

Lessons from local governance programmes in South Sudan

Iffat Idris

GSDRC, University of Birmingham

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Question

What are the key lessons from past and current local governance¹ programmes in South Sudan?

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¹ For information on local governance in South Sudan please see: Idris, I. (2017). *Local governance in South Sudan: overview*. K4D Helpdesk Report 235. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

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1. Overview

Donor-funded (governance) programming in South Sudan has been hampered by numerous challenges, notably renewed conflict and economic crisis. The literature points to a general failure by donors to appreciate these challenges and to donors' overestimating state capacity, leading to overambitious programmes. Donors are urged to be flexible, integrate political and development interventions, and work through rather than bypass government in order to achieve long-term development. Key lessons from individual governance programmes include: the need to work with traditional authorities; the importance of having an on-ground presence (state-based teams) in project implementation; taking a phased approach to capacity building; and working with existing state structures rather than setting up alternatives. Since there were few evaluations specifically of local governance programmes, the report also gives relevant lessons in relation to donor programming in general in South Sudan.

Key findings of the review are as follows:

South Sudan presents a very challenging environment for donor-funded governance programmes. South Sudan is a very young country with little capacity, coming out of decades of conflict. Post-independence economic crisis, renewed civil war, and the president's decision to treble the number of states have made implementation of local governance programmes harder still.

Evaluation of donor programmes in South Sudan is in itself difficult. A 2016 'meta-analysis' of some 30 evaluation reports found that: very few addressed impact, with most only evaluating projects/programmes on the basis of stated goals; most expressed the need for better baseline information and documentation to assess outcomes, since paucity and quality of data remain problematic; underdevelopment, violence and political crisis affect both programmes and their evaluation – rigorous data collection is difficult and comparison of data sets over time could be meaningless because of these issues; development programmes and evaluations remain centralised in Juba (NORAD, 2016: 8-9).

General issues with donor programming were highlighted in two significant 'meta-evaluations' of development interventions in South Sudan (in 2010 and 2016). Key among these were: donor failure to understand local power relations and drivers of conflict; overestimation of the state capacity to deliver services, leading to overambitious, unrealistic programmes; lack of an overall strategic vision for development, and specifically to support decentralisation; prioritisation of getting donor projects done (even through 'cocooning' and setting up parallel systems) rather than focusing on outcomes; and taking 'orthodox' approaches to capacity building that were unsuited to the complex environment of South Sudan.

General lessons for future donor programming include: donors need to build their own capacity for coordination and greater flexibility to engage differently in different parts of the country; there needs to be better integration of political and development interventions; while responding to emergency situations, donors should not lose sight of longer-term development needs; and bypassing government will have negative consequences – restoring basic functionality of the government is central to long-term recovery, but this will require donors to manage a high degree of political risk.

Lessons from individual governance programmes are as follows:

Involve traditional authorities in local governance: An assessment of two UNDP programmes to support decentralised democratic governance in South Sudan, one focused on the role of traditional authorities and the second on empowering women, stressed the need to incorporate traditional authorities in local governance because of the historical legitimacy they enjoy. This would require donors to build their capacity to understand and participate in local governance, as well as support government to work with traditional authorities. Donors were also urged to provide guidance and resources to promote gender mainstreaming, and to document interventions and share lessons.

Take phased, standardised capacity building approach through on-ground presence: Funded by the European Union, *Technical Assistance for Subnational Capacity Building in Payroll and Public Financial Management* (PFM) or EU-TAPP was a three-year project which prioritised lesson learning. Six main lessons identified by the project were: use state-based teams to build capacity; use a standardised PFM manual and capacity building approach; take a phased approach to payroll reform (be pragmatic) and prioritise getting the right people in the system; create simple, easy to use accountability and transparency systems; seek opportunities to collaborate and share information with other implementing partners; and be flexible and persistent.

Work with existing state structures: A 2015 brief by Oxfam on its *Within and Without the State* (WSS) governance programme identified six key lessons. The one most relevant for local governance programming was the first: work with existing state structures rather than inventing parallel systems. Examples of this in WSS implementation included the decision to change Community Accountability Committees (CACs), which were functioning effectively but had no official sanction, into Boma/Payam Development Committees which are provided for under the Local Government Act 2009.

