment is more resource intensive than M&E of a humanitarian intervention. This will require additional M&E budget (financial and time), certainly in the early phase of an early recovery intervention. Both donors and implementers must ensure that this is fully taken into account in the proposal development process of any early recovery investment.

While the M&E system, with the above mentioned limitations, functioned well within South Sudan, the information did not flow in a way to inform AusAID appropriately.
The grant contracts required only two reports, one at nine months and one final. The nine-month reports showed a very slow start by all implementers, but seems to have elicited minimal feedback from the donor. The mid-term review could have stimulated the NGOs to perform information collation and analysis and

could have informed AusAID, but the review did not happen,[14] and Oxfam did not produce the first learning report.

AusAID had no representation in-country. While there was a significant presence in nearby Kenya, the grants were managed from Canberra. Video conferencing and Skype are now common in development practice, but in South Sudan finding a mobile telephone network is often a challenge, and internet is very slow and unreliable throughout the country. A time difference of seven hours makes direct communication during office hours difficult, and the required electricity is often unavailable in the field in South Sudan outside office hours.

Staffing changes in Canberra also limited AusAID's capacity to absorb the available information and monitor progress. A limited information exchange process happened between AusAID and ACFID[15], but this was an exchange between a working group of all Australian NGOs working in South Sudan and AusAID. The NGOs provided informal verbal updates of this and other grants, but only focused on generic issues, such as work permits and taxation (as recorded in the minutes). Personnel issues also affected OXFAM, when the learning lead in Juba had to be evacuated for medical reasons to Australia, at a critical stage.

The diaspora project (key question ii)

The role of the diaspora in post conflict reconstruction is increasingly recognised globally[16]. In Somalia for example, diaspora remittances and investments dwarf official development assistance. AusAID is to be commended for including the highly relevant diaspora aspect of the program in this call for proposals. Oxfam Australia rose to this challenge, and their proposal shows expected outcomes and activities and a dedicated budget-line of $75,000 for this diaspora action. This action however did not appear in the risk matrix.

Implementation of this action proved to be somewhat problematic. Any diaspora is a reflection of the situation in the country of origin, and in many cases a distorted reflection, certainly in conflict countries. The diaspora may appear homogenous to an outsider, but to an insider it is clear that political and ethnic differences are very important drivers of diaspora dynamics, as they are in the country of origin. A multitude of groups exist in the South Sudanese diaspora in Australia. This is not surprising as research[17] has shown that South Sudanese (near) universally experience discrimination and describe that most of their social contacts are with people of South Sudanese origin. These diaspora groupings may be formal or informal, have their basis within a geographical region of Australia, or have their roots in a shared ethnic identity or language from South Sudan. Many of these groups claim to be *the* representative of the diaspora, though no mechanism exists to determine the legitimacy of these claims.

The "South Sudanese Community in Australia Incorporated" (SSCA) is a very vocal and visible organisation. They were incorporated in 1999 and were initially the "voice" of the SPLA/M that kept the liberation struggle on the Australian political agenda. With the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005 the civil war had effectively ended, and a political diversification happened both in South Sudan and in the diaspora. No formal inventory of South Sudanese diaspora organisations in Australia exists, but about a dozen have a presence on the internet, some with videos of board meetings, suggesting fairly mature organisational development.

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[14] World Vision did a (not contractual required) external mid-term evaluation and shared this with the donor, but received no feedback.

[15] Australian Council for International Development

[16] http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Project-and-Operations/2011%20The%20role%20of%20the%20Diaspora%20in%20Nation%20building%20-%20lessons%20for%20fragile%20and%20post-%20conflict%20countries%20in%20Africa.pdf

[17] STATT, The Last Mile 2012, http://www.statt.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/STATT-The-Last-Mile-Australia-November-2012.pdf

SSCA benefitted from their visibility and long standing networks with Australian institutions and politicians and was contracted by IOM in 2010 to enable the diaspora to take part in the referendum on independence. In 2011 SSCA approached AusAID for funding, which AusAID declined, though AusAID introduced SSCA to Oxfam as a potential partner in the diaspora project. Oxfam had completed its own scoping of the diaspora political landscape and was reluctant to enter into an exclusive relationship with a group that was perceived by some as being linked to one political party. Oxfam eventually decided to go ahead with its engagement for practical reasons, while attempting to apply safeguards to ensure the inclusion of diaspora members of diverse political persuasions and ethnicity.

The evaluators did interview some diaspora members in Australia who felt excluded by the mechanisms used by this project. None agreed to have their name mentioned in this report (even when assured it would be confidential) so their views cannot be reproduced in detail here. Oxfam is aware of complaints of exclusion by members of other South Sudanese diaspora associations and also highlighted a difficult working relationship with SSCA. Oxfam stresses the need to ensure the participation of the full spectrum of any diaspora in any future actions of this nature, in order to ensure neutrality.

Oxfam, SSCA and the Humanitarian Crisis Hub (HCH) organised a series of 6 one-day workshops for diaspora members who were interested in engaging in development in South Sudan. HCH was not available for interview, but Oxfam and the two diaspora delegates provided information. The three partners designed objective criteria for the selection of workshop participants, and SSCA played a dominant role in the selection process. HCH was the main actor in providing the course material. The curriculum focussed on establishing an NGO and the basics of proposal writing and project management. The course took place just in time to select people for the learning event in South Sudan.

Out of 30 participants two were selected for a field trip to attend the learning event in Juba in April 2013. At the last moment the director of SSCA was added to the delegation. During the learning event the director and one of the delegates proved that their very close connections to the government were very useful, and they succeeded in getting the undersecretary of the ministry of labour for human resource development, Angeth Acol deDut, to attend part of the meeting and engage in a constructive discussion.

The evaluators are of the opinion that the diaspora component was highly relevant (score 5) and reasonably effective (score 4), though maybe not very efficient (score 3), and may have done harm within the diaspora, by seeming to endorse one grouping that may not be perceived as representative by all.

