Conflict, the Continuum and Chronic Emergencies: A Critical Analysis of the Scope for Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development Planning in Sudan

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The concept of the ‘relief-to-development continuum’ has been the subject of renewed interest in recent years. Concerned by the rise in relief budgets over the past decade and the absolute fall in development aid resources, support has been growing for the concept of developmental relief. In the context of complex political emergencies, it has been argued further that as effective development aid can reduce vulnerability to the impact of natural hazards, so it might also be used to contribute to a process of conflict prevention. In this way, the concept of the relief-development continuum has become entwined with broader discussions about the contribution of official development assistance to conflict management.

Drawing on a Review of Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS), this paper cautions against uncritical application of the concept of the continuum in complex political emergencies, and of rehabilitation in particular, in the current Sudanese context. It argues that in order to move legitimately from relief aid programming to development aid programming, three fundamental conditions must be in place: first, a minimum level of security, respect for human rights and humanitarian access. Second, empirical evidence from the field needs to demonstrate that the emergency is over. Finally, moving from relief to development aid programming is contingent on donor governments accepting the legitimacy of national governmental structures and of the rebel movements. In other words, for donor governments, moving along the continuum is in significant part determined by foreign policy considerations, not only technical ones. Consideration needs to be given to the actual and perceived legitimation of the different movements that a move to rehabilitation might be seen to imply.

The paper argues that none of these conditions had been satisfied in Sudan by mid-1997. Instead of a process of normalisation paving the way to long-term development, the current situation in Sudan is better described as a chronic political emergency. In such a context, uncritical pursuit of developmental strategies may negatively affect the welfare of conflict-affected populations.
Introduction

Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) was established in 1989. It was the first UN-managed humanitarian programme mandated to assist populations on both sides of a conflict, while working within the confines of a sovereign government. OLS was a response to the widespread suffering caused by the civil war in southern Sudan which had reigned in 1982, following the breakdown of the Addis Ababa accords.

The origins and dynamics of conflict in southern Sudan are complex and insufficient space precludes a full analysis here. Briefly, however, Sudan is a country characterised by strong differences in the political, economic and cultural life of north and south. An estimated six million people live in southern Sudan, largely black Africans who follow Christian and animist traditions and practise pastoral and agro-pastoralism. Northern Sudan is predominantly Arab and Muslim. The civil war which has plagued southern Sudan over decades has concerned issues of governance, in particular the degree to which the south can act autonomously over its own affairs and benefit from the extraction of the region’s rich natural resource base which historically has been dominated by northern political and commercial interests. The war itself has served to reinforce further the economic, social, religious and political divides between the two regions (Jok, 1996).

In 1994, a number of donor agencies called for a review of OLS. The OLS Review, published in July 1996, is the first systematic assessment of the scope and limitations of humanitarian policy and practice in a chronic political emergency (Karim et al., 1996).

This paper, prepared by several members of the Review Team, aims to report on their findings with regard to the application of the continuum concept in Sudan, and in relation to the future development of rehabilitation policy in the country. Given the renewal of interest in the concept of the relief-development continuum globally, and its application in complex political emergencies, the paper is also expected to contribute to wider debates.

It is important to stress that the analysis presented here draws on a Review of OLS specifically. It is limited, therefore, to war-affected populations and areas of Sudan. Judging the extent to which its conclusions are generalisable to other areas of the country and to other similar contexts would require further, more detailed research. ¹

Definitions of ‘relief’, ‘rehabilitation’ and ‘development’ assistance differ markedly between different organisations, and few are sufficiently substantive to provide policy guidance. Formal definitions frequently differentiate between the functions of these different aid instruments. The criteria applied to planning relief operations are primarily concerned with the physical survival of individuals, that is, they emphasise saving lives; development activities are usually planned with respect to the sustainability and appropriateness of social and economic systems. However, as described in more detail below, these definitions fail to acknowledge the wider political factors which determine which instruments and channels aid agencies are willing and able to use in these contexts.

The authors have assumed that ‘rehabilitation’ assistance, in addition to having a (developmental) concern for promoting livelihoods and reducing future vulnerability, also maintains a concern for the preservation of life.

The remainder of the paper comprises five parts. The second section provides an overview of the conceptual and policy debates around the ‘continuum’. The third and
fourth sections, respectively, analyse the continuum as it pertains to the Northern (government-held) and Southern (rebels-held) Sectors of OLS. The final section outlines the policy issues and implications arising from the two sectors. Finally, brief recommendations are made.

**Conceptual overview of the continuum**

**Origins of the continuum**

The concept of the relief-to-development continuum derives from natural disaster relief models of the 1980s. Far from being simply an abstract academic construct, the formulation of the continuum has been built on extensive analysis of the dynamics of disasters and the response of communities. Interestingly, much of this analysis has been undertaken in Sudan, particularly in drought-prone areas.

In simple terms, natural disaster relief models conceive a linear progression from a state of crisis, through rehabilitation and development. The role of relief assistance is to sustain people through short periods of stress until such time as the crisis is over. Through rehabilitation, a 'normal' life or process of development can be reconstructed.

Interest in the continuum also reflects a very real concern that relief aid is often an inadequate and inappropriate response to complex political emergencies. There has thus been considerable interest in applying the concept of the relief-development continuum in complex political emergencies. In particular, it has been assumed that as aid can be used to reduce vulnerability to natural hazards, so it might be used to reduce vulnerability to the hazard of violence. In other words, there is now greater and explicit interest in using aid as a tool in conflict management (see, for example, European Commission, 1996; Boutros-Ghali, 1994; UNDP, 1995). Relief aid is often the only aid instrument deployed in conflict situations, as the conditions for development aid spending are typically not in place; thus when the idea of using aid to manage conflict, it is relief aid which is being referred to.

**Constraints and contradictions in applying the continuum**

At one level, notions of linking relief to development indicate an evolution in relief policy. However, debates regarding the application of continuum thinking to complex political emergencies suffer from three key limitations.

