



Missed Out:

The role of local actors in the humanitarian response in the South Sudan conflict



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Cover: Women assisting in a food distribution in Mingkaman, South Sudan

Alison Martin/Oxfam

ⁱ ActionAid is a partner in the 'Missed Opportunities' and 'Missed Again' research series, but is not present in South Sudan.

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Acronyms

ACT	Action by Churches Together
CBO	Community-based organisation
CERF	Common Emergency Response Fund
CHF	Common Humanitarian Fund
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HPF	Health Pooled Fund
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICWG	Inter Cluster Working Group
IDP	Internally displaced person
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
NFIs	Non-food items
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NNGO	National non-governmental organisation
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD-DAC	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
OLS	Operation Lifeline Sudan
POC	Protection of Civilians
RRF	Rapid Response Fund
SPLM-IO	Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition
SRP	Strategic Response Plan
UN	United Nations
UNIDO	Universal Intervention and Development Organisation
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

Glossary

Term	
Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF)	The CHF is a pooled funding mechanism that was set up in South Sudan in 2012. It is one of four CHFs globally and is designed to support the allocation and disbursement of joint donor resources to meet the most critical needs. Allocation processes take into account complementary funding mechanisms such as the UN Central Emergency Response Fund and bilateral funding arrangements. Since December 2013, more than \$199 million has been allocated from the CHF. ²
Cluster	Clusters are groups of humanitarian actors that include UN agencies and NGOs. There is a cluster for each of the main sectors of a humanitarian response, such as health, food security and logistics. The cluster is responsible for coordinating agencies' responses.
Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)	The HCT is a decision-making and oversight forum responsible for agreeing the common strategic issues related to the humanitarian action.
Humanitarian Coordinator	The Humanitarian Coordinator is a UN high-level official responsible for ensuring that the response is well organised and delivered in accordance with humanitarian principles. He or she leads the HCT in deciding appropriate coordination solutions and which clusters to establish.
Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)	The IASC is the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian responses. It includes UN and non-UN actors and supports effective humanitarian delivery, including design of humanitarian policies, identifying gaps in response, defining clear divisions of responsibility, and advocating for the application of humanitarian principles. ³
Level 3 activation	When IASC declares a Level 3 activation, it activates a humanitarian system-wide response for an initial period of three months. The Level 3 activation commits IASC organisations to mobilise resources, coordination mechanisms and systems.
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC)	The OECD/DAC is a forum for discussing issues related to aid, development and poverty reduction in developing countries. OECD/DAC developed a set of criteria for evaluating complex emergencies in 1999. The criteria, used in this report, are relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coverage and connectedness.
Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)	OCHA is a UN agency responsible for bringing together humanitarian actors to ensure a coherent response to emergencies. ⁴
Principles of Partnership	In recognition of the need for partnership to become a more integral aspect of humanitarian response, the Global Humanitarian Platform adopted the Principles in 2007. They are designed to support strengthening of partnerships between national and international organisations on the basis of equal value, transparency and trust.
Strategic Response Plan	The Strategic Response Plan is a countrywide strategy that includes the objectives and priorities for the humanitarian response.

Executive summary

South Sudan is one of the world's poorest countries and has a long history of conflict and humanitarian intervention. Since the latest conflict erupted in December 2013, more than 2.3 million people have been forced to flee their homes, and 3.9 million (approximately one third of the population) do not have enough to eat. An estimated 30,000 are facing catastrophic food insecurity.⁵ All humanitarian actors struggle to respond to these acute needs against a context of chronic poverty, ongoing conflict and insecurity, limited infrastructure and a significant funding shortfall. Local, national and international actors all bring important contributions to this response.

This is the latest in a series of research papers commissioned by ActionAid UK,⁶ CAFOD and Trócaire in Partnership, Christian Aid, Oxfam GB and Tearfund on the subject of humanitarian partnerships. *Missed Opportunities: The case for strengthening national and local partnership-based humanitarian responses*⁷ established the value of local and national organisations in responding to humanitarian emergencies, and *Missed Again: Making space for partnership in the Typhoon Haiyan response*⁸ looked at partnerships within the context of a disaster caused by a natural hazard. This study seeks to understand the strengths and challenges of working with national and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in South Sudan's conflict-driven emergency following the escalation of conflict on 15 December 2013, and reviews how the broader humanitarian system facilitates or prevents their involvement. The findings of this study are based on interviews with a broad cross-section of humanitarian actors in South Sudan between April and June 2015, and a thorough desk review. The research, was conducted by one national and one international researcher in both government and Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO) held areas and included 51 interviews with representatives of national organisations, international NGOs (INGOs), United Nations (UN) agencies and donors, government and local authorities, and nine focus group discussions with national NGOs (NNGOs), community members and faith leaders.

The report evaluates the roles that national organisations have played in the humanitarian response in South Sudan against the OECD-DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coverage and connectedness. It finds that:

- Local and national organisations contribute significantly to the **relevance** of the humanitarian response in South Sudan through their proximity to disaster-affected communities, their understanding of culture and language, and their sensitivity to

political and social dynamics. Nonetheless, closeness to affected communities varied significantly between organisations. In some cases, relevance has also been undermined by concerns over national organisations' neutrality and contingent ability to act impartially. Moreover, the potential ability of national actors to respond to women's priorities is not being realised, due to the lack of involvement of women's organisations in the response and the limited number of female staff in senior positions in national organisations.

- National and local organisations contribute to the **effectiveness** of the humanitarian response through ad hoc timely action, communicating with communities and strengthening accountability to communities. Their capacity was often poorly understood and underestimated by international organisations. However, their work has also been constrained by poor communication and low human resource capacity.
- The comparative advantages of national and international NGOs in terms of **efficiency** are complex. National and local organisations have operated with significantly lower overheads and staff costs, and when funds are scarce, some staff work without salaries. However, strong, mutually beneficial partnerships require significant investment from INGOs for support, training, monitoring and organisational strengthening.
- **Coverage** of humanitarian assistance has been a significant challenge in South Sudan. Vast distances separated affected communities. Direct delivery by INGOs accounted for much of the coverage in the response. The majority of South Sudanese NGOs were relatively localised in their reach and thus limited in their ability to scale up. However, they played a crucial and complementary role in improving coverage of hard-to-access areas and in reaching remote communities.
- The **connectedness** of the humanitarian response in South Sudan has been moderate. Fluctuating funding priorities and changing conflict dynamics posed significant barriers. A lack of funding for recovery and resilience programmes limited opportunities to help communities rebuild their coping mechanisms. However, in some instances, connectedness has been enhanced by partnerships established prior to the crisis.

While relevance was assessed as 'good', other criteria were seen as 'moderate'. Just as in the Typhoon Haiyan response, the potential contribution of national and local NGOs to the humanitarian response has not been realised.⁹

The successes and limitations of local partnerships do not exist in a vacuum but are shaped by the broader humanitarian system, which has the potential to promote or prevent collaboration, transparency and inclusivity. This research found that the structures, norms and processes of the system in South Sudan remain internationally led and often hinder the participation of national actors.

Involvement of national actors in the **humanitarian coordination mechanism** in South Sudan is constrained by a number of significant barriers. Local community-based organisations (CBOs) are often based outside Juba, have limited logistical capacity, and struggle to attend coordination meetings. Some larger NNGOs have shifted resources to facilitate a greater presence in Juba, but this has sometimes come at the expense of proximity to their grassroots constituencies. Cultural and linguistic differences further discourage participation, reflecting findings from Typhoon Haiyan that national actors feel out of place within the humanitarian system.

These constraints are strongly linked to barriers in accessing **funding**. Funding opportunities in South Sudan are dominated by a small number of large pooled funding mechanisms. Successfully accessing this funding depends on an organisation's ability to produce proposals, knowledge of how proposals are ranked, presence in Juba and visibility within the cluster system. Most NNGOs and CBOs therefore receive funding via larger international organisations, and the majority of these **partnerships** are of a sub-contracting nature, often short-term, project-specific and prescriptive. National actors do not have resources to reinvest in organisational development and capacity building which, in turn, further undermines their ability to access pooled or bilateral funding. The research also found that concerted effort to address these issues – particularly through a NNGO adviser based at OCHA and the NGO Forum (an independent coordinating body of national and international NGOs) – has been effective.

The report identifies four broad categories of national actors: well known, large NNGOs which are based in Juba and receive direct funding from pooled fund mechanisms and manage budgets of over \$1 million a year; NNGOs which are active in the cluster system and may receive some direct funding; implementing

partner NNGOs, which are often smaller organisations without a Juba base; and CBOs, including faith-based organisations (FBOs). Findings suggest that in order to realise the potential contribution of these different types of organisation, humanitarian strategies should be context specific and collaborative, with a focus on embedding involvement of national actors from the start. The most effective humanitarian partnerships to emerge in South Sudan are based on complementarity, where the comparative advantages of national organisations have been complemented and supported by those of internationals. The most successful partnerships were established pre-crisis and facilitated rapid and effective scale up.

The humanitarian system and investment in partnership in South Sudan need to adapt substantially before the potential contribution of national actors is realised and a shared sense of ownership achieved. The system remains internationally led and exclusive, consistently recognising the role of just a few NNGOs and not allowing space for the diversity of national actors. While international organisations bring essential professional expertise and mechanisms, complementarity is not favoured in a system that prioritises immediacy and short-term value for money. Moving forward, concepts of partnership should consist of flexible ways of enhancing capabilities and capacities, and explore more innovative approaches to enhance comparative advantages. Maximising the role of national actors will require changes to the humanitarian system, including to the way in which donors, the UN and INGOs support the capacity of national actors as professional humanitarians, going beyond a tick box approach to representation. Power imbalances need to be addressed and spaces created, particularly at a local level, where the full range of national organisations can take part in decision making.

The similarity in findings between South Sudan, the Typhoon Haiyan response and the *Missed Opportunities* research, despite the different contexts, suggests that the role of national actors remains a distinct challenge for the humanitarian community. The international humanitarian community must redouble its efforts to develop supportive, long-term partnerships and to build local capacity and resilience before, during and after an emergency, and ensure that the humanitarian coordination system is accessible to national actors.



I. Introduction

Members of a displaced community pour corn into individual bags during a distribution of food and non-food items to displaced families in Kotobi.

I.1. Purpose of the research

Recent years have seen the emergence of new humanitarian actors based in the global south, many of them significant in scale and impact.¹⁰ National and local actors have an important role in responding to humanitarian emergencies. As *Missed Opportunities* found, when international aid organisations work in partnership with local and national groups their efforts tend to be more effective, relevant and appropriate to the people they are trying to help.¹¹ At the same time, the rapid increase in the scale, frequency and complexity of emergencies is making the importance of local capacity ever more acute.¹² While the UN's annual global appeal for humanitarian aid has risen 500% in the last decade, by December 2015, only 49% of requirements had been met.¹³ More effective partnerships with national and local actors lead not only to a better response but also to better value for money.¹⁴

However, there continues to be a wide gap between partnership rhetoric and practice. Many international organisations are reluctant to work in meaningful partnerships with national organisations, often perceiving them as lacking in capacity and accountability mechanisms, or unable to deliver aid impartially. Moreover, the way the humanitarian system is financed, coordinated, staffed, assessed and delivered is increasingly criticised for marginalising local capacity.¹⁵ This research seeks to document and review the role of local and national NGOs in South Sudan in response to the current humanitarian crisis, and to evaluate their interaction with different levels of the humanitarian system. It examines the strengths and challenges they face in delivering humanitarian assistance, and how the humanitarian system facilitates, promotes or inhibits their inclusion in a conflict context.

I.2. Methodology

The research was conducted by Dr Lydia Tanner, a research consultant who has been working on South Sudan since 2010, and Dr Leben Moro, a researcher and lecturer at the University of Juba. The methodology is the same as that used in the *Missed Opportunities* research, which assessed the potential of partnerships according to each of the OECD-DAC criteria for evaluating humanitarian aid: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coverage and connectedness.¹⁶ The research is built on a review of 113 documents regarding the humanitarian response in South Sudan, partnerships in South Sudan, partnerships in humanitarian responses globally, and emerging findings on the current response; and key informant interviews and focus groups with UN agencies and donors (five interviews, attended by six men and no women), government and local authority (five interviews, attended by 13 men and no women), INGOs (17 interviews, attended by nine men and 19 women), NNGOs¹⁷ (24 interviews and two focus group discussions with 12 organisations, attended by 40 men and 13 women), and community members and faith leaders (seven focus group discussions, attended by 41 men and 27 women).