Further efforts with the South Sudanese as well as other diasporas, should undoubtedly take place. Global experience shows that diaspora remittances and investments play a major role in post conflict economies. Diasporas can help resolve conflict, but also exacerbate conflict[18]. Great care should be taken to ensure that if there is participation from the diaspora in any early recovery project it should come from a wide political spectrum, and it must be realised that these interventions carry a degree of risk. It is important to interact with (or even to create) a politically (and at times ethnically) neutral platform, certainly when funding or high visibility is involved, and proper procedures must be in place to prevent the dominance of one group to the exclusion of others. Selection processes where engagement involves free courses and flights must be meticulous.

It is also worthwhile considering adjusting the current training curriculum, so that the focus is not just on implementing projects in an NGO manner, but also covers preparing the diaspora for the potential of investment in small and medium enterprises. Somewhat longer and more in depth courses would be appropriate, and some proof of individual commitment, before free flights are considered.

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[18] http://unu.edu/publications/books/diasporas-in-conflict-peacemakers-or-peace-wreckers.html#overview

Was AusAID's management of this round effective and how might this be improved? (key question iv)

The management of this round by AusAID was modestly effective.

The call for proposals was innovative and allowed for an early recovery approach. The round was made possible through the humanitarian funding window, while the approach was at least partially developmental. The call for funding was in recognition of the very fluid environment in South Sudan, and an acknowledgement that the transition from humanitarian thinking to a development approach was due. The call was also very specific about the organisational learning objective of AusAID, as one of the two overarching objectives.

The selection process seemed sound, though it is not clear whether the rather dissident opinion of the independent appraiser was taken into account. There were some useful suggestions for improvement of the selected proposals. The budgets were amended in the selection phase, but the technical narratives were not amended in line with the suggestions.

The grant contract only required two reports, one at nine months and one final report. While this may have helped lighten the AusAID management load, the evaluators consider this suboptimal for a funding round where AusAID's organisational learning is an overarching objective.

The Quality at Implementation report of February 2012 nevertheless shows clear evidence of a very close working relationship between the AusAID manager and the NGOs on a very regular basis, with good information sharing and agreements on minor adjustments to the implementation that were required in the very fluid context of the early days of independence.

The first contractually required report up to end March 2012 was duly submitted by the Australian NGOs, and showed across the board a slow start and under-expenditure. The NGOs stated to the evaluators that no feedback was received from AusAID on this state of affairs, while AusAID states that informal feedback was provided by an AusAID officer on receipt of the reports to confirm the second tranche payment.

The planned joint monitoring trip and mid-term review of the funding round due to occur in late 2012 did not materialise, nor were the first of the two agreed joint learning documents delivered to AusAID. The evaluators did not see any documentation that suggested that AusAID actively followed up these issues, though the ANGOs did individual monitoring/quality assurance trips to South Sudan. The evaluators were provided with some of these reports, but these had not been shared with AusAID.

There is evidence of some limited interaction between the four ANGOs and AusAID through the ACFID South Sudan working group meetings. ACFID is the umbrella body of NGOs and CSOs active in humanitarian and development aid in Australia. These were held a few times (2 or 3) in 2012, and minutes show that these meetings included updates on security and climate, but focussed mainly on generic issues such as work permits and taxation issues in South Sudan. There are some verbal reports that the mid-term review was discussed in this forum, but this is not mentioned in the minutes. NGOs also provided informal programme updates, but these also do not appear in the minutes.

According to all actors, the interactions between AusAID and the NGOs were energised in February 2013, apparently around the "learning event". The evaluators have not seen the correspondence, but the ANGOs stated verbally that the announcement that the current funding window would not be available in the future was perceived as a sudden announcement. While AusAID had communicated throughout the call for proposals that this was a one-off intervention, this important detail may have been lost in the pressure of field-work.

AusAID commissioned this external evaluation, and the evaluators were verbally requested to perform the evaluation on April 8. The Terms of Reference (ToR) mentioned that the evaluation would coincide with the learning event April 23-25 in Juba, and that no travel to the project sites would be allowed for security reasons. When the evaluators sent out an introductory note to the Australian and the implementing organisations on April 12 2013, it became clear that the NGOs were not aware of the planned evaluation,

nor that the evaluation would be performed during their own internal learning event. The ToR of the Evaluation had not been shared with the NGOs.

It seems likely that this joint learning and review approach was discussed in September at the ACFID forum for the planned mid-term evaluation, but subsequent to that discussion the 2012 review had not taken place. In early 2013, the NGOs were preparing for an internal learning event in April, but the announcement that the evaluation would be at the same time came as a surprise. It is to the credit of the NGOs that they very professionally prepared as well as possible on such short notice, and to the credit of the AusAID delegation's professionalism and diplomacy when accompanying the evaluators that both the learning event and the evaluation went smoothly, and that cordial and professional relations were maintained.

It seems that personnel changes in AusAID and Oxfam were a major cause of the interrupted communications. There are nevertheless some systemic shortcomings that lead us to the following management recommendations:

a) Regular reporting requirements are imperative in any grant in a very fluid situation in the early recovery space, and certainly in a funding round with an overarching objective of learning for AusAID. While lightening the management load is laudable, in this case a six monthly reporting interval would have been more appropriate.

b) A dedicated desk officer is indispensable with this kind of early recovery and learning grant, and if a personnel change is inevitable a proper handover is essential. Informal cooperation between the AusAID desk and the ANGOs is a very useful and low cost tool, but it is highly dependent on people, not systems, and thus at high risk of collapsing if people change. Some form of systemisation is required, striking a careful balance between flexibility and bureaucracy in a very fluid environment.

c) While in-country presence of AusAID staff was not an option, remote management from Canberra is certainly possible, albeit with some drawbacks but with the advantage of easy direct interactions with the ANGOs. An intermediate solution of management from Nairobi, with occasional field trips under the UN security umbrella could have been considered, though at a partial loss of the ANGO interaction.

d) Formal feedback on reports is always required, and close follow up is needed if reports are cause for concern. Milestones, such as the delivery of the first "learning report" must be monitored and actively pursued. If planned major activities, such as the joint field monitoring visit and review do not happen, the reasons for this must be clearly documented and alternatives sought.

e) Major changes in funding policy need to be communicated to partners in a timely and appropriate manner. All partners know that follow-on funding is never guaranteed, but expectations may be high if the work is of high quality and in line with policy direction of the donor.

f) Evaluations need sufficient notice so that the partners can prepare. Seeking the input of the stakeholders in drafting the terms of reference will greatly increase the effectiveness of any evaluation.