This literature review drew largely on programme documents from South Sudan. Some documents referred to gender, but on the whole the literature was gender-blind, and made no mention of the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

2. General challenges and lessons for donor programming in South Sudan

Challenges

The literature stresses that South Sudan presents an extremely challenging environment in which to implement donor-funded programmes, including governance programmes. The challenges faced include (EU-TAPP, 2016: 1-2; NORAD, 2016; 11-14):

- **Young country** – South Sudan is a very young country emerging from decades of war. Capacity is weak across the board, and particularly at local government level.
- **Renewed conflict** – The outbreak of civil war in December 2013 made the situation harder still. The deteriorating security situation made it difficult to access parts of the country, notably the conflict-affected states of Unity, Jonglei and Upper Nile. Renewed fighting in July 2016 means security continues to be an issue.
- **Economic crisis** – South Sudan's main export is oil, but the drop in global oil prices greatly reduced oil revenue. The economic downturn was further exacerbated by the civil war. The IMF warned in 2016 that the year's deficit could exceed USD 1.1 billion – 25% of GDP (cited in EU-TAPP, 2016: 1). The collapse of Government revenues led to across-the-board cutbacks, including centrally financed local government services. Again the situation has been made worse by deterioration in the exchange rate and high inflation.²
- **Increasingly localised conflicts** – Following the economic collapse in 2012 and even more so after the outbreak of civil war in December 2013, inter- and intra-community fighting in South Sudan intensified. Local conflicts have also increasingly become part of a complex interconnected conflict 'system' (NORAD, 2016: 14). Moreover, the ethnic dimension has become increasingly important since the 2013 civil war began.
- **Increased number of states** – A presidential decree in December 2015 increased the number of states from 10 to 28, with a further four states added in 2017. This means that personnel and services that were already struggling to manage with 10 states now have to stretch to cover three times that number. Moreover, uncertainty about the future following the creation of new states demotivates public sector staff.
- **Corruption** - South Sudan languishes at the very bottom of international rankings measuring the perception of corruption and quality of government indicators.³ There is no political will to implement anti-corruption or transparency measures – and even if there was, it is questionable whether the country would have the necessary capacity to do so (NORAD, 2016: 14).

Issues with donor programming

While South Sudan undoubtedly presents a difficult operating environment, there have also been issues with donor programming which have undermined their effectiveness.

² <https://www.public-admin.co.uk/project-references/south-sudan-mid-term-review-of-the-local-government-and-service-delivery-project/>

³ In 2015 Transparency International ranked South Sudan 163 out of 168 countries (NORAD, 2016: 4).

In 2010 a group of 15 donors and development organisations sought to evaluate the extent to which aid to Southern Sudan was contributing to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The report, *Aiding the Peace* (Bennett et al. 2010), focused on the dominant notion that development would bring peace, stability and prosperity to South Sudan, and found that this assumption might be flawed. Donors worked with a poor understanding of local power relations, drivers of conflict and causes of vulnerability; this created flawed and unsustainable programme designs which barely involved existing structures or communities (Bennett et al. 2010). Aid was compartmentalised, scattered and unresponsive to the demands of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. *Aiding the Peace* concluded that donors had been generally over-optimistic in their prognosis of peace, overlooking that South/South conflict was a significant threat.

Specifically in relation to governance programmes, the report found these were overly ambitious and technical and there was never a clear strategy on how to support decentralisation. Moreover, as the donor community became increasingly overwhelmed by the extremely difficult contextual environment of South Sudan, ‘they responded by creating parallel systems and delegating government functionality to foreign advisers, in an attempt to preserve the success of donor-funded projects. This “cocooning” allowed donors to ensure their project succeeded (*as in achieved project goals*) in a low capability environment’ (Bennett et al, 2010). In the long-run such an approach does not allow for capacity transfer or scaling up: ‘cocooning is a valuable technique of persistent failure as one can have long strings of demonstrably successful projects while a sector itself never improves’ (Bennet et al, 2010).

Larsen, Ajak and Pritchett (2013) criticise the stress on and approach to capacity building taken by donors in South Sudan. Explaining that Southern Sudan had no formal institutions of self-governance prior to the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), they note that foreign development agencies contributed billions of dollars of aid and technical assistance to build capacity in the new Government of South Sudan, using approaches and mechanisms that reflected the prevailing aid orthodoxy. ‘We argue that state-building and capacity building more or less failed in South Sudan, leaving the world’s newest country mired in a “capability trap”’. Despite countless trainings, workshops, reforms, and a large corps of foreign technical assistants embedded within state ministries, there is an absence of real change, and the Government of South Sudan now “looks like a state” but performs as anything but’ (Larsen et al, 2013: 1-2). USAID, for example, has been a principal funder of capacity building, and, through the use of international consultants, has installed technical advisors in major ministries in Juba since 2005. The practice has been widely criticised: instead of building capacity, it has increased institutional dependence on the international community and facilitated the growth of domestic patronage (NORAD, 2016: 25). Larsen et al call for innovative approaches to building state capability ‘which go beyond importing “best practice” solutions while feigning “client ownership”’ (Larsen et al, 2013: 2).

