

Moving towards local-level peacebuilding?

Contextualizing early peacebuilding activities to local circumstances: South Sudan case-study

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With research assistance from Philip Ohuyoro

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Acronyms

ACCORD	African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes
CA	Civil Affairs
CAD	Civil Affairs Division
CBO	Community Based Organization
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSAC	Community Security and Arms Control
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSBs	County Support Bases
DDR	Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration
DFS	Department of Field Support
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
GoSS	Government of South Sudan
IGAD	Inter-governmental Authority on Development
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NPA	Norwegian Peoples Aid
QIP	Quick Impact Project
RCSO	Resident Coordinator Support Office
RRP	Recovery Reintegration and Peacebuilding
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SPLM	Sudan People's Liberation Movement
SSC	Sudan Council of Churches
SSPC	South Sudan Peace Commission
SRSO	Special Representative of the (UN) Secretary-General
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDSS	United Nations Department of Safety and Security
UNAMIS	United Nations Advance Mission in the Sudan
UNMIS	United Nations Mission in Sudan
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNPOL	United Nations Police
UNV	United Nations Volunteer

Map of South Sudan



Source: UN OCHA, South Sudan Reference Map, 26 September 2011

Executive Summary

The UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan, UNMISS, is one of the most ambitious operations in UN history, in terms of local-level peacebuilding. In the course of the next three years, UNMISS aims to establish 35 County Support Bases (CSBs) in the ten states of South Sudan. According to Ms Hilde Johnson, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and head of UNMISS, these are to serve as a platform and a portal for early peacebuilding activities.

This report is part of a comparative study of UN local peacebuilding in three countries – Haiti, Liberia and South Sudan. When initiating this study, the research team chose the Civil Affairs (CA) section of UN peacekeeping operations as an entry point, as this section is usually deployed wherever the peacekeeping mission has established presences, and is tasked with, *inter alia*, acting as the intermediary with local authorities and populations, as well as the rest of the UN peacekeeping mission and other UN actors.

The UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan is unique, as the first UN peacekeeping mission with an explicit and comprehensive peacebuilding mandate. The mandate has, however, been carefully crafted so as not to put the main responsibility of peacebuilding on the UN. It states that that the UN should ‘develop an early strategy in support of national peacebuilding priorities’¹ which can ‘can deliver prioritized support that reflects the specific peacebuilding needs and priorities of the Republic of South Sudan.’² The civil affairs section is present in all field locations, but in the set-up envisaged by the SRSG their responsibility will be focused on the core tasks of conflict mitigation and political space. Reintegration, reconstruction and peacebuilding (RRP) officers will be responsible for enabling the CSBs to operate according to the vision of the SRSG.

This report is structured in two main segments. The first part examines how CAD has been implementing its key tasks, including the difficult balancing act of working with both institutional and non-institutional actors; the second section considers more broadly how UNMISS, with its RRP officers, envisages engaging with the rest of the UN system and other peacebuilding and development partners.

1 UNSC, "S/RES/1996," United Nations Security Council, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp_symbol/RES/1996%282011%29: p.2.
2 Ibid.: p. 7.

Civil affairs (CA) are playing an important role in facilitating reconciliation and dialogue in South Sudan. While CA officers often remark that they frequently act as ‘travel agents’ facilitating travel for government officials at the local, state and national levels, their role should not be underestimated, as it enables officials to attend peace conferences and engage with local populations to hear their complaints and concerns. This is the first step towards building a relationship between the government and its people, with a participatory system of governance where the periphery is better linked up with the centre in a state.

While it is critical that international actors work side by side with government, it is equally important that CA officers, and all other international actors operating at the local level, engage with customary authorities as well as emerging community-based organizations (CBOs), the local churches, youth, women and local civil society. In many instances, the influence of elders and traditional authorities has been weakened by the civil war. Government-appointed chiefs may also not be representative of their communities, so all UN officials and other partners must be able to understand the complex political economy and dynamics on state and local levels in order to do more good than harm.

The CSBs are part of a very ambitious plan for further strengthening the presence of national authorities on the local level. Based on the principle of equality between international peacekeepers and national authorities, each of the CSBs will co-locate local authorities with the UN, sharing the same standards of buildings, internet access and facilities. They will also facilitate access for other partners within and outside the UN system, including civil society organizations (CSOs).

As such, the CSBs carry a great promise to the local population that the mission will be wise to heed. Unless the presences can be paralleled with service delivery and real peace dividends for local populations, they will result in anger and loss of confidence in peacekeepers and local authorities alike. They will thus be a prism through which it may be possible to follow and measure to which degree the international community and the government in Juba are managing to instil the trust and confidence needed to achieve ‘real’ peacebuilding from the ground up in South Sudan. While all actors should have a sober vision about what the UN can realistically be expected to achieve with a few CSBs in a country the size of France, there is no doubt that the CSBs will be an initiative that merits continued and careful scrutiny by the international and research community alike.

Summary of recommendations

1. Civil affairs and local-level engagement

- Consider embedding/co-locating CA officers in relevant state-level government offices, in coordination with UNDP and AECOM
- Continue to support an inclusive dialogue with the political opposition
- Encourage local government authorities to work with customary authority structures, including inviting them to meetings, ceremonies and other events
- Make use of local CBOs and CSOs to reach out to the population and the village level.

2. Can local actors influence national decision-making processes?

- Press for a more participatory approach among national decision-making organs and politicians, through the SRSG on the strategic level and CA officers on the operational and tactical levels
- Make sure that the CSBs contribute to feeding local voices into national policy processes, including youth, civil society and customary authorities
- Continue and expand the cooperation between UNDP and CAD on CSAC consultations and use the presence of the CSBs to broaden these also to the county level.

3. The UN and local peacebuilding – moving from civil affairs to County Support Bases (CSBs)

- Share the baseline study undertaken in the payams with civil society and other development actors to get their inputs and enable programming for local-level peacebuilding and development
- Ensure close cooperation in CSBs and on state and national levels between CA and the RRP section/UN country team
- The CSBs should be externally evaluated after the first year of operation to improve value for money, effectiveness and ownership among local stakeholders, and remedy possible unintended consequences
- Review the implications of the transfer of QIPs from CA to the RRP officers after one year as regards effectiveness, comparative advantages, and possible unintended consequences

- Follow up the IGAD initiative as a potential model for AU support, as well as for other UN missions, also noting any unintended consequences.

4. Promoting local ownership – the recurring challenge

- Continuously consider and reflect on questions of legitimacy of local actors
- Involve the youth, as well as other groups such as elders and women, in peace conferences and events, as well throughout the entire long-term follow-up process
- Continue the decentralized mission agenda that empowers local CAD teams to operate contextually and flexibly, including developing policy lines for state coordinators approach to their local substantive teams
- Sensitize UNDSS and other administrative sections such as MOVCON to the flexible nature of peacebuilding/CA work.

5. Can the UN strengthen the confidence of local populations in central authorities?

- Allocate all state coordinator positions to individuals with a civil affairs background: that means persons with backgrounds from the country or at least the region, as well as experience in conflict management, analysis and local peacebuilding
- Promote greater information-sharing of CAD conflict analysis and reports within and beyond the mission, including to government and UNDP, while acknowledging that some information may be too politically sensitive to share with the government.

*We concentrate on the top of the tree but we have to focus on the roots.*³

*Right now, the GoSS cannot implement anything except if it uses an international organization to do it.*⁴

Introduction

This project has examined how the UN is undertaking local-level early peacebuilding, focusing on the efforts of the UN DPKO Civil Affairs section. The rationale for making this connection between CA and local-level peacebuilding is grounded in the evolving understanding that ‘peacekeepers are peacebuilders’⁵ and should implement early peacebuilding tasks.⁶ In peacekeeping missions, the Civil Affairs section is most frequently deployed throughout the host country, providing the UN with a presence on the local level. The project looks at how Civil Affairs in several missions operationalize and implement their mandates, through field research in Haiti (United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti – MINUSTAH), Liberia (United Nations Mission in Liberia – UNMIL) and South Sudan – (United Nations Mission in South Sudan – UNMISS). It also studies how the UN peacekeeping more broadly is organizing its work on the local level and working together with local authorities, other UN agencies and development actors.

The overall objective of the project is to see how the early peacebuilding activities of these actors are contextualized to local circumstances. In a UN peacekeeping context, the civil affairs section, as the component most consistently present in the field, is often set to perform the very challenging and courageous act of serving as the intermediary for the various actors: between the local population and local government, and the mission itself, frequently acting as a space-maker for other

³ Interview with South Sudanese Catholic Relief Service staff in Eastern Equatoria State, referring to the international community’s focus in South Sudan.

⁴ Interview with Eastern Equatoria State Peace Coordinator and Secretary to the State Peace and Reconciliation Committee, revealing the sense of dependency felt by the government towards the international community.

⁵ United Nations 2012., *Peace: Keep it. Build it. The Contribution of United Nations Peacekeeping to Early Peacebuilding: Strategy*. UN DPKO and DFS, New York: p. 10.

⁶ As defined by the Secretary-General in his opening remarks of the Security Council discussion on peacebuilding, 13 October 2010 (UN 2010), where he stressed that peacekeeping missions should be enabled ‘to have an impact as “early peacebuilders”’. The meeting in the Security Council was held to discuss the latest *Progress Report of the Secretary-General on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict* (UN 2010).

actors to take on their roles, including early peacebuilding activities.⁷ Also in the academic literature there is increasing consensus that the peacekeeping/peacebuilding divide is an artificial one, and in reality, civilian peacekeepers should be considered early peacebuilders.⁸ The question then is how/if they can perform a catalytic and enabling role to facilitate the developmental activities of other actors, UN and others, so as to create peace dividends out of their presence.

What has been missing in the research is a focus on practical aspects at the subnational level and on adapting activities to local needs and political realities. In Sudan, an ACCORD study on UNMIS' work in local peacebuilding in Southern Sudan prior to independence notes the importance of understanding local context, adapting conflict resolution efforts and supporting local stakeholders, instead of implementing on behalf of local actors.⁹ While the focus of the present report is on the role of CA, it will look to frame these within the wider United Nations engagement in local-level peacebuilding in South Sudan.