Was this modality relevant, effective and efficient for the South Sudanese context? (key question i)

The overall conclusion of the evaluators is that the modality of this funding round was highly relevant (5), effective (5) and efficient (4) with regards to the field activities, but that the AusAID learning objective, though very relevant (6) was of disappointing effectiveness (3) so far, while the efficiency of the learning component cannot be judged as no budget was allocated to this important objective. Oxfam did have a policy staff member in Juba who was partly paid out of this funding round, but the learning activity was poorly defined, without activities, memoranda with the other NGOs, and expected results. We can only conclude that all stakeholders must take a share of the responsibility for the underperformance on this objective up to now.

We hope that this learning event, and the follow up activities it catalysed, will lead to a final learning document that will meet some of the information needs of AusAID for further programming in South Sudan

and other post conflict and early recovery situations. The evaluators are reasonably confident, based on the evidence gathered for this report, that this will happen.

It is encouraging that learning was a deliberate objective in this early recovery funding round. In further initiatives of this kind, there must be clear activities with a budget, proper agreement on responsibilities of all partners, and well-defined deliverables. All this must be in place at the start of the project, and joint specific learning issues and methods must be identified at an early stage. M&E systems that are suitable for early recovery, not just for emergency, are a very good way to ensure learning gets done.

A matrix of actors

The NGO team in the learning event, facilitated by the evaluators, also scored the different humanitarian and development actors in South Sudan on relevance, effectiveness and efficiency, and the NGOs (on their own initiative) added the government as a key actor in early recovery.

	ANGO	INGO	LNGO	UN	GOVT
Relevance	5	5	6	5	6
Effectiveness	4.5	4.5	3.5	4	2
Efficiency	4.5	4.5	3.5	3.5	2

The half scores are the result of voting. The scoring showed a minimal spread.
The evaluators (based on experience of the organisations involved) agreed with these scores.

The lead evaluator presented these score to the heads of two UN agencies (UNDP and UN Women) and deputy of UNOCHA, the head of the NGO coordinating body, and five senior donor representatives (heads of ECHO and SDC, deputies of USAID and Netherlands, governance advisor UKAID), and found agreement with these scores, with the reservation that this was correct for the rural areas in the current context of South Sudan.

The strength and weaknesses of the different actors are detailed in the following matrix, developed by the NGO participants as part of an exercise facilitated by the evaluators.

	Strength	Weakness
ANGO	Strong fundraising capacity with Australian public ($850m/yr) Accredited with AusAID, low barrier access to funding Knowledge of policies/rules Policy informing role, very relevant with Australia security council seat Public awareness raising	Far away Thinly spread over the world Relatively new in Africa Funding dependent on political decisions with unknown rationale
INGO	Global Access to broad variety of funds Advocacy to global institutions and individuals In country Access to multiple donors Policy informing national govt, donors and UN/clusters Flexible/fast implementation Strong links with LNGOs Deliberate skill transfers Go where the others don't Ear on the ground Strong situational analysis Economy of scale Neutral Good reputation Voice of communities Cheaper than UN	Dependent on short term funding Donor driven priorities Difficulty in recruiting quality staff at NGO pay rates Difficult security management in remote/fragile locations Uncertain position with govt Heavy admin burden through different donor requirements Relatively expensive
LNGO	Local culture and language Grassroots, sensitive to local dynamics Appropriate solutions Able to mobilise communities Able to identify vulnerable Real time information Able to "make peace"	Weak systems Lack of accountability Low in resources Low staff capacity Leadership struggles Reluctant to change at times
UN	Able to influence government High competency Fantastic logistics Has "the big picture"	Very expensive Cultural insensitive/very limited local understanding Limited skill transfer Top down No partnerships but subcontracts
Govt	Provides law and order Makes policy	Not accountable Not transparent Not equitable Limited competencies Dislocated from the periphery Broke

This matrix was not presented in full detail to the external stakeholders in Juba (UN & donor).

A key question that was asked of every external stakeholder concerned funding options for a medium-sized donor such as AusAID. The relative strengths and weaknesses of the potential partners that came out of these discussions were very much in-line with the analysis that the NGO teams communicated. However none of the external stakeholders could comment on Australian NGOs, and few were aware that Australian NGOs were involved in South Sudan.

The evaluators conclude therefore that the ANGO/INGO/LNGO construction, as used by AusAID in this funding round, was a very appropriate choice as their respective strengths are complementary, allowing high impact in the field and efficient management. The strong focus on building the capacity of local governance and civil society actors and promoting peace further enhances the value of this form of cooperation.

Funding four Australian NGOs in five states in multiple sectors, as in this round, was appropriate in this phase, as the context was very fluid, and AusAID was still exploring its options. AusAID wanted to learn from the NGO experience and clearly expressed this in the call for proposals. A consortium of ANGOs, with one lead ANGO, working with the same ANGO/INGO/LNGO axis would have provided similar strengths with regards to the axis approach, and similar management costs. It would likely have reduced the variety of the learning experience, but could potentially have strengthened the analysis of the learning.

For further funding of ANGOs it seems advisable to sharpen the focus, as the current funding round was rather thinly spread and somewhat underfunded to achieve attributable lasting impact in a complex situation. This could be achieved through a geographical concentration, though this could be problematic in a new country that is plagued by inequity, and thus should not focus on one state or ethnic area only.

