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Food assistance, reintegration and dependency in Southern Sudan

Sarah Bailey and Simon Harragin

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About the authors

Sarah Bailey is Research Officer with the with the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI).

Simon Harragin is an independent consultant.

Field Research Team

Charisse Tillman (WFP), Urszula Swierczynska (WFP), Mac Anyang Yuang (WFP), Gummat Abdallatif (WFP), Albino Mawich Kuol (WFP), Martin Kir Wol-Field (WFP), Barjok Ring Kuac (IOM), Radha Pathmanathan (IRC), Hou Akot Hou (IRC), Daniel Deng Mewein (IRC), Achuil Dut Nan (IRC), Luka Madhieu Kuot, Joseph Garang Mou

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Humanitarian Policy Group
Overseas Development Institute
111 Westminster Bridge Road
London
SE1 7JD
United Kingdom

Tel: +44(0) 20 7922 0300
Fax: +44(0) 20 7922 0399
Website: www.odi.org.uk/hpg
Email: hpgadmin@odi.org.uk

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Acronyms

ANLA	Annual Needs and Livelihood Assessment
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
FFE	Food for Education
FFR	Food for Recovery
FFW	Food for Work
GFD	General food distribution
GNU	Government of National Unity
GoS	Government of Sudan
GoSS	Government of Southern Sudan
IDP	internally displaced person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
OLS	Operation Lifeline Sudan
SAF	Sudan Armed Forces
SDG	Sudanese pound
SPLM/A	Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army
SRF-SS	Sudan Recovery Fund-South Sudan
SSRRC	South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission
UNMIS/RRR	UN Mission in Sudan/Return, Reintegration and Recovery section
UNOCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
WFP	World Food Programme

Synthesis

Southern Sudan is experiencing an important transformation. Since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, more than two million people have returned to Southern Sudan (or have arrived for the first time). Yet alongside positive developments are serious concerns about political stability. Violence in Abyei in late 2008 and Jonglei in 2009 underscores the fragility of peace and of the gains that have come with it.

Aid agencies – many of whom have been present in Southern Sudan for two decades – have therefore faced a rapidly changing context. On the one hand, there have been hopes of an imminent move from relief assistance to recovery and development. The dominant role that food aid has played in assistance to Southern Sudan is evolving in response to new needs, challenges and opportunities. On the other hand, serious problems remain, including high malnutrition and mortality rates, grossly inadequate infrastructure and basic services, ongoing insecurity and the limited capacity of the government to address these needs. Given the long history of relief assistance in Southern Sudan, fears about dependency also loom large.

This study builds on previous Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) research on reintegration in Southern Sudan to examine three separate and interconnected issues: reintegration, the role of food assistance in supporting reintegration and concerns about dependency on food aid. It examines the process of reintegration, and the role World Food Programme (WFP) food aid is playing in assisting reintegration. It also explores the concept of dependency, its influence on policy and programming and whether dependency on food aid is influencing the livelihood strategies of returnees and host communities. Overall, it makes the case for WFP to continue supporting reintegration, and doing so in a manner more closely based on the needs and realities of returnees and residents. It also finds that, despite plentiful evidence that food aid has not caused dependency among those receiving it, dependency is still widely perceived to be a problem.

Reintegration¹

The international community and the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) have been heavily preoccupied with logistics of the return process, primarily through supporting the transport of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees to Southern Sudan. However, people returning through these organised channels are the minority – fewer than 13% of all

returnees. The overwhelming majority are ‘spontaneous returnees’: those who have organised their own resources and transport. International agencies and the GoSS have begun to turn their attention to the more complex process of the reintegration of returnees. While this attention is a significant step, it cannot be the only one. The lack of strategic support to reintegration has meant that residents are shouldering the heaviest burden of assisting returnees.

Cities and towns are growing. Many returnees choose not to settle in rural areas, a trend that the government is resisting and that aid agencies are struggling to address – or avoiding addressing altogether. The population growth in both urban and rural areas has been accompanied by a deterioration in services, at a time when many humanitarian agencies that had been delivering basic services are reducing their activities and in some cases withdrawing entirely from certain areas. Returnees, often coming back to different livelihood opportunities than they had abroad, face a range of challenges to restarting their lives: saturated markets for unskilled labour, farm land requiring intensive time and labour to clear, a very low level of basic services and limited access to credit, land, and agricultural inputs.

Against this complex backdrop, aid agencies have focused their efforts on providing assistance to meet basic needs, primarily through a ‘reintegration package’ of a three-month food ration, seeds, tools and non-food items. However, assistance upon and after arrival is uneven and uncoordinated – only a handful of IDP returnees interviewed for this study received all components of the ‘reintegration package’. The challenge of identifying and registering spontaneous returnees means that there are delays and legitimate returnees are excluded from this support; the lack of coordination between agencies has further limited potential impacts. There is also a lack of support to returnee livelihoods, a shortfall that is both striking and worrying. For WFP in particular, the need for food interventions supporting reintegration – now and in the future – will depend in no small part on the ability of returnees to establish (or re-establish) meaningful and productive livelihoods.

Food assistance and reintegration

Food aid – specifically the three-month ration distributed as part of the ‘reintegration package’ – has been the most visible and far-reaching form of assistance to returnees. Immediately upon receiving the ration, recipients benefit from a tangible impact on their livelihoods: food aid allows them to pursue important tasks such as building houses, calling in debts and clearing land, without having to worry about where their next

¹ This study uses the UNHCR definition of reintegration as ‘the achievement of a sustainable return i.e. the ability of returnees to secure the political, economic and social conditions to maintain their life, livelihood and dignity’.

meal will come from. Food aid can also be sold, traded and shared with relatives, all of which are activities that can promote reintegration, even if they are not planned by aid agencies. When returnees share with relatives who remained at home, thereby reducing the burden they place on their families, local coping mechanisms are enhanced.

