Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium

Complexities of service delivery and state-building

Briefing paper 21
October 2016

Key messages

- State-building involves highly political, long-term, internal processes. The presumed link between service delivery and people's improved views of the state was not straightforward in South Sudan even before its decline into the current armed conflict.
- Before the return to widespread armed conflict, people's reported priorities were physical security, perceived fairness in resource allocation, and any access to services, regardless of whether they were provided by the state.
- In the future, both internal and external actors should prioritise resources and capacity at the local level, and enhanced information for and participation of local authorities and communities.

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Background

The SLRC South Sudan programme has been working since 2012 to identify and understand the realities of livelihoods, access to basic services, and perceptions of governance in post-independence South Sudan. In 2013 SLRC conducted research in Uror, Nyirol, and Pibor counties to examine the dynamics of service delivery, state-building and livelihood changes in the context of armed conflict and raiding. Following the outbreak of large-scale armed conflict in December 2013, the research was adjusted to reflect the shift in the focus of aid towards humanitarian action.

This briefing paper summarises findings from the publications of SLRC South Sudan over the life of the programme, all of which can be found at: www.securelivelihoods.org/South-Sudan.

Challenging the assumed nexus between service delivery and legitimacy

State-building as a field of international engagement emerged as a response to civil wars and other crises affecting states, particularly the threat of terrorism emerging from 'weak' states. External support to state-building efforts aims at countering armed conflict and fragility. One of the key underlying assumptions of state-building is that access to basic services enhances a) the relations between citizens and the state and b) people's perceptions of the state, and therefore fosters peace and stability. Through institution-building and capacity-building, state institutions

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ought to be strengthened and enabled to deliver services. These underlying hypotheses are based on idealised notions of a bureaucratic state. Some of the values and concepts of authority, governance and legitimacy prevalent in South Sudan contradict such ideal concepts. South Sudan is a pilot country for the implementation of the five Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals introduced by the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States. The New Deal aims, among other things, at enhancing the country ownership and leadership of peace-building and state-building processes.

South Sudan has a long history of poor infrastructure and service delivery dating back to the colonial era. During the civil war (1983-2005), the Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) humanitarian operation provided some basic services besides food aid. OLS aid and services delivered in areas held by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) – then the main rebel group in Southern Sudan – undisputedly fostered the recognition and the people's perception of the SPLM/A as the ruling authority in the eyes of the populace. Donors also supported, to some degree, capacity-building of the SPLM/A administrative institutions. The OLS humanitarian operation may have created expectations of aid and humanitarian assistance in some areas which continue to exist. In Jonglei, Lakes and Unity States, SLRC research found high expectations among respondents – both community members and government employees – that external actors should and would come to their assistance.

Despite state-building efforts, service delivery remained inadequate in remote areas

After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, large sums of international aid money were channelled to South Sudan for development, infrastructure construction, service delivery and humanitarian aid. Approximately 4.75 billion USD was spent in South Sudan between 2012 and 2014 alone.[1]

In view of the international commitment to state-building, aid funds were partly coordinated with and directed through newly established state institutions. These new institutions were at the same time also supported with capacity-building programmes. The Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GRSS) received approx. 9.65 billion USD in oil revenues between 2005 and 2012 and had the highest GDP per capita of any country in the region. Nevertheless, the funding for services was to a large extent external, while few state resources were channelled towards service delivery. Furthermore, services were largely delivered by international NGOs, though under the auspices of GRSS institutions.

In spite of improvements in infrastructure and service delivery, access to services continues to be inadequate, particularly in remote regions (MoFEP, 2012). In northern Jonglei and Pibor County – focus areas of SLRC research – services were inadequate at the time of the SLRC visit in early 2013 and livelihoods were severely constrained. This includes access to healthcare, education, water and sanitation but also livelihoods support and social protection. Primary healthcare units and schools often lacked qualified and trained staff, and frequently were void of materials such as essential drugs and school books. Social protection was not available, other than occasional emergency aid from international agencies and NGOs, mostly distributed through the South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (SSRRC). In the villages visited in northern Jonglei many boreholes had broken down. Infrastructure such as permanent roads and mobile networks had not reached northern Jonglei. In the case of Pibor County, restricted services were only available in Pibor and Boma towns and a few other administrative headquarters.