Structure of the report and guiding questions

Following a brief overview of the country context and local-level peacebuilding challenges in South Sudan, the report provides a brief introduction to the history of UN peacekeeping, focusing on South Sudan, as well as a short section on the overall roles, responsibilities and challenges of CA in South Sudan. The report seeks to elucidate some core research questions developed jointly by NUPI and UN DPKO Best Practices:

- What kinds of mechanisms have been used to feed the voices of local institutional and non-institutional actors into political processes?
- Are local institutional and non-institutional actors able to influence national decision-making processes, and if so, how?

⁷ For policy documents on the role of UN DPKO on the local level, see e.g. United Nations 2008. *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines*, ('The Capstone Doctrine') Department of Peacekeeping Operations, New York: United Nations. Available at:

http://www.peacekeepingbestpractices.unlb.org/Pbps/Library/Capstone_Doctrine_ENG.pdf; and United Nations DPKO 2008. *Policy Directive: Civil Affairs*, Department of Peacekeeping Operations; and Department of Field Support, April 2008. Available at:

<http://www.undg.org/docs/8915/Civil-Affairs-Policy.pdf>; United Nations (2008).

⁸ See e.g. ACCORD 2011. *Conflict Trends 3/2011* issue dedicated exclusively to the peacebuilding–peacekeeping nexus. Available at:

http://www.accord.org.za/downloads/ct/ct_2011_3.pdf.

⁹ ACCORD 2010. *The Conflict Management Work of the Civil Affairs Division of the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS)*, ACCORD Training for Peace.

The term 'local actors' is extremely broad and requires deconstruction and acknowledging the complexity and contradiction inherent in the term when using it. For the purpose of this report, the term 'local actors' is simplified to refer to local government authorities, customary authorities, and local civil society groups.

- How are the needs for service provision and political participation dealt with on the local level, and how do these needs feed into decision-making processes?
- Are civil affairs officers promoting local ownership and effective participation of all stakeholders in decision-making processes, and if so, how?
- How can civil affairs officers contribute to the strengthening of confidence of the local population in local authorities, and the support given by the UN and other international actors?
- How does the cross-mission representation role of civil affairs facilitate implementation and/or transition, etc.?

Methodology

The research in South Sudan consisted of four weeks of fieldwork, from October to November 2011 where some 60 extended qualitative interviews were conducted in the capital Juba and in two the states of Upper Nile and Eastern Equatoria. The team was composed of Diana Felix da Costa, John Karlsrud and Philip Ohuyoro Karlo. Research conceptualization was done together by NUPI and the UN DPKO Civil Affairs Best Practices Section. The team was hosted and supported by UNMISS's civil affairs division (CAD) and was able to count on the invaluable administrative and logistical support of CA officers throughout the field office visits.

The first week was spent in Juba interviewing HQ senior staff and South Sudanese intellectuals and academic staff from the University of Juba. Two one-week visits were made to Eastern Equatoria State and Upper Nile State. Interviews were limited to Torit and Malakal towns. Although visits to other counties in the two states had been planned initially, these had to be cancelled because of security concerns and various unforeseen events. The final few days were spent in Juba where the team met with civil affairs and UNDP at headquarters level to discuss the preliminary findings and receive feedback.

The methods and tools used throughout the research were anthropology-based and qualitative. In addition to participant observation and semi-structured interviews, the research team held several informal discussions with UN CA officers, other substantive sections within the mission, UNDP staff, state-level government, and CSOs. Six focus-group discussions were carried out with members of the general population, in local markets in Eastern Equatoria and Upper Nile States, and with students at the University of Juba.

Table 1: Interviews conducted in each location, by organizational background and gender¹⁰

	CA staff		Other UNMISS staff		UN agencies		Government authorities		Civil society		General Population	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Total	8	3	3	4	4	1	6	0	17	2	27	16

Discussions aimed at outlining the key experiences and challenges of CA officers, including strategies they had found for contextualizing their mandates. Interviews with non-CAD participants were intended to develop alternate perspectives on the work of CAD; better understanding cross-mission coordination and cooperation; and cooperation with non-UN actors, including local stakeholders. Discussions with the wide array of local actors also sought to assess expectations and understandings of UNMISS in general, and CAD in particular. Individual case studies were explored to supplement the team's understanding of CAD work.

Challenges in methodology

The study offers some useful insights and reflections on civil affairs work in South Sudan, from the perspective of CA officers as well as that of local actors. However, it is not intended as a comprehensive account of UN efforts in local peacebuilding, nor of CA work in South Sudan, particularly given the highly localized nature of local political dynamics. More time would have been needed for a more comprehensive and deeper analysis.

It was not possible to find many women in relevant local government positions, so there is an overwhelmingly male voice throughout the research. Whenever possible, the team made efforts to seek women to speak with, so as to enable a more nuanced gender perspective.

¹⁰ This table includes only those interviews formally conducted as interviews – not include the team's many background talks and informative exchanges with people from all organizational backgrounds. However, these more informal exchanges inform the following text as much as the formal interviews, and should be recognized as part of the process of participatory observation and fieldwork.

Background

Brief country context and challenges to local peacebuilding

South Sudan has been marked by war for over 40 years. In the past 20 years, the conflict has claimed at least 2 million lives,¹¹ caused the displacement of more than 4 million people,¹² and destroyed what little infrastructure existed. The country has a structural deficit of human capacities and skills. As argued in a recent report, ‘the challenge for South Sudan is one of construction rather than reconstruction’.¹³ In terms of human development, South Sudan is one of the poorest countries on earth,¹⁴ but because of the country’s oil revenues, average income per capacity is one of the highest in the region.¹⁵ However, most of the population must struggle to survive on less than one USD per day.¹⁶

Porous borders adjoining difficult regions contribute to insecurity, and the relationship with Sudan remains critical.¹⁷ The provision of essential services like education, health and water remains very limited. This is compounded by a general lack of infrastructure, which increases the challenge of security, and restricts access to services and markets that could aid economic development. Much of the country remains isolated with few or no roads, particularly during the rainy season, and many areas are accessible only by air or on foot. Most states are marked by widespread local violence and conflicts. The widespread proliferation of small arms remains a significant challenge,¹⁸ and at the time of writing several serious conflicts were ongo-

¹¹ Save the Children UK (2011), *South Sudan – A post-independence agenda for action*, London: Save the Children UK, p. 2.

¹² Ibid, p. 2.

¹³ Ibid, p. 2.

¹⁴ As the country was only half a year old at the time of writing, there were no data available from the World Bank or the UNDP Human Development Report on GDP per capita or ranking in terms of human development.

¹⁵ GDP per capita in 2010 was estimated at US\$1,546 compared to US\$769 in Kenya and just US\$189 in Burundi. See The Republic of South Sudan National Bureau of Statistics (2011), *Release of first GDP and GNI figures for South Sudan*. Available at <http://ssnbs.org/home/2011/8/11/release-of-first-gdp-and-gni-figures-for-south-sudan.html>, accessed 22 December 2011. GNI is significantly lower at US\$ 984, due to the sharing of oil revenues with the Sudan.

¹⁶ Southern Sudan Centre for Census, *Statistics and Evaluation*, 2010.

¹⁷ See e.g. J. Giroux et al. (2009), *The tormented triangle: the regionalization of conflict in Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic*, Crisis States Research Centre, Working Paper No. 47. London: London School of Economics.

¹⁸ The widespread proliferation of arms was mentioned as a key issue by most interviewees. See also the UNDP Country Consultation Reports done in 2010 under the UNDP Community Security and Arms Control project; as well as the Republic of Sudan Conflict Mitigation and Stabilization Plan July 2011-July 2012 for Upper Nile State and Eastern Equatoria State.

ing,¹⁹ both internally in Jonglei, Upper Nile and Unity State, and with the neighbouring Sudan over the disputed border area of Abyei.²⁰ Moreover, the conflicts in South Kordofan and Blue Nile States cause insecurity along the Sudan–South Sudan border and have led to the displacement of some 80,000 refugees from Blue Nile alone into South Sudan.²¹

The population of South Sudan has extremely high expectations as to independence and the role of UNMISS in ‘delivering peace’.²² There is a genuine risk of rising tensions if expectations are not met – or if people perceive that peace dividends are being shared unequally. As one of our CA interlocutors explained, ‘[t]he population is a bit negative, they think we’re not doing enough. (...) They want to see something tangible. Soft development in the form of workshops is not enough’.²³ Thus, the UN is facing challenges on all levels. The next section offers a short introduction to the UN and its peacekeeping engagement in the Sudan and South Sudan.

Brief introduction on UN peacekeeping history in the Sudans

The UN Security Council first established a special political mission, the United Nations Advance Mission in the Sudan (UNAMIS) of 11 June 2004,²⁴ mandated with facilitating contacts with between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) and to prepare for the introduction of an envisaged UN peace support operation.²⁵

On 9 January 2005, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed by the government of the Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army in Naivasha, Kenya, ending more than 20 years of war. The CPA included provisions on security arrangements, power-sharing, some autonomy for the south, and more equitable dis-

¹⁹ Conflict was raging in Pibor in Jonglei State, where members of the Lou Nuer tribe were pursuing members of the Murle tribe in cattle-raiding revenges. One thousand people were reported to have been killed according to various news outlets, although this was not confirmed by the UN. For more, see BBC, ‘South Sudanese flee to escape deadly ethnic vendetta’. Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-16381579>, accessed 10 January 2012.

²⁰ Abyei was expected to hold a referendum on whether to be part of the Sudan or South Sudan prior to secession. Similarly, popular consultations about the future of their states had also been planned in Blue Nile and South Kordofan, before the split.

²¹ MSF, South Sudan: Window of opportunity closing fast to provide assistance to 80,000 Sudanese refugees from Blue Nile state. Available at: <http://www.msf.org/msf/articles/2012/03/south-sudan-window-of-opportunity-closing.cfm>

²² Most interviews with local leaders and population pointed at the role of UNMISS in responding to improved security, jobs and access to basic services.

²³ Interview with national CA officer, Torit.

²⁴ Established by UNSC [resolution 1547 \(2004\)](#) of 11 June 2004.