The team met with donors, government and humanitarian organisations in Juba and conducted further research visits to Aweil (Northern Bahr el-Ghazal), Leer¹⁸ (Unity), and Mingkaman (Lakes). A visit to Melut¹⁹ (Upper Nile) was planned but could not be undertaken. The locations were selected to explore the roles played by local and national organisations in government and SPLM-IO areas, incorporating the range of acute humanitarian situations and low-level chronic scenarios.

The researchers identified local organisations to

interview by mapping the commissioning agencies' partner organisations as well as identifying organisations registered with the NNGO Forum via the Operational Presence 3W website.²⁰ CBOs were identified during visits to field locations as well as by communities, grassroots organisations and humanitarian actors

established there. The researchers engaged with staff from the organisations identified, including senior leadership, national-level staff, technical advisers, and implementers. The research was limited by the lack of collated data relating to organisations operating in the country.

Box 1: Background to the research

This report is part of a series of research projects originally commissioned by five UK development and humanitarian agencies that have been collaborating since early 2012 to document and research partnership experiences with local actors in humanitarian responses (Christian Aid, CAFOD, Oxfam, ActionAid and Tearfund). It builds on previous publications including the Christian Aid report *Building the Future of Humanitarian Aid: Local Capacity and Partnerships in Emergency Assistance*,²¹ and the inter-agency report *Missed Opportunities*²² and subsequent Typhoon Haiyan response case study.²³

These research papers focused on the agencies' own experiences of local and national-level partnerships. The South Sudan research builds on these publications, exploring issues of partnerships in the context of armed conflict, and attempting to understand their place in the wider humanitarian system.

Volunteers from a NNGO partner collect refuse to improve sanitary conditions at the Protection of Civilians site for internally displaced people in Topping, Juba.





2. The context of the humanitarian situation in South Sudan

Jerry cans waiting to be filled with clean water at a newly installed water point, built in response to concerns arising from a recent outbreak of cholera.

Violent conflict erupted in Juba, the capital of South Sudan, on 15 December 2013. It spread rapidly across Upper Nile, Jonglei and Unity states, while populations were displaced in Warrap, Lakes, Central and Eastern Equatoria states. The increased intensity of armed conflict in Unity and Upper Nile states since April 2015 triggered a new wave of displacement, and the conflict has since spread to parts of Greater Equatoria and Greater Bahr el Ghazal. Local survival mechanisms were depleted throughout 2014 and 2015 and populations have few remaining resources.²⁴ A Peace Agreement was signed in August 2015 yet in early 2016, conflict continues, more than 2.3 million people are displaced and the prospects are bleak.

The long legacy of humanitarian action in the country influences the attitudes of South Sudanese people today. Opportunities have repeatedly been missed to build the long-term capacity of local and national actors. Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) (1989–2005) set important precedents, particularly by negotiating with both parties to the conflict to secure access to civilians through humanitarian ceasefires and ‘corridors of tranquillity’.²⁵ Yet OLS also had negative consequences for South Sudan and has been criticised for: prolonging the conflict, fostering a sense of expectation and entitlement to aid, disrupting social relations in beneficiary communities and conferring legitimacy on non-state actors. This has resulted in limited ownership and participation in relief activities and decision-making by Sudanese institutions and beneficiaries.²⁶

Between the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 and the outbreak of conflict in 2013, South Sudan remained host to one of the world’s largest humanitarian responses, bringing together national and international humanitarian actors in an operation worth

more than \$1.2 billion in 2013.²⁷ Challenges included the continued presence of refugees, tensions with Sudan, internal displacement as a result of communal violence, and some of the worst development indicators in the world. NGOs played an important role in delivering basic services, scaling back humanitarian capacity as strategies transitioned towards post-conflict recovery and development. In the months before the crisis, South Sudan’s food security outlook was the best it had been in five years,²⁸ and there was much debate around how to link relief and development, and how to build resilience.

The outbreak of conflict in December 2013 took many of the resident humanitarian and development actors by surprise. The humanitarian community struggled to scale up to reach the worst affected areas, hampered in particular by limited access and preparedness. Representatives of national organisations and churches complained that they were largely sidelined by the international humanitarian response, despite playing important roles as first responders. The transition back to humanitarian programming was rapid and overwhelming, and organisations were forced to grapple with multiple challenges.

Whilst South Sudan received \$1.94 billion funding in 2014,²⁹ including the largest humanitarian pooled fund globally, as the conflict becomes more protracted, it is unlikely that this level of funding will be sustained – in 2015 total funding was \$1.33 billion, and only 65% of the Humanitarian Response Plan was funded.³⁰ Meanwhile, humanitarians are concerned that they will need to ‘achieve more, with less, and with higher stakes’³¹ in a context of a collapsing economy, ongoing insecurity and increasing irregular taxation, state regulation, harassment of aid workers, and looting of compounds.

3. The role of local and national actors

Displaced children with soap following an NFI distribution at a church compound in Katigiri.

South Sudan has a diverse civil society community. More than 200 national organisations are registered with the NGO Forum, and there are an estimated several hundred other CBOs, FBOs and civil society groups. This section examines the role that these

organisations have played in the humanitarian response in South Sudan, evaluating it against the OECD-DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coverage and connectedness.

Box 2: The diversity of national organisations in South Sudan

South Sudanese organisations can be broadly grouped into four categories:

1. NNGOs with funding > \$1 million

Seventeen South Sudanese organisations receive funding through the CHF. These are large, professional organisations which are confidently able to meet humanitarian standards. They work across multiple states and sectors and frequently employ skilled technical staff from other countries in the region. They often model their operations on INGOs and are sometimes seen as less connected to their original grassroots constituencies than smaller organisations are.

2. NNGOs active in the cluster system

An additional small group of approximately 20 organisations play an active role within the humanitarian cluster system. These organisations have projects registered with the cluster, are implementing partners for international organisations, and are striving to professionalise to attract funding.

3. Implementing partner NNGOs

A significant cohort of organisations do not receive direct funding but are implementing contractors for UN agencies, and some have long-term partnerships with INGOs. Most aspire to receive CHF funding

as a perceived means to become more financially independent. This group is often particularly frustrated by funding challenges.

4. Community-based organisations

There are an estimated 150 South Sudanese organisations that are not registered with the NGO Forum. Many of these are CBOs that operate in only one state, and are registered at the state level. They are often not part of the humanitarian cluster system and receive minimal formal funding, often through limited partnerships with INGOs. They include women's groups, small faith-based groups and churches, and civil society organisations addressing human rights issues. In opposition areas, many CBOs have closed because they are unable to access state offices and therefore unable to maintain their registration. For example, the SPLM-IO Relief and Rehabilitation Agency reported that there were 29 organisations active in Leer before 2013, but only four in April 2015.

This report will refer to organisations in categories 1-3 as NNGOs, unless otherwise specified, and organisations in category 4 as CBOs. National organisations or national actors will be used to refer to all four categories together.

3.1. Relevance: how well humanitarian activities meet local needs

Rating: Good

Key findings:

- National organisations (as well as national staff at international organisations) have strengthened the relevance of response through their understanding of the local context, barriers and language. This has strengthened the response of international actors. In a conflict context, local insights are a fundamental necessity for timely security updates, and to inform conflict sensitivity and the 'do no harm' principle.
- In some cases the relevance of national organisations has been challenged by concerns over neutrality and independence, exacerbated by the ethnic dimensions of the conflict, and their potential to reach women has not been fully realised.

Box 3: Benefits of working with NNGOs

Both national and international organisations cited a range of benefits to working with NNGOs, particularly relating to their proximity to communities and their wealth of contextual and cultural knowledge. In two focus groups, 12 NNGOs identified the following seven factors as the major benefits of working through national and local organisations:

1. Understanding of local context, language, traditions and culture
2. Access to hard-to-reach locations
3. Low overheads and staff costs
4. Good local ownership and sustainable solutions
5. Flexibility in responding to changing needs
6. Minimal bureaucracy
7. Good relationships with local authorities

In interviews, INGO representatives repeatedly only noted the first three benefits as valuable assets in local partnership.

Knowledge, understanding and communication

National organisations' understanding of the issues communities face was the most frequently cited benefit of partnership by both national and international organisations. All national organisations interviewed described taking time to sit with communities to discuss their needs, build relationships with traditional leadership, and share openly. One NNGO described how it works closely with communities to plan responses: at the start of a new project it gathers input from community-based staff, community members and the local authority and community leaders. A representative of the organisation said: '[The community] are open with us because they trust us... people feel that the organisation that is coming is theirs. It is an organisation that belongs to them'.³² This is seen as particularly valuable in longer-term programmes focused on peace building, reconciliation, resilience, behaviour change and sustainability.³³ INGOs further noted the advantage that NNGOs have in understanding and drawing on traditional coping mechanisms, cultural attitudes to gender and early warning systems.

Numerous examples were cited of local and national organisations engaging communities, understanding culture, and building trust. When an INGO in Aweil East encountered difficulties in distribution of food vouchers, a group of church leaders from three denominations was able to talk to the community about the purpose of the distribution and persuade those not included to let the distribution continue peacefully. The group was also well placed to understand and identify gaps in assistance: when vulnerable people were excluded it was the church representatives they sought out for help and information.

The ability of national actors to communicate effectively in local languages was also seen as a major advantage. Recent evaluations of major humanitarian responses have repeatedly raised concerns around how little local languages are used to communicate with beneficiary populations³⁴ often leading to increased stress, loss of influence and dignity and reduced ability to make informed decisions.³⁵ South Sudan has more than 60 indigenous languages and although English is the official language, conflict-affected communities, especially the most vulnerable families, rarely speak it.

Box 4: Emergency response in Leer

In February 2014, conflict broke out in Leer, Unity State. The community fled to the bush, where they lived on water lilies, grass roots, and occasionally slaughtering their livestock.³⁶ Staff from the Universal Intervention and Development Organisation (UNIDO) fled with them, carrying the generator and other valuable equipment on their heads.³⁷ They were able to update international aid workers on the humanitarian needs and to arrange a drop-off point for anti-retroviral drugs and other emergency medicines.³⁸

When the community returned, the International Committee of the Red Cross began conducting food drops in Leer Town. UNIDO was not able to provide food on the same scale, but in partnership with Christian Aid, provided cash vouchers for the most vulnerable households, non-food items (NFIs) and materials for temporary shelters. UNIDO spoke with local chiefs in order to understand which areas and which groups were most seriously affected and was able to bring assistance closer to the community and build trust.

In interviews, chiefs explained that there are areas close to the frontline that international staff can't reach that NNGOs can. Women in the community explained that 'when [the INGOs] come they bring a translator, but when UNIDO comes they speak to us in the local language.'³⁹

Increasing knowledge of other humanitarian actors

Particularly in the early phases of the response, local organisations provided their international counterparts with vital knowledge relating to access, security, cultural awareness and the rapidly changing scenario. INGOs, especially in field locations, relied on national organisations and national staff to gain a picture of what was happening,⁴⁰ through local knowledge on population movements, needs and security. Even when NNGOs could not contribute to the response practically, they were still able to provide information to partners and UN agencies. In Aweil, NNGOs located and reached displaced communities by bicycle and then informed INGOs working in the area of their presence. NNGOs made use of their local information networks, frequently walking long distances to collect information in places with no radio signal or access to technology.⁴¹

The extent to which local knowledge is used in the ongoing humanitarian response varies, with notable differences between capital and field level. In Juba, international organisations gather and share information through the NGO Forum and cluster system but rarely seek knowledge from NNGOs, faith leaders or other local actors.⁴² Instead, INGOs tend to look to their national staff for contextual insight. However, national staff are more likely to come from unaffected areas, and are less likely to maintain the wide network of local relationships that is vital for NNGOs. INGOs identified the pressure to respond rapidly and the high turnover of international staff as factors leading to the non-prioritisation of traditional and localised forms of knowledge.⁴³

At the field level, NNGOs regularly provide information on local needs assessments, security and geography, and INGOs report greater interaction with them.⁴⁴ In the three field locations visited during the course of this research, NNGOs were actively providing valuable information, particularly on security, to other humanitarian actors.