First, conflicts, and the humanitarian crises that they generate, are not temporary interruptions in a linear process. Rather, they arise from a failure of existing models of development to provide the conditions for political and economic stability. To the extent that the development process has become dysfunctional in countries such as Sudan, it may be anti-humanitarian to use relief aid for 'developmental' purposes (Macrae, 1996). The actually existing development process in the country, particularly in government-held areas, relies upon forcible resettlement of populations away from their land and source of livelihood and upon extractive labour relations (Karim et al., 1996).

Second, shifting from relief to development — or, more accurately, from using relief aid instruments to development aid instruments — implies a political judgement
on the part of donors. Relief aid is provided by the majority of donors unconditionally. Because relief has no conditions attached, it is one of the few instruments that can be used in countries where donors are not prepared to provide development aid due to political considerations. Donors have sought to neutralise relief aid programming by bypassing state institutions, and disbursing funds through decentralised channels such as NGOs, rather than through state structures. At a geo-political level, NGOs and the UN thus act as political buffers between donors and recipient governments. This does not imply that governments and rebel movements cannot and do not manipulate relief aid. Indeed they do; however, with relief instruments, aid becomes politicised at the meso- and micro-operational levels. This is achieved by authorities intervening in NGO and UN relief operations (see, for example, Macrae, 1996).

Unlike development aid, relief aid does not imply international recognition, nor legitimisation of the government or other authorities controlling territory. In terms of the mandates of donor agencies, and the definition of aid budget lines, far from a smooth link between relief and development assistance, there is a clear threshold which distinguishes relief and development assistance. This threshold is marked not by material conditions on the ground, but by the foreign policy position of donor countries in relation to recipient countries.

Humanitarian aid does not aim to build institutional capacity: rather, in theory at least, it strives to be neutral and impartial regarding the legitimacy of competent authorities, striving only to provide life-saving assistance. By contrast, development assistance does imply making decisions about the legitimacy and desirability of different institutions. Thus, moving along the continuum implies making decisions about which institutions are used to disperse and manage rehabilitation assistance. Additionally, it implies decisions regarding the degree to which aid agencies wish to work with, and be seen to be working with, the warring parties — including the Government of Sudan (GOS), rather than maintaining political distance. Developmental programming is necessarily neither neutral nor impartial. It implies making decisions about the legitimacy of partners, and in particular about public and political institutions in the recipient state.

In this regard it is interesting to note that, while many donors are pushing for relief to become more developmental in Sudan and other countries experiencing complex political emergencies, at the time of writing to our knowledge, none is advocating a resumption of development aid in Sudan. In other words, donors are simultaneously maintaining that political conditions are not conducive to development aid, while urging that relief should contribute to long-term development objectives. As described in more detail below with regard to Sudan, this position is contradictory in both principle and practice.

Third, in the context of donor pressure to improve the efficiency of aid delivery, rehabilitative or developmental programming is perceived as more efficient, and hence more cost effective, than humanitarian relief. Many protracted emergencies are experiencing a steady reduction in funds: OLS is no exception. While difficult to prove, there is a sense that donor fatigue has set in, and that there must be demonstrated some kind of progress towards self-sufficiency among beneficiaries in order to sustain donor support.

The Review Team concluded that claims that developmental approaches to relief can yield substantive savings are at best illusory, and at worst have a serious impact on the welfare of conflict-affected populations. In Sudan, adoption of ‘developmental’
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The objectives of the aid programmes have actually resulted in a reduction of conflict-affected populations' access to international public welfare. A similar conclusion is reached by Apthorpe et al. (1995) in their review of WFP's programme in Liberia.

There is therefore a risk that continuum rhetoric can be used by different actors to gloss over the negative impact of reductions in relief allocations on the health and welfare of conflict-affected populations. If used to justify reductions in entitlements to relief, without yielding corresponding increases in access to other resources, the concept of the continuum may be further punishing conflict-affected populations.

View from the Northern Sector

This section aims to clarify the Review's analysis of the continuum as it applies to the Northern Sector of OLS operations.

Who is promoting the continuum?

The Review found a striking degree of consensus among different actors in the Northern Sector that relief aid channelled through OLS should become more developmental. Also striking was the extent to which the concept has been diffused through the relief system and within Sudanese institutions. Thus, provincial authorities in places such as Ed Da'ein and Wau, for example, were extremely well versed in the tenets of continuum thinking. Despite this apparent consensus, there are important differences with regard to the position of different actors as to why it is time to 'move further along' the continuum.

The Government of Sudan (GOS)  GOS is acutely aware that the effective embargo on development aid has dramatically reduced the country's total receipts of official development assistance. Since absorptive capacity for relief is much lower than for development assistance, GOS is keen to resume development aid relations. In addition to financial concerns, the government is also keen to resume development aid relations in order to re-establish its legitimacy within the international community. Reasserting this legitimacy is closely linked to a reassertion of sovereignty, which the government feels is eroded by relief operations in general, and OLS in particular. Any move towards more development aid is thus likely to be interpreted by GOS as implying donor support for its developmental agenda.

United Nations agencies  There are four key UN agencies involved in the OLS Northern Sector: the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The UNDP Resident Representative is also the UN Resident Coordinator and acts as the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator (UNCERO). UNDP also had a limited programme of technical assistance. UNDP was clearly concerned by its lack of operational resources, by the predominance of relief-oriented programming, and — importantly — by the fact that relief instruments tend to weaken rather than strengthen government institutions. UNDP's interpretation of the situation of conflict-affected populations was premised on the assumption that the primary problem in
Sudan was a lack of governmental capacity, rather than there being a malevolent government policy at work which threatens their livelihoods. UNDP also believed, along with the government, that through a process of poverty alleviation, the causes of conflict could be addressed; for example, that innovative development programmes could form the basis for democratisation and nation-building. Finally, UNDP argued that relief is detrimental to the economic viability of Sudan, since it creates dependency. It concluded, therefore, that developmental aid is more cost-effective than relief aid.5

Many of these views were shared by UNICEF. For example, UNICEF actively promotes its Household Food Security Project on grounds that it is extremely cost-effective relative to the costs of food aid (provided by WFP). UNICEF argued that relief and development programming are complementary, focusing on the similarity of content in its activities for war-affected and non-war-affected populations. It did not accept that the instruments used to deliver this aid need to be modified for war-affected populations, in order to ensure the neutrality and impartiality of the programme.