²⁵ A joint AU–UN mission – UNAMID – has also been established for Darfur, but this will not be discussed in this report.

tribution of economic resources, including oil.²⁶ While the parties established the unity of the Sudan as a priority under the agreement, a six-and-a-half-year interim period was set up during which transitional institutions would govern the country and international monitoring mechanisms would be established and operationalized. As per the CPA, a referendum to determine the status of Southern Sudan (unity or secession) would be held at the end of this interim period.

The UN Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS) was established on 24 March 2005 by UNSC Resolution 1590 (2005). It was tasked with supporting the parties in implementing the CPA, including facilitating and coordinating, within its capabilities and in its areas of deployment, the voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons and humanitarian assistance; assisting the parties in the mine action sector; and contributing towards international efforts to protect and promote human rights in the Sudan.

At the referendum held in January 2011, the overwhelming majority – 98.83% of those voting – chose independence.²⁷ The Sudanese authorities were responsible for the referendum process, backed up by on UN logistical and technical assistance to the CPA parties' referendum preparations.

With the declaration of independence for South Sudan on 9 July 2011, the UNMIS mandate expired and was replaced by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) through UNSC resolution 1996 (2011). This new mission was mandated to consolidate peace and security and help establish the conditions for development, with a view to strengthening the capacity of the government of the Republic of South Sudan to govern effectively and democratically and establish good relations with its neighbours. UNMISS is arguably the first UN mission to have a strong local-level mandate with a specific focus on local-level peacebuilding.

Uncertain transition

It has been understandably difficult for most South Sudanese to follow the changes in missions and their mandates, from UNAMIS to UNMIS now to UNMISS. The shift in mandate and mission has remained unclear not only to members of local governments and the populace, but to UNMISS staff itself, with implications for general expectations as to the role of the UN in the country.

²⁶ Great uncertainties still remain after the independence of South Sudan as regards how the Abyei area should be divided. An Ethiopian force – the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) – has been deployed to stabilize and secure the area, under UN Security Council Resolution 1990. UN, *S/RES/1990*, 27 June 2011.

²⁷ UNMIS website, 'Referendum on Southern Sudan', Available at: <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmis/referendum.shtml>

At the time of our visit, the overall mission concept note was still being revised and sent between Juba and New York. There was frequent confusion at HQ level, and even more so at field level. One senior CA officer suggested that this could be due in part to the shift from Chapter VI to VII in the mandate of the mission,²⁸ and the reluctance of the GoSS to accept this.²⁹ According to this officer, not even military troops and observers were clear on this shift in the mandate. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) had visited all state capitals and arranged meetings with members of government and civil society, who were therefore able to explain the shift in the mandate, but greater efforts were required by the Public Information Office (PIO) to communicate the message to the population.

²⁸ According to the conventional interpretation of the UN Charter, a Chapter VII-mandated mission can be more robust and if necessary use force against non-strategic actors and groups to enforce its mandate and to protect civilians. See NYU CIC, *Robust Peacekeeping: The Politics of Force*, ed. J. Nealin Parker, vol. 2011 (New York: Center on International Cooperation, New York University, 2009); UN, *Draft DPKO/DFS Concept Note on Robust Peacekeeping* (New York: United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations / Department of Field Support, 2010).

²⁹ Interview with senior CA officer, Juba.

Contextualizing early peacebuilding to local circumstances – findings from South Sudan

1. Brief introduction to civil affairs in South Sudan

Civil affairs (CA) is one of the largest civilian components in UN peacekeeping, with 1009 staff members mandated and 870 staff deployed globally to facilitate the implementation of peacekeeping mandates at the subnational level.³⁰ The *Policy Directive on Civil Affairs* establishes three main roles for CA components, depending on the mandate and the stage of mandate implementation:³¹

- cross-mission representation, monitoring and facilitation at the local level;
- confidence-building, conflict management and support to reconciliation; and
- support to the restoration and extension of state authority.

The Civil Affairs Division (CAD) in South Sudan is focused on conflict management and extension of state authority at the local level, although it also plays a significant part in cross-mission representation, monitoring and facilitation. The CAD mandate has not been greatly affected by the shift from UNMIS to UNMISS, although, as also with the status of the general mission concept note, there was as of yet no CA-specific concept note nor work-plan at the time of our visit. However, each region had already begun preparing its own specific work-plan based on strategic priorities and the local context.

2. Civil affairs and local-level engagement

By their very nature, peacekeeping missions operate side by side with and in support of a host government, at national, state and local levels. The government is always the primary interlocutor and partner of a UN mission. The UN operates under the basic peacebuilding premise that it is there in order to establish security and the underlying conditions for the government to establish the rule of law and improve the delivery of basic services and development activities. The UN may often take local government and its legitimacy for granted. While this

³⁰ Including professional national and international officers and UN Volunteers. UN 2012. *Civil Affairs Staffing January 2012*. UN DPKO, New York.

³¹ DPKO/Department of Field Services 2008. *Policy Directive on Civil Affairs*.

may be a pragmatic result of the UN's need to engage in a particular country and context, which necessarily requires the cooperation of the host government, it may also limit wider engagement with other actors. In South Sudan, most CA officers spend much of their time working with government. Notwithstanding, CAD has also looked to support customary (traditional) authorities, religious organizations and other community-based organizations (CBOs) in their conflict resolution work, acknowledging their importance in the social fabric of the young nation.

Linking logistical support to political analysis

UNMISS is a political mission and CAD has a political role at the local level. Its work focuses primarily on collection and analysis of information on localized conflict dynamics, and providing the government with logistical support 'in doing their job'.³² CAD support largely focuses on practical aspects of conflict resolution in the form of transporting government officials and other relevant stakeholders such as representatives of Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) and local church organizations to peace conferences and related events in isolated parts of the country,³³ as well as assisting in organizing those meetings, particularly in relation to conflict management. As explained by one CA officer,

One of the follow-ons from the old mission is to move the government around. CA is strong in transporting the governor and his advisors. But we don't participate greatly. A lot of the work we do is allowing the government to do their job. We then sit backstage. Sometimes we feel like 'travel agents'. Even when we bring individuals together, we are able to pre-empt their next moves because we're able to understand the dynamics.³⁴

By being 'close to the action', CAD has a privileged position close to government officials on state and local levels in responding to local conflicts. CAD has a limited advisory role and operates mostly behind the scene at events, facilitating meetings and supporting the parties. As observed by one CA officer in Upper Nile State, 'On our own, we're not leading any efforts, we had no mandate to do that before anyway. We're providing capacity and support. In most cases we sound the early warning.'³⁵

³² This expression came up regularly with several CA officers interviewed.

³³ For a good study of how the UN can partner with religious actors and churches for local peacebuilding, see I.M. Breidlid and A. Stensland 2011. 'The UN Mission and Local Churches in South Sudan: Opportunities for Partnerships in Local Peacebuilding', *Conflict Trends*, 3/2011. ACCORD, Durban.

³⁴ Interview with CA officer, Malakal.

³⁵ Ibid.

Although there were some exceptions, most government authorities regarded the role of CA and UNMISS more broadly as providing logistical support and transport. This type of logistical support is critical in a country that is roughly the size of France yet has only 100 kilometres of paved roads³⁶ – and the rainy season prevents most travel between state capitals and the rest of the territory. The CAD use mission assets (like helicopters and boats) as their added-value, and as a tool for their peace facilitation and advisory work.

Working with local institutional actors³⁷

Most interviewees reported that relations between CA and government officials on the state and local levels were as fairly positive, but we noted significant differences in the two field offices visited. For example, all members of the CAD in Upper Nile State reported that they had the direct telephone numbers of the state governor and other senior-level state officials, and close working relations with local authorities. By contrast, in Eastern Equatoria State the CAD was not authorized by the state coordinator to have direct access to the local authorities, particularly those above their own hierarchical level: that greatly restricted the ability of CA officers to conduct their job,³⁸ like collecting information and supporting the government in its work. While this has largely to do with individual personalities (e.g. relations between the state governor and the UNMISS state coordinator), it made CAD work potentially isolated from wider events.

Nevertheless, the approach taken by CAD in the two states visited was where CA personnel act backstage, seeking encourage the government to act in certain ways. To judge from our fieldwork in Haiti and in South Sudan, national professional officers are regarded by both CA colleagues and local stakeholders as being those with the closest relationships to local authorities and thus able to exert significant influence on policy processes:³⁹

We push the government to do their job, but we don't ever lead. We use a carrot and stick approach, we try to push them in the right direction. We push them by chatting with them, building good relationships, but let them feel they're doing things and coming up with ideas. We don't take the lead.⁴⁰

³⁶ International Monetary Fund 2011. *South Sudan Faces Hurdles as World's Newest Country*. Available at <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/2011/car071811a.htm> accessed 22 December 2011.

³⁷ In this report, the term 'institutional actors' refers mostly to local government, while the 'non-institutional actors' are civil society organizations and traditional authorities.

³⁸ Interviews with several CA officers.

³⁹ The team visited Haiti and MINUSTAH in a prior field research period for the same project.

⁴⁰ Interview with national CA officer, Malakal.

The statement also highlights the challenges that peacekeepers face in trying to get their local counterparts to take the lead and assume ownership in programming and implementing activities. As shown by the statement quoted above, the UN is struggling between seeking to control the direction and actions of their counterparts, while at the same time trying to maintain the sense of ownership of the very same activities.⁴¹

Privileging relationships with institutional actors, as the UN tends to do, is not an easy task and can complicate or even prevent the organization from engaging with other stakeholders, be they opposition parties or rebel groups. Broad engagement is a necessary feature of CA work, and can be critical in local-level development. In South Sudan, as in many other states, the governing party (here: the SPLM) seeks to maintain the leading position it gained through the struggle for independence. This can put the UN and CA in a difficult position: ‘It’s hard for us, we’re by very nature meant to be neutral and non-partisan. But South Sudan is effectively a one-party state. If opposition parties are perceived as a threat, they get destroyed by SPLM.’⁴²

Despite its constitution, South Sudan remains a *de facto* one-party state, its government reluctant to involve non-state actors into the power sphere and discussion. One CA officer shared his frustrations with us:

We [CA UNMISS] have to be neutral but the government gets pissed off when we show up with SPLM-DC or other opposition parties. We’re accused of supporting the opposition. I’ve been at an SPLA garrison where I’ve been verbally attacked by SPLA officials because of it. We’re providing a forum for negotiation and good offices, which is what we’re supposed to do. But it doesn’t go down well, spending time with ‘rebels’.⁴³

Despite their cordial relationship and the logistical support facilitated by CA, the current working environment prevents CA and the government from engaging in a real working partnership. Some CA officers echoed the lack of trust between the two sets of actors. One officer confided, ‘there’s an element of suspicion between the government and UNMISS (...) there’s an information impasse.’ He went on to add that the government ‘only come to us [CAD] when they need our help, and we don’t share all our reports with them either. To me it would make sense to have a CA officer in the state office.’⁴⁴

⁴¹ SPLM-DC is chaired by Lam Akol, a former SPLM official with close ties to Khartoum.