Challenges to relevance

Interviews during this study raised important challenges to the relevance of national actors' ability to respond. Larger NNGOs (categories 1 and 2), often based in Juba, risk becoming disconnected from the communities that they work with. Several communities interviewed were unable to differentiate between the INGOs and NNGOs working in their areas and community members said that they feel better represented by faith leaders or traditional leaders than civil society actors.

Furthermore, the politicisation of aid in South Sudan means that national actors are often perceived as neither neutral nor independent, calling into question their ability to deliver aid impartially. The conflict has divided the country into government- and SPLM-IO-controlled areas, and local staff are often unable to access areas across front lines. Over half the organisations working in opposition-controlled areas said they could not also work in government-controlled areas because of the ethnicity of their leadership or the perceived allegiances of their staff. INGOs explained that they did not adequately understand the ethnic dimensions to the conflict and therefore did not know who they could partner with where, and that the lines delineating local and national organisations, political parties and the State are sometimes blurred.⁴⁵ NNGOs explained how negative *perceptions* of independence and neutrality from INGOs and some communities places limits on their work.⁴⁶

There are, however, examples of NNGOs working across the divide and employing staff from a broad range of ethnic backgrounds. One organisation is working in both government- and opposition-controlled areas and employs both Nuer and Dinka staff in Juba. Their CEO explained: ‘the problem comes if you become affiliated

to one side; but we can work in both by remaining neutral’.⁴⁷ On the other hand, the history of INGOs’ own engagement in southern Sudan is fraught with questions over impartiality and neutrality, particularly in relation to their engagement with the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army during OLS.⁴⁸

Box 5: Neutrality and impartiality

Independence requires that humanitarian action is ‘autonomous from... political, economic, military or other objectives’, while *neutrality* requires that ‘humanitarian actors do not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature’.⁴⁹ In South Sudan, NNGOs need to maintain a close relationship with local authorities – this is vital for their ability to operate and respond to populations’ needs. Tensions over ‘taxes’ and other support that local government and SPLM-IO authorities demand have been a particular source of strain between international and national NGOs, as have growing divisions between INGOs and the government, leading to an increased perception amongst INGOs that NNGOs are ‘too close’ to the government.⁵⁰

Impartiality requires that humanitarian action is ‘carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no

adverse distinction on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinion’. A clear benefit of working through local partners is that they are established in the community, understand the local power structures, are trusted by the population and able to identify who is most vulnerable. However, they may also face pressure from their families, communities and local politics to use their resources in particular ways. In interviews, there were allegations of instances where NNGOs had succumbed to such pressures in their targeting of beneficiaries.

Section 3.4 describes the benefit of local partners in providing access to otherwise inaccessible communities. The challenges associated with neutrality and independence – perceived or otherwise – arise as a direct consequence of this access. Nevertheless, NNGOs should consider how they can provide assurances of impartial delivery of aid and adherence to humanitarian principles. Employing staff from multiple ethnic groups is one example.

Gender sensitivity

Gender relations in South Sudan are complex and linked to local conflict dynamics (for example, cattle raiding to obtain cattle for dowries). Before the crisis the scale of these challenges was significant, for example a survey conducted in October and November 2013 found that rape, beatings, psychological abuse and denial of education and economic opportunity were both commonplace and seldom reported.⁵¹ These underlying issues continue to present an important long-term challenge in South Sudan, and since this conflict started, gender inequalities have been violently exacerbated. Women, boys and girls have been the most affected by the conflict and humanitarian situation. The majority of people registered in displacement areas are women and girls; boys and men have been mobilised or coercively recruited into armed groups, and the number of reported cases of gender-based violence increased five-fold in the two years up to December 2015.⁵²

National organisations have played a role in enhancing a cultural understanding of long-term gender issues and addressing them through culturally appropriate

development and peace building programming. However, women’s organisations in South Sudan have traditionally been more involved in development work and are perceived as ‘development organisations’ with little expertise to quickly step into humanitarian operations following an emergency. The shift in funding priorities away from longer-term programming has had negative implications for women’s organisations and more specifically, programmes focusing on gender equality. Moreover NNGOs have very few female representatives at a senior level, particularly in the context of humanitarian response. The Interagency Gender Adviser in Humanitarian Action identified the lack of gender- and age- disaggregated data as a major gap that prevented aid agencies (both national and international) from carrying out deeper humanitarian needs analysis with gender trends in 2014.⁵³ Greater efforts to include women’s organisations in the response, and a particular focus on encouraging women’s roles and gender expertise within national organisations, could improve the overall humanitarian response, and maximise national actors’ contribution to its relevance.

3.2. Effectiveness: how far have activities achieved their purpose

Rating: moderate

Key findings:

- National organisations and churches contributed to providing timely life-saving support despite logistical and security constraints that have negatively impacted the ability of all actors to respond.
- NNGOs were frequently the first responders to reach affected populations in conflict areas and contributed to timeliness through informal life-saving work in the days following the outbreak of conflict.
- NNGOs were inhibited by poor coordination and low human resource capacity. The capacity of NNGOs varies widely but is poorly understood by international organisations.
- There are examples of local organisations strengthening accountability to communities.

Timeliness

In mid-December 2013, the majority of international staff were either preparing to leave South Sudan for Christmas or had already left. When the conflict erupted, most of those remaining were evacuated. The effectiveness of national actors in the days and weeks that followed is a mixed picture. Many were badly affected: offices were looted, South Sudanese aid workers executed, vehicles taken and machinery broken. Larger national organisations (categories 1 and 2) employ staff from across the country and the wider region and while in general these staff were more likely to stay than international staff of international organisations, many fled to their families or to camps in Ethiopia, Uganda or Kenya. Even for those organisations with adequate staff, the conflict presented an insecure operating environment.

National organisations that could have responded to the crisis often did not intervene rapidly because of the physical and psychological effects of war. In interviews, NNGO staff described the feeling that: 'we woke up one day and everything had changed'. There was deep disappointment that the country had descended into conflict again. In addition to the physical damage that NNGOs suffered, the trauma and loss of hope significantly affected NNGO staff and their ability to respond.

Nevertheless, a range of local and national organisations did support timely humanitarian assistance. In general, national actors improvised in response to immediate needs. Across South Sudan, churches hosted tens of thousands of displaced people in their compounds, receiving piecemeal funding for food and other emergency provisions via international faith-based partners, Caritas and ACT Alliance members, and individual donations. Several NNGOs (categories 1-3) provided emergency support for displaced people located within camps or staying with their families, for example Sudanese Relief & Development Agency (SUDRA), the relief and development arm of the Episcopal Church of Sudan, provided 20,000 people with two weeks' supply of sorghum. Some NNGOs (categories 1-3) were able to use resources for planned programmes to meet sudden humanitarian needs. For example, in Bor, Jonglei state, an NNGO was able to deliver cash grants to fleeing communities in the immediate aftermath of fighting in part due to a strong pre-existing partnership with an ACT Alliance member.

In Juba, where the crisis first hit, NNGOs (categories 1 and 2) cobbled together an initial emergency response that was informal and ad hoc. Theseo and Healthlink put volunteer doctors into hospitals in Juba, took water tankers to affected communities, collected wounded people and removed dead bodies from the streets. In locations across the country, the local Red Cross began to register missing children and identify bodies.⁵⁴



Kieran Delaney/Oxfam

The community of St Mary's gather in their local church for a distribution of water purification sachets and rehydration salts as part of the cholera response in Juba. Churches have played an important role as partners in the humanitarian response.

When the UN peacekeeping mission, UNMISS, started sheltering people in its compounds or Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites, NNGOs played an important role in providing NFIs and medicines and working as interlocutors. Nile Hope, for example, set up community structures, latrines and rubbish collection in the sites in the days after the crisis. A donor noted that they were ‘on the ground immediately, and with the trust of community provided key water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services and ensured access to a community still in shock’.⁵⁵

There were also notable examples of CBOs and faith-based groups providing voluntary assistance and taking personal risks to provide protection for their communities. Church leaders described sheltering thousands of people in their compounds in the days after the crisis, sleeping in doorways, preventing the entry of armed soldiers, and negotiating for food with local business owners and NGOs.⁵⁶ One recounted:

‘I slept at the gate in my collar and full clerical dress, with only my bare hands... I said, “This is a place of life: I won’t have violence here.” If I had been scared, I couldn’t have prevented it, I couldn’t have prevented the atrocities. But the people were vulnerable. They were children and the elderly who couldn’t even run. For those days I had real courage and I was very bold and talked without fear. Nobody died in the compound.’⁵⁷

In some areas, national organisations had unrivalled early access to displaced communities. It took up to three months for UN Humanitarian Air Service flights to start to some locations. In Leer, local organisations moved with the fleeing community and were the first organisations to re-establish a presence when they returned (see Box 4). In Akobo, one NNGO was able to provide nutrition assistance to the most vulnerable using pre-positioned supplies until April 2014 when UNMISS and INGOs were able to return.

The lack of recognition for the informal work of NNGOs in the early days of the crisis has been a source of tension between NNGOs and international staff in Juba. The high turnover of international staff, the informality of many local responses, and the chaotic nature of the weeks after the crisis resulted in a low appreciation of the work of local actors. Similarly, the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition found that following the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami of 2004, local people carried out life-saving actions and provided initial support to affected communities, but were not necessarily later recognised by INGOs.⁵⁸

Surge capacity and limitations

In the first days of the crisis, several agencies mobilised a large number of volunteers. However, a lack of coordination, particularly among UN agencies, resulted in unused local surge capacity. For example, on the second day of the conflict, an SMS was sent to all national organisations and national staff, which led to 160 staff presenting themselves as volunteers. UN agencies were struggling to manage their response to the crisis and did not have the capacity to engage with or manage the volunteers. As a result, volunteers felt they were ‘not good enough to help’.⁵⁹ An exception to this is the Red Cross, whose mobilisation of its pre-existing network was strong.

Another exception was Caritas South Sudan, which had trained 75 parish volunteers in each of the dioceses as rapid response teams to assist in a sudden crisis. The training included distribution, needs assessment and humanitarian principles and standards. In 2013, the volunteers were able to assist in food distributions in Jonglei.⁶⁰ In December 2013, when people flocked to churches in Juba as ‘safe havens’, volunteers distributed food, medicine and NFIs. However, there was no scale-up to other areas.

The lack of partnerships formed before the crisis undermined the potential for a rapid and effective scale up, which would require well-established partnerships built on trust, agreed processes and systems, identified areas of access and trained personnel. Chapter 4 examines this in further detail.

Capacity

NNGOs’ engagement in the humanitarian response increased after the initial weeks of violence through their own frontline interventions and their role as implementers for INGOs and UN agencies.⁶² However, INGO interviewees repeatedly raised concerns over the technical and logistical capacity of NNGOs, and low capacity was the primary reason given by donors for deprioritising NNGO support.

During the response, national organisations have often worked at their maximum operational capacity, and found it challenging to meet international standards and network in the wider humanitarian community as well as their own constituencies. Their staff capacity has been limited by: staff leaving the country or moving to work for INGOs offering higher salaries, limited funding for capacity building or training, short-term contracts which prevent reliable recruitment and make them reliant on a small number of staff, limited experience of financial accountability and reporting standards, and low levels of education and poor IT literacy.⁶³

Nevertheless, it is a mistake to view all NNGOs as identical and their capacity varies widely (see Box 2). NNGOs feel that INGOs in South Sudan transpose negative experiences of one national organisation onto all others.⁶⁴ The tone and substance of interviews made it clear that the debate around NNGO capacity has affected the morale of national organisations.