Importantly, DHA had been slow to define its position with regard to the implications of adopting developmental approaches to relief programming. Despite the efforts of its Khartoum-based staff, it had largely failed to defend humanitarian principles of impartial and neutral aid programming in government-held areas. WFP's position was equivocal on this continuum issue: on the one hand it seemed more concerned than UNICEF/UNDP about neutrality issues; on the other, it used continuum arguments to justify sustained reductions in rations.

Non-governmental organisations Many NGOs shared the developmentalist assumptions proposed by UNDP and UNICEF. One NGO employee commented that:

Relief is not good for anyone ... We would like to work in communities who can provide inputs ... we demand some participation [in order to] create an environment where people take control of their development.

Other NGOs were more cautious. In their view, the concept of the continuum was being promoted in part to conform with the priorities of GOS, and in part because of donor imperatives:

We perceive that donors, particularly the European Commission and Euronaid, would prefer that we do rehabilitation rather than relief ... The Euronaid funding guidelines stress rehabilitation and development and will therefore not give relief food.

Donor community The view expressed by the NGO above is partly accurate in relation to the donor position. One major donor, for example, felt that food aid to Sudan could legitimately be reduced since the country produced an annual surplus of grain. In his view, the provision of food aid could be justified only if an aggregate deficit in food supply could be proven. Such an approach illustrates confusion on the part of several donors, and other agencies, regarding the rationale for the provision of relief aid in Sudan. Relief for conflict-affected populations is required not primarily because of structural food deficits, but because of the impact and dynamics of the
war. Rather than filling a temporary food gap, donors are paying for the consequences of violent and discriminatory policies. Given this, the crucial question confronting the international community is how to aid conflict-affected populations most effectively.

**What is being done?**

As the section above suggests, the concept of the continuum has gained considerable ground in the Northern Sector. At programme level, however, there is a remarkable lack of innovation and diversity in strategies designed to achieve developmental responses. Indeed, the primary strategy said to mark the transition from relief to development is the reduction in general rations for war-affected populations.

Over the duration of OLS, the total quantity of food aid provided has been declining. This has been achieved by reducing rations, providing food aid on a seasonal basis and reducing coverage of food aid programmes to certain geographical areas and population groups. Restricting coverage of food distributions, in theory, is designed to increase the accuracy of targeting and reduce unwarranted dependence on relief. However, this change has taken place without adequate assessment of the food security and health situation of war-affected populations.

To offset reduced rations, seed and tool programmes are being implemented by NGOs, UNICEF, FAO and UNDP. Some of these include cost-recovery and credit elements. However, these attempts to move along the continuum are hampered by a number of technical and political constraints.

**Constraints on 'developmental space' — technical viability**

There are two key considerations in assessing the technical viability of rehabilitation objectives in the context of government-held areas: whether or not the emergency is over, and how much space there is for developmental relief.

**Is the emergency over?** An important assumption underpinning the continuum is that the emergency is over. Two related bodies of evidence suggest that the emergency is not over for war-affected populations living in government-held territories:

- their continued vulnerability to political and military threats;
- continued deterioration in their physical status, particularly in terms of nutrition.

In each of the three GOS-controlled areas visited by the Review Team, people internally displaced by the war continued to face significant threats to their security. The continued political vulnerability of war-affected communities has led to a deterioration, rather than an improvement in their nutritional status. This deterioration has not, however, halted the programme of reducing food aid rations.

Targeting declining food aid and relief resources in a context where populations continue to be extremely vulnerable raises a number of acute ethical and programming dilemmas. The response in Sudan has been to adopt strategies which raise the threshold for qualifying for assistance higher and higher, in other words to redefine the 'emergency'. In Ed Da'ein, in 1992, malnutrition rates of over 20 per cent were considered high enough to prompt a major relief operation. In 1994, despite the fact...
that malnutrition rates were worse, it was proposed to cut rations: serious levels of malnutrition had become normalised.

Justification of ration reduction, which relies on portraying the available information regarding very poor nutritional indicators as acceptable, is leading to an erosion in standards for the provision of relief assistance (Stockton, 1996). In other areas, such as the informal settlements occupied by war-displaced in Khartoum, there is no systematic information available to inform policy, because the government does not permit access. It is arguable that where political conditions mediate against the collection of even the most basic socio-economic and demographic information, developmental programming — which aims to have a more complex, targeted response than relief aid — is likely to be extremely problematic. It is therefore difficult to conclude otherwise than that decisions regarding the management of food aid are not made on the basis of empirical evidence; either relevant data do not exist or where they do they are frequently ignored.

Lack of alternative strategies for protecting entitlements In addition to a lack of systematic monitoring of the impact of ration reductions on the physical status of war-affected populations, there is also a lack of monitoring of the impact of such reductions on survival strategies. While attention continues to focus on the issue of aid dependency, much less attention has been paid to the increasing dependence of war-affected communities on strategies which are economically, socially and environmentally unsustainable.

In Ed Da'ein, the war-displaced have been integrated into the economy of the province not as independent subsistence producers, but as cheap and tied agricultural labourers, who are becoming increasingly indebted to local landowners. The Provincial Commissioner, for example, noted that the war-displaced now account for 85 per cent of the agricultural labour force, although they constitute less than 20 per cent of the population. In Wau, the displaced are increasingly reliant on cutting timber and prostitution. These activities are not, as conventionally seen, an indication of 'coping', but rather an indication of a group under extreme stress.

Thus, reducing relief aid, without a parallel expansion in genuine development opportunities, serves to increase further the vulnerability of displaced populations, while benefiting other powerful economic and political interests. It is therefore unsurprising that merchants, local authorities and the national government are at the forefront of continuum thinking in Sudan.

Structural economic decline A final threat to the technical viability of rehabilitation initiatives is the structural economic crisis confronting the country. Experience from other countries has shown that rehabilitation of public infrastructure and the provision of additional material supplies and training, will not result in sustainable improvements in service provision unless and until measures are taken to revive public financing (see, for example, Macrae et al., 1994).