⁴² Interview with CA officer, Malakal.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Other organizations, among them the UNDP and AECOM,⁴⁵ focus their local peacebuilding work on institutional actors, albeit with a different and arguably more successful approach that promotes greater trust between organizations and government.⁴⁶ Both organizations have embedded staff within government offices at the state level. The UNDP has UN Volunteers (UNVs) integrated in the Ministry of Local Governance and Law Enforcement in all ten states, who also provide technical advice to the State Peace and Reconciliation Committee, which is the state organ that spearheads peace activities in various conflicting communities. Through its ‘Community Security and Arms Control’ (CSAC) project, the UNDP has also undertaken extensive community-level consultations on community priorities and needs:⁴⁷

We reach down, send roots to the ground (...) we do consultations, go to county level, because most international community support has focused on national institutions. We invite at local level to hear women leaders, youth leaders, religious leaders, traditional leaders and local authorities, police... So, using PRA [Participatory Rural Appraisal] tools and methodology, we sit and do a conflict analysis – who is involved in the conflicts, who are the victims, root causes, the trends, consequences, etc. Based on this, in their own wisdom, what are their priorities and what would they do to resolve these.⁴⁸

AECOM has state advisors placed in the governors’ offices of all ten states, with direct regular access to the governor. Indicative of the potential and recognized ability of CA, seven out of the ten state advisors are former CA officers. According to one state advisor, ‘the work we [state advisors] do is exactly that of CA but more effective, since it doesn’t have DPKO rules and limitations.’ He went on to provide some examples where CA officers come for quick meetings and leave soon after, whereas AECOM or UNDP staff are permanently based in government, building trust and confidence and better able to influence processes.

Although one senior CA officer in Juba mentioned she always advised her staff to make use of AECOM officers (former CA officer colleagues) strategically placed in governors’ offices throughout the ten states, as a way of gaining access and trust, this will still only give limited access for CA. The leverage enjoyed by the UNDP and AECOM through co-locating their staff within government structures is high and relatively cheap compared to the access and leverage that CA can achieve. According to the same senior CA officer, the gov-

⁴⁵ AECOM, a US private company financed by USAID, has been engaged in peace work in South Sudan since 2007. Although it has been doing what most interviewees considered ‘very good work’, USAID did not renew their contract. Interview with AECOM peace advisor Upper Nile State, Malakal.

⁴⁶ This is based on interviews with government officials where they spoke with great familiarity about AECOM and UNDP in both states visited.

⁴⁷ See UNDP 2011. ‘Community Security and Arms Control in Southern Sudan’. Available at http://www.sd.undp.org/projects/s_cp2.htm, accessed 14 November 2011.

⁴⁸ Interview with UNDP official, Juba.

ernment had been very reluctant to have UN staff embedded in its ministries during the former UNMIS, explaining that it would create parallel structures, and thus CAD did not make use of this option.⁴⁹ The UNDP, however, had several senior officers embedded in a range of central-level ministries and over 100 UNVs in the ten states.⁵⁰ We would argue that the UN would do well to operate with a hybrid system where both UNDP and CA officers could be co-located with local officials, improving the impact of the organization. However, it may also be possible to improve internal cooperation between the UNDP and CA, so that the variations in access and co-location could be sorted out without CA actually locating staff within ministries. One possible model would be to co-locate CA officers on local levels, and UNDP officers on state levels and up.

Working with non-institutional actors

The current peacebuilding model accords to civil society a prominent role in the overall response to sustainable peace, as regards scholars as well as practitioners. Most UN and INGO policies now have projects to support and strengthen local civil society, and these are seen as a means and a condition for sustainable peace. Local civil society organizations (CSOs) have increasingly become the implementing arm and the objective of many peacebuilding interventions.⁵¹

Peacebuilding policies with a considerable focus on civil society have also been accused of bypassing the strengthening of local state authorities, even though the latter might not be present at all or have little legitimacy in the eyes of the people.⁵² Predictably, our government interviewees emphasized the need for the UN and other international actors to work alongside the government, whereas CSO interviewees stressed the importance of engaging with CSOs and CBOs to truly reach the population. In both states visited, the team heard several success stories of CA support to local CSOs, such as the ones below:⁵³

⁴⁹ In addition, it was also explained that if CA officers were to be embedded they would answer directly to the government, and CAD as it were was already short on staff.

⁵⁰ This number is expected to rise to 180 UNVs located in the ministries in all ten states, through the UNDP 'support to states' programme. Interview with UNDP official, Juba.

⁵¹ D. Hillhorst and M. van Leeuwen, 2005. 'Grounding local peace organisations: a case study of southern Sudan', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 43, 4, pp. 537–563.

⁵² S. Crowther, 2001. 'The Role of NGOs, local and international, in post-war peacebuilding', Committee for Conflict Transformation Support, *CCTS Newsletter 15*.

⁵³ For a critical discussion of the term 'civil society organization' applied to the African context see D. Lewis, 2002. 'Civil Society in African Contexts: Reflections on the usefulness of a concept', *Development and Change*, 33(4): pp. 569–586.

Civil affairs support to the Peace Actors Forum in Upper Nile State⁵⁴

The Peace Actors Forum was established in 2009 with the support of the civil affairs division to coordinate all activities related to peace taking place in the state. Currently under the purview of the Peace Commission which exists at national level, the Peace Actors Forum in Upper Nile State includes national and international actors operating in the sphere of peace and reconciliation, such as the Council of Elders, the South Sudan Council of Churches, the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission, the South Sudan Small Arms Control, the Women's Association for Peace and Development, UNMISS civil affairs, UNDP, Pact Sudan, and Care International.

The coordination forum was established after the civil affairs division started receiving many similar requests for assistance from various organizations involved in peace work. While at its inception, CAD had a central role, the Peace Commission has now taken the lead in organizing meetings and getting organizations together, while still relying on the support of UNMISS. The Acting Director of the Forum explained that whenever 'an incident takes place, I call an emergency meeting and we [organizations] can plan together', meeting in case of emergencies but otherwise regularly on a twice a month basis. In the words of the acting-director:

UNMIS always helps us. We achieve some important things in the state. At one point, we were organizing a Peace Conference, including people from Unity and Jonglei, before the referendum. We planned for around 250 people, which would bring together all politicians and leaders, opposition parties. The list of delegates had been given to UNMIS and everything was ready. At the last minute, the national government in Juba cancelled with the excuse that this could divide people before the referendum ... We had three main topics of discussion, unity in Upper Nile; land disputes and relationship between SPLA and civilians. The government didn't want to discuss with rebel groups and opposition parties, and this was very disappointing.⁵⁵

This case also demonstrates the challenges in attempting to engage with non-institutional actors in the context of South Sudan and the reluctance of the government to bring together opposition parties.

⁵⁴ Interviews with the Peace Actors Forum acting director and with CA officer, Malakal.

⁵⁵ Interview with the Peace Actors Forum acting director, Malakal.

Civil affairs support to the establishment of the Youth Forum and Civil Society Network in Eastern Equatoria State⁵⁶

The Eastern Equatoria State Youth Forum was set up in August 2010 with the support of one national CA officer. Although the youth had initiated several community-based organizations (CBOs) throughout the state, they had remained unable to voice their concerns and come together as a group. As the CA officer explained: ‘I started telling them – ‘We call you civil society. But if you don’t unite you can’t talk to the government. If you approach the government as a group, they will listen to you.’⁵⁷ From here, a united youth forum was established. The CA officer assisted in registration and procedures, and although the Forum is still in its infancy, it has worked with Pact Sudan on civic education and UNDP during the referendum as a means to engage youth.⁵⁸

Similarly, CAD also assisted in establishing the Eastern Equatoria Civil Society Network for regular meetings of Eastern Equatorian local NGOs.⁵⁹

Historically, the 1980s saw a proliferation of NGOs in the South as a response to the presence of international aid agencies that required local CSOs to work with.⁶⁰ Although umbrella organizations such as the Youth Forum of Eastern Equatoria, the Civil Society Network or the Peace Actors Forum are still in a nascent stage, they are promising interlocutors for community actors to engage with the government in a unified and structured manner. However, it is also worth reflecting on whether such local organizations are in fact representative of the communities – and what influence and legitimacy they have on the ground. At present, local churches are the most important civil society actors in South Sudan, whereas the international community (non-faith based) has been providing support mainly to small secular CBOs that have little influence among the local population.

⁵⁶ Interview with the chairman of the Youth Forum in Eastern Equatoria State; chairman of the Civil Society Network of Eastern Equatoria State and with national CA officer, Torit.

⁵⁷ Interview with national CA officer, Torit.

⁵⁸ We use the term *youth* aware of its multiple identities and voices, ranging from educated urban youth to less accessible and widely illiterate and marginalized youth from villages and cattle camps. Sommers and Schwartz (2011) highlight how the civil war has led to three new identities for South Sudanese youth: 1) those who remained in South Sudan during the war; 2) IDPs who fled to Khartoum, known negatively as ‘Jalaba’ (Arabs); and 3) ‘diaspora youth’, referring to those who fled to East Africa. For a good analysis of the complexity and specific challenges facing South Sudanese youth see M. Sommers and S. Schwartz, 2011. *Dowry and Division: Youth and State Building in South Sudan*, USIP Special Report November 2011.

⁵⁹ Interview with national CA officer and chairman of the Network, Torit.

⁶⁰ H. Abdel Ati, 2006. ‘Untapped potential: civil society and the search for peace’, *Conciliation Resources*, available at: <http://www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/sudan/civil-society.php>.