Even before the outbreak of widespread armed conflict at the national level in late 2013, violence was endemic and serious in parts of the country. In early 2013, for instance, SLRC research found that Jonglei's Uror and Nyirol Counties and Pibor County had been affected by inter- and intra-communal violence almost continuously. Armed conflict severely affected livelihoods and also impacted access to services in these areas. In inter-communal fighting, infrastructure such as health centres and schools were destroyed, material and assets, particularly livestock, looted and many people were displaced. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) often lost access to services. Teachers in northern Jonglei, particularly those from neighboring states or other areas, left and did not return.

Complex interface between service delivery and people's perceptions of the state

International support to service delivery is based on the assumption that service delivery through the state enhances state capacity, visibility and people's perceptions of the state, while service delivery by international NGOs and other non-state actors might negatively impact citizens' view of the state. Working through government institutions aims not only to strengthen government capacity but also to increase its reach and visibility. SLRC research, however, illustrates that the nexus between service delivery and people's perceptions of the state is not so straightforward. Citizens' perceptions are much more nuanced and mediated by different aspects including previous experiences with state institutions and international actors and their expectations. Also, perceptions vary between individuals and groups, and differ in relation to levels of government.

In northern Jonglei, Mingkaman and Ganyiel – where respondents had some experience with aid during OLS – interviewees anticipated international agencies and NGOs to provide services. A considerable number of respondents sympathised with the government for being young, lacking funds and therefore not (yet) capable of providing adequate services. Thus the lack of services or limited services per se does not negatively affect people's perceptions of the state.

1 OECD-DAC aid database at stats.oecd.org; totals from the 'social infrastructure and services' and 'humanitarian aid' catgories; see also Shankleman, J. (2011) "Oil and State Building in South Sudan". Washington DC: USIP.

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Waterpoint - IDP site in Mingkaman

> [Other respondents] felt marginalised in terms of infrastructure, basic services, state resources and political representation.

Respondents – both citizens and local authorities – in many cases expected and called for more and better services and infrastructure, particularly roads, but many noted that they didn't care who provided them. Interestingly, respondents often associated the government with services delivered by others, attributing credit to state institutions for inviting and coordinating external aid actors. Thus services that were provided by international organisations or local community-based organisations still conferred recognition to state institutions. IDP respondents in Mingkaman noted in October 2014 that people saw aid being brought and distributed by external actors, not the government, so their assumption was that the government had asked the agencies to come in, and were ultimately behind the aid effort.

On the other hand, respondents criticised the lack of information from and consultation by both state and international actors. Others felt that services and infrastructure were inadequate because of deliberate neglect by the government. They felt marginalised in terms of infrastructure, basic services, state resources and political representation. This was particularly true among Murle and Lou Nuer respondents, convinced that the Jonglei State and the national government would marginalise them because of their ethnic background, intra-communal conflict or their communities' political positions during the civil war.

A considerable number of respondents in northern Jonglei also noted that emergency aid, sent in the aftermath of floods or violence, was poorly distributed and did not reach many IDPs in need. Some respondents accused the local authorities, including chiefs and the SSRRC, of aid diversion. In general, in the different case study areas, views of the local government actors – particularly chiefs – were largely positive. Grievances related to service delivery were more directed at the state and the national government. This distinction points to the often under-appreciated fact that citizens differentiate between levels of government. This may be in part because chiefs and local administrators can be challenged by their constituents and, to some extent, held to account for bad performance, unlike higher-level administrators.