Sudan is, in effect, implementing a structural adjustment policy, but without the benefit of international balance of payments support to subsidise essential social service provision. The high cost of sustaining the military, combined with the country’s deteriorating balance of payments and revenue-raising position, means that supporting social sector provision is becoming increasingly difficult. At the same time, GOS is attempting to expand coverage of public services; for example, as it extends
the security zone around Wau. This process of expansion is taking place when there is an overall contraction in the public financing base. As overall public provision deteriorates, so increasing pressure is being exerted on relief supplies provided by OLS and other programmes. In 1996, more people are in need of the free health and water services provided through the relief programme, rather than less.

An important premise underpinning rehabilitative interventions is that responsibility for recurrent financing can be resumed by public authorities. This, however, is not likely in Sudan for the foreseeable future. If rehabilitative programming implies restoration of the infrastructure, boosting supplies and training opportunities, and sustaining current levels of relief input, while maintaining free provision, then rehabilitation is likely to be more expensive for donors, rather than less.

**Political implications of the continuum**

The Review Team had a number of serious concerns regarding the political implications of promoting development objectives through a humanitarian programme.

**The continuum, human rights and the war** Evidence collected by the Review Team and others suggests that the developmental agenda of GOS with regard to war-affected populations is directly linked to its military strategy.

In 1990, GOS stated explicitly that the 'return of [displaced] civilians to [agricultural production] sites will safeguard the Armed Forces itself' (GOS, 1990). In Wau, as in the Nuba Mountains, the creation of camps for the displaced has enabled the government to secure its military position. UNDP, with support from UNICEF and WFP, are supporting rehabilitation and development programmes in these highly militarised areas, without acknowledging that by so doing they are contributing to the government's consolidation of territory.\(^8\) UNDP support for such schemes at best suggests an ignorance of the context.

More generally, there is a risk that by relabelling relief as rehabilitative assistance, inappropriate signals are sent to the Sudanese authorities. In particular, using the term 'rehabilitation' carries the implication that some sort of progress has been made. In using the rehabilitation label, donors are likely to be seen to accept the view of GOS that the situation is normalising, and that populations are no longer particularly vulnerable to the effects of insecurity and human-rights abuses.\(^9\)

**Aid, conflict resolution and neutrality** The links between relief and development are being reformulated globally. An important element of this reformulation is the concept of preventive development, whereby development is promoted as the basis for peace-building and conflict management (Boutros-Ghali, 1992, 1994; European Commission, 1996).

In the Sudan case, the Review Team noted a striking convergence between GOS policy and UN policy, as represented by UNDP. GOS has made clear its objective to '... bring peace to the South through development' (NDF, 1996, March 28). Through projects such as the Agricultural Rehabilitation Scheme and the Culture of Peace initiative, UNDP makes a direct link between poverty alleviation, rehabilitation and conflict resolution strategies.

The UNDP strategy of linking rehabilitation, development and peace is based on a particular view of conflict as arising from poverty and underdevelopment, and is a
view shared by GOS. The Review Team offered two distinct reasons why such an approach is deeply flawed.

The first reason is that it fails to acknowledge the complex causes of conflict. Poverty, *per se*, is rarely a primary cause of conflict. Other factors, especially national and international political and security arrangements, are critical in determining how social conflict manifests itself, and whether it becomes violent.

Second, in adopting the explicit aim of conflict resolution, and using aid to reinforce a political process, aid loses its neutrality and impartiality. UNDP's analysis of the causes of conflict — and the conflict resolution strategies that this analysis promotes — are unlikely to be shared by southern movements and other opposition forces. In simultaneously claiming a role in both conflict resolution and mitigating the effects of conflict, there is a serious risk that all aid provided by the UN and its partners, including humanitarian, is seen to be politically biased.

*Dilemmas of institutional choice*  As described earlier, moving along the continuum implies a political choice on the part of aid agencies with respect to the legitimacy of national and local authorities. In other words, there is political tension between the aims of development-oriented and relief-oriented activities in the context of an ongoing war. In the Northern Sector, this tension is apparent in relation to current UNDP and UNICEF programming. These agencies are attempting to engage in both activities simultaneously, and argue that these inputs are complementary. However, on a number of occasions, the humanitarian imperative has brought these agencies into direct conflict with their development objectives.10

For development aid programming purposes the UN is required to treat government authorities as legitimate and competent, while for relief purposes the UN treats GOS as a belligerent party to a war characterised by extensive abuses of human rights and humanitarian law.

**View from the Southern Sector**

This section articulates the Review Team's analysis of the continuum as it applies to the Southern Sector of OLS operations.

**Who is promoting the continuum?**

As in the Northern Sector, there is a convergence of opinion between all actors in OLS about the need to move beyond emergency relief. In contrast to the Northern Sector, however, the move from relief to developmental programming is mainly driven by donors, UN agencies and NGOs. The southern movements have formulated no overall development plan for southern Sudan.

While all involved in OLS agree on the move from relief to development in general, there is no clear working definition of 'rehabilitation' or 'development' accepted by all agencies beyond a perceived need for capacity building to promote self-reliance. The translation of the concept of the continuum, as well as the reasons why it is necessary to move beyond relief, therefore varies between NGOS, UN agencies and donors. It ranges from promoting food security and rebuilding local infrastructure, to direct support for 'counterparts' in the rebel movements.
In the Southern Sector, the move along the relief-to-development continuum appears more driven by aims of resuscitating the rural economy and rebuilding civil society, than by a perceived need to reduce relief dependency.

**UN agencies** The main UN agencies in the Southern Sector are UNICEF and WFP, with UNICEF acting as lead agency for OLS. UNICEF in particular promotes institution building as an essential requirement for a move along the relief-to-development continuum, and initiated a distinct OLS capacity-building project in June 1993, based on:

... increasing recognition at all levels of the humanitarian community that capacity building in complex emergencies is a *sine qua non* for moves away from relief to rehabilitation and development (O'Brien, 1996, January 3).

Whereas capacity building was defined as:

An explicit intervention that aims to improve an organisation's effectiveness and sustainability in relation to its mission and context.