In 2016 NORAD produced a *Country Evaluation Brief* for South Sudan, which systematised relevant findings from existing evaluations of development interventions in the country. The brief drew on close to 30 evaluations and reviews of development interventions published since 2010. Its key findings are as follows:

- The donor community did not develop an overall strategic plan for recovery and development for itself or in collaboration with the government.
- Diplomats, politicians and development practitioners did not collaborate closely enough to develop joint approaches.

- The donor community mostly failed to adapt their development interventions to the volatile and fragile South Sudanese context. Their vision for South Sudan was often different from what national or local political actors pursued.
- The aid architecture was inconsistent and lessons learned did not alter approaches (were not applied).

Relevant findings in the context of local governance programming are as follows:

- The country is vast and development efforts are concentrated in easy-to reach places. Donors hardly diversified aid to local levels. Urban areas have fared marginally better, with a huge amount of service delivery focused on Juba.
- Funds for basic services have been disbursed unreliably to local government, hampering growing capacity where it matters most (NORAD, 2016: 12).
- Since 2013, with once again widespread, armed violence and a humanitarian crisis, the international community's attention has switched abruptly from state building and recovery to protection and relief. This means that in 2014, 67 percent of the aid to South Sudan was categorised as humanitarian aid (OECD 2016 cited in NORAD, 2016: 19).
- External actors are divided in their approach to working with the government. Some try to avoid government institutions altogether, due to documented human rights abuses and atrocities by government forces. The same reservations hinder working with SPLM/A-IO⁴ in areas under opposition control. Others focus on the local level, avoiding the central government as much as possible, while a third group continues to work with the government.

The UN Country Programme Document for 2016-2017 notes that a common theme across many evaluations of UNDP recovery programmes was the degree to which development partners underestimated the state-building challenge in South Sudan, and overestimated the capacity of the Government and how soon it would be able to take on responsibility for service delivery (UN, 2016: 3). This resulted in over-ambitious and unsustainable programmes. Another recurrent evaluation finding related to a failure to fully consider the trade-offs between rapid delivery to demonstrate 'peace dividends' and efforts to strengthen national ownership and capacity.

Lessons

Based on analysis of the findings of close to 30 evaluations of donor programmes published since 2010, the NORAD brief derived the following general lessons for future programming:

- Donors need to build their own capacity for greater coordination and flexibility between humanitarian and development modes, including more flexible funding and the ability to engage differently in different parts of a vast country with enormous challenges.
- Donors need to provide better integration of political and developmental interventions.
- Taking political refuge in demand-led humanitarian aid without working on government capacity to supply goods and services to its citizens is not likely to be a good long-term strategy, and will probably lead to more – not less – tension between citizens and the state. Therefore, the familiar question of how long donors can respond to emergencies without losing sight of longer-term development needs will again be taking centre stage, but in a context where dealing with divisive political actors will be a particular challenge.

⁴ Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-in opposition

- Bypassing the government will have negative consequences. Restoring basic functionality of the government is central to the recovery capacity of a nation and the resilience of its institutions and communities. For anything to change, however, donors must accept and manage a high degree of political risk as the price of future success. This might mean taking a tough stance on government actors – with the risk that civilians pay the price - or overlooking unacceptable political and military behaviour.
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This section has detailed challenges faced in relation to donor programming in general which are relevant to governance programming, and lessons learned from this. The remaining sections of the report detail lessons learned from examples of individual agencies/programmes.

3. UN governance programmes

UNDP lessons from CPA-era programmes

Two United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) documents detail lessons learned from implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA)-era (2005-2011) programmes. The UNDP Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP) (UNDP, 2012-13: 6) identifies the following strategic lessons:

- The overarching need to ‘put state-building first’ and ensure that all programme components contribute to the process of building credible, functioning and accountable government structures;
- The need to balance a focus on core executive functions with support to oversight and accountability, including citizen participation and building strong relations between state and society;
- The need for more appropriate and credible approaches to transition from humanitarian relief to development, focused on building core service delivery capacities that enable Government to take on responsibility for delivery of services to the population.