Some INGO partners, most notably organisations within the ACT Alliance, have helped to improve capacity by training their partners to use common standards and tools. Other NNGOs (categories 1 and 2) have hired staff from Kenya and Uganda to build their technical capacity.

Accountability to communities

Both INGOs and NNGOs acknowledged that the rapid displacement of many tens of thousands of people sometimes resulted in insufficient accountability to communities. A representative of a major INGO explained:⁶⁵

'We need to listen more. We were running around like crazy, doing and doing, but not thinking or asking. In January, we set up a water source without talking to a single person in the community about where a water supply should be located. We were just thinking about how to get water to so many people.'

NNGOs perceived that they added value in partnerships by enhancing the effectiveness of assistance by providing an entry point to targeted communities, mobilising local support, and showing accountability to affected populations. In turn, INGOs argued that they complement NNGO engagement with technical knowledge of accountability mechanisms. Partners of ACT Alliance, for instance, described receiving training in Humanitarian Accountability Partnership standards, which strengthened the quality of their response.⁶⁶

3.3. Efficiency and value for money: a measure of outputs achieved as a result of inputs

Rating: Moderate

Key findings:

- South Sudan is an expensive country for all humanitarian operations, but NNGOs are able to achieve lower overheads and staff costs than their international counterparts and often work with volunteer staff when funding is low.

- Working through partners often elicits additional costs for INGOs, including training, seconding staff and providing technical and financial support.

Overheads and volunteerism

In general, the high cost of operating in South Sudan affects INGOs and NNGOs equally. To minimise the overall overheads and to maximise time-efficiency, the UN coordinates pipelines for procurement and pre-positioning of supplies by air and land. Therefore the cost of supplies is equal for both INGOs and NNGOs.

Interviews showed that questions about the relative cost-efficiency of national actors is a particular source of tension between national and international actors. NNGOs (categories 1-3) see themselves as more efficient and emphasise their vastly lower salaries and overheads. Without fail, NNGOs spoke negatively about the inefficiencies of INGOs. One group of NNGOs asserted that 'money intended to assist the vulnerable is going as overheads for INGOs and creating employment for foreigners'. NNGOs also expressed frustration that they are expected to do the same work without comparable payment.

The relative cost-efficiency of national organisations is varied. The most capable national organisations (category 1) are able to achieve an impressive expense-output ratio with low staff and overhead costs and high-quality technical work. In addition, they typically spend less on transport (for example, field staff usually travel by motorbike rather than using vehicles) and very little on security.

The majority of NNGOs (categories 2-3) operate on a project-to-project basis and there are widespread examples of staff continuing to work as volunteers when funding ends. National organisations emphasised their access to a committed workforce who are willing to work without salary when necessary. The Director of an NNGO working in Juba reported that he does not take a salary in between projects and that his staff also continue to volunteer while he seeks new funding opportunities.⁶⁷

Smaller FBOs and CBOs (category 4) often achieve good value for money by working with volunteers from the local population to transport supplies and other activities. They reported that they work flexibly by using church finances to continue activities whilst waiting for external funding.⁶⁸ However, activities in this category are all implemented at low scale.

Cost of partnership

In the short term, working through partnership is more complex, less efficient, and more risky, particularly where partnership goes beyond sub-contracting. One INGO Country Director explained: 'You support [NNGOs] not just because you need the project done but because you have a common vision of what you want them to do as an organisation.'⁶⁹

Partnerships take time and resources to set up, manage, and grow. INGOs working in partnership reported additional costs including organisational strengthening, training, technical support, accountability, and monitoring and evaluation. There are numerous definitions of 'value for money' but most tend to focus on the cost per beneficiary. While there is insufficient data available to quantify the average efficiency of working through partnership in South Sudan, INGOs often described partnering with NNGOs as less efficient because of additional support, administration and capacity building costs. On the other hand, demands on NNGOs in terms of fundraising, reporting, hosting and facilitating are often forgotten.

Corruption was a major theme in response to questions about efficiency and was cited as a risk to partnership by many interviewees. Rampant corruption in South Sudan means that NNGOs and CBOs must have adequate capacity to manage their resources and minimise risk.⁷⁰ Many organisations have conducted training in attempt to tackle this challenge, and INGO/NNGO partnerships focus on increasing financial compliance and accountability, including timeliness of reports and provision of supporting documentation. Most NNGOs (categories 1-3) rely on Microsoft Excel for their financial monitoring but several INGOs are increasingly supporting them to use QuickBooks accounting software and offering training to help them to improve accountability across all projects.⁷¹

INGOs adopt a wide variety of monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning systems and have different reporting requirements from their national partners. While most INGOs have staff dedicated to monitoring and evaluation, these roles are unusual in national organisations, which face multiple different reporting demands, further absorbing limited capacity. Small NNGOs and CBOs (categories 3 and 4) repeatedly said they would benefit from coordinated support with simple, standardised reporting.

Expense	NNGOs	INGOs
Operational costs	Reduced costs associated with office space and vehicles (often associated with higher risk taking) Significantly reduced costs associated with security	Significant operational costs associated with security and transport Able to achieve efficiency at scale
Salaries and subsistence costs	Salaries at least two times lower than INGO equivalents Subsistence costs are often lower Increased use of volunteers	Higher wages paid to both national and expatriate workers Travel and accommodation ⁷²
Transaction costs	Comparable transaction costs For small organisations, local knowledge can reduce costs, for example, through understanding of markets	Comparable transaction costs
Partnership costs	Costs associated with establishing, maintaining and managing relationships with INGOs and UN agencies	Costs of capacity building of national organisations and monitoring; this is not always cost-effective (and may take away from project funds that could go to final beneficiaries)

Summary of costs for INGOs and NNGOs

3.4. Coverage: how far assistance reaches affected populations

Rating: Moderate

Key findings:

- Much of the response coverage has been through direct delivery by INGOs, in part due to the relatively localised and small operations of small NNGOs and CBOs (categories 3-4) and their limited ability to respond to wide-scale acute emergency scenarios on their own.
- National and local actors support coverage by reaching remote, dangerous and hard-to-access areas. The permanent presence and country-wide networks of churches in particular brings significant benefits to the overall humanitarian response.

Scale

South Sudan is a vast country and conflict often erupts rapidly in remote areas. In Unity and Upper Nile states, tens of thousands of people have repeatedly moved within the state and to other locations; in Mingkaman, a small hamlet home to a couple of local NGOs, 80,000 people arrived in one week.

A handful of NNGOs (categories 1-2) were able to scale up significantly and now operate across multiple locations, both government-held and opposition-held. One NNGO is currently operating in six states on programmes including primary care, sanitation, nutrition and gender-based violence. When the crisis broke out, staff were evacuated from only one of the locations; the rest remained with communities, in some cases moving with the local population to ensure continuity. In order to achieve scale, the organisation has supported other NNGOs by co-implementing projects across a number of states. It is able to operate in both government- and opposition-controlled areas, negotiating where necessary to ensure the safety of aid workers and supplies.

However, the majority of local and national NGOs are not able to achieve the scale or coverage of the INGOs due to small staff numbers, inconsistent funding streams and limited experience of large logistical operations. While many report working in multiple states and sectors, their active projects at any one time are normally significantly smaller.

Access

Access is increasingly problematic in South Sudan. There are tens of incidences of harassment and interference each year, as well as violence towards aid workers, interference with assets, restrictions on movement, looting and theft.⁷³ The most vulnerable populations are often located in hard-to-reach or insecure areas and the rainy season and insecurity mean that many remote communities face violence and displacement alone. The vast majority of international agencies interviewed for this research cited access as a reason to work through local partners.⁷⁴

Since December 2013, a broad range of national actors have demonstrated a willingness to risk their own safety in order to deliver humanitarian assistance to people separated by violence and distance.⁷⁵ A survey of 47 NNGOs in April 2014 found that 30% were operational in areas in conflict and an additional 55% had access to such areas but were not working there, primarily due to the physical and psychological toll of conflict.⁷⁶ At the same time, NNGOs describe walking for several hours to reach distribution points in the rainy season as typical.⁷⁷

In Nasir, a local organisation told of moving with the displaced population and providing humanitarian aid via air and through the Gambella corridor from Ethiopia. In Unity state, local volunteers and church leaders distributed emergency NFIs after international organisations left for security reasons. One leader explained:⁷⁸

'INGOs cannot travel to that area, but the priests have no problem because they can stay with the people...The UN and INGOs evacuated when the emergency reached Level 3. But we went with NFIs: plastic sheets, mosquito nets, blankets, soap. You can't expect a priest to come out with a detailed WASH or nutrition report, but you can train volunteers in proper distribution of items.'

Another NNGO (category 2) has employed community-based staff who can travel quickly to emergency situations and report back to the organisation. If an area cannot be reached by aircraft, their staff travel on foot to respond, sometimes walking for several hours. In one instance, they moved with communities that had been displaced, set up a compound and temporary learning space, and continued education and child protection programmes.

Other organisations emphasise NNGOs' access to isolated communities in remote areas. In 2014, the community development officer for Sudan Peace and Education Development Programme visited several areas in Aweil North County (Northern Bahr el Ghazal state), travelling by motorbike along a road that was almost entirely overgrown with vegetation. He recalls that the people were surprised to see him as no organisations had previously been there. The organisation was able to obtain funding to establish nutrition and microfinance programmes with the community. He noted: 'This is what organisations like ours can achieve – reaching places and people that are cut off, and bringing services to them'.

Subcontracting security

Although international actors have provided the majority of the response in South Sudan, national actors play an important role in accessing remote areas. Security management is often passed onto national organisations

without adequate training and resources, as detailed in 3.2 above, although South Sudanese nationals are particularly vulnerable to increasing violence against aid workers.⁷⁹ Moreover, several NNGO interviewees felt that the humanitarian system gives priority to international NGOs during evacuations; one interviewee described being trapped in a PoC site for a month while he negotiated with his international partner to take responsibility for his evacuation.^{80,81}

Responsibility for security management and the level of risk accepted by national actors were not specifically mentioned during this research. The extent and impact of different acceptance of risk is an important question and international organisations need to ensure they are not pushing risk onto national ones. Further research might identify how improved support to national actors' security management could improve the response.

Box 6: The Caritas Diocese of Malakal in Melut, Upper Nile State

When fighting broke out in Upper Nile State in December 2013, tens of thousands of people were displaced, including local organisations. The Diocese of Malakal fled to Juba, losing all its vehicles, computers and other assets. In June 2014 it relocated to Melut, a small town in Upper Nile hosting thousands of internally displaced people, and close to where communities had relocated to remote areas, accessible only by boat or on foot.

The Diocese set up emergency health services, cash grants and livelihoods, NFI and WASH interventions. CAFOD and Trócaire in Partnership helped it set up offices in Melut and Juba and seconded staff to provide additional technical and logistical capacity and financial management. Challenges included definitions of roles and expectations, as well as difficulties in the procurement of local goods, transportation to remote locations and security management.

Nevertheless, together the organisations were able to provide substantial humanitarian aid to more than 3,000 households in Melut and Manyo counties, including establishing water points, providing cash grants, building emergency latrines, hygiene promotion activities and emergency medicines. Previous experience of working together and a long-term relationship were identified as key to the success of the partnership.

3.5. Connectedness: how far emergency interventions take longer-term and interconnected problems into account

Rating: Moderate

Key findings:

- The humanitarian response in South Sudan has not achieved good connectedness due to the unpredictable nature of the conflict and the rapidly changing funding priorities.
- National actors are able to respond flexibly to fill the gaps in the wider humanitarian response.
- Their work could have been strengthened through additional funding for preparedness and resilience activities prior to the conflict.

Flexibility and bridging the gaps

The NNGOs (categories 1-3) contributing to the humanitarian response are largely those with pre-existing partnerships or unrestricted funding that allowed them the flexibility to shift focus. Small NNGOs and CBOs (categories 3 and 4) were most affected by rapid changes in funding priorities in South Sudan.