Recommendations

- Consider embedding/co-locating CA officers in relevant local-level government offices, in coordination with UNDP and AECOM;
- Continue to support an inclusive dialogue with the political opposition;
- Encourage local government authorities to work with customary authority structures, including inviting them to meetings, ceremonies;
- Make use of local churches, CBOs and CSOs to reach out to the population and village level.

3. Can local actors influence national decision-making processes?**Gap between centre and periphery**

As in many post-conflict countries where the state is nearly entirely absent from rural areas and there is a wide divide between the centre and periphery, South Sudan is no exception. Given that until the country's recent independence, Juba was considered periphery in relation to Khartoum, it is no surprise that there are huge challenges in reducing the gap between the current political, administrative and economic centre – Juba – and the rest of the country. The notion of centre-periphery is also applicable to state capitals and the rest of their territories. The government is present at national and state levels, albeit with weak capacity. On the county level there is nearly a complete lack of state presence and infrastructure, while below the county level (*payam* and *boma*) only informal structures exist. The principle of decentralization has been more in word than action. Most power and resources are located in the centre – in Juba, and to a lesser extent at the state levels. As articulated by a UNDP official of the conflict prevention and recovery unit (CPRU) involved in community-level consultations:

People in communities have never seen their government. In Khartoum time, the government was limited to the county. During the war, there was total chaos. And now post-independence, government is sitting in state capitals. There are no peace dividends to be seen. No schools, no roads, no hospitals, at community level. At community level what has kept communities together are the chiefs, who have held legislative, administrative and judicial power. The social contract that should tie the government to communities simply isn't there.⁶¹

⁶¹ Interview with UNDP official, Juba.

The divide between the core (centre) and the periphery in the (old) Sudan has historically been very deep, and local institutional and non-institutional actors have barely been connected to the centre, let alone able to influence national decision-making.⁶² The South Sudan national government remains authoritarian in nature and extractive in its economic pursuits. There is little tolerance for dissent, nor real interest in consultations. One should keep in mind that most officials on all levels in the government and administration have a history of participating actively in the civil war, and very often as military officers in the SPLA. The military influence on the administration is thus enormous and it will be a great challenge to start changing the combative and zero-sum mindset that pervades the current administration of South Sudan towards a more conciliatory and inclusive government.

The core idea behind the centre-periphery argument is that ‘central elites seek control over the resources of the country by exploiting the natural resources of the periphery (farmland, oil) and the labour of its inhabitants, also gaining profits from trade in the provinces, while investing its capital only in the centre’.⁶³ This framework can assist in conceptualizing not only the history, but the present and future of South Sudan. The new capital Juba, a previously provincial periphery has which has now become ‘the centre’, is now employing many of the same predatory measures it was previously victim of, such as manipulation of local conflicts and politicization of inter-communal tensions. A centre-periphery analysis also helps to understand the successive waves of international involvement in the Sudan from the colonial period until now, where the periphery is largely ignored, in relation to greater emphasis given to national dimensions.⁶⁴ In broader terms, it can also be used to frame the post-CPA international peacekeeping and peacebuilding presence in the country that has overwhelmingly been based in provincial capitals and emphasized liberal understandings of peace. UNMISS’s attempts to assist government presence and performance at county level through the County Support Bases (CSBs) may be a promising step in the right direction, to be discussed in the next section.

UN support to narrowing the gap

Supporting local actors’ influence national decision-making processes and establishing links between the national and local-level dimensions are hence extremely challenging yet necessary features of CA’s work. If decision-processes are to be duly informed of the needs from the

⁶² For a good overall historical background see D. Johnson, 2011. *The root causes of Sudan’s civil wars*, Oxford: James Currey.

⁶³ A. De Waal, 2007. Sudan: What kind of state? What kind of crisis?, Occasional Paper No.2 London: London School of Economics, Crisis States Research Centre, p.6.

⁶⁴ See also Edward Thomas, 2011. ‘The Past & Future of Peace’ in I. Ryle, J. Willis, S. Baldo and J.M. Jok (eds.) *The Sudan Handbook*, Woodbridge: James Currey.

ground up, it is important to encourage national decision-making organs and politicians to listen to local actors as much as supporting local actors in having a coherent message in voicing their concerns. The UN and CA can play an important role in this work, both at central and local levels. In Juba, senior CA officers can develop relationships with counterparts in relevant ministries as well as guiding the SRSNG and other senior officials of the UN who can weigh in at the political level.

At the local level, CSAC consultations aim to contribute to the creation of a social contract between the government and the people. The consultations have been done jointly by UNDP with CAD, yet according to the CSAC project manager, 'the whole consultation process is not done by UNDP, it's the South Sudan Peace Commission and the South Sudan Bureau for Community Security and Arms Control, part of the Ministry of Interior.'⁶⁵ UNDP has provided training in PRA methods to ministry staff who then train people at the county level that can conduct the consultations in local languages. From there, depending on the issues identified at local level, various ministries are involved. For example, if food security is identified as a conflict factor, then the ministry of agriculture is involved. By the time of our field research, consultations had been completed in Eastern Equatoria, Jonglei and Upper Nile, and were about to start in Unity, Lakes and Warrap states.

UNDP aims to act as the messenger between the community and the state through the CSAC, which could be the start of a relationship built on trust where communities identify their concerns and their government acts upon these.⁶⁶ Community priorities are also shared with other stakeholders who may want to work at county level. Yet most importantly, the consultations open up 'entry points': 'Communities look at themselves as tribes, yet responses come regionally to the whole country.'⁶⁷ According to the CSAC project manager,

This is still early days, but this is where conflict transformation comes from. We support the Peace Commission focusing on a peace strategy, which can involve mediation teams, peace cadres, etc. This is a process, of continued change and requiring flexibility with a learn-by-doing approach. Look at many aspects, livelihood issues, issues of culture, how to change the mindset. There is no one right approach to get it right. What we get from the consultations feeds into the Sudan Stabilization Fund.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Interview with UNDP official, Juba.

⁶⁶ See UNDP 2011. 'Community Security and Arms Control in Southern Sudan'. Available at http://www.sd.undp.org/projects/s_cp2.htm, accessed 14 November 2011.

⁶⁷ Interview with UNDP official, Juba.

⁶⁸ Interview with UNDP official, Juba.

Recommendations

- Press for a more participatory approach among national decision-making organs and politicians, through the SRSG on the strategic level and CA officers on the operational and tactical levels
- Make sure that the CSBs contribute to feeding local voices into national policy processes, including youth, civil society and traditional authorities
- Continue and expand the cooperation between UNDP and CAD on CSAC consultations and use the presence of the CSBs to expand these to the county level as well.

4. The UN and local peacebuilding – moving from civil affairs to County Support Bases

This section will look more closely at the role of civil affairs in terms of facilitating access to service provision, whether from national authorities or other actors. It will also sketch out the main tenets of the County Support Bases (CSBs) now being established across South Sudan, and how these are expected to function.

Decentralizing the UN

The UN mission has realized that the work it does at local levels requires flexibility. For this reason it is focused on decentralizing authority to the state coordinator level, and further to the subsections below the state level. The two field offices visited by our team differed in their approaches and understandings of how authority was decentralized, although there appears to be a policy of decentralizing authority to all states.

The decision of UNMISS to decentralize its offices and focus attention at the subnational level was grounded in the realization that South Sudan's greatest needs exist at the county and subcounty levels. Important here are the capacity and physical infrastructure limitations across South Sudan as well as the localized nature of conflicts:

...our presence there, even without doing anything already has a great impact, people feel reassured. And when we're around the government tries to be more present too. It would be even better if we could spend more time in *payams* and *bomas*.⁶⁹

The local level is also where there are fewer international organizations operating, and are hence where the UNMISS can have greatest

⁶⁹ Interview with CA officer, Malakal.

impact can be greatest and most value added, according to one of our CA interlocutors:

Let me tell you the truth, this mission, and especially CA, will find its added-value at county level and below. In state capitals you'll find UNDP, USAID, and others entrenched in ministries. Rather than start top-bottom, we should start at county towns and make it bottom-up. That's where we'd find relevance and be useful.⁷⁰

Decentralization started already during the tenure of the previous SRSR during the UNMIS period. According to Sylvia Fletcher, who heads the newly established Recovery, Reintegration and Peacebuilding (RRP) Section, there was an ambitious vision of the UN resident coordinator to establish Referendum Support Bases ahead of the referendum in January 2011.⁷¹ Support was established in the ten states and in fourteen out of the seventy-nine counties. Some temporary presences were also established. Governors appointed county commissioners; UNMIS provided considerable assistance, with logistics, transport and administrative support. Some visits by state authorities to the local level also got under way in the county offices during this period.

Resident Coordinator Support Officers (RCSOs) were deployed to these presences, to liaise with and between humanitarian actors, national and local authorities. Among their tasks was to undertake assessments including a survey in 237 of about 700 *payams* on livelihoods, policing, and so forth, creating a baseline study which is the most comprehensive in South Sudan to date.⁷² The study focused on the *payams* with the highest number of returnees, assessing the ability of these communities to absorb the returnees. The RRP Section is a continuation of the RCSO liaison function, but is planned to take up other tasks as well. The baseline study of the *payams* serves as an important tool in planning the future activities of the section, which will undertake a mixture of tasks, as the title indicates. This baseline study will also be central to the work of the government and development actors when planning their future interventions across South Sudan.

When questioned about the relationship between this section and the CAD, mission representatives emphasized the need to separate the task of conflict resolution that sits with CA from the wider peacebuilding tasks that now fall under the RRP section:

⁷⁰ Interview with CA officer, Torit.

⁷¹ Sylvia Fletcher is the deputy to the Resident Coordinator and DRSR Lise Grande. As such her position and the RRP section is located within the development pillar of the mission, but funded over the assessed budget. We will analyse the implications of this later in this report.

⁷² Interview with Sylvia Fletcher, UNMISS, Juba.

UN Resident Coordinator Lise Grande is adamant about the separation between the mission and development and humanitarian actors. Civil affairs is not working enough in conflict resolution, mostly work on mitigation, but will do this in the future hopefully, as well as support the extension of state authority.⁷³

It was argued that CA officers lack the necessary background, as they do not have experience in development programming and delivery. However the RCSOs were originally CA officers who were later offered new contracts when the RCSO posts received separate funding and were added to the staffing table.⁷⁴ The rationale for adding RCSOs and RRP to the staffing table was thus primarily political and grounded in the wish to maintain a separation between peacekeeping and peacebuilding/development tasks, as the quote above shows. Because of the separation of tasks, CA will continue to focus on conflict management in South Sudan.