UN/OLS agencies in the Southern Sector have also promoted programmes that support people's coping mechanisms from early on in the operation. It was considered more effective to strengthen people's ability to withstand the multiple and successive crises that characterise the emergency in south Sudan, rather than limiting interventions to crisis response. Supporting coping mechanisms was given as an explicit objective of OLS in the 1992 and 1993 OLS Southern Sector assessments (OLS Southern Sector, 1991, December; OLS Southern Sector, 1993, February). Although these programmes may originally have been initiated to assist people to withstand crisis, the aim of all UN-sponsored food security programmes now is to promote self-reliance, which appears to conflict with the recognition that those same populations suffer multiple and successive crises.

**The movements** Not surprisingly, the capacity- or institution-building component of the continuum is most actively supported by the movements. In their document, 'The Way Forward', the SRRA describes capacity building as human resource development and institutional support. At central level, the movements also promote food security interventions to rebuild the local subsistence economy. At the local level, however, representatives may be influenced by the need to secure resources for their 'constituencies', with food aid representing a more valuable resource than food security inputs.

**NGOs** There is now a broad consensus among UN agencies and NGOs on the need for institutional support to the humanitarian wings of the movements to improve the implementation and co-ordination of Southern Sector programmes. However, not all agencies agree on the precise nature or the objectives of this type of support. Whereas for UNICEF capacity building is seen as a move from relief to development, some NGOs felt that the aim should remain limited to improving the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Some agencies also felt that capacity building was inappropriate in an unstable environment, or a deviation from the main priority of emergency relief.
Although there may be some scepticism about the aims and methods of capacity building among the NGO community, there was almost unanimous agreement on the need for more developmental programming, in particular a shift from food aid to food security interventions in order to promote sustainability and self-reliance. For example, a review commissioned by SCF (UK) suggested that different parts of the South, ‘... occupy different places on a relief-development continuum’, and that different levels of emergency need different types of intervention (Boyle and Shearer, 1994, April). The effects of the war have been variable throughout south Sudan, and NGOs have concentrated in those areas which have not experienced constant fighting. It is in these areas that NGOs have moved furthest beyond the provision of emergency relief.

Donors Donor agencies initially opposed what were considered more rehabilitative programmes, such as production support and attention to physical infrastructure. For example, during the crisis following the return of refugees from Ethiopia in 1991, a consultant to the OFDA, advised against ‘expenditures on infrastructure and agriculture that would at least have the appearance of involving USG in a development program’ (Brennan, 1991, July: para. 36). From 1994, however, there has been a change in donor policy for funding developmental programmes. The rationale behind this shift is unclear, but could be related to a shift in position with regard to the movements, as well as a search for greater cost effectiveness, originating from the currently fashionable paradigm of developmental relief.

What is being done?

Developmental strategies in the Southern Sector are much more sophisticated than those in the Northern Sector, this is evidenced in capacity-building projects, developmental programming in general, and a move from food aid to food security in particular.

Capacity building Lack of consensus among international agencies on the modalities of capacity building means that OLS agencies are involved in a range of activities that come under the heading of capacity building. For UNICEF, this support has included cash payments to SRRA and RASS to cover salaries, rents and office expenses; this strategy has attracted strong criticism from UNDP and WFP (Khartoum) not least because it increases pressure from GOS for similar initiatives in the territory it occupies. For most agencies, projects contain a capacity-building component in the form of training community workers through workshops and seminars. In addition, some OLS agencies are helping to rebuild the service delivery capacity of Sudanese NGOs (SINGOs) and church-based organisations by establishing INGO/SINGO partnerships.

Developmental programming The original strategy of OLS was to provide emergency assistance to populations in southern Sudan. However, from the beginning of the programme it was realised that the infrastructure needed to implement relief programmes was virtually non-existent, and had to be recreated or strengthened in order to meet minimum distribution goals.

The related sectors of health and water and sanitation have moved rapidly beyond
the limited goals of UNICEF's EPI campaigns and towards more sustained improvements in the health of rural populations. In supporting various aspects of primary health care and rural water supply they have found that they must be involved in supporting or re-creating the administrative structures that — before the war — recruited, trained, supplied and maintained the teams who ran such programmes.

Increased access, the dispersal of displaced populations, as well as improved security and good harvests in 1994, led to a change in programming. This included cost recovery, income generation and extension work, as well as an increased emphasis on training and community-based work. The livestock programme, for example, trained a new network of community animal health workers to treat a range of diseases, based on the idea of 'cost recovery'. In areas of southern Sudan which have remained more stable, there has been a move into 'income-generating' projects.

Food aid and food security  Aims of supporting coping mechanisms brought about a shift from a focus on food aid to food security interventions, such as support for agriculture, fishing and livestock.

As in the Northern Sector, the transition from relief to development has been accompanied by a reduction in food rations, increased targeting of food aid and the provision of food aid during certain times of the year only. Accordingly, the role of food aid has also changed, from being perceived as a life-saving measure, to — in most situations — being perceived as a food production and livelihood support. In contrast to the Northern Sector, however, reduced food rations and geographical targeting are based on assessment information (from 1994). WFP Southern Sector, with the assistance of SCF (UK) has developed a specific methodology for estimating people's access to food.

However, food aid and food security programmes have changed independently to include developmental approaches, and there is little co-ordination between these sectors, reflecting in part the lack of coherence in the mandates of different UN specialised agencies. In addition to organisational ones, constraints on access and logistics often hinder the provision of assistance according to assessed needs.

Despite these problems, the OLS Review Team felt that in addition to emergency relief, continued food security support is justified, because this form of assistance is appropriate for rural, home-based populations (as opposed to internally displaced populations), and is in accordance with the priorities of communities themselves. The essential difference in food security programming between the Northern and Southern Sectors is that, in the latter, these programmes are aimed at reinforcing or rebuilding the local subsistence economy. Whereas in the Northern Sector, agricultural support serves to endorse the (forced) transition of the war-displaced into an agricultural labour force, and the expansion of mechanised farming by GOS. Thus, the concept of 'development' — in terms of attaining food self-sufficiency — has an entirely different meaning in the Southern and Northern Sectors of OLS. Despite the significant potential and need for developmental programming, in southern Sudan fundamental constraints remain.