Funded NNGOs typically moved from development to humanitarian activities during 2014; some have shifted both location and sector in order to access funding. Many of the most successful organisations (categories 1 and 2) are those based in Central Equatoria, which have better access to an educated workforce and to funding. They have moved from addressing the local needs of their own communities to responding to the needs of communities in other states. For instance, an NGO working on livelihoods in Lakes state said it now plans to start education programmes in Unity State because of the greater funding opportunities. By contrast, CBOs and small NNGOs that are not based in Juba (categories 3 and 4) tend to be unknown by donors, UN agencies and INGOs and are seen as too small to fund directly.

National organisations have undoubtedly contributed towards improved connectedness, but this is not always a smooth process. In Mingkaman, for example, a sudden and significant reduction in funding meant several of the INGOs were no longer able to cover operational costs. They handed over to national organisations, whose overheads are lower, without, for the most part, significantly investing in their capacity. Some community members expressed disappointment that INGOs were leaving and concerns that local organisations would not provide the same level of services. It is not yet clear how NNGOs will respond when funding streams for Mingkaman are further reduced.

Box 7: Connectedness and the role of the church

Interviewees repeatedly noted the role of the church as the only permanent South Sudanese institution with a broad constituency able to advocate at the highest levels of government.

The research included interviews with a range of churches in several locations. The majority of those interviewed were volunteers in small churches. Some organisations note that churches have played a vital role in providing protection, serving as makeshift camps and distribution points, and providing informal emergency aid. Across the counties, church facilities are still being used to house displaced people and hospitals.

Churches and faith-based groups benefit from lower staff turnover and long-term commitment to their communities. They have parishes with local volunteers and priests in areas that INGOs cannot travel to, enabling them to extend their reach into more remote and volatile areas. They are often able to galvanise local resources to cover gaps after emergencies while waiting for larger organisations to arrive, although this depends on the personality of individual local church leaders.

Interviewees emphasised the role of the national and local churches in peace building and informing humanitarian assessments. They also described the roles played by churches across the country in supporting resilience through being available to talk with communities, give dignity to grieving families, and support trauma recovery.⁸²

The churches are not very visible within the humanitarian response and discourse because they are not part of the cluster system. The majority of churches receive very little funding and, away from Juba, most have limited interaction with international organisations (apart from a select few which have longer-term direct relations). Funding is primarily limited by a lack of capacity in the church institutions and a lack of understanding of how they operate on the part of many international humanitarian actors. Recognising the value of the existing and potential role of the churches through stronger relationships and networks could benefit humanitarian efforts, peacebuilding and recovery.

Promoting connectedness through partnership

INGOs and NNGOs both highlighted the longevity of partnerships as important. All the strong partnerships encountered through this research were based on long-term relationships. When crisis hit, the organisations had already established agreements, tools, capacity assessments and processes.^{83,84}

Pre-crisis capacity-building activities were cited as an important part of preparedness. INGOs working through the ACT Alliance and Caritas networks emphasised the importance of formal partnership building, assessing capability, developing action plans and tracking progress. A handful of organisations also explained that they have seconded staff to support the capacity of partner organisations in specific areas such as accountability frameworks, Core Humanitarian Standards and monitoring and evaluation. The Caritas Network, for example, has used secondments to achieve long-term approach capacity strengthening and organisational mentoring.⁸⁵

An INGO working through the ACT Alliance also described how they complemented a NNGO (category 3) in the early stages of the crisis. Together with the NNGO, it identified logistical capacity as the NNGO's weak point but recognised its advantages in access and relevance. It therefore took over the procurement, purchasing NFIs and delivering them to Juba for the NNGO to distribute.⁸⁶ It also seconded staff in order to provide ongoing training to the NNGO. In other cases, INGOs organised workshops to further support capacity in areas such as gender and protection mainstreaming, and identified conflict sensitivity as an area of need post-crisis.

Resilience and recovery

Both INGOs and NNGOs note that communities are requesting disaster risk reduction and recovery projects, such as cultivation, but that funding is prioritising life-saving humanitarian support.⁸⁷ There are limited examples of successful recovery or resilience programmes in South Sudan. While communities have a broad range of coping mechanisms, these have been undermined by massive food insecurity and destruction of their resource bases. Shortfalls in global and national humanitarian funding are forcing a change in approaches to disaster response. More investment is needed in this area, working closely with communities and local actors.⁸⁸

4. National actors and the humanitarian system

Malakal Protection of Civilians site for internally displaced people, where thousands sought refuge from violent conflict and where humanitarian organisations have been responding to their urgent needs since late 2013.

This section explores how the humanitarian system in South Sudan has facilitated, promoted or inhibited the inclusion of national organisations in the humanitarian

response. It is divided into three sections: humanitarian coordination, funding, and coordination with government.

Box 8: Barriers to national organisations and partnerships in the humanitarian system

In two focus groups, 12 NNGOs identified the following as the major barriers to national organisations' participation in the humanitarian system:

1. Inadequate funding opportunities, complex funding proposal formats and the challenge of meeting all conditions (such as audits)
2. Funding opportunities too closely linked to attendance at cluster meetings
3. Perception of low capacity and the lack of opportunities for NNGOs to prove themselves
4. Competition between national and international organisations and prioritisation of INGOs in funding proposals
5. Lack of technical support for NNGOs
6. Losing staff to INGOs who pay higher salaries
7. Lack of funding for organisational development
8. Limited funding for the seven 'non-emergency' states and for development programmes
9. Limited financial management capacity

INGOs and donors cited the following challenges that prevent them from greater engagement with local partners:

1. High turnover of international staff makes it difficult to build close long-term relationships with partners
2. Reservations regarding the capacity, independence and neutrality of local organisations
3. Difficulty of investing the significant time necessary to build partnerships during an emergency response
4. Insufficient investment in partnership prior to the conflict
5. Concerns over financial management, corruption and accountability
6. The humanitarian system 'does not reward engagement with national actors'

4.1. Humanitarian coordination

This section explores the challenges for national organisations in engaging with the humanitarian system, the limitations of current efforts to map the national actor landscape and national involvement in humanitarian coordination. NNGOs (categories 1-3) engage with the humanitarian system through two principal forums: the cluster system and the South Sudan NGO Forum. The cluster system is the principal channel for coordination of UN, INGO and NNGOs. The South Sudan NGO Forum provides a useful platform for members to share information, experiences and opportunities for capacity building.

‘Being in the room’

In the days and weeks after the conflict broke out in December 2013, a small number of NNGOs in Juba participated in the cluster system and provided vital information from PoC sites and hard-to-access conflict areas. However, the majority of NNGOs did not engage with the cluster system for several months. While NGO Forum representatives state that access has improved in the past two years as a result of NNGOs’ greater understanding of the humanitarian system and funding mechanisms,^{89,90} there are significant barriers to participation and the humanitarian system continues to be internationally dominated. This is linked to five factors that particularly affect medium-sized NNGOs (category 3):

- **Funding restricts participation.** Most medium-sized NNGOs do not have unrestricted funding to cover their core costs and lack the resources that participation in the humanitarian system demands. CBOs, in particular, are based in their constituencies with only a skeleton staff in Juba. NNGOs often have small staff teams and are not able to afford the staff time required to attend frequent coordination meetings across multiple sectors.⁹¹
- **Technical barriers.** Smaller NNGOs have limited access to electricity, internet and other logistical support. Cluster communication is by email, and proposals are submitted through a complex online tool.
- **Language and meeting structure.** Meetings are conducted in English and decisions are made rapidly. Many NNGO staff studied in Arabic and are only now becoming comfortable working in English. NNGO staff said they do not fully understand the terminology, abbreviations and acronyms used in meetings and can feel excluded from the decision-making culture.

- **Cultural barriers.** INGOs note that the cluster system creates cultural spaces and decision-making forums that are most comfortable for international staff,⁹² who are better able to form relationships through the social networks and activities of the expat community. To gain funding, NNGOs must ‘win over’ the cluster lead and co-lead, and vie for visibility.⁹³
- **Timekeeping.** There are often different cultural expectations regarding timekeeping and attendance. This was a recurring theme in interviews with INGOs. Small NNGOs (category 3), in particular, lack logistical capacity and often miss or turn up late to meetings. This has led to frustration amongst international staff who feel they are trying to promote inclusion and have been let down.⁹⁴

Consequently, cluster meetings are dominated by the representatives of UN agencies and big INGOs. Some NNGOs will only attend when there are meetings to discuss funding, but too often do not experience the financial benefit, feel excluded from the system, and stop attending. This sense of exclusion has led NNGOs to seek separate coordination and funding mechanisms.

Interviews indicate that INGOs have limited knowledge of each other’s national partners and make insufficient efforts to coordinate and represent local partners at the cluster level. They could play a more substantive role in representing and advocating on behalf of national organisations within the different coordination forums.

Agency mapping, security and local level coordination

A key challenge for good coordination is the lack of quality mapping of national actors. At the cluster coordination level there is not a clear picture of which national organisations are operating in which locations. The lack of mapping means that national actors regularly feel they are overlooked. For instance, obtaining funding for rapid response involved sending a team from Juba to conduct a needs assessment and these teams have limited knowledge of the national partners operating in the field. NNGOs state that assessment teams do not enquire broadly enough about the national organisations present at the state level and their capacity to scale up.

Nevertheless, coordination between international and national organisations is often best at the state level. National organisations often have very good relationships with local authorities, which are of vital importance to their international colleagues. International organisations are also increasingly making efforts to facilitate NNGOs’ work. For example, in Mingkaman, ACTED, the camp coordinator, provided shared NGO office space, which

allows local organisations to access a desk, internet and electricity. There are also plans in place to establish new humanitarian hubs providing basic office services to aid organisations in Wau, Rumbek, Torit, Aweil and Juba.⁹⁵

Possibly the most effective area of cooperation is in tackling security challenges. Security and access constraints plague the emergency response in South Sudan. INGOs, particularly in high-risk areas, coordinate closely with national organisations to understand the rapidly changeable security landscape. However, as discussed above, this coordination is seldom matched by support in security management and risks being exploitative.

Leadership through the Humanitarian Country Team

The majority of large NNGOs (categories 1 and 2) are led by senior staff with previous experience in INGOs. They bring an understanding of the system, coordination mechanisms and funding procedures. Two representatives of large NNGOs have seats on the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), which is responsible for establishing common strategic direction for the humanitarian community, and NNGOs see their representation here positively.⁹⁶ However, the number of NNGOs with this level of experience is small and consequently their directors are busy. Their ability to invest in leading the NNGO community and to pass on the lessons learned is limited.

Generally NNGOs continue to view the humanitarian system as led by international actors. Accordingly, they have long called for a greater role for local actors in the leadership of the humanitarian system, particularly in managing the CHF.

4.2. Funding

Access to funding was the biggest concern for all national organisations interviewed for this study. NNGOs expressed frustration at being treated as subcontracted implementing partners and at the lack of transparency over project budgets.⁹⁷ This section provides an overview of the funding available to national actors, explores the implications of the limited funding opportunities, and briefly examines attitudes around local entitlement to resources.

Overview of direct funding opportunities

Access to funding has been a long-running concern for national organisations, and a key criticism from an evaluation of the post Comprehensive Peace Agreement

Multi Donor Trust Fund was the failure to involve NNGOs and civil society sufficiently in the design, implementation and monitoring of programmes.⁹⁸ At the time of writing, there are several pooled funding mechanisms for the humanitarian response: the CHF, Health Pooled Fund, Rapid Response Fund and Common Emergency Response Fund. Among these, the CHF is the most keenly sought, by national and international organisations alike, because it includes the overhead costs crucial for organisational development.