Food aid can therefore play a role in reintegration, but it is often too little, too late or entirely absent. Returnees and many in aid agencies and government view the three-month duration as insufficient, especially if there is some time to go until the next harvest. The three-month ration alone does not allow people to rebuild viable livelihood alternatives, unless they already have networks and assets of their own in place. The benefits of the food aid are also compromised by under-coverage and unpredictability for spontaneous returnees and, in the case of Northern Bahr el Ghazal, diversion. Because spontaneous returnees must be 'verified' to qualify for food assistance – a process that takes up to several months and skips over an uncertain number of returnees – most do not receive the ration immediately upon arrival, and many never receive it at all. The question of what role food aid should play for returnees staying in and around urban centres also remains to be addressed. The exclusive targeting of returnees fails to acknowledge the needs of host communities, which are also facing serious challenges because of the influx of returnees. Food for Recovery has been seen as a potential answer, but its effectiveness is questionable.

Dependency

Dependency is a word that provokes strong emotions and reactions in humanitarian and development actors, particularly where food aid is concerned. A major challenge in discussing dependency and the issue of whether people are dependent on food aid is that 'dependency' means different things to different people. In many cases, 'dependency' is associated with relief, and food relief in particular. This study uses a two-fold definition of dependency: 1) people receiving food aid are unable to meet basic needs in the absence of external assistance; or 2) food aid undermines the capacity of recipients to meet future needs.

In Southern Sudan, fears of dependency have provided a justification for limiting food aid, usually as part of a broader logic to move away from relief assistance towards interventions focused on recovery and development. Many aid agency and government officials see dependency as a left-over problem from the Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) era. Lower down government hierarchies there is less talk of dependency; instead, there are more requests for WFP to respond to particular crises that have affected localities in the short term, and to provide assistance to returnees. Despite the wide – and generally unsupported – perception that dependency is a problem, there is no serious discussion of withholding essential emergency assistance in the interest of

combating dependency. The discourse is more commonly used as an afterthought to justify decisions made according to political or budgetary constraints – though it does provide subliminal 'mood music' that feeds into decision-making, and its importance should thus not be ignored. The fear that continuing to provide free food creates a lazy and lethargic population runs counter to the current programming trend, which aspires to secure people's passage from relief to sustainable development. It should also be kept in mind that the very people who receive food aid firmly reject the possibility that it may cause them to become dependent.

This study concludes that food aid is not causing dependency in Southern Sudan, not least because it is too little and too unreliable to do so. Aid agencies tend to overestimate the contribution food aid makes to household food consumption; even during OLS, relief assistance contributed less than 5% of household food. That said, food aid does make an important contribution to food security and livelihoods for those who receive it, but it is rarely sufficient to take people through to the next harvest. Recipients use it as part of a broader portfolio of strategies – such as a reliance on kinship, livestock and remittances – the details of which are rarely shared with aid workers, creating the misconception that they are more 'dependent' on food aid than is really the case. The persistence of 'dependency' as an assumed problem caused by current or past relief assistance points to a worrying disconnect from this reality and a failure to engage with the imaginative ways that people manage their livelihoods. A possible and alarming consequence is that food aid may soon be considered irrelevant and phased out, even where it is still needed.

Supporting reintegration

WFP should place a high priority on continued engagement with processes that support reintegration, including lobbying for support to livelihoods and promoting understanding of reintegration within WFP. WFP should continue to provide rations to future returnees, but should base the ration on assessed needs as it is apparent that a three-month allocation is arbitrary and often inadequate. WFP should also consider programming in urban areas, and should examine alternative programming that could support reintegration, such as cash transfers. For food assistance to promote reintegration through contributions to food security, livelihoods and social cohesion, WFP must adopt a more rigorous intervention logic than simply restricting assistance to new returnees; the needs of host communities must also be considered. Given four years of targeting food rations to returnees while simultaneously phasing out General Food Distribution activities, WFP can hardly expect to make such a change overnight, but WFP must make a shift in the near future to reintegration programming that more holistically considers the needs of host communities.

The problem of spontaneous returnees being left out of the verification and registration processes is a crucial factor in the

under-coverage of food assistance to returnees. While WFP's participation in the verification process is currently voluntary and falls outside of WFP's mandate, the agency should promote the efficiency, accuracy and coverage of verification activities if it wishes to improve the coverage, timing and predictability of food aid to returnees.

Although WFP is eager to promote self-sufficiency and make a clean break with OLS-style food aid provision, it must stay focused on vulnerability and supporting livelihoods. This

report also presents an opportunity for WFP to promote informed dialogue about concerns that relief tools such as emergency food aid could cause (or are causing) dependency, both within and outside of the organisation. Above all, the fragile peace in Southern Sudan and the Three Areas will continue to face serious challenges in the lead-up to the referendum and beyond, making insecurity one of the biggest threats to reintegration. It is therefore imperative that WFP and other humanitarian agencies maintain the capacity to respond to crises.

1. Introduction

In Southern Sudan, food aid has been provided for more than two decades – since before the signing of the Operation Lifeline Sudan agreement in 1989. The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement created hopes of an imminent move from relief assistance to recovery and development, as well as the large-scale return of many of the estimated four million people displaced because of the war. Now, four years on from the signing of the CPA, the return process has seen more than two million people return to Southern Sudan. While a number of studies have been undertaken to examine the wider processes of reintegration,² none has focused specifically on the role of food assistance in promoting reintegration in areas of return, and none has looked in depth at dependency.

The Government of Southern Sudan and donor governments are keen to see an end to widespread emergency food aid and a shift to more developmental approaches. In this context, concerns about ‘dependency’