A sharper thematic focus seems an attractive option. Gender has a very high priority for AusAID, and the ANGO/INGO/LNGO combinations are strong at community level, so interventions at community level, with a strong focus on women (but inclusive of men) would be very suitable.

In discussions with implementers it became clear that a South Sudan specific theory of change around women and peace was emerging. This is as yet strongly rooted in practical field experience, such as mechanisms whereby women of differing ethnicity reach agreement on the use of shared water-points for household use, which is then used as a model to reach agreement between male groups on water use for cattle. This experience has not crystallised out yet and needs further work and documentation. A further grant should include resources to harvest and digest this emerging peace model. If a potential call for further funding included building the capacity of local[19] government and civil society, this would address another underfunded, and high need, area, and would make a significant contribution to peace building.

Strengthening of the "making of peace" as a deliberate objective, as already pioneered in this round, goes beyond do no harm concept. It is particularly important in those states that are currently described by major donors as "emergency states". From the Juba perspective of the donors, UN bodies and Pooled Funds, these states seem to be in complete crisis, judging by the aggregated data. From the NGO perspective, looking out of their bases in the periphery and working in the field, these states are indeed in trouble but largely because of pockets of crisis. Larger areas within these states are also vulnerable, but because of severe under-development. From this perspective more development-oriented action is needed (whether we call this early recovery or early development) in most parts of these states, and humanitarian action only in small, but potentially variable, pockets.

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[19] The UN governance strengthening work has only recently extended to the state level, but no plans exist to go to the local levels. The government has severe resource limitations because of the oil crisis and is thus unable to address the local levels, even though all are aware that local governance is key to strengthening the legitimacy of the state.

In view of AusAID's existing support to the pooled humanitarian and health funds, and likely commitment to the pooled food security initiative, a community level intervention with a gender focus (including capacity building of local government and civil society and "making peace") to be implemented in the so called "emergency states" would be very appropriate to the current state of affairs. An economic empowerment approach would be a good complementarity investment to the already supported pooled funds.

The evaluated funding round was spread over a number of partners and areas of work. It would make sense, with similar funding, to reduce this to two or maximum three areas. Consortia of NGOs have proven their value in acute crisis, but not as yet in early recovery, but this could be considered. A selection of two or three Australian NGOs (independent or in consortium) seems appropriate. The size and quality of their networks with local organisations should be an important criterion in their selection, as this is important for peace building and governance strengthening.

In the early recovery approach, longer-term funding is important. Consensus building takes time in a context where local governance and civil society is weak, and at times divided. Baselines of developmental indicators are often scarce and have to be collected. Capacity building is slow when the available human resource base has a low starting capacity. Re-emergence of crisis can cause delays, and a temporary switch back to emergency mode.

Early recovery is a developmental approach, starting in an emergency context.[20] Planning horizons must therefore be those of development, if not longer, because of the complex starting situation. Planning must also be flexible to adapt to the fluid situation. A three to five year flexible grant would be ideal, possibly with internal review twice a year, and review with donors on an annual basis. If only a two-year grant can be guaranteed, than regular review is still required, and at least a mechanism for possible extension must be put in place.

Early recovery is a promising approach to a very difficult problem, but it is inherently management intensive. As AusAID already has robust relationships with a number of ANGOs, much of the management load can be transferred to the ANGO (alone or in consortium). This funding round evaluation shows that these four ANGOs had the capacity to manage and adapt with minimal supervision but this approach will obviously need resources.

Are these lessons transferable?

Whether these lessons are transferable or not depends on a number of factors. This observation is based on an analysis of comparable situations in post-conflict states the lead evaluator is familiar with.

The international community has limited experience with new countries where development has to start (almost) from scratch.[21] Most "new" countries inherited a government system from colonial (1960s and Zimbabwe) or disposed (South Africa, Balkans, former Soviet states) masters. There were systems in place that may have been discredited at the political level, but that were still (somewhat) functional at the operational level, such as health, education, water, electricity, roads and communications. These systems were important entrance points for post conflict recovery.

At the CPA in 2005, South Sudan mainly had a rudimentary military command structure in the bush, while major towns were still controlled by an adversary. Line ministries were emerging in exile, but there were hardly any functioning systems in the periphery. NGOs and Faith Based Organisations provided most of the social services, supported by logistical and coordination systems of (mainly) UN organisations.

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[20] http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/crisispreventionandrecovery/focus_areas/early-recovery.html

[21] AusAID has considerable experience with Timor Leste, a much smaller country with somewhat similar conditions as South Sudan.

Much progress has been made since 2005, and governmental development partners are certainly available at the capital level, and increasingly at state level. Peripheral governance and service delivery systems are still very weak at the time of this evaluation. Linking to the community level, as these four NGO projects did, is thus very important in this context.

The relationship between NGOs (and FBOs) and government is also not without tensions. South Sudan has a formal policy of provision of services by the government, but the government has very limited experience with service delivery. The NGOs have in the past, and arguably up to now, delivered the majority of the services, and there is thus a competition for resources. In the education sector this is particularly evident, as the faith based organisations, the churches, want to continue do deliver education for ideological reasons[22].

There are certainly countries in similar situations, where these lessons from South Sudan would be transferable with minor adaptations. These are countries like DR Congo, Afghanistan and Somalia, where a protracted crisis has destroyed peripheral governance systems. There are caveats here as well, mainly because of the various degrees of legitimacy of the central governments. Some West African countries such as Equatorial Guinea might eventually fall in this category, though there is limited legitimacy to the government as yet.

The population in South Sudan is still very supportive of the new government, and has very high expectations of peace dividend. The achievement of independence has however also diminished the need for political unity, and the political spectrum is diversifying again, and old grievances are re-emerging. Nevertheless the government is clearly emerging as a key development driver (for example through the New Deal), and the linking of communities to government will build a solid base for peace and development. This might happen in the other countries as well, provided the central government gains legitimacy, and for this to happen complementary mechanisms (UN) are also required at the central level.