Constraints to developmental space

There are certain technical and political limitations to the impact that developmental programmes can be expected to have in terms of achieving self-reliance.
Is the emergency over? Assumptions that the emergency is over in rural southern Sudan cannot be supported by information on people’s physical status because this information does not exist for the majority of the population. However, information on the options available to people to achieve food security indicates that they remain extremely vulnerable. Further, the continued targeting of civilians as a war strategy (by all warring parties), means that the risk of acute crisis remains. For the majority of the population, the conditions that contributed to their vulnerability in the past continue today.

Limited information on people’s physical status is a result of the practical difficulties of collecting quantitative information on a widely dispersed population in often insecure or inaccessible areas, as well as the more deliberate decision to focus assessments on access to food. Current assessment and intervention strategies make assumptions about people’s ability to survive, and that, if they are surviving, they are meeting their energy needs. In addition, it is assumed that their priority is to meet immediate food needs. This does not take into account the possibility that people may have to use strategies that are damaging to their physical well-being, or to livelihoods in the longer term. Assessments therefore risk creating the misleading impression that problems that existed in the past (malnutrition and mortality), no longer occur.

Even the briefest analysis of the causes of food insecurity indicate that people’s options for coping are extremely limited; most have been blocked either directly or indirectly as a result of the war. Coping mechanisms, such as labour migration, greater dependence on wild foods and fish, the exchange of cattle for grain and reliance on wider social networks, are now obstructed due to insecurity. Different areas in southern Sudan may be held by opposing movements, or GOS, so trade and employment opportunities and access to social support networks, are hindered. The psychological effect of displacement and fear of attack, also inhibit people’s attempts to achieve some degree of food security (UNICEF/OLS, 1994, September).

The risk of direct attack is still very real for many people in southern Sudan. The southern movements, as well as GOS, continue to target civilians. Destruction of crops, houses and other assets may be the result of fighting, but more often looting and theft is their real purpose. This situation is deteriorating, rather than improving, due to increasing factionalisation; this is seen, for example, in the increasingly insecure environments in Bahr-el-Ghazal and Jonglei. Current assessment methodologies, however, ignore the continued vulnerability of populations to violence and insecurity.

There is some evidence that, in areas which have remained relatively stable, the food security situation has improved. This includes areas of Western Equatoria, and the case study area in Western Upper Nile. Overall, however, the predominant characteristic of the war is its unpredictability. Increasing factionalisation, changing alliances and volatile front line mean that the pattern of war constantly changes, and there is no guarantee that areas which are currently stable will remain so in the future. However, agencies adopting developmental approaches in areas which are stable at the time of programme initiation assume implicitly that they will remain so.

Technical constraints The restriction of options open to people in southern Sudan for gaining access to food means there is only limited scope for supporting coping strategies. These limited options may enable people to meet their immediate food needs, but they are not necessarily ‘developmental’ in terms of achieving sustainable livelihoods in the longer term.
The provision of food aid as a livelihood support is based on taking into account strategies that households use to gain access to food. This approach must be based on an accurate knowledge of the options open to people, an in-depth understanding of livelihoods and people’s own priorities in maintaining or rebuilding livelihoods. However, this kind of in-depth information is very difficult to obtain, due to the various constraints that exist. In the absence of such information, there is a danger that over-confident assumptions will be made about the ability of people to cope with food insecurity, and that reduced rations may, in some cases, be unsubstantiated. If, on the other hand, a good understanding is gained, this approach will assist people to overcome short periods of acute food insecurity because their options for achieving longer-term food security are limited by the war.

More developmental uses of food aid, such as food for work and monetisation, have not proved possible because of the absence of functioning markets, the inability to supply food aid on a regular basis and the lack of administrative infrastructure. Developmental uses of food aid are therefore limited to providing the same free food rations in smaller quantities, for the purpose of supporting livelihoods, rather than for purely nutritional reasons. In addition, a coherent strategy for promoting food security is contingent on the provision of inputs to support coping mechanisms, alongside the provision of food aid. However, OLS is often unable to deliver these inputs in the right quantity at the right time.

Constraints in the implementation of cost-recovery and income-generation programmes has meant that they have not been able to achieve their objectives. Cost-recovery programmes cannot operate because basic items — such as drugs for livestock programmes — have to be purchased in hard currency, while the programmes generate only Sudanese pounds or locally produced goods. Further, most of the currency circulating in southern Sudan for purposes of trade is issued by the government. Currency notes have been changed three times since the beginning of the war; where some old Sudanese pounds are no longer convertible against the dinar, there are already problems related to the accumulation of old currency notes. Income generation and cost recovery in non-government areas are thus vulnerable to further manipulation of currency by the government.

Bartering programmes, although extremely popular in terms of the items brought into southern Sudan for trading (mosquito nets, soap, salt, etc.) have been largely unsuccessful. This is due to a lack of local markets for the local produce that is bartered, and the logistical problems of transporting them to other areas. Similarly, where surplus food production is encouraged by NGOs — for example, in Western Equatoria — this cannot be marketed easily. These criticisms of current OLS Southern Sector programmes do not imply that the programmes themselves are unnecessary or inappropriate; rather, it is their aim of achieving self-reliance and sustainability that is challenged.

**Political constraints** Political constraints on sustainable development in the Southern Sector are both external (war-related) and internal to the southern movements. External constraints include the strategy of warfare as it is fought on the ground, and the broader constraints affecting implementation of OLS agreements. Internal constraints concern the tensions within the southern movements themselves. The strategy of war pursued by the main combatants, and the government in particular, involves the deliberate (if selective) degradation of rural areas. In addition
to fighting the war through supporting militia from the north, the government has attempted to subvert southern opposition by backing certain movements in order to undermine others. Southern movements themselves have also destroyed or seized relief inputs intended for other sides.

In some parts of the Southern Sector, OLS projects invite attack. The rehabilitation of physical infrastructure has always been problematic, because roads and wells, for example, are strategic targets, available for use by soldiers as well as civilians.

Further, OLS programmes in some areas — notably Bahr-el-Ghazal — have been suspended when access has been denied by the government, either as a result of the activities of its forces, or through the imposition of bans and restrictions on relief flights.

In this context, ‘development’ is impossible. The conditions do not exist for sustained progression from one phase of activity to the next. Programme ambitions have had to be scaled back. At best, programmes are constantly restarted; at worst they have to be abandoned. Limited access not only disrupts programme continuity, it also hinders the development of the local knowledge required for community-based programming, and the regular monitoring of programme delivery and impact.