The 2016 UNDP Country Programme Document highlights the following lessons learned (UN, 2016: 3-4):

- In terms of programmatic approach, UNDP employs state-based interventions and, through partnerships with civil society, engages conflict-affected populations. Programming includes components to develop the capacities of local partners to serve as mediators and service providers, contributing to the sustainability of these skills within conflict-affected communities.
- On the operational side, it became evident that a robust field presence was critical to achieving impact. It was therefore essential for UNDP to partner with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) peacekeeping mission and other UN partners to have a secure, affordable presence at the state level. To that end, UNDP negotiated memoranda of understanding with UNMISS based on cost-recovery to maintain a presence in key states, with a provision to return to conflict-affected states as soon as the security situation allows.
- On partnerships, key lessons learned included the importance of understanding the political context and funding priorities in donor countries, and remaining flexible to respond strategically as the political situation develops.

UNDP programmes to support decentralised democratic governance

In 2010 an independent assessment (Soux, 2010) was carried out of two UNDP programmes to support the development of decentralised democratic governance in Southern Sudan:

- **Support for the Development of Policies and Legislation for Responsive, Accountable and Equitable Local Government in Southern Sudan** - implemented in 2005, with funding of USD 200,000. The project entailed conduct of formal consultations with traditional authorities in Southern Sudan to elicit their ideas on traditional structures, authorities and systems of the communities to facilitate decentralisation and the incorporation of these into the new local government and state structures.
- **Strategy for Mainstreaming Gender Empowerment in Local Government in Southern Sudan** - running from 2006-2008 with USD 485,000 funding, this project aimed at empowering local women to take their place in local government within the democratisation of Southern Sudan. It focused on the institutionalisation of gender awareness, gender sensitivity and the incorporation of gender criteria within local governance structures.

In its lessons and recommendations, the report stressed that traditional authorities and indigenous cultural systems had provided the only constant structures of governance throughout the history of Southern Sudan. 'Traditional authorities know their people, their needs and the challenges of the environment. They have always provided leadership and received popular legitimacy' (Soux, 2010: 21). The report urged the Government of Southern Sudan to work with chiefs, arguing that incorporating them in local governance would ensure the effective participation of local communities. Crucially, this process of sharing governance responsibility at local level would foster the creation of a common Southern identity to unite diverse tribes.

With regard to the traditionalist vs. modernist debate, the report noted that possibilities need not be limited to one or the other: 'by working with traditional authorities one maintains comfortable and legitimate structures that have the capability to rally the population towards peace and development. Education and economic development will provide modernising mechanisms in these communities' (Soux, 2010: 21-22).

Specific recommendations for UNDP were as follows (Soux, 2010: 22):

- Traditional authorities should to be supported through ongoing capacity-building and adequate dissemination of the new laws. Both traditional authorities and local government officials should be helped to develop a clearer understanding of the links between county, state and central levels of government in order to be able to operate optimally within these new state structures;
- The government should also be supported to work with traditional authorities.
- Given that gender mainstreaming and gender equality are new themes in Sudanese governance policy, ongoing consistent support is needed for them to become strongly rooted in Sudanese society. Donors should provide guidance and resources in this regard.
- Efforts and projects in support of decentralised democratic governance should be properly documented and stored, and a lessons learned database created on forms of local governance and possible ways to integrate traditional authorities and cultural values

into states structures. This would be useful for future Sudan reference, as well as to inform other states facing such challenges and disseminate lessons.

Recovery and Rehabilitation Programme (RRP)

As noted above, a common theme across many evaluations of CPA-era recovery programmes was the degree to which development partners underestimated the state-building challenge in South Sudan, and overestimated the capacity of the government resulting in over-ambitious programmes. The mid-term and final evaluations of the Recovery and Rehabilitation Programme (RRP), implemented in five states from 2005 to 2010, highlighted numerous challenges in this respect. The RRP was a USD 57 million programme funded by the European Commission, administered by UNDP and implemented through NGO consortia. The RRP was explicitly designed as a transitional programme, combining quick recovery impacts with the institutional development of local government. The mid-term and final evaluations of the RRP noted that sizable outputs were achieved, particularly in service delivery infrastructure. But they found that the programme was less effective in institutional development. As a result, service delivery outputs were not sustainable and there was insufficient capacity to maintain them after the programme ended.