In 2014, the CHF allocated close to \$134.9 million to seven UN agencies, 48 INGOs and 14 NNGOs.⁹⁹ In 2015, the figure decreased to \$85.5 million. The proportion of CHF funding allocated to NNGOs increased from 7% in 2013, to 8% in 2014 (from \$6.7 to \$10.9 million).^{100,101}

CHF funding is highly competitive: it requires an intimate knowledge of the humanitarian architecture and stipulates that organisations are registered and engaged in the UN cluster system. Interviewees argued that the conditions attached to the CHF mechanism favour UN agencies and large INGOs with well-established offices and staff in Juba. Small NNGOs and CBOs (categories 3 and 4) encounter significant hurdles when applying for funding and feel they are disadvantaged by poor influence and visibility. One donor agreed, noting that while the clusters do use a point scoring system, 'the way that people score things is also influenced by... their worldview.'¹⁰²

Other funding opportunities

There are few other funding streams accessible for national organisations, and in practice many depend on the CHF. The Financial Tracking Service indicates that 91% of humanitarian funding committed to the 2015 appeal was allocated to just 25 organisations (UN agencies or large INGOs),¹⁰³ which are perceived to be 'most reliable in moving a large amount of aid reliably, quickly and efficiently'.¹⁰⁴ In 2014, NNGOs received only 1% of total funds allocated through the Humanitarian Response Plan, and in 2015 NNGOs received 1.4%.¹⁰⁵ Some of the major donors will only work with NNGOs via a large INGO partner because of concerns over capacity, scale, neutrality and independence.¹⁰⁶

Beyond the CHF, most NNGOs look for partnerships with international organisations, although it is not currently possible to measure how much funding is sub-granted in this way. The word partnership is used to describe a wide variety of relationships between national and international organisations and most contracts are short-term with little organisational funding. A survey

in April 2014 found that 76% of partnerships were 'sub-grants'; 16% were receiving funding for a budgeted programme and 8% were in equal partnership with an INGO.¹⁰⁷ Operational UN agencies in particular have a tendency to subcontract NNGOs. Interviewees reported that these grants are often particularly short-term, activity-based, prescriptive, 'donor driven', and diminish locally adapted approaches. NNGOs reported feeling that they 'are not visible'.^{108,109}

Box 9: Funding challenges for CBOs

In many locations, CBOs (category 4) have been hit hardest by changes in funding since December 2013. Contributing factors include the difficulty of re-registering organisations in Juba, particularly for CBOs from conflict-affected areas; the overall shift of funding from development to humanitarian priorities; and the fact that many CBOs do not have staff present in Juba to attend cluster meetings.

WADA is a CBO with headquarters in Warawar payam, Aweil East County. The payam shares borders with Sudan, and is host to people who fled bombing by Sudanese planes along the contested border. It began implementing a project in 2008 with funds from Mercy Corps, an INGO operating in Northern Bahr el Ghazal State. Three years later, it received another grant from AECOM/USAID which enabled it to build an office and purchase office furniture. In 2012, the International Organisation for Migration gave WADA a grant to drill boreholes throughout Aweil East County. Now the project has been completed and it is left with no money. It started to make bricks to earn income. Its seven staff no longer receive salaries but continue to work on a voluntary basis. Meanwhile, the Director is writing proposals and sending these to potential donors.

Accessing the system

The funding challenges mentioned in Boxes 8 and 9 have led some NNGOs to believe that 'the humanitarian system is an international system designed for international actors'.¹¹⁰ NNGOs described becoming like INGOs in order to thrive within the coordination and funding mechanisms. They move to Juba and reframe their approach, often at the cost of their grassroots structures. NNGOs and CBOs have recruited staff from neighbouring countries to prepare proposals and reports. One organisation noted: 'Our style as NNGOs is changing. To get the benefits of funding, we are having to make ourselves like international institutions.'¹¹¹

The failure of many local organisations to access funding has resulted in frustration and a growing 'perception of conspiracy against NNGOs', of which a recurring theme among those interviewed was a feeling of exclusion.¹¹² More than 80% of the NNGOs interviewed believed capacity development should be prioritised to allow them to compete more 'fairly'. Following advocacy by the NGO Forum and NNGOs, in early 2015 Norwegian Refugee Council and OCHA recruited a Senior National NGO Adviser seconded to the NGO Forum (see Box 10) to support the role and recognition of national actors in the response.

The perception of exclusion has also led South Sudanese NNGOs to campaign for a quota system to be adopted in the distribution of pooled funds: UN agencies 40%; NNGOs 30% and INGOs 30%.¹¹³ The CHF allocates resources according to prioritised humanitarian needs and has resisted calls to automatically allocate a greater share of resources to NNGOs.

In interviews, INGOs and donors repeatedly commented that NNGOs express a culture of entitlement. INGOs argue that national organisations should be doing more to illustrate their comparative advantages in terms of access and understanding of the context. One representative argued that 'humanitarian funding is competitive, and so the organisation best positioned to provide the assistance to the needy is funded'.¹¹⁴

The Operational Progress Review in May 2014 recommended that the CHF look at ways to increase NNGO engagement to promote a 'more multifaceted' humanitarian response including by improving information sharing, encouraging peer learning, building the technical capability of NNGOs, strengthening NNGO participation in wider cluster processes, and enhancing state-level coordination mechanisms.¹¹⁵ Much of this has been achieved through the Senior NNGO Adviser position. The 2015 Humanitarian Response Plan shows further indications of promising practice. For example, the NFI and emergency shelter clusters have committed to increase engagement with NNGOs by developing local partnerships, to provide technical support and capacity building, and to advocate for funding on their behalf.¹¹⁶

Box 10: Senior NNGO Adviser

This role was created to build the capacity of member organisations, to improve their ability to access funds, and to strengthen their engagement with the coordination system.¹¹⁷ As a result of the post, significant steps have been taken in 2015 to ‘mainstream’ NNGOs into humanitarian planning processes and embed clear roles for them into humanitarian coordination.

Within the humanitarian coordination system in South Sudan, two NNGOs represent national organisations on the HCT, one on the Inter Cluster Working Group (ICWG), one on the CHF advisory board, and NNGOs are present within each cluster, including on peer review teams responsible for planning, reviewing and scoring funding proposals. On a yearly basis, NNGOs registered with the NGO Forum elect a steering committee of ten members and representatives for the HCT and ICWG are nominated from this. They commit to attending meetings and feeding back into the steering committee and wider NGO Forum.

Embedded participation of NNGOs is a key opportunity for NNGOs to share information and feedback, and this relies on the representatives advocating on behalf of the wider NNGO group, maintaining accountability to them and feeding back information such as why some projects have scored higher than others within clusters.

The Senior NNGO Adviser has also worked closely with the NGO Forum to support better NNGO engagement with humanitarian structures, including:

- developing strategies to build NNGO capacity (including a peer support mechanism to enable inter-NNGO support and mentorship)
- devising clear terms of reference for NNGO representatives on the HCT, ICWG, CHF and clusters, and orienting them in their roles
- providing guidance on humanitarian structures, including guidance notes on how to write proposals, templates, and consolidating lists of technical training on offer from clusters
- enhancing OCHA’s approachability by building relations directly and making it clear what resources are available for common use.
- In 2014–2015, these initiatives have led to membership of NNGOs in the NGO Forum increasing from 90 to more than 200, and the proportion of CHF funding going towards NNGOs increasing from 8% to 20%. However, the Senior NNGO Adviser role ended in December 2015, and at the time of writing there are no plans for it to continue.

Impact of the economy

The deteriorating economic situation was mentioned in several interviews as negatively affecting all humanitarian organisations, but having a more significant impact on small national organisations. According to the World Bank, since December 2013 an additional 1 million people have been pushed below the poverty line, a consequence of the combined impact of the rapid depreciation of the South Sudanese pound, soaring inflation, a shortage of hard currency, dependence on imports, and the fall in global oil prices.¹¹⁸ The quantity of funding reaching both international and national organisations is affected by donor requirements and flexibility on currency exchange. Funds paid in South Sudanese pounds lose significantly more value than those paid in US dollars. NNGOs expect to suffer from a lack of access to cash and lower purchasing power if the exchange rate collapses further, and rapidly increasing prices at market level will affect their ability to meet contractual obligations. Working with smaller

budgets means that they are less able to adapt than larger organisations, and spiralling operational costs and staff demands to be paid in US dollars further strain budgets and subsequently ability to deliver and NNGOs’ reputation.



Alnour Kon Lual, a medical assistant, examines Deng Garang as his mother, Ayide Reng, observes in a Caritas clinic.

4.3. Coordination with authorities

Local government authorities and traditional leaders can play a key role in facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid, acting as gatekeepers, intermediaries and brokers. This section examines the relationship between NNGOs and the government at national and local levels.

NGOs, government and local authorities

When South Sudan became independent in 2011, the Government had limited capacity to manage health, education and other public services, delegating this to the UN cluster system. In 2011, at least 49 INGOs were delivering services and development activities.¹¹⁹ This led to an expectation among communities and local government authorities of relief and hand-outs rather than development cooperation.¹²⁰

Prior to 2013, foreign governments and institutional donors provided large sums of development aid to the Government of South Sudan and to international and national organisations. When the crisis hit in December 2013, the UN's emergency coordination mechanisms were already in place and the NGO community transitioned into a full-scale emergency response. This switch to crisis management vastly reduced development funding and led donors to adopt a tone of caution rather than cooperation and state-building with the Government of South Sudan, souring their relationship with it.¹²¹

At a national level, this shift has resulted in a strained operating environment. Government authorities complain that humanitarian actors, especially the UN and INGOs, do not consult adequately with them. The Minister of Information and Broadcasting reportedly described international organisations as not being 'transparent to the Government of South Sudan'.¹²² The Non-Governmental Organizations Bill can be seen, in part, as a reaction to this (see Box 11).

In general, national organisations can play an important role as interlocutors between international organisations and local government, liaising with the latter and explaining to the former how best to communicate their work. Local government, traditional and faith leadership structures are vital for effective humanitarian action. National organisations demonstrate very strong relationships with these and assist INGOs' understanding of how to operate with local structures.

The Government of South Sudan, through the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management, has encouraged the UN and INGOs to cooperate more with national organisations. An official from the Ministry stated: 'these local organisations are part of the community, they know the community and operate cheaply. We encouraged the INGOs and donors to support the NNGOs. We told them that in any funding arrangement a capacity building component should be included'.¹²³

Nevertheless, national organisations face two significant challenges in their work. Firstly, civil society space for national actors is now shrinking. Political tensions have led to increasing restrictions on national civil society and on local and national media.¹²⁴ NNGOs have reported harassment by the military and administrative branches of both the SPLM and the SPLM-IO including threats of arrest and confiscation of materials.¹²⁵

Secondly, taxation is unpredictable and rising. Humanitarian and development initiatives are coordinated at the state level by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission. Taxation has required careful negotiations from both international and national organisations. The Relief and Rehabilitation Commission also requires all NGOs to provide detailed information on their activities and movement. In SPLM-IO-controlled areas the Relief Organization for South Sudan is an additional opposition-controlled coordination mechanism.¹²⁶ There have been challenges associated with access and delivery of humanitarian assistance in both structures.

Box 11: NGO Bill

While opening the South Sudan National Assembly in May 2015, President Salva Kiir called on parliamentarians to pass the Non-Governmental Organizations Bill, to 'organize and regulate the work and activities of these various organisations which are operating without government supervision'.¹²⁷ The Bill was passed by the Parliament and signed by the President on 11 February 2016. While NGOs have emphasised that they would welcome a strong regulatory framework and consistent legal environment, there have been concerns that elements of the Bill may hinder their ability to meet humanitarian needs, due to the nature of some restrictions, a lack of clarity around language and requirements, and a lack of mechanisms for NGOs to participate in the development of procedures.



5. Conclusions

Aloel Dau works on the thatched roof of her hut in a displaced persons camp in Agok.

This research underlines the important contribution of national actors to humanitarian responses. In South Sudan, the most effective humanitarian partnerships have emerged when the comparative advantages of national and international organisations complement each other, and where investment in long-term partnerships before the crisis facilitated rapid and effective scale up. While many findings reflect those of earlier research on the role of national organisations in response to disasters caused by natural hazards, they also suggest that in a conflict context, national actors and partners have a particularly important role to play in enhancing access, providing information and analysis critical for security and needs assessments, and strengthening accountability and relationships with communities. The research suggests that where national actors are strongly connected to communities, their contribution is fundamental to improving the sustainability of interventions and resilience – a finding of particular importance given the increasingly difficult funding environment.