Respondents in Jonglei overwhelmingly reported that the service they most needed at that time was physical security – which is particularly notable given that security is rarely discussed by international actors as a basic service. A considerable number of Lou Nuer and Murle respondents were dissatisfied with insecurity and expected the government to provide security and to protect against attacks and cattle raids from neighbouring groups. At the same time, some saw the SPLA itself as a source of insecurity due to coercive disarmament campaigns and counter-insurgency.

Descent into armed conflict in December 2013 despite state-building efforts

Notwithstanding the intense international engagement in institution-building, South Sudan descended into armed conflict in December 2013. Key donors became wary of funding and working through state institutions, as GRSS is a party to a conflict and the SPLA is accused of having committed atrocities against civilians. Accordingly, international support to service delivery through GRSS diminished, and capacity-building efforts have largely been dropped. Humanitarian assistance, which is currently dominating international engagement, is working around rather than through the state and thus raises the important question of how to engage with a government that is party to an ongoing armed conflict and

associated with human rights violations.

The outbreak of large-scale armed violence severely affects service delivery and access to services. Armed violence has displaced more than two million South Sudanese, and service infrastructure has been looted and destroyed. While IDPs in Mingkaman (Lakes State) in 2014 had access to health services, water and food aid provided by international NGOs and agencies, others faced challenges to access services. Assistance to Ganyiel (Unity State), for instance, was limited almost entirely to food aid distributed to IDPs and hosts, with minimal health and education services available to the thousands of IDPs there. The spread of armed violence and insecurity to areas that were once more stable, such as Equatoria and Western Bahr el-Ghazal, has also had an impact on access to services in these areas. Due to the armed violence and the related precipitous drops in oil revenues, state resources spent on service delivery have further diminished. The economic crisis and skyrocketing inflation also affect access to services. By mid-2015, when fieldwork was conducted in Eastern Equatoria, schools and health centres faced challenges with employees who did not show up for work regularly; respondents told SLRC that staff members increasingly had to look for other income-generating opportunities due to high inflation and the fact that government employees had not been paid. In addition, even where services were available, they were increasingly out of people's reach due to the deteriorating economic situation.

Conclusions and implications

SLRC research has clearly illustrated that there was a need for improved delivery of basic services and social protection in research areas, both before and after the resurgence of conflict in December 2013. Yet, in view of the ongoing armed conflict and humanitarian crisis, improved access to services is unlikely in the near future.

What mattered to respondents was that services be provided at all, not who provided them. The perceptions of some Lou Nuer and many Murle respondents from Jonglei were affected by mistrust and grievances. Future state-building support should work to enhance state-society relations and counter the feelings of neglect by following a more informative and participatory approach involving community members and also state employees (from different levels) in implementing service delivery and development. More resources and capacity-building that includes relational aspects – at the local level where services are actually provided – could also further enhance service delivery in remote areas such as northern Jonglei. Allocating state resources and services, however, is a political as well as technical endeavour. Civic education and making space for public debates about service delivery, accountability and resource allocation might contribute to addressing some political aspects of service delivery.

The highly political nature of state-building and post-conflict transformation processes should be more systematically taken into account.

The decline into armed conflict in South Sudan raises questions about realistic expectations of state-building processes, including the supposed linkages between service delivery and stability. These processes are highly political, long-term and endogenous and do not follow a linear transition out of fragility. It is therefore important to critically analyse what external support should and can achieve in supporting such processes and what the responsibilities of the domestic political and state actors are, along with how the relationships between them should be managed. Based on the experiences of South Sudan, it is important to review the underlying assumptions of state-building and activities that aim at enhancing institution- and capacity building, service delivery and the relations between state and society. The highly political nature of state-building and post-conflict transformation processes should be more systematically taken into account.

It remains to be seen how the crisis that started in December 2013 will impact institution- and state-building processes in the longer run. Further research is needed to explore how the ongoing armed conflict affects service delivery and the support of local government in service delivery and how this impacts longer-term state-building and citizen-state relations in South Sudan.

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