The previous UNMIS regional coordinator was successful in decentralizing the UN presence, by double-hatting the CA staff. These were called State Coordinators back in 2009. They were further empowered in 2010 when these posts got their own funding. Half of the CA people stayed on board and changed their contract, and another half came from other backgrounds.⁷⁵

As the RCSOs were already funded by assessed contributions to undertake their liaison work, also the new RRP Section will be funded by assessed contributions, although it is located within the development pillar of the mission and undertakes peacebuilding tasks. According to one senior UNMISS official, the SRSG had been prepared to argue with member states on the importance of budgeting for decentralization, but found that she did not have to.⁷⁶ UNMISS thus represents an important and new feature of peacekeeping operations, as it has formal funding to peacebuilding activities through the RRP Section.

County Support Bases – a portal and a platform for peacebuilding?

The RRP Section will be coordinating the County Support Bases (CSBs). Most UN peacekeeping operations today have an impressive reach in the countries where they are deployed, but UNMISS is aiming to stretch even further and with a much wider scope. Apart from being present in all ten state capitals, UNMISS plans to have a presence at county levels selected on the basis of level of conflict and isolation, in an attempt to provide support to conflict management and the expansion of state authority presence and to build local capacities.

⁷³ Senior UNMISS official.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

The CSBs are built upon the model of the referendum support bases that became semi-permanent after the referendum and were seen as a positive addition to the UN mission. After extensive consultations the mission decided to have County Support Bases in many of the counties. The new staffing table authorizes a total of 35 CSBs and 10 regional state offices. This entails considerable challenges, in logistics not least, but will increase the presence on the ground of UNMISS significantly across the entire territory of South Sudan. There will be 29 presences in the course of 2012 (10 states and 19 counties), and the remaining 16 CSBs will be completed during the next two financial years by summer 2014. The locations are selected according to: 1) conflict-proneness; 2) potential as economic hub; and 3) predominance of returnee populations/refugees. They will be staffed by CA officers, RRP officers, human rights officers, UN Police and administrative officers.⁷⁷

The key feature of the CSBs is the principle of co-location with local authorities, with equal facilities and the same standards. The CSBs are to comply with UN security regulations, have water, solar-powered electricity, internet and basic services infrastructure. These will be accessible to UN and local authorities, and their buildings will be of the same standard. Each CSB is to consist of small enabling infrastructure, with a large *tucol* as an assembly area for about 100 persons, a community development centre – a meeting place for activities, hard-wall classroom-sized multi-purpose centres, a borehole for water, satellite internet, and a battery of toilets. When the UN leaves, the facilities will be handed over in their entirety to the local authorities.

The SRSG envisages that the CSBs will support the peacebuilding and state-building agenda by being a ‘portal and a platform’⁷⁸ not only for the sections of UNMISS and local authorities, but also to facilitate the support of other development partners and CSOs: ‘UNICEF, ILO and others will through this be enabled to be in the field. RRP can top you up and help agencies have a presence on the county level implementing development projects.’⁷⁹ RRP officers will support local peacebuilding with small-scale development projects like feeder roads, livelihoods projects, and small local markets, serving as a portal for community development by other actors as well:

[UNMISS w]ill leverage the presence of [the] peacekeeping operation through the RRP [section]. RRP will be a platform for logistical support to local authorities, and support the delivery of a development package consisting of, *inter alia*, literacy training, community development and youth *payam* services. It will also offer to be a platform (in addition to the UNCT) for the NGOs such as NPA,

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Interview with SRSG Hilde Johnson, Juba.

⁷⁹ Interview with Sylvia Fletcher, Juba.

NCA, PACT, CRS⁸⁰ and other NGOs who want to deliver basic services, capacity development and development support, and who are not strongly against cooperation with the mission. Initially there was scepticism, but there is now wide support.⁸¹

At the time of our field research, UNDP had received \$5.8 million for small-scale peacebuilding initiatives to be conducted in cooperation and under the leadership of the RRP officers. Again according to Fletcher, there will be no overheads on this money, as the presence is already there through the RRP officers funded by assessed contributions.⁸² This is an interesting feature of UNMISS – the RRP officers will be funded by the assessed budget of the peacekeeping mission, but will also facilitate peacebuilding and development activities. While this may not sound so surprising to people less familiar with UN rules and regulations, some member states may find this to be quite controversial. Generally, UN mission staff paid over the assessed budget are expected to deal with peacekeeping tasks, and there has been growing concern among the development funds, programmes and agencies of the UN as to what might be seen as the ‘mission creep’ of UN peacekeeping operations, engaging in early peacebuilding such as supporting capacity-building in rule of law and other sectors. However, we would argue that these funds may be well spent – enabling the UN to better cover the local-level ‘peacebuilding gap’ and in principle enabling local authorities and other actors to deliver real peace dividends to the local people.

QIPs and finances

Another noteworthy feature of UNMISS is the recent transfer of responsibility for Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) from CA to the RRP section. For civil affairs, this will mean a lot more time to focus on their core tasks, as QIPs generally involve considerable amounts of administrative work.⁸³ According to Sylvia Fletcher, the RRP Section has a comparative advantage in implementing the QIPs: ‘Comparative advantage here is the heritage of the RCSOs – they are seen as team players by the UNCTs and can link up with the funds, programmes and agencies.’⁸⁴ She also explained that they would narrow down the amount and type of QIPs that the mission would implement: ‘Ruthlessly only going to do certain QIPs, and standardize them. We will bring projects to scale, e.g. training of teachers. [We will] bridge the

⁸⁰ Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA), Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), Pact Sudan (PACT), Catholic Relief Services (CRS).

⁸¹ Interview with SRSJ Hilde Johnson, Juba.

⁸² Interview with Sylvia Fletcher, Juba.

⁸³ In MINUSTAH in Haiti, we found that QIPs took more than 25% of CA staff time.

⁸⁴ Interview with Sylvia Fletcher, Juba.

gap between technical expertise and support on higher level and bringing it out to the lower level.’⁸⁵

However, as civil affairs long have been responsible for most QIPs, they may feel that they are also losing an important source of leverage with the local community, as they have been able to complement their conflict management activities with small-scale projects, creating goodwill and mutually beneficial projects between conflicting communities. ‘If you look at UNMIS projects, 60% have been sponsored by CA. Maybe even more. Here in Upper Nile State, 80% of projects are from CA. We’re able to put together projects and we have people within our ranks with a project management background.’⁸⁶

So how will the relationship between the CA and RRP sections of UNMISS and development agencies evolve? There is huge potential for UN agencies, particularly UNDP, but also other development partners and CSOs/NGOs. One UNDP interlocutor informed the research team that the CSBs will provide accommodation and office space, already a significant benefit, to assist agencies in deploying staff at county level.⁸⁷

Innovation or duplication?

Civil affairs is the section in UNMISS closest to community leadership. As noted, it is the section that local actors usually get in touch with when they need the support of the UN mission. Apart from its contacts with local networks and understanding of local realities and dynamics, the strength of CA lies in its information-gathering abilities. The mission has argued that it was necessary to add the RCSOs and later the RRP to the staffing table because of the lack of a development culture among CA officers and the need to keep conflict management separate from peacebuilding/developmental work. This may sound reasonable, but in fact the distinction is very blurred and it has serious cost implications.

CA is expanding its presence across South Sudan and plans to have about 160 posts across the country in the course of 2012. RRP officers are being hired and sent out to every state office and CSB as well. The cumulative effect is a massive presence of UN peacekeeping officers throughout the country. With it follow great expectations, particularly as the promise of the SRSG is to make it possible for real peacebuilding and developmental work to commence, including the deployment of local authorities.⁸⁸ With the large-scale presence of the UN on the

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Interview with CA officer, Malakal.

⁸⁷ Interview with UNDP CSAC project manager, Juba.

⁸⁸ Interview with SRSG Hilde Johnson, Juba.

ground, expectations are bound to rise. This is a crucial point. The deployment of young and inexperienced staff (mostly composed of UNVs) adds to this concern – as they are going to need to operate in extremely complex and politically sensitive situations. The close cooperation with local authorities could also compromise the perceived impartiality and credibility of the UN mission, especially in cases where the local authorities are involved in a local conflict. This will require analytical skills, context-specific knowledge and experience. We examine this challenge further in the final section of the report.

Cooperation with neighbouring countries to support capacity development

To better support the development of national capacities on national and state levels, UNDP has initiated cooperation with the regional organization IGAD (Inter-governmental Authority on Development), comprising six countries in eastern Africa, with financial support from Norway. Through the IGAD initiative, 200 civil servants from ministries in Ethiopia (60), Kenya (80) and Uganda (60) are to be seconded to national and state-level offices in South Sudan.⁸⁹ This regional expertise appears well-suited to support the capacity needs in South Sudan. They have been co-located with South Sudanese officials in a capacity-transfer initiative which seems promising so far, particularly as it is strongly owned by its South Sudanese counterparts.⁹⁰ The IGAD arrangement should be followed closely as a possible example for future peace operations.

The African Union (AU) is currently trying to gather funds to bolster the IGAD initiative and has envisaged setting up a new civil service training institution and the secondment of 1000 civil servants from AU member states. However, programme costs are estimated at approximately US\$ 90 million, and the necessary funding has not yet been secured.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Interview with UNDP officials, Juba. See also UNDP (2011), *IGAD Regional Initiative for Capacity Enhancement in Southern Sudan*. Available at http://www.sd.undp.org/projects/s_dg23.htm, accessed 22 December 2011.

⁹⁰ K.N. Tarp and F.F. Rosén (2011), 'South Sudan: a new model for civilian capacity in post-conflict settings', *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 6(2).

⁹¹ The 200 civil servants seconded through IGAD are receiving their salaries from their home ministries. Administration, management and allowances are paid by Norway, and amount to approximately US\$ 10 million. See Norway's website in South Sudan (2011) *Norway supports helping hands from neighbours*, http://www.norway-sudan.org/News_and_events/CPA/Norway-supports-helping-hands-from-neighbours/, accessed 22 December 2011.