However, the research also shows that the potential contribution of national organisations to the humanitarian response in South Sudan is not being fully realised. While there have been targeted efforts to encourage participation of national organisations in the humanitarian system, especially through work instigated by the NGO Forum and the Senior NNGO Adviser, the system does not go far enough in redressing power imbalances and enabling deeper and more embedded involvement and context-specific approaches.

The South Sudan humanitarian system remains internationally led and exclusive, consistently recognising the role of just a few NNGOs. In addition, the barriers that prevent national organisations from being more involved are compounded by the difficult operating context. While international organisations bring essential professional expertise and mechanisms, complementarity is not favoured in a system which prioritises immediacy and short-term value for money. Decisions are largely made in Juba, despite the opening of humanitarian hubs, and the system does not make allowances for the support and flexibility that national organisations need to participate fully. The most local organisations (categories 3 and 4) are both closest to communities and least likely to be heard or included. Approaches to partnership should consist of flexible ways of supporting and maximising different capabilities and capacities, and explore more innovative ways of enhancing comparative advantages. This applies to donors too, where funding frameworks favour a small number of well-known organisations (category 1) and, as such, do not strengthen the organisational capacity or long-term viability of the broader swathe of national organisations. While there are some examples of strong partnerships in South Sudan, there are also many instances where the opportunity to work in partnership is overlooked, despite repeated assertions by international humanitarian actors that it is important to work closely with nationals.

Maximising the role of national actors will require multiple changes to the humanitarian system and include support from donors, the UN and INGOs to build the capacity of national actors as professional humanitarians, going beyond a tick box approach to representation. Spaces should be created where the full range of national actors are able to participate in decision making, and power should be delegated to the most local level, according to the principle of subsidiarity. Greater efforts to include women's organisations should further increase the relevance of humanitarian action and better realise the potential contribution of national actors. National actors need to work effectively together to articulate their role and strengthen their own organisations and accountability. Work such as that of the NGO Forum and the Senior NNGO Adviser must continue with support from the most senior levels of OCHA and the HCT, with the real will to further open up decision making spaces and strengthen local-level engagement.

The sheer range of emergencies in recent years is pushing the humanitarian community to re-examine operational approaches, particularly its reliance on international actors.¹²⁸ However, too often there is a difference between rhetoric and reality in approaches to partnership in Africa.¹²⁹ In order to better serve communities and stretch funding further, new and stronger models of partnership are needed and the humanitarian system needs to adapt. This case study suggests there is far more to do on this in conflict-affected states, and that these settings are complex and politically sensitive and require strategic rethinking.

5.1. Recommendations

The international humanitarian community should rethink its relationship with national and local actors and ensure that partnership is an integral part of the humanitarian response in conflict settings.

Overall recommendations:

- National actors should be viewed as critical partners within the humanitarian system, and appropriate actions taken to embed clear roles for them within relevant humanitarian structures (HCT, ICWG, clusters) with support to help them navigate structures and funding mechanisms. The model of establishing a Senior NNGO Adviser or focal person and working closely with the NGO Forum should be applied in other contexts (tailored as appropriate) and should include funding for capacity support, effective communication and the adoption of systems amenable to national organisations' participation from the start. Greater efforts should be made to support strong local gender expertise and meaningful participation and leadership of women in humanitarian response.
- The international humanitarian community should prioritise investment in humanitarian partnership, particularly long-term partnerships, within which capacity development should be an essential component. INGOs should ensure that at least 20% of their funding goes towards national organisations.¹³⁰ The IASC should consider complementing the international Level 3 surge mechanism with national surge capacity. This should include a package of training, communication and support delivered by OCHA or via partners. Funding should be made available for building capacity for rapid and quality scale up in potential crisis locations.
- OCHA and donors should establish a conflict analysis group in contexts at risk of conflict, which includes national actors as key members in developing and implementing humanitarian response plans and strategies, conflict analysis and contingency plans.

The following recommendations are specific for South Sudan but also of use in other contexts.

Recommendations for OCHA, HCTs and humanitarian coordination

- Prioritise roles such as the Senior NNGO Adviser and fund related activities and support for NNGOs attempting to navigate the humanitarian system to access pooled funding mechanisms; continue to embed clear roles for NNGOs within coordination structures (HCT, ICWG, clusters) and support them to fulfil these roles. NNGOs should be included in strategic planning at the initial stages to ensure ownership of these processes (e.g. as some were in 2015 during the development of the 2016 Humanitarian Response Plan). Care should be taken to avoid the use of exclusionary language in cluster meetings – regular slots where cluster leads set aside specific time to meet with NNGOs could help to build and strengthen relationships.
- Lead a review of how humanitarian structures can best facilitate national actors' participation in information sharing, analysis and planning, at Juba and field levels. Such a review should examine decision-making structures and outline steps to devolve decision making power as locally as possible, with strong participation from national organisations.

Actions from such a review should then be implemented with regular follow up. Deep field coordination should be strengthened, and strong efforts should be made to ensure that NNGOs and local actors are aware of deep field focal points and hubs, further enabling them to access email-based cluster coordination.

- Update mapping of national actors, making efforts to include women's groups, and identify how different types of organisation can best engage with the humanitarian response, focusing on complementarity of roles. This should feed into the review above, and identified areas of need in capacity support should be acted upon. Work with the NGO Forum to build on existing strategies for meaningful inclusion of NNGOs in the funding and coordination process should continue. OCHA should ensure that it makes itself approachable to local and national actors.

Recommendations for INGOs and UN agencies

- Take time to identify the complementary strengths of national organisations and invest in long-term partnerships that include building preparedness, supporting strategy development, contingency planning and training on issues such as gender and protection mainstreaming, conflict sensitivity, Core Humanitarian Standards, accountability and monitoring and evaluation. Such partnerships should go far beyond a sub-contracting relationship, recognising the contribution of national organisations and ensuring they are intrinsic to planning and evaluation as well as to implementation. Practical support for capacity building is particularly crucial in the context of armed conflict, when international organisations may be forced to withdraw at short notice. Secondment, accompaniment and co-implementation have been used successfully in South Sudan.
- Ensure that partnerships include regular reviews to build understanding of what constitutes good practice, for example using tools which evaluate the partnership itself, and increase efforts to share information and coordinate. Investment in standardised reporting formats would significantly benefit small NGOs, CBOs and FBOs (categories 3 and 4). Enhance the visibility of national actors by facilitating their inclusion in meetings and discussions with donors and VIPs, encouraging visibility and participation in cluster meetings, and through media communications. INGOs should ensure that recruitment processes are sensitive to the need to build long-term capacity of national organisations

Recommendations for donors

- Develop strategies for directly funding national organisations (including within the Consolidated Appeals Process), taking into account the barriers national organisations face accessing funding, including their limited presence in Juba. All donors and UN agencies should provide a minimum percentage of humanitarian funding directly to national organisations, and set themselves targets to increase this on a gradual basis.

Recommendations for national authorities

- Promote the role of national actors in humanitarian response, including through clarity and consistency in the implementation of all legislation relating to NGOs and civil society, and by establishing clear mechanisms for them to feed into the development of procedures and to raise concerns. Ensure rapid and unhindered access to those in humanitarian need, and hold to account those involved in unofficial taxation and harassment of NGO workers.

Recommendations for national NGOs

- Better highlight comparative advantages and value within the humanitarian system and in funding proposals, avoiding messages of entitlement by strongly demonstrating capacity. Coordinate on shared advocacy messages, invest collectively in capacity for humanitarian coordination. Ensure accountability to peers as nominated representatives – and proactively identify and lobby for positive changes to the system. Organisations which successfully access funding should increase support and training to other local organisations, for example through peer support and learning mechanisms.
- Work with the NGO Forum to develop shared language on the specific benefits and achievements of local organisations, including a set of locally relevant conditions or standards that demonstrate competence and adherence to humanitarian principles. The NGO Forum should facilitate communication and positive interaction between national and international NGOs, and the NNGO Focal Point at the NGO Forum should continue to build strong relationships with OCHA.



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7. Appendices

Hygiene and sanitation awareness session in a school in Koch Town, run by a local NNGO partner.

7.1. The potential and contribution of partnership

OEDC-DAC criteria	Missed Opportunities report: The potential of partnerships. (Potential for partnerships: strong / good / moderate / weak)	Missed Again report: Local partnerships in response to Typhoon Haiyan (Contribution of partnerships: strong / good / moderate / weak)	Local partnerships in response to South Sudan December 2013 crisis (Contribution of partnerships: strong / good / moderate / weak)
Relevance	Strong Well-designed partnerships can mitigate criticisms of the lack of relevance and appropriateness of conventional aid delivery.	Strong NNGOs had good proximity to, and knowledge of, local communities. This strengthened the relevance of responses.	Good NGOs demonstrate good knowledge and proximity to the communities they work with. They are undermined by perceptions of partiality and sometimes restricted by the ethnic dimension of the conflict.
Effectiveness	Good Local partnerships can improve the speed, accountability and engagement of responses. Challenges exist in areas of coordination, learning and human resources.	Moderate Partnerships contributed to a timely response, but on a small scale. NNGOs also enhanced effectiveness through their knowledge of communities. Areas of weakness included co-ordination, capacity and learning.	Moderate There are strong examples of NNGOs contributing to a timely response. Effectiveness was enhanced through NNGOs' accountability to and knowledge of communities. In general, NNGOs contributions were ad hoc and limited by logistical challenges related to the context, funding and capacity.

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Efficiency</p>	<p><i>Moderate</i></p> <p>There are considerable cost savings in staff costs.</p> <p>Other aspects of financing are at parity with international efforts.</p> <p>Partnerships require time and effort to set up, maintain and support.</p>	<p><i>Moderate</i></p> <p>NNGOs provided efficiency through low overhead and salary costs.</p> <p>Partnerships required additional costs for operational and technical support.</p> <p>Value for Money analysis identifies potential improvements to outcomes through engagement with communities and knowledge of the context.</p>	<p><i>Moderate</i></p> <p>NNGOs demonstrated efficiency through lower salary and overhead costs. They also spent substantially less on expenses relating to security.</p> <p>South Sudan is a logistically challenging and expensive country to work in. Costs associated with delivery of items are at parity with INGOs and UN agencies.</p> <p>INGOs working in partnership identified additional costs associated with capacity development and technical assistance. In general NNGOs are limited by scale.</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Coverage</p>	<p><i>Moderate</i></p> <p>This is the most challenging area.</p> <p>Coverage challenges affect both partnership agencies and operational agencies.</p> <p>Issues of scale cannot be resolved by simply spending more through local or national organisations.</p>	<p><i>Moderate</i></p> <p>Partnerships between INGOs and faith-based groups benefited from the latter's extensive networks.</p> <p>Direct delivery by INGOs accounted for the majority of coverage.</p> <p>Direct delivery was frequently prioritised over partnerships.</p>	<p><i>Moderate</i></p> <p>NNGOs act as implementing partners for WFP and other UN agencies in their aid delivery.</p> <p>Most NNGOs cannot deliver assistance on the same scale as international counterparts.</p> <p>NNGOs provide access to areas that international agencies are unable to reach because of geography or security.</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Connectedness</p>	<p><i>Good</i></p> <p>National partners smooth links between resilience, preparedness, response and recovery.</p> <p>Partnerships are constrained by separate funding streams for humanitarian and development assistance.</p>	<p><i>Moderate</i></p> <p>In many cases, NNGOs were newcomers to the area affected by the typhoon. As a result connectedness could have been strengthened</p>	<p><i>Moderate</i></p> <p>There are examples of NNGOs smoothing links between preparedness, resilience and response. However, in general, there was insufficient focus on preparedness and NNGOs were limited by rapid shifts in funding for geographical regions and sectors.</p>