**Political implications of the continuum**

In the midst of civil war, there can be no neutrality in institution building. Any support for the structures of civil society implies making a political decision. Southern movements depend on these structures for their support, and the admitted war aims of GOS include the destruction of civil society. Even such apparently benign areas as education are highly political. The government has always objected to OLS support for southern schools outside government areas, because the syllabus preferred by the southern movements is the East African syllabus, rather than the Sudanese syllabus set by the government.

However, the issue of institution building and neutrality applies in particular to support for the humanitarian wings of the southern movements, and especially in the area of cash grants. At present, none of the southern movements has a clearly defined economic policy, and their access to certain types of resources comes mainly through relief agencies. Although the movements claim to have no funds for the running costs of their humanitarian wings, they do have sufficient resources for the continuation of the war. For this reason, the OLS Review recommended that administrative or training support for humanitarian wings of the movements should be phased out, unless the movements are prepared to make adequate provision for their running costs.

The fact that this type of institutional support was historically channelled exclusively through the SRRA in SPLA areas is now being challenged. New SINGOs, being created at the behest and with the assistance of the international community, and the new structures of civil administration, are also demanding the same type of agency and donor support which has formerly been reserved for the humanitarian wings of the movements.

At the same time that OLS Southern Sector is involved in capacity building, there is a recognition of the disaster-producing activities of the movements. This has led to the creation of the Ground Rules. On the one hand, it could be argued that the fact that SPLA/M and SSIA/M signed the Ground Rules provides a form of recognition to these bodies. However, it is because of the Ground Rules that capacity building in the Southern Sector is conditional upon observance of these rules. The Review Team felt
this was an important development, especially in contrast to the situation in the Northern Sector. Since the introduction of the Ground Rules, capacity building in the Southern Sector also incorporates the training of southern Sudanese aid staff in the application of humanitarian principles to aid work (UNICEF/OLS, 1995, April 5/6).

Through the formulation of the Ground Rules, Southern Sector agencies have sought to influence the way in which the war is being fought, insofar as they can ameliorate the condition of civilians. Nevertheless, and again, in contrast to the Northern Sector, Southern Sector agencies do not appear to have illusions about the role of OLS programmes in contributing towards the peace process.

**Issues and implications**

What the above review suggests is that there are important similarities as well as differences between Northern and Southern Sectors in terms of assessing the scope for rehabilitative programming. On both sides there are significant technical and political constraints: in particular, while the conflict and associated policies continue, the space for development is being deliberately eroded. Also common, is the need for donors and implementing agencies to consider systematically the political implications of promoting developmental programming. There are some differences between the two sides, however.

Rehabilitative activities in the Southern Sector which assist with the recovery and stabilisation of the rural economy, particularly where populations are not displaced, may have a beneficial impact in terms of health, livelihoods and labour retention. In particular, they may enable people to remain on their land. The same cannot be said for war-affected populations in the Northern Sector. Here, lack of secure land tenure, lack of political entitlements and lack of legal protection mean that the displaced are politically and physically more vulnerable.

In the Southern Sector, limited institution building of the humanitarian wings of the movements can be justified, because it is necessary for effective implementation and co-ordination of relief programmes, and because this form of capacity building is contingent on observing the Ground Rules. In the Northern Sector, however, there is at present no indication that support for GOS institutions would be conditional on observing humanitarian principles and human rights.

The emergency in Sudan is not over on either side. This is seen in the deteriorating nutritional status of populations in government-held areas, and in areas of sustained insecurity in rebel-held areas. The longevity of the crisis has been mistaken for a normalisation. In a deteriorating situation, the assertion by OLS agencies and some donors that there is an opportunity to progress from relief to rehabilitation, appears misplaced.

The move to support rehabilitation may signal anxiety over the failure of humanitarian assistance to solve the humanitarian problem. The fault, however, does not lie with the principle of humanitarian aid, but rather in the way it has been managed. As the Review describes in detail, there is much room for improvement in the current relief programme to maximise impact and effectiveness. However, the fact that the relatively simple task of delivering humanitarian aid has proven so difficult in the Sudanese context suggests that achieving more complex, developmental objectives is likely to be extremely problematic.
Moreover, while a well-managed relief programme can contribute to reducing mortality and morbidity, of itself it cannot resolve the war or its impact. This is a matter for political actors, including the foreign ministries of donor governments, rather than for humanitarian actors. In line with the Rwanda evaluation, the OLS Review concluded that humanitarian aid cannot substitute for political action. The fact that it is so difficult to move beyond relief is primarily due to the lack of progress at the political level, not because humanitarian agencies continue to want to provide relief.

The Review Team concluded that current formulations of rehabilitation and development — which, for example, promote financial sustainability over respect for human rights, and which do not address the particular 'development process' and political framework which continue to precipitate disasters — are unlikely to contribute to peace and stability.

**Conclusions**

In situations such as those in war-affected areas, the above evidence suggests that priority should be accorded to improving the effectiveness and integrity of relief efforts in Sudan. In particular, greater attention should be paid by donors and agencies to increasing the mechanisms for regulating humanitarian aid in order to insulate it from the worst political abuses by the warring factions. In other words, the rule-based, conditional approach to relief should be expanded to the Northern Sector, and deepened throughout emergency operations in Sudan.

*Such conditions might equally apply to so-called rehabilitative programmes, such as support for livelihoods. Particular consideration should be given to the emphasis placed on neutrality and impartiality, and to carefully defining criteria for measuring effectiveness and appropriateness.*

The lack of a clear information base regarding food security, nutrition and health indicators means that even the most basic facts regarding the impact of policy changes are not collected. Lack of coherence in the mandates and activities of UN specialised agencies, particularly in the food aid and food security sectors, combined with a lack of adequate access, blocks the collection and analysis of appropriate data. In the absence of basic empirical evidence to support policy changes, justifying rehabilitative programmes in terms of appropriateness and cost effectiveness is likely to be extremely difficult.