Recommendations

- Share the baseline study undertaken in the *payams* with civil society and other development actors to get their inputs and enable programming for local-level peacebuilding and development
- Ensure close cooperation in CSBs and on state and national levels between CA and the RRP section/UN country team
- External evaluation of the CSBs after the first year of operation, to improve value for money, effectiveness, ownership among local stakeholders, and address possible unintended consequences
- Review the implications of the transfer of QIPs from CA to the RRP officers after one year for effectiveness, comparative advantages, and possible unintended consequences
- Follow up the IGAD initiative as a possible model for AU support, as well as for other UN missions, and to identify any unintended consequences.

5. Promoting local ownership – the recurring challenge

The IGAD case is a promising example of local ownership not least because it is founded on the needs and wishes of the government and officials of South Sudan. Among government officials and others the initiative is known as the ‘Government of South Sudan – IGAD initiative’, with UNDP seen as a service provider paying allowances and facilitating logistical issues. This indicates the perceived strong ownership on behalf of the government and other South Sudanese stakeholders.⁹² While local ownership is largely acknowledged as a precondition for successful international support to local authorities, in practice there are various internal and external challenges facing that the UN when it engages with local actors. Staff operating at local level have developed strategies and ways to support the promotion of multiple voices, also by extending those voices within the mission as well as towards wider national political processes.

External challenges

As discussed above, it is challenging to bring local stakeholders into decision-making processes, particularly in a context like that of South Sudan as it surfaces from a long history of conflict and with a government that has emerged from and with a strong militarized structure. It also gives rise to the question of who the local actors are and how they are selected. Given the primacy of institutional actors, CA officers face huge challenges in trying to support non-institutional actors to gain influence on decision-making processes, at the local and national

⁹² Tarp and Rosén, *South Sudan: a New Model*, p. 3.

levels. The ethnic composition of the government, with the overwhelming influence of the Dinka tribe, and the resultant level of political manipulation, cannot be ignored, and is critical in re-igniting conflicts.⁹³

Civil affairs operates largely in the background providing logistical support to government. For example, when government officials request UNMISS' support to travel to a remote area of the country on an official visit, it is to CA they turn to for assistance. One CA officer explained that a typical state government visit to a village might include the local county commissioner and an SPLA representative, if they are present in the area. Often head chiefs are not specifically invited but they are easily recognizable.⁹⁴ While the customary authorities may not be comfortable speaking in the presence of government representatives, particularly in areas where ethnic identities might clash, CA officers mentioned they would always try to speak to these persons and hear their version of events and concerns. National professional officers are in a unique position to approach customary authorities and understand the dynamics of power and exclusion.

CAD was often praised by local actors and UN staff for their information-gathering abilities and sound political and conflict analysis, critical to understanding who local actors really are and their role in the local political economy. Most non-institutional actors we spoke with stressed the importance of inviting the youth, women and elders/chiefs, blaming the frequent failure of peace conferences on 'not involving the right people'.⁹⁵ Young people are noticeable absent from such meetings, although these are often the ones who perpetrating the violence. As one South Sudanese academic argued:

Now there's a lot of talk of building peace, big meetings, workshops, a lot of talking, but sometimes they even invite the wrong people to these events. (...) They need more genuine processes and to involve the right local actors.⁹⁶

⁹³ It must be added that the regional composition of the new cabinet has been balanced according to census results. However, some ethnic groups feel underrepresented and blame the Dinka (majority tribe) of dominating the government. This needs to be seen in relation to the civil war, when Dinkas dominated the SPLA (and after the CPA – many SPLA officers were given positions in the government as a reward for their efforts during the civil war). However, the perceived 'Dinka dominance' is a generalization and is often used to manipulate anti-Dinka and anti-government sentiments.

⁹⁴ It is important to distinguish between traditional authorities and government chiefs. See Markus V. Hoehne, 2008. *Traditional Authorities and Local Government in Southern Sudan*, Study supported by the World Bank as part of the ESW 'Southern Sudan: Strengthening Good Governance for Development Outcomes in a Post-Conflict Setting'.

⁹⁵ Interview with chairman of the Youth Forum in Eastern Equatoria State, Torit.

⁹⁶ Interview with South Sudanese academic, Center for Peace and Development Studies, University of Juba, Juba.

Internal dimensions

While it will take a long time to change the political culture of exclusion in South Sudan inherited from the pre-secession phase, there are several internal challenges that CA officers must face in their jobs. These include the lack of a flexible work culture, seriously constraining security rules, a hierarchical chain of command and a donor-driven agenda often disconnected from the reality in the field. One state coordinator (whose background was from civil affairs) asked,

Why has it become so difficult to work in the current institutional setting on conflict transformation at grassroots level? That's because those designing the rules have very little field experience. There are also problems with insurance companies and security.⁹⁷

Some CA officers argued that CAD's intervention mechanisms tend to be set up mechanically and often cannot be developed in parallel. Sources of conflict and their dynamics have to be addressed before working on political space. One CA officer asked '...as for local state authority institutions, do they even exist? This mission has recognized this and it is the first time a mission has recognized a decentralized approach to conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding'.⁹⁸ Another argued:

[m]ost peace conferences are failing because there's no local ownership. We come up with western ideas of conflict resolution and then impose them on communities. But they have good mechanisms, and should use them. Local ownership means involving the community at all stages of the process and identifying their own problems. We don't give people enough time to identify their problems. The big problem is that we're not involving people in solving their own problems. There is a clash between government appointed chiefs and real hereditary leaders/chiefs.⁹⁹

Bureaucratic nature of peacekeeping and security constraints

The bureaucratized nature of peacekeeping operations renders CA work very difficult. Conflict facilitation requires flexible and quick responses, and may be seriously hampered by the hierarchical command structure in peacekeeping, and the many rules and regulations that both guide and constrain peacekeepers. Indeed, many peacekeepers argue that their ability to move projects depends on their ability to bend the rules and find ways of using and 'playing' the system.

One of the most commonly heard assertions from CA officers concerned the extremely restrictive role of United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS). As expressed by one senior CA officer:

⁹⁷ Interview with state coordinator and senior CA, Malakal.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

UN Security also makes it very difficult to go out in the field. During the war I could do all kinds of things with UN Security approval that I can no longer do. I was dropped with a radio set and a tent and stayed for weeks in the bush. Today no one walks, no tents. This means that we have no access and not the flexibility to go to the areas where there is the greatest need. And humanitarians, who are present in some locations, are reluctant to house UNMISS staff even if we are not accompanied by the military.¹⁰⁰

Also UNDP staff, like the UNVs embedded at state level, must follow security rules, although they tend to have greater autonomy. They are quartered in the UNMISS camp, often a little outside of the town, but have their regular workspace in the various state ministries where they are co-located and spend most of their time.

Although not all government officials distinguished between UN sections, some attributed the limitations of CA support to the rigidity of UN bureaucracy:

UNMISS has to always listen to our requests and interfere quickly. If any conflict arises, you need to act quickly; if you can get transport by air to access the place quickly. My understanding and complaints are not so much of CA as such, I know them well and trust them, but because of bureaucracy they need permissions from Juba, the state coordinator, transport and military. With CA, I don't have doubts that they always want to help but Movcon [UNMISS transport section] at short notice or head of office stops them. I'm 100% sure CA is always on our side.¹⁰¹

Although there is a UN mission policy on decentralization of authority, the individual personalities of state coordinators significantly influence the level of autonomy accorded to each CAD team. In some state offices, the state coordinator has restricted CA officers from gaining access to their government counterparts, insisting that the officers follow strict hierarchical protocol and go through the coordinator to reach government counterparts. According to interviews, state coordinators with a CA background naturally tend to trust and understand better the work of CAD, including the flexibility required for its success:

As a civil affairs officer acting as state coordinator, what I'm doing with my CA officers, I'm thinking with them - can we look at their [rebels or different tribes] grievances? Look at the concerns, positions and interests of these groups and see how we can remove the fire from these groups? So for us in this state, what are the historical concerns and grievances and how can we incorporate them into modern state structure? CA needs the flexibility to look at underlying causes of conflict. How can we address underlying concern of political space when we haven't addressed the root causes?¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Interview with senior CA officer, Juba.

¹⁰¹ Interview with senior government official, Upper Nile State.

¹⁰² Interview with state coordinator and senior CA.

In the opinion of this state coordinator, those state coordinators who have not themselves been through CA experiences may feel uncomfortable in backing CA decisions. Yet, as the above-quoted coordinator went on to say ‘in my opinion, the final authority rests with civil affairs. What kind of advice did you give your state coordinator? And even if they don’t take it, at least document it and send it by email.’¹⁰³ One clear example of this was given by a national CA officer in Eastern Equatoria State:

When people are under threat and government isn’t able to protect them, the UN has to come in. We took the decision also to evacuate GTZ Madi staff that were being targeted. The [UNMISS] state coordinator and deputy governor were both against this, but civil affairs took a decision and Juba [CAD HQ] supported us we should move those civilians.¹⁰⁴

Strategies

Within this somewhat restrictive environment, CA officers find strategies to operate and work in the current institutional framework. They act backstage and never directly in peace mediation, usually searching for appropriate and legitimate institutional and non-institutional local actors such as the church that can take the lead in negotiations. They often have to make difficult decisions which on the one hand can make them unpopular with UN transport or even state coordinators who might feel overruled, while on the other hand the ‘bend the rules’ in relation to for example, engagement with rebel groups. For example, while UN mission policies as formulated in New York and Juba might not allow any contact with rebel militia groups, in the field CA officers cannot ignore them:

Civil affairs have to coordinate between New York, national and local level. If X [CA officer colleague sitting in the room] goes to the field and one of her key interlocutors is a rebel leader, what do you do – you call him a chief. I call it bending the rules. You can’t ignore these key figures... so officially you may have to call him a different name, for the papers...¹⁰⁵

These examples are not unique to CA or to UNMISS. In the UN system, as in other bureaucracies, the rules and norms guiding peacekeeping are continuously being developed through the influence of practices on the ground – and there is a premium on developing the ability to bend the rules so that work can be implemented using common sense.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with national CA officer, Torit. GTZ is the former acronym for the German development cooperation enterprise Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

¹⁰⁵ Interview with senior CA.