4. European Union Technical Assistance for Subnational Capacity Building in Payroll and PFM (EU TAPP)

Objectives and components

The *Technical Assistance for Subnational Capacity Building in Payroll and Public Financial Management* (PFM) was a three-year project funded by the European Union. The wider objective of the project was to strengthen public financial management at central, state and local level in South Sudan. The specific objective was to increase the capacity of local governments to implement and execute existing policies and directives in the fields of payroll and PFM in all ten states of South Sudan.

The main components of the project were:

- Supporting local governments in meeting the requirements of the local government PFM manual;
- Providing state level support for the analysis of current payrolls;
- Supporting county administration departments to properly manage payroll;
- Supporting the establishment and operation of a Country Transfer Monitoring Committee (CTMC).

EU-TAPP was implemented from August 2014 to the end of July 2016 by Ecorys and VNG.⁵

⁵ <http://www.vng-international.nl/blog/projects/south-sudan-technical-assistance-for-sub-national-capacity-building-in-payroll-and-public-financial-management-eu-tapp/>

Lessons learned

EU-TAPP prioritised documentation of lessons learned to ensure sustainability of the capacity building provided in South Sudan, as well as to bring insights for future projects to provide capacity for PFM to improve service delivery in fragile contexts. Six main lessons were identified:

Lesson 1: Work with state-based teams under the capacity building approach

The project used state-based teams who worked with state officials to build PFM capacity. They used both short workshops and on-the-job training – the latter ensured that the skills conveyed were applied in a daily context. The continuous presence of state-based teams, and frequent visits to counties by the same advisers, help build a sustainable relationship and trust, easing the work and reforms needed. High absence of staff and continuous transfers is a problem in South Sudan. Again, having a state-based team allowed staff to be continuously engaged for capacity building. The team were also able to identify ‘champions’ among state officials, who could train other staff members – thereby promoting sustainability.

Lesson 2 – Use a standardised PFM manual and capacity building approach

In order to ensure that all local government staff, regardless of their geographical location, received the same training and used the same tools, the EU-TAPP team developed a standardised approach for capacity development, including using a standardised local government PFM Manual developed with the government. The use of a standardised capacity building approach also mitigates problems regarding staff transfers: if a staff member is transferred from one county to another, the same training will have been received by that officer. In the current situation where the number of counties is being significantly increased, the use of a standardised manual will ensure more sustainability in this process. Finally, use of a standardised LG PFM Manual enhances opportunities for coordination with other implementing partners carrying out similar projects.

Lesson 3 – Work with a phased approach in payroll reform, primarily ensuring the right people are in the system

When assessing the situation of payroll management in South Sudan, the EU-TAPP team found that implementation of a computerised payroll system was difficult for various reasons: lack of electricity or hardware, low ICT skills of the payroll staff, lack of knowledge about how to split the county payroll from the state payroll, lack of clarity over staff roles, and lack of accurate data ready to migrate to payroll software. The team thus decided to focus on having a payroll and nominal roll, first having the right data in place for the eventual implementation of a computerised payroll system. In a context with very low payroll management capacity, it is important to start with the most important issues, ensuring readiness for more in-depth reform.

Lesson 4 – Create simple and easy-to-use systems for building accountability and transparency systems

Complicated systems and reports do not work in a context where both equipment as well as capacity for using and interpreting the systems are inadequate. However, building accountability and transparency mechanisms is essential in building a financial management system, especially in a country with high fiduciary risks such as South Sudan. In response to this, the EU-TAPP team developed a variety of simple feedback mechanisms. These include a grant-tracking tool (GTT) which was developed and piloted in Western Equatorial State: it comprised a set of excel templates designed to capture records of grant transfers, budgets and actual receipts revealing any gaps and discrepancies.

Lesson 5 – Seek opportunities to collaborate and share information with other implementing partners

Coordinating and harmonising aid efforts are a standard focus of development projects. In the case of South Sudan, and specifically when working in subnational contexts on service delivery, this becomes even more important. Due to limited resources available, and security issues when travelling to the various states and counties, the EU-TAPP team collaborated with many other implementing and development partners. For example, workshops in the states were given together with other partners such as LOGOSEED (Local Government and Service Delivery Project), GESS (Girls Education South Sudan) and the HPF (Health Pooled Fund). Due to the EU-TAPP project having team members in most of the states, information gathered was relevant for other organisations as well. This information was shared with, for example, organisations stimulating advocacy amongst civil society (OXFAM). Collaborating with these other programmes increased their understanding of PFM and their role in the process, and could improve transparency and accountability.