More broadly, the Sudan case suggests the need to reassess the similarities and differences between relief and development aid. These are seen to lie not primarily in the *content* of such assistance, but rather in the *strategies* used to deliver it. For example, immunisation programmes achieve the same goal in both relief and development programmes. However, the strategies which are used to deliver that intervention either do, or in some cases *should*, differ substantially depending on the particular political context. For relief actors, a key concern should be to ensure that aid is delivered in a manner which protects the impartiality and neutrality of assistance. To provide aid through channels — either linked to the state or to rebel movements — which are parties to the war increases the risk that aid will be manipulated and that international resources will be selectively provided (or denied) on the basis of political affiliation not need.
It is thus the differences in the political meaning of relief and development aid which need to be recognised. A discussion of whether and how these instruments can and should complement each other is necessary, as is debate over how they conflict. Unless and until these issues are confronted, uncritical application of continuum thinking and promotion of developmental relief may do more harm than good.

Notes

1. Readers might be interested, however, to note the findings with regard to the continuum in the recent evaluation of WFP's assistance to the Liberia region (Apthorne et al., 1996). While not as in-depth a study as that provided by the OLS Review, the Liberia report's findings resonate with many of those described in relation to Sudan.

2. Contributions received against appeals have hovered at the 50 per cent mark, despite the fact that requests for financing fell from US$185 million in 1994 to $101 million in 1995.

3. During the period 1980–87, net official aid amounted to $40.4 per capita annually, representing 63 per cent of domestic investment. In 1985, it peaked at $1,907 million, falling to an average of approximately $600 million until mid-1992, and then dropping to $127 million in 1993/4 (GOS, 1995).

4. This is an obvious, but often overlooked point. It is far simpler for a donor to disburse several millions of dollars of official development assistance — through, for example, balance of payments support — than to organise the disbursement of millions of dollars of emergency food aid which requires complex institutional and logistical structures to reach its intended beneficiaries.

5. These views were well encapsulated in a statement by the then UNDP Resident Representative in Sudan:

   We often define humanitarianism as putting bread in the mouth of a starving person, but it is not humanitarian to let him get into that situation. We should replace free food deliveries and make people repay what they have received. This is what we are doing in Wau ... People should repay this humanitarian loan not to us but to the community. We are taking them out of the beggar mentality. People are proud to pay for themselves ... this is part of society building, enabling people to feel more consciously self-reliant. It is linked to democracy building because people have to elect a management committee.

6. For example, Save the Children (UK)'s programme in Ed Da'ein, and UNDP's ARS programme.

7. Specifically: In Khartoum, there is a continual threat of forcible relocation and resettlement. In Wau, the establishment of 'peace villages' for war-displaced populations has served to widen the government's security perimeter around the town, and the 'villages' (in effect, camps) are highly militarised. In Ed Da'ein, relations between the war-displaced and the host community were extremely tense at the time of the Review; political inequality between the two populations, and threats of violence, act as major barriers to the achievement of health and food security for the war-displaced.

8. The Kadugli Agricultural Rehabilitation Scheme (ARS) in Southern Kordofan is one of three such programmes proposed by UNDP. The main focus is agricultural development, and the aim is to 'reduce dependence on emergency assistance in areas affected by civil strife' (UNDP, 1996, February 22). This will be done by support to mechanised farming. The project is to be implemented through the State Peace and Resettlement Administration Project, and its objectives are claimed to be similar to those of Administration. These include to:
resettle ['returners'] in peace villages and then promote agricultural development to strengthen their attachment to land (ibid.: 10. Emphasis added).

Given that the 'returners' are Nuba who have been dispossessed of their lands, this statement appears somewhat cynical. Further, there appears to be no analysis of the implications of the project in political terms, and especially the linkages between the GOS policy of 'self-reliance', GOS war aims, the military establishment and the expansion of mechanised farming.

9. Further, it should be noted that for GOS, the term 'rehabilitation' is associated with the establishment of 'peace villages'. Relief, on the other hand, is associated with 'displaced camps'. By implication, endorsing the concept of rehabilitation means being seen as condoning the establishment and maintenance of peace villages.

10. For example, evidence of an outbreak of cholera in a displaced camp in Khartoum was allegedly suppressed by a UN agency, fearing that it would embarrass the Ministry of Health, its partner in the development side of its activities. Because cholera was not specifically declared, procurement procedures meant that special orders of the required IV drugs and fluids could not be placed. Over 30 people died in the outbreak. The implication here is not that the agency concerned was exclusively to blame, but that, in seeking to protect its country programming, a direct conflict with its humanitarian responsibilities arose.

Combining both humanitarian and development responsibilities in the position of the UNDP Representative has also created significant tensions. As early as 1992, it was noted:

... that this puts the Coordinator in an extremely difficult position having to be the go-between and the bearer of bad tidings between the government and the SPLM, (not to mention the donor community) while at the same time carrying out his normal UNDP responsibilities (UN, 1992, September 3: 5).

11. So, for example, the farming population in Western Equatoria has been able to produce sufficient food to meet their needs, and in many cases have produced a surplus. The case study in Western Upper Nile noted an improvement in food security due to the expansion of commercial networks. In Bahr-el-Ghazal, the Review Team found that OLS programmes had resulted in the return of labour to the area, leading to a temporary stabilisation of the economy in 1994. This was later undermined, however, by the activities of Kerubino, the Popular Defence Force and Nuer raiders under the control of SSIM commanders. The Review Team concluded that situations of relative stability are localised, and in the majority of cases temporary. Moreover, an improvement in food security often invites attack.

12. For example, GOS links with Kerubino, and recent agreement between GOS and SSIA.

13. The Ground Rules establish a series of roles and responsibilities between OLS agencies and the opposition movements. They incorporate administrative and programme support to the movements, but also establish the inviolability of aid workers and their property, and the acceptance of humanitarian principles by the movements (UNICEF/OLS, 1993, May 1, UNICEF/OLS, 1994, June). Importantly, the Ground Rules have also been extended to include human rights. Since 1994, signatories to the rules, which include the SPLA/M and SSIA/M, undertake to observe the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Geneva Conventions. This has enabled OLS to enter into direct dialogue with movements when it has felt that the Ground Rules have been broken. Unlike the Northern Sector and many humanitarian operations elsewhere, this has meant that human rights and humanitarian aid issues have been brought together.
References


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