Delivering the peace dividend to the periphery is essential. In most countries there are NGOs, whether local or international, that have a long-term working experience at grassroots level, and their in-depth understanding of the situation, though often poorly documented, is of enormous value in developing intervention strategies, jointly with the emerging government. Resources are always limited in early recovery, and a competition for scarce resources between government and NGOs, must be carefully managed.

More care is required in transferring lessons from South Sudan to countries that experienced a less protracted political crisis, for example Liberia and Sierra Leone. Governance systems re-emerge fairly quickly in those contexts, though they often display low accountability and competency. Linking communities to governance is also important in these countries, though the dynamics differ somewhat. In a country like Mali, which is going through an immediate crisis, even more care is required in transferring lessons, as systematic weaknesses may be hardly documented. Post conflict reconstruction, in any situation with limited governance legitimacy, is always a political minefield, with much potential to do harm, and a very thorough political economy analysis is required before lessons are adapted and transferred.

The emerging theory of change around gender and peace evident in this program seems to have a very high potential. It still needs work to properly distil this, and document it, but this might prove very relevant in a number of other post-conflict countries.

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[22] Human Rights, the Church, and post-war Sudan, Eduardo Hiiboro Kussala

Funding options for AusAID

AusAID is a relatively new donor for South Sudan, and has no presence in-country. The following chapter is partly based on interviews during this evaluation and partly on the extensive experience of the evaluators with other funding mechanisms in South Sudan, literature on the subject and the opinions expressed by other donors, implementers and beneficiaries.

This evaluation shows that the combination of Australian NGO, implementing International NGO, and local partners was particularly strong in this funding round for interventions at the peripheral level. The strong interaction with government at local level, down to payam (sub-district), and with civil society, demonstrates the particular strength to this way of working.

The management burden on AusAID of this funding mechanism[23] is relatively low thanks to a strong accreditation process of ANGOs and well-established procedures and accountability procedures.
The direct link gives the Australian government the potential to be well informed of developments in Africa and achieve relatively high visibility. The ANGOs further actively inform the Australian public as part of their mandate and thus ensure that a constituency in Australia continues to support investing in development.

A particular strength of this funding round through Australian NGOs is 1) the focus at county level, something that is relatively ignored by other larger donors, 2) that the interventions are mainly in areas that are generally considered to be in emergency and yet these interventions manage to do early recovery, or even early development, and 3) that most of these interventions have deliberate elements of "making peace in the community". Funding a consortium of ANGOs, with one lead agency, is an equally viable option[24].

Direct funding of reputable INGOs would pose a somewhat higher management burden on AusAID. The global systems of the reputable INGOs by now meet global standards, but are not necessarily fully compliant with Australian regulations.
The INGO systems benefit from economy of scale, and pays much lower salaries and benefits than the UN systems. At field level AusAID would get a similar quality of work, but it would 1) lose to some degree its ability to influence policy in Africa, 2) it would be considerably less informed on what is happening on the ground, and 3) AusAID would have less visibility. It would further 4) have much less constituency building in Australia for overseas development assistance.

With direct INGO funding the ability of the ANGOs to raise funds from the public would diminish somewhat. The Australian NGOs are trusted by the Australian public to make good use of their hard-earned money, in a development context that is often perceived as corrupt. According to ACFID, the Australian NGOs active in humanitarian and development issues raise about $ 850 million from the public each year, while they received $ 110 million from AusAID in 2012-2013. Having an organisation close to home that can be held accountable plays a major role in this trust. Most of these Australian NGOs are in the process of forming alliances with similar named NGOs in other countries, usually in the form of XXXX International. These International Alliances are however far from Australia, and still have to build that brand and trust. A message of "I was there, I saw the problem, and I saw that the work was good, and the money spent carefully" just raises more money in Australia if communicated in an accessible way (through Australian personalities or with an Australian accent for example).
The Australian NGOs provide considerable amounts of technical and management support to "their" projects, possibly to a value in excess of their 10% of the AusAID budget. When INGOs are funded directly, that support will have to come from somewhere, and this will obviously appear in the INGO budget, though this time as a direct costing. It is by no means certain that this would lead to any real savings.

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[23] A consortium construction would further reduce the AusAID management burden, but shift that to the consortium lead. As consortium systems will take time to mature, this might be more costly short-term.

[24] As already mentioned in the Aid Effectiveness Review.

For a Government donor like AusAID, funding of trusted UN bodies is a very attractive option from a management perspective. The Australian Multilateral Assessment provides a very sensible guidance on which agencies to support and their comparative strengths. As an example, the gender indicators for South Sudan are very poor and AusAID priorities gender issues. The newly formed UN Women is now charged with seeking to sharpen the focus and impact of the gender equality activities of the entire United Nations system – South Sudan may be an option for this sort of work.

While some UN organisations are rated as very effective and competent, all have higher overheads (and thus lower efficiency) than comparable NGOs. They tend to work at a higher level, as opposed to the community level, and while they have the big picture, local understanding tends to be weaker. There is a tendency to leave much of the field implementation to INGOs and LNGOs in a subcontracting relationship, rather than a true partnership, and skill transfer tends to be less. NGOs thus clearly have a role to play, and any involved donor should channel part of its funding through non-governmental channels.

The evaluators are of the opinion that bilateral assistance, particularly technical assistance, should play a role in Australia's assistance to South Sudan. South Sudan is at very high risk of becoming a victim of the "resource curse"[25], and Australia's is fully committed to fighting this curse through its M4D (Mining for Development) initiative[26], though the oil sector and South Sudan are not part of M4D. The extensive experience of Australia with mineral extraction is of enormous value for South Sudan, and TA, in cooperation with Norway (another medium-size independent donor) for the oil sector, could be scaled up. There may be other niches outside mining with a high potential for technical cooperation, and a high development and peace impact,[27] for example meat for export.

Funding through pooled funds seems an attractive option and fully in line with the "New Deal" approach. The New Deal report of South Sudan was released in December 2012, but had not yet reached the field level in South Sudan, even though at least one of the NGOs (Oxfam) had been involved in the consultations leading up to the report.