Lesson 6 – Be flexible and persistent

Perhaps the most important lesson learned while working in a fragile, post-conflict state as South Sudan, is the importance of being flexible and persistent. The EU-TAPP team was flexible in its approach: when conflict erupted, the team decided to work with state-based teams in the non-affected states, and a roving advisor in the three conflict states. When the roll out of the payroll ICT systems turned out to be too ambitious, the team worked with local officials ensuring accurate nominal and payrolls on both state and county level, and creating reform readiness. Thus working with a phased approach turned out to be necessary. In these contexts it is important to work with what works, as well as with *who* wants to work. In the trainings not all staff members were equally enthusiastic. In order to ensure results, the teams focused on working with the people that were willing to learn, engaging them as champions for reform to activate their peers.

Most of all it is important to persist. In fragile contexts setbacks will ensue frequently, shown here in the cases of civil war, or little political will. This project shows, however, that by persisting, concrete outputs and outcomes can be achieved. The team deems further follow-up of the workshops and on-job-training OJT will be necessary to ensure sustainability of the results.

5. Others

Oxfam *Within and Without the State* (WWS) Governance Programme

In 2015 Oxfam produced a brief listing lessons learned from implementation of the *Within and Without the State* (WWS) governance initiative in South Sudan. This has been running since 2012 in the states of Lakes and Western Equatoria, and its focus is on strengthening the citizen-state relationship to bring about improved participation, transparency, accountability, gender equality and peacebuilding.

The 2015 brief identified six lessons, but the one with most relevance for local governance was probably the first: work with existing state structures rather than inventing parallel systems. The Local Government Act 2009 has provisions for the establishment of County Legislative Councils (CLCs): these are meant to supervise the executive council, ensure delivery of social services, approve budgets, and promote human rights and democracy. These were not functioning when

WWS began. Oxfam WWS implementing partner CEPO had already begun promoting open community public forums, but in the second year of WWS began lobbying for establishment of CLCs. As of July 2015 there were functioning CLCs in all eight counties of Lakes state. CEPO also delivered trainings on budget tracking to ensure CLCs could carry out their assigned role.

Similarly, to support local development, Oxfam partner SUTCO set up two Community Accountability Committees (CACs) to gather and convey the concerns of the community. Their role was also to monitor public expenditure at county and state level, and identify community needs so these could be reflected in area development plans. While the CACs were functioning well, they had no official mandate from the state to operate and thus faced challenges from the police. The LGA 2009 contains provisions for Boma/Payam Development Committees. SUTCO therefore applied for the CACs to be changed to Boma/Payam Development Committees as this would make them officially sanctioned and facilitate their functioning. Under WWS, specific trainings were delivered for members on budget tracking, how to liaise with Payams, how to forward cases to the Human Rights Commission or Anti-Corruption Commission, and on leadership, communication and conflict resolution.

South Sudan Recovery Fund (SSRF)

The South Sudan Recovery Fund (SSRF) was established in 2008 to expedite delivery of recovery assistance and bridge the gap between short-term humanitarian aid and long-term development efforts. Implementation arrangements included the Government of South Sudan, UN agencies, the World Bank and donors (GoSS & UNDP, 2012: 29). While not directly focused on local governance, a 2012 assessment of SSRF identifies a number of lessons that are relevant to local governance programming:

- A coherent theory of change is the essential programme foundation; providing a strategic framework, defining the implementation modalities required and for resource allocation.
- A theory of change is different from the political imperatives confronting stakeholders, and from their individual interests and incentives. It is important that these issues be separated, and addressed accordingly.
- The State has primary responsibility for the protection and security of its citizens. Vacuums occur when the State is not visibly present in their daily lives, its legitimacy is not recognised or respected, and where the State is unable to deliver core public goods and services.
- Stabilisation programmes are effective when implemented through State-led processes that align resource allocation, with priorities from State recovery strategies and the political consensus between national and international Stakeholders.
- Bypassing Government to deliver basic services undermines the legitimacy and credibility of the State, over the medium term. Care must be taken that service delivery through non-State entities does not replace the State, and is integrated into State priorities.

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