7.2. Timeline

Dates	Events
December 2013	<p>Growing political tensions within the ruling party erupt into armed conflict in Juba. Hundreds are killed and thousands seek shelter in UN compounds in Juba.</p> <p>The conflict quickly spreads to other parts of the country, particularly Unity, Upper Nile and Jonglei states. There is heavy fighting in several regional towns and cities including Bentiu, Bor, Malakal and Rubkona.</p> <p>Many foreign workers are evacuated</p>
January 2014	<p>A cessation of hostilities agreement is signed but rapidly broken.</p> <p>By 23 January, 575,500 people have been internally displaced, 112,200 people have fled to neighbouring countries and 76,100 people are sheltering in UN bases, according to UN OCHA (UN OCHA 2014b).</p>
February 2014	<p>Aid agencies request \$1.27 billion to assist 3.2 million people. A Level 3 emergency is declared by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (UN OCHA 2014c).</p>
May 2014	<p>International donors pledge \$600 million in Oslo to scale up the humanitarian response in South Sudan.</p>
July 2014	<p>The UN Security Council describes the food crisis in South Sudan as the worst in the world.</p>
August 2014	<p>Flood conditions worsen, especially in Bentiu PoC. Aid workers are killed in Maban County, Upper Nile State (UN OCHA 2014c).</p>
January 2015	<p>UNMISS release findings of an investigation into attacks on civilians in Bentiu and Bor in April 2014. Their report confirms that civilians were killed in hospitals, places of worship and PoC sites. It also states that civilians were targeted along lines of ethnicity, nationality or perceived support for the opposing party.</p>
May 2015	<p>Increasing conflict in Unity State leads to large-scale violence, the displacement of more than 100,000 civilians and the suspension of nearly all aid to more than 300,000 civilians (UN Security Council 2015).</p> <p>The UN reports that fighting in South Sudan has worsened considerably, with reports of 'widespread killings, rapes, abductions and the burning and destruction of towns and villages throughout South Sudan's Unity state' (UN News Centre 2015).</p> <p>The WFP warns that South Sudan is facing the worst levels of food insecurity in its history because of conflict, high food prices and a worsening economic crisis. According to an Integrated Food Security Phase Classification analysis, about 4.6 million people, or 40% of South Sudan's estimated population, face acute hunger in the next three months.</p> <p>The UNMISS mandate is renewed for six months.</p> <p>The Government of South Sudan expels Toby Lanzer, the UN Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Humanitarian Coordinator for UNMISS.</p>
June 2015	<p>According to UN OCHA, 1.6 million people are internally displaced and 592,795 have fled to neighbouring countries. The humanitarian response is 41% funded, with a funding gap of \$969.8million (UN OCHA 2015b).</p>

Endnotes

1. In South Sudan CAFOD works as 'CAFOD and Trócaire in Partnership'
2. See UN OCHA information: <http://www.unocha.org/south-sudan/common-humanitarian-fund>
3. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/>
4. <http://www.unocha.org/about-us/who-we-are>
5. UN OCHA 2016
6. ActionAid does not operate in South Sudan, therefore this particular case study was commissioned by the other four agencies, though ActionAid maintained an advisory/observer role.
7. Ramalingam, Gray and Cerruti 2013
8. Featherstone and Antequisa 2014
9. See *Missed Opportunities*, and Annex 1 for a comparative summary
10. Street 2013
11. Ramalingam, Gray and Cerruti 2013
12. Nightingale 2012
13. <http://reliefweb.int/report/world/un-and-partners-launch-2016-humanitarian-appeal-asking-201-billion-aiming-reach-over-87>
14. The IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team has emphasised that meeting the funding gap must include a real prioritisation of nationally-led approaches to humanitarian response (Future Humanitarian Financing 2014).
15. eg, Caritas Internationalis 2014
16. Ramalingam, Gray and Cerruti 2013
17. The term NNGO is used throughout to refer to both national and local organisations. In South Sudan, there are two forms of NNGO: organisations working in multiple states are registered at the national level while CBOs working in only one are registered at the state level.
18. Shortly after the research visit to Leer, conflict forced the population to flee. All international staff were evacuated; the local organisation that facilitated the research visit fled alongside the community.
19. The research visit to Melut was cancelled due to poor weather, which prevented the flight from landing. Melut suffered from subsequent violence.
20. The Operational 3W website for NNGOs illustrates Who does What, Where. It is available at: <http://southsudannngoforum.org/>
21. Nightingale 2012
22. Ramalingam, Gray and Cerruti 2013
23. Featherstone and Antequisa 2014
24. Martins 2014
25. Minear 1991, Philpot 2011
26. Aboum et al 1990, Bradbury 2002, Branch and Mamphilly 2005, Duffield 2002, Philpot 2011
27. Bennett 2013
28. FAO/WFP 2014
29. OCHA Financial Tracking Service <https://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=emerg-emergencyDetails&appealID=1024>
30. OCHA Financial Tracking Service <https://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=emerg-emergencyDetails&appealID=1062>
31. Interview with donor in Juba on 7 May 2015
32. Interview with NNGO in Juba on 13 May 2015
33. Interview with INGO in Juba on 2 May 2015
34. Christoplos 2006; Wall and Robinson 2008; Kelly and Quentier 2014
35. Kelly and Quentier 2014
36. Interview with male community members on 5 May 2015
37. Interview with NNGO in Leer on 5 May 2015
38. Interview with church leaders in Leer on 5 May 2015
39. Interview with female community members on 5 May 2015
40. In some interviews, local staff and local organisations were referred to interchangeably. The authors of this report see the roles of the two groups as distinct. In particular, NNGOs benefit from being locally embedded, owned and run.
41. Interview with INGO in Juba on 20 May 2015
42. Interview with NGO Forum in Juba on 8 May 2015
43. Interview with INGO in Juba on 30 April 2015
44. Interview with NNGO in Juba on 15 May 2015
45. There is a poor legacy of aid diversion and a lack of neutrality in previous interventions in South Sudan (Philpot 2011). During OLS, donors often turned a blind eye towards aid diversion. The change in attitudes towards diversion is one root of the strained relations between NGOs and government actors (Maxwell et al. 2015).
46. Interview with INGO on 2 May 2015
47. Interview with NNGO on 13 May 2015
48. Minear 1991, Maxwell, Santschi and Gordon 2014
49. Taken from the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability. <http://www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/files/files/Core%20Humanitarian%20Standard%20-%20English.pdf>
50. Interview with INGO on 4 May 2015
51. Care, undated
52. OCHA 2015c, see also <http://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/crisis-impacts-households-unity-state-south-sudan-2014-2015-initial-results>
53. https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/SouthSudan/2015_SouthSudan/Interview%20with%20Gender%20Advisor%20on%20gender%20equality_FINAL%20VERSION.pdf
54. Interview with INGO in Juba on 20 May 2015
55. Interview with donor in Juba on 7 May 2015
56. Interview with NNGO in Juba on 18 May 2015
57. Interview with church leaders on 14 May 2015
58. Telford, Cosgrave and Houghton 2006
59. Anonymous interview on 8 May 2015
60. Volunteers were taken from Jonglei and other regions where they were seen as neutral.
61. Interview with church-based organisation on 13 May 2015
62. Interview with INGO in Juba on 1 May 2015
63. A study of local organisations in 2012 found that NNGO staff have a high level of training: 44.93% held a Bachelor's degree, 22.47% held a Diploma, 14.25% held a Masters' degree, 2.19% held a PhD. The education levels may have dropped since 2014 when many qualified South Sudanese left the country due to conflict (NGO Forum 2012b).
64. Interview with NNGO on 19 May 2015
65. Interview with INGO in Juba on 2 May 2015
66. Humanitarian Accountability Partnership standards are designed to help organisations to design, implement, assess and improve accountability programmes. The standards are also intended to reduce the risk of mistakes, abuse and corruption. See www.hapinternational.org
67. Interview with NNGO on 13 May 2015
68. Email communication on 5 September 2015

69. Interview with INGO in Juba on 14 May 2015
70. INGOs also face corruption challenges and there is insufficient data available to make statements about the comparative levels of corruption faced by INGOs and NNGOs. However, larger organisations tend to benefit from better systems that provide checks and balances.
71. The extent to which corruption affects both NNGOs and INGOs is an area which requires more research to collect more measurable data.
72. Gingerich and Cohen 2015
73. UNMISS 2014
74. The extensive reach and capacity of national and community-based actors has been seen in South Sudan since the OLS response, when small and versatile local organisations, with an understanding of the situation on the ground, were supported to continue operations (Salinas O'Toole 1998).
75. Identity politics have jeopardised the ability of some national organisations to reach populations in conflict-sensitive areas.
76. NGO Forum 2014b
77. Interview with NNGO on 19 May 2015
78. Interview with church-based organisation on 14 May 2015
79. South Sudan Protection Cluster 2015
80. Interview with church-based organisation on 13 May 2015
81. Cf OCHA 2011
82. Interview with church-based organisation on 15 May 2015
83. Interview with NNGO on 13 May 2015 and interview with NNGO on 20 May 2015
84. In 2012, 123 of 142 NNGOs surveyed had undergone a capacity assessment with their partner INGO. Capacity assessments are developed by individual INGOs so the quality and usefulness to the NNGO is variable.
85. D'Arcy 2014
86. Interview with INGO on 19 May 2015
87. Interview with INGO in Juba on 20 May 2015
88. Cf Cairns 2012
89. Interview with NNGO on 8 May 2015
90. Interview with INGO in Juba on 11 May 2015
91. For example, the NNGOs involved in focus groups had an average of six staff in Juba.
92. Interview with INGO on 8 May 2015
93. Interview with donor on 7 May 2015
94. Interview with INGO on 1 May 2015
95. UN OCHA 2015a
96. Interview with NNGO on 15 May 2015
97. Focus group with NNGOs in Juba on 8 May 2015
98. Fenton and Phillips 2009
99. https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/SouthSudan/2015_SouthSudan/List%20of%20CHF%20supported%20projects.pdf
100. This excludes supplies managed through NNGOs. The logistical challenges are disproportionately difficult in South Sudan, as a result, the supply lines are managed centrally by the UN agencies. INGOs and NNGOs receive in-kind support. For example in 2013 the humanitarian response received \$1.8bn, 1bn of which was for supplies.
101. CHF Annual Reports can be downloaded from <http://www.unocha.org/south-sudan/common-humanitarian-fund/resources-and-publications>
102. Interview with anonymous donor on 19 May 2015
103. fts.unocha.org
104. Interview with donor in Juba on 19 May 2015
105. fts.unocha.org
106. Cf Taylor et al. 2012, which found that, globally, NNGOs have increased opportunities to access pooled funding, but very little access to bilateral funding.
107. NGO Forum 2014b
108. A briefing published by the South Sudan NGO Forum in 2014 argues that service delivery can be a 'comfort zone' role for NNGOs because it is seen as less antagonising to government. The authors argue this limits the role NNGOs can play in peace building (NGO Forum 2014a).
109. This reflects findings that emerged from a review of NGO perspectives on four Level 3 crises, including South Sudan, which described implementing partnership arrangements as 'donor-client relationships' which create a barrier to engagement for local NGOs and smaller INGOs (International Council of Voluntary Agencies 2015).
110. Interview with NNGO on 8 May 2015
111. Interview with NNGO in Juba on 15 May 2015
112. Interview with NNGO in Juba on 8 May 2015
113. At the Oslo conference in May 2014, NNGOs demanded a quota system in the UN funding pipelines including the CHF, HPF, CERF, and RRF.
114. Interview with INGO on 8 May 2015
115. UN OCHA 2014a
116. UN OCHA 2014c
117. UN OCHA 2015a
118. Pape and Pontara 2015
119. NGO Forum 2012a
120. Conway 2013
121. Maxwell et al. 2015
122. Yoron, Roger Alfred 'Government urges transparency from humanitarian organizations' *The Citizen News* Vol. 9 Issue No. 68, 30 May 2105, page 3
123. Interview with senior administrators at Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management on 11 May 2015
124. South Sudan Protection Cluster 2014a
125. South Sudan Protection Cluster 2014b
126. At the time of field research this was known as the Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (RRA).
127. <https://radiotamazuj.org/en/article/kiir-calls-new-law-control-ngos>
128. Knudsen 2011
129. Contu and Girei 2014
130. Charter for Change, 2015

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