Initial experiences with pooled funds in South Sudan were however somewhat disappointing. The MDTF (Multiple Donor Trust Fund) was not an overwhelming success, while the evaluation of the Basic Services Fund is still pending. The Common Humanitarian Fund has some teething problems, while the Pooled Health Fund has hardly started up, and its model in Afghanistan has mixed reports. These new initiatives certainly deserve support, and the evaluators would suggest that AusAID does not just supply financial support, but also helps to make sure that this modality has sufficient technical support and, potentially independent external, quality assurance mechanisms.

AusAID representation

For any medium sized donor it is also important to have an in-country presence. Remote management is possible but has many drawbacks.

In the absence of an Embassy in South Sudan, Australia could consider the following options in future:

- Establish a small freestanding one or two person AusAID office in Juba. This might be housed in an existing "camp", similar to the way the British Council currently does in the AFEX camp.
- The Swiss Development Cooperation has a similar, somewhat bigger, setup with its own compound that also houses a consular section of the Swiss Embassy in Ethiopia. The head of office is not an ambassador or charge d'affaires, but nevertheless enjoys near diplomatic access to government.

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[25] http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/08/17/the_devil_s_excrement

[26] http://www.abc.net.au/unleashed/4702518.html

[27] Local conflicts are often portrayed as based on ethnicity. Quite often the root cause however is competition over land and water. The creation of markets, and the introduction of modernized production can increase livelihood and decrease conflict, though it does not automatically do so.

This construction underlines the neutrality of the Swiss, and allows them "to punch above their weight". This might be an attractive option for Australia in the medium term.

- A hosting arrangement with another embassy is certainly possible and could be implemented rather fast. Commonwealth countries are an obvious choice for Australia. The UK embassy is a potential host, though that would create the perception that Australia is closely aligned to UK policy, and as the UK embassy is in the European Union compound, also aligned to EU policy. In that respect the Canadian embassy could be a better option. Norway also deserves exploring if Australia would wish to pursue a more independent and stronger role in South Sudan. Links already exist through the technical advisors in the ministry of petroleum and mining.
- A dedicated desk officer within the AusAID office in Nairobi can be implemented near instantly. It would provide much less access to the Juba meetings circuit, but would hardly be a limitation to field visits (under the UN security umbrella). This could be an appropriate short-term solution pending the establishing a presence in South Sudan.

In all the above scenarios a (part-time) person would still be required in Australia to act as a liaison with the ANGOs, the diaspora, the public and the political level. In all cases this should be a staff member dedicated to South Sudan and experienced with the portfolios, and any handover must be managed appropriately.

AusAID and ANGO relationships (key question v)

The partnership between AusAID, Australian NGOs, International NGOs and local NGOs was clearly a successful one in this funding round. At the local level there is evidence of not just early recovery, but early development, with what will likely prove to be a lasting impact.
The scale of the local impact is obviously small, if compared to the needs in the whole of the new country, but it is proof that this kind of early recovery intervention at the level of community/payam/county does work, even in a context that traditionally would be considered as still only suitable for emergency interventions. Some steps clearly have been made in community peace building, though no measurements took place. The telephone interviews confirm that there was clear evidence of governance building at the local level, and there are indications that there were at least some contributions to policy strengthening at the national level.

The funding round was thinly spread, and lasted only two years. Quite likely more impact could have been achieved, both in the field as well as at South Sudan policy level, had the grant been more focussed, possibly involving only two or three sectors, and of a somewhat longer duration.

The relationships between AusAID and the ANGOs was very closely cooperative in the design phase and the first phase of implementation, but suffered serious interruptions in 2012, and was then re-established in early 2013.

The "learning lead" experiment functioned sub-optimally. There were several reasons for this.

- The learning lead role was poorly defined. The lead agency Oxfam had no activities nor budget in their proposal and grant documents, there were no learning questions and no methodologies
- The role of the participating agencies was not clear. The joint learning was not in the grant contracts and a Memorandum of Understanding with Oxfam was lacking. As a result they did not allocate resources, in particular person time, to this objective.
- The start of the projects suffered serious delays due to factors outside the control of the NGOs. In the rush to achieve delayed targets in field activities, learning went to the background.
- An important opportunity to refocus on learning was missed. The mid-term evaluation of second half of 2012 was to coincide with an interim learning report. When the mid-term evaluation did not happen the interim learning report seems to have been "forgotten" in the pressure of field work.

In a further grant the activities and deliverables of the lead agency must be clear, and of course with a budget line. The participating agencies must be equally clear about their expected contributions, whether through the grant contract or through MoUs with the lead agency, and they must as a minimum dedicate staff time to the learning component.

In order to ensure robust methodologies and proper documentation, the addition of some form of academic expertise to the experienced field practitioners should be considered. A working group of ACFID and Australian University representatives already exists, but the emerging universities of Juba could also be included.

The conclusion must be that early recovery funding through Australian NGOs is a suitable mechanism for delivering assistance to rural areas of South Sudan, which are badly underfunded. Certainly if the funding could be somewhat less diluted and somewhat longer-term, and with a stronger learning component, robust results are possible.

AusAID is developing its strategy for South Sudan, and it would be of tremendous benefit to involve the ANGOs in this strategy development process. While it may not be possible to discuss future funding, it would give the ANGOs (with their partners) an opportunity to present their case, and AusAID would benefit from a tremendous amount of field experience. The situation in South Sudan remains very fluid, and it is everybody's hope that early recovery can be abandoned and a move towards development can be made, but an early recovery approach, with the possibility to switch back to emergency or forward to development, will likely be required for quite a few more years.

OCD/DAC Ratings for the overall programme
(ratings for the individual ANGOs can be found in annex 1)

Relevance

Rating: 5

This action was very much in line with AusAID's five goals of saving lives, promoting opportunities for all, sustainable economic development, effective governance and humanitarian and disaster preparedness. Only when addressing 'opportunities for all' does the objective deviate slightly from the aim of tertiary education, in favour of accelerated primary education. This choice was fully appropriate in the context of South Sudan, where primary education has been so severely disrupted due to the lengthy war, and hardly any candidates with secondary education were available for a tertiary education programme.
The intervention was delivered by trusted and accredited organisations, in line with AusAID strategy and Aid Effectiveness Review 2011.

The action was also fully in line with South Sudan's updated Aid Strategy 2011 (though the project was developed when this strategy was still in development) and the priorities of the Fragility Assessment under the New Deal, (though the draft of this assessment was only published towards the end of life of this grant).

The level of the interventions, at state level and below, was something that was very much required in the current state of development of the new country, and involved an underfunded area. The current disconnect between the policy level in the capital and the harsh realities of the periphery can clearly not be solved by this relatively small program, but the lessons learned here can inform further actions, especially regarding governance (and thus peace building) at the devolved levels.

The choice of the geographical intervention areas goes somewhat against the current thinking of major donors, many of whom divide the country into emergency areas (the border states) and development areas (the three Equatorias). This rather development oriented early recovery action shows that this approach is feasible and appropriate even in very fragile areas of the country, and thus one of the potential solutions to moving South Sudan out of severe dependence on aid, 56% of which is currently spent (UNDP) on emergency assistance. The evaluators are of the opinion that this "ground breaking" program is a very relevant role for a medium sized donor.

The component of "making peace" running through all sectoral interventions, going well beyond the peace benefit thinking, seems a viable approach that could be followed by other donors. If properly analysed and distilled, Australia could advocate this approach in the Security Council as an additional tool in post-conflict environments.

Effectiveness

Rating: 4 (5 for the implementation part, 3 for the learning part)

In spite of serious unexpected setbacks at the first year of implementation, three out of the four grantees are likely to achieve their output targets, or slightly exceed them. A three months no cost extension is expected to be confirmed, largely to enable a proper finalisation of the projects and measurement of results. The education project needed to lower its enrolment target by about 25 per cent, as one of the operational areas became inaccessible for security reasons, which shifted the emphasis of the project from quantity to quality. It is not clear whether AusAID formally approved this change. Despite these challenges, the project achieved satisfactory results, with an unprecedented (for the age group in the South Sudan context) enrolment rate of 35% female students.

All projects proved strong in gender, and all had a very good component of "peace making". Whereas most other projects in South Sudan report considerable underperformance in this period (the first years of independence) these projects performed very well overall.

However the learning component was impacted by a serious delay, and will likely not fully deliver expected results[28], even if some degree of catch-up can be expected in the final five months.

Efficiency

Rating: 4

Operating costs in South Sudan are known to be among the highest in the world. The harsh terrain and very limited infrastructure hugely inflate the costs of all commodities. Qualified South Sudanese senior and technical personnel are scarce as a result of decades of conflict, and wages are thus high. Relatively large complements of expensive expatriate expertise are still required. The total cost of an expatriate posting within the embassy and UN system is above USD 300,000 per year, though NGOs seem to manage at considerably lower cost.

The strong drive of the newly independent government to have more national staff filling positions may have helped reduced costs, but resulted in long recruitment delays, less experienced personnel, and a loss of effectiveness over the short term. It must be noted here that, for example, the staffing budgets may initially increase as the focus shifts to a more developmental approach, as much more time must be spent on joint planning, and building the capacity of counterparts. Building the capacity of counterparts and preparing national staff to take over senior functions in NGOs will also temporarily require a higher calibre of international staff than if expatriates were to simply perform these functions themselves.

The short timeframe of the evaluation, and the inability of the team to visit operational locations, did not allow for a proper assessment of the efficiency of the operational systems of the NGOs. The evaluation could only confirm that the systems of all four NGOs within South Sudan were the global systems of their international offices, which meet stringent global standards. The influence of the efficiency drives of USAID, DFID and the EC were clearly evident. The team did not note any instances of gross inefficiencies within the South Sudan operations. Pictures of the field showed rather Spartan living and working conditions for NGO staff.

The Budgets

The evaluators had no access to actual expenditures, only the budgets for the projects, and noted that these were very reasonable for emergency interventions, and modest for the high-cost South Sudan operating context. These budgets would not have been sufficient for a development type project. A more traditionally development orientated program would usually contain considerable budget allocations for capacity building of counterparts, a rather lengthy joint planning period, and realistic allocations for establishing of baselines, monitoring evaluation, documentation and dissemination. These were not evident in the budgets the evaluation team examined.
Early recovery sits somewhere between emergency and development, and no consensus exists as yet on reasonable budget allocations for the developmental components that are inherent to early recovery.
The M&E components in budget (and narrative) may have been sufficient for the emergency approach the NGO (and donor) were used to working with, but they were insufficient for the early recovery approach.

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[28] Though it is not documented what results were specifically expected beyond the very broad phrase "to inform future AusAID programming and funding prioritisation"

NGO Systems

In the past, the NGOs concerned often had separate offices in-country for each different donor. Now all the four NGOs have a "Unified Country Presence" and are in various stages of becoming true "International" or "Alliance" organisations. The implementing NGOs now each have joint support systems such as senior management, HR, logistics and finance, and technical assistance, for a multitude of projects and donors, thus greatly increasing efficiency. The differing reporting requirements of donors, and at times awkward procurement rules, still somewhat limit this efficiency drive. Only the donors can solve this issue by agreeing on more uniform requirements.

Further efficiency gains are obviously possible. Joint logistical chains for all NGOs working in a common geographical area in particular would potentially bring considerable long-term savings, but requires high up-front investment. Donors have so far been reluctant to invest in common logistic chains, and even the shining example UNHAS (United Nations Humanitarian Air Services) continues to struggle to attract funding, even though all actors agree that it is essential and working well.

Risk management was well developed with all 4 implementing NGOs, not surprising in view of their long working history in this volatile environment. Management of security risks was particularly strong, and this is the area where the best examples of cooperation have been achieved between agencies, the UN and NGOs. AusAID should consider the effectiveness of this excellent security network, and consider immediately lifting the blanket travel ban for areas outside of Juba.

Thanks to the long field experience of the NGOs, they were also strong in managing the local political risks. The South Sudanese staff often had a deep insight into the political economy of the area, though this was rarely formally documented. This insight allowed the NGOs to limit doing harm, and was the foundation of peace building activities.

Fiduciary management was described by all as challenging, but, based on other audits (EC, USAID, DFID etc.) of the INGOs concerned, is fairly mature and suitable for the context. Tendering procedures are transparent, though cartels and high-level corruption are still problematic, but the internal auditing functions were well developed.

The implementing INGO office provided all the support functions to the projects, such as security, logistics, HR and finance, in an efficient manner according to audits by other major donors. The project managers of the AusAID grant had dual reporting lines, one to Juba to the implementing country director or his delegate for formal reporting within the INGO systems, and an active management and technical support line to the Australian NGO and onwards to AusAID. The mandate and time frame of this evaluation did not allow a full analysis of this dual line of command.

The overall efficiency of the Australian component could not be assessed in the course of this evaluation, which only visited Juba. The evaluation team can however confirm that the project officers from Australia, whom we interviewed both in person in Juba and by Skype from Australia, had a very strong involvement in managing the projects, as had the learning and advocacy staff from Australia. In one case (Care) technical support was provided by regional staff from the Australian NGO. Support for the M&E components could come either from Juba from an INGO staff member, or from the Australian NGO.

As no information was gathered on the activities of the ANGOs in Australia, no judgement can be made whether this represented "value for money". It is however clear that the technical support from Australia provided considerable value to project implementation, and ensured accountability towards AusAID.

Gender Equality

Rating: 5

Gender was paramount throughout all projects, and well implemented. Encouraging outcomes are visible both at field and at policy level, but impact will be slow to eventuate.

It is encouraging to see that gender was strongly incorporated in sectoral designs, not as a stand-alone objective, whether it was water, health or livelihoods. All implementing NGOs had completed extensive

gender analysis, and applied best practices, in the context of their whole South Sudan portfolio,[29] and linked this with their specific local experience in project design, though in an informal manner. None however did a local specific gender analysis, nor were local gender baselines collected. This informal integration was also true of the "making peace" aspects of the program. All had some form of South Sudan conflict analysis, and that was applied to the local context.

All NGO staff interviewed linked gender and peace. This ranged from simple formulations about men contributing to war and women keeping the peace, to theories of change around reducing competition over resources through female economic empowerment. These ideas were soundly rooted in practical experience, but had not yet been fully articulated. In this funding round, gender and peace went beyond mainstreaming. All NGOs had already identified these as key issues to be addressed in South Sudan, throughout all sectors. Gender and peace were at the heart of each project. This joint approach, across sectors, might be an important focus in further calls for proposals for NGOs to be funded by AusAID.

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[29] This material does not seem to have been shared with AusAID as yet.

Conclusions

The design of this additional funding round came at an appropriate time in the run-up to independence of South Sudan. The overarching objectives of early recovery and learning to inform AusAID's strategy were appropriate to the development needs of South Sudan and were useful to AusAID's program development. The choice of restricting partners to accredited and trusted Australian NGOs was prudent in this fluid context. The ANGOs and the selection process by AusAID showed courage and innovation by awarding this developmental oriented funding round to projects in areas that were considered by other donors to be in a state of emergency. The intervention portfolio was a sound mix of water, health education and livelihood interventions, which involved four sectors, over five states – unfortunately this meant that the funding was spread thinly over several areas.

There were two other innovations: the involvement of the diaspora, and the explicit learning component for AusAID. The learning component was however not well defined, with deliverables, activities and a budget missing, and while the diaspora component did have a budget, it was very vague on objectives.

Implementation was slow to start, due to a variety of unforeseen circumstances that affected all of the development agencies in South Sudan. The most significant issue was the unresolved oil dispute between the South Sudan and the Republic of Sudan, which caused an economic crisis in both, and a closure of borders. The ANGOs dealt with this challenge in an exemplary way, and are likely to achieve their targets.

Due to capacity constraints, AusAID did not query this slow start, and a planned mid-term review and organisational learning action did not happen in the second half of 2012 as initially envisioned.

The maturity and strength of the axis of Australian NGOs, International NGOs and Local NGOs ensured that the pace of implementation continued, without continuous scrutiny by the donor, however the overarching learning objective, which was rather new to both AusAID South Sudan desk and the (still emergency oriented) South Sudan branches[30] of the NGOs, disappeared to the background, only to reappear on the agenda in early 2013.

At the time of this evaluation (April 2013) all four NGOs are well on track to reaching their implementation targets, within the three months no-cost extension, but are currently underperforming on the learning objective (though there are indications that this will be remedied somewhat by an extension).

The pilot diaspora component was successful, but also showed that any diaspora involvement is politically very sensitive and needs to be treated with caution.

The overall score is 5 for relevance, and 4 for efficiency. Effectiveness scored 4 overall. The implementation of the projects was particularly effective with a score of 5, but the learning component delivered significantly below expectation, and can only be scored 3[31], making a 4 overall. If the learning component catches up in the extension phase (even to 4) the overall effectiveness of this funding round would move to 5. The gender score is 5, and the evaluators were impressed that gender was not just mainstreamed, but truly at the heart of all actions, joined together with a "making peace" element.

Early recovery interventions are clearly an appropriate approach in the current context of South Sudan, however the design and M&E components of this program of funding remained more appropriate to an emergency intervention, rather than early recovery.

In further interventions a stronger situational analysis will be required and M&E frameworks will need considerable strengthening.

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[30] The problem of separate desks for emergency and development not only affects donors, but also NGOs.

[31] If the scores were weighted by budget allocation (as DFID does) the learning objective would have zero weight, and the overall effectiveness score would now be five already.

Annexes

1) Assessment of the individual projects and NGOs
2) List of people interviewed
3) Terms of Reference evaluation
4) Evaluation Plan
5) Call for proposals