Recommendations

- Continuously consider and reflect on questions of the legitimacy of local actors
- Involve the youth concerned, as well as other groups such as elders and women, in peace conferences and events, as well throughout the entire long-term follow-up process
- Continue the decentralized mission agenda that empowers local CAD teams to operate contextually and flexibly, including developing policy lines for state coordinators approach to their local substantive teams
- Sensitize UNDSS and other administrative sections such as MOVCON to the flexible nature of peacebuilding/CA work.

6. Can the UN strengthen local confidence in the central authorities?

UNMISS's most visible contribution to increasing local confidence in the government is in its support in travel arrangements and logistics, transporting state and national authorities to remote regions of the country and making the government visible and present in eyes of its citizens. Civil affairs are central for facilitating these arrangements.

Many in UNDP and other international agencies are critical to the approach usually taken by peacekeeping missions:

There is a tendency for DPKO to simply take over the government job, and end up undermining the very government they were meant to be strengthening. My conceptual clash with UNMISS' approach is on how they deal and engage with government. Our conceptual clash – we support a government if it is weak, we don't substitute it. PKO is always very tempted to do the job the government is meant to do and take over, and by doing so undermines the very government they're trying to strengthen.¹⁰⁶

Contact point and mediation between UN mission and local actors

Civil affairs often serve as the institutional memory of the mission at both local and national levels. Several CA officers mentioned how other sections often come to CA, particularly to national professional officers, when they needed information or to gain access to government officials or others: 'All other sections are more or less dependent on CA. I'm always chosen to accompany the SRSG or people from New York. It makes CA an information centre. Security or military come often as well.'¹⁰⁷ According to interviewees, it is not uncommon

¹⁰⁶ Interview with UNDP official, Juba.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with national CA officer.

for other substantive sections to approach CAD requesting their support in linking them up to a particular local authority or segment of society. CAD have a long list of contacts, ranging from school teachers and nurses, and customary authorities in isolated *payams* or *bo-mas*, to members of parliament and the state governor, including opposition members and local civil society groups.

It is not surprising then, that when the government requires UNMISS assistance, they approach CAD, who then get in touch with the appropriate UN mission structures. As asserted by one senior government official in Upper Nile State: ‘They’re like a mediator between the mission and the government, trying to convince the mission of what we need and want.’ In this manner, CAD functions to support the analysis of the political and social context in which the mission and its components are working.

The research team also heard of several cases where CA officers played a critical role in mediating between UNMISS sections, including the military and substantive sections, sensitizing them for particular aspects of the mission mandate or to the socio-political context. Below we present two such examples.

Protection of civilians in Jonglei State, and awareness-raising among military

One national CA officer told an anecdote that showed the important role CA officers can play in translating local realities into the missions' actions, in the context of the protection of civilians in the Jonglei crisis between the Lou Nuer and the Murle tribes from March to May 2009 in Pibor.¹⁰⁸

After a Murle village was burnt by the Lou Nuer, the SPLA was deployed to the region, mostly composed of Dinka and Nuer – which exacerbated existing tensions. An incident involving an attack on some SPLA soldiers aggravated the situation. UNMIS intervened with CA deployed alongside UN Police (UNPOL) and the military, and was responsible for mediating between the SPLA commander and the Pibor county commissioner. The violence escalated and civilians started seeking refuge in the UN Temporary Operating Base.

...Our UN military commander said no civilians were allowed in the base. I told him – our mission is to protect civilians. He spoke to his commander, who still said no. I refused the orders and went and opened the gate. I allowed 120 civilians in and when the compound was full I closed the doors and told all others to stay around our temporary camp base as we would put lights and would protect them. At 8pm, I requested a meeting with all military and UNPOL and read them our mission mandate on protection of civilians. I said - now let's start planning and working together. We started doing patrols. We got a high-level government delegation from Juba and Bor to resolve the tension. We removed the 12 SPLA soldiers involved.¹⁰⁹

Although it acted as a deterrent to further violence, UNMIS pulled out after only three months, to the great disappointment of the local authorities.¹¹⁰ The CA officer involved conducted an analysis and chronology of the conflict and of earlier failed peace conferences, and explored responses for peace. No action was taken, however, and the issues have continued throughout the years, claiming thousands of lives in the state.

¹⁰⁸ For a detailed account of this conflict see International Crisis Group, 2009, *Jonglei's Tribal Conflicts: Countering Insecurity in South Sudan*, Africa Report N° 154 – 23 December 2009. The account described above is based on the version given by a CA officer.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with national CA officer, Juba.

¹¹⁰ See ICG, 2009, pp. 5–7 in particular.

Fact-finding mission in Eastern Equatoria State, coordination and advocating a contextual understanding

Civil affairs officers regularly go on fact-finding missions to high-tension areas to monitor and collect information. While CAD often initiates and leads these missions, at times they are organized by other sections such as the human rights section, military observers or others, and civil affairs are invited to join. These visits can prove very challenging in terms of coordination, as exemplified in the case of a joint fact-finding mission to one of the counties in Eastern Equatoria State in October 2012.

There is a problem of coordination. I as CA had a clear plan why I wanted to go there, to understand what happened. But the military has its own rules. I thought we should deploy in X where one person had been killed, but the bridge on the way there was broken. I suggested the other APC [armoured personnel carrier] could go through there anyway and the other vehicles would go on. But the military commander said no. UNDSS and UNPOL agreed with me... we wasted 12 hours! Very bad CIMIC [civil-military cooperation]... I prefer when we as civilians do our work alone, with no military, only UNDSS.

It can also be challenging to work with human rights officers and military observers who have different working approaches and ways of asking questions. For example, human rights officers might be interested in highlighting human rights abuses even though such issues might still be too sensitive to take up, and that could lead to further tensions. Questions can also be posed in very direct ways that may offend people. One of our CA interlocutors mentioned, ‘... the human rights officer was making people very nervous. I had to calm down the situation.’

We heard of many episodes where CA officers had to deal with the situation after the ‘wrong’ questions were asked. They were also referred as the most visible element of the UN mission in the eyes of local institutional and non-institutional stakeholders.

Information gathering and sharing

Most national and international interlocutors referred to CAD’s excellent information-gathering skills, but some expressed reservations in relation to the degree to which information was shared. There were many appeals from both international and government partners for greater information sharing. According to one CA officer, during the elections and referendum a very good information-sharing system was in place. However, a human rights report with very strong language got leaked, and that led UN headquarters in New York to tighten the

sharing of information. As a senior CA officer argued, '[e]veryone agrees it should be shared but we have to figure out the modality'.¹¹¹

Recommendations

- Allocate all state coordinator positions to individuals with a CA background: persons with background from the country or at least the region, as well as experience in conflict management, analysis and local peacebuilding
- Promote greater information-sharing of CAD conflict analysis and reports within and beyond the UN mission, including to government and UNDP, while acknowledging that some information may be too politically sensitive to share with the government

¹¹¹ Interview with senior CA officer, Juba.

Conclusions

In South Sudan, civil affairs (CA) is present in all field locations. However, in the set-up envisaged by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, CA responsibility will focus on their core tasks of conflict mitigation and political space, whereas Reintegration, Reconstruction and Peacebuilding (RRP) officers are to be responsible for coordinating and enabling the County Support Bases (CSBs).

Civil affairs officers act as ‘space-makers’. As argued by one national CA officer, ‘we [civil affairs] don’t have direct funding, but we have the information on needs, which we refer to other agencies.’¹¹² The CSBs are still in the conceptualization phase, and it is important that the mission side of the UN in general and CA in particular should be closely involved in this process. Co-location of CA, RRP officers, local officials and staff from other UN agencies must be seen as a minimum requirement if the CSBs are not to become yet another duplicative and divisive element of UNMISS peacebuilding strategy. All peacebuilding and development activities have a political component which, if ignored, may have unintended and negative consequences.

The Civil Affairs Division is playing an important role in facilitating reconciliation and dialogue in South Sudan. CA officers often remark on how they act as ‘travel agents’ facilitating travel for government officials at the local, state and national level. In fact, their role should not be underestimated, as it enables officials to attend peace conferences and engage with local populations to hear their complaints and concerns. This is the first step towards building a social contract between the government and its people, and a participatory system of governance where the periphery can be better linked up with the centre – in a state where this has only been sheer utopia.

While it is essential for all international actors to work side by side with government, it is critical that CA officers, and all other international actors operating at the local level, also engage with customary authorities. Here one must acknowledge an important difference: between those appointed by the government on the one hand, and others who often remain the most legitimate authority structure in rural areas, as well as emerging community-based organizations (CBOs), the local churches, youth, women and the local civil society. In many instances, the influence of elders and traditional authorities has been weakened

¹¹² Interview with national CA officer, Torit.

by the civil war. Moreover, government-appointed chiefs may not necessarily be representative of their communities. Thus, all UN officials and other partners must be able to understand the complex political economy and dynamics on state and local levels, in order to do more good than harm.

The CSBs are part of a very ambitious plan for further strengthening the presence of national authorities on the local level. Based on the principle of equality between international peacekeepers and national authorities, each of the CSBs will co-locate local authorities with the UN, sharing the same standards of buildings, internet access and facilities. They will also facilitate access for other partners within and outside the UN system, including CSOs.

As such, the CSBs carry a great promise to the local population, and the UN mission will be wise to heed this. However, unless this presence can be accompanied by service delivery and real peace dividends for local populations, the result is likely to be anger and loss of confidence in peacekeepers and local authorities alike. The CSBs will thus be a prism through which one can follow and measure to which degree the international community and the government in Juba are able to instil the trust and confidence needed to achieve 'real' peacebuilding from the ground up in South Sudan. While all actors should have a sober vision about what the UN can realistically be expected to achieve with a few CSBs in a country the size of France, there can be no doubt that the CSBs will be a noteworthy initiative deserving continued and careful scrutiny by the international and research community alike.

Background and information about the authors

This report is the result of one-month field research in South Sudan in October/November 2011. It forms part of a larger project supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Contextualizing peacebuilding activities to local circumstances*. The project includes three case-studies on South Sudan, Liberia and Haiti, with a policy brief and a report published for each of the cases. A final summary report drawing on the comparative findings will be issued in the second quarter of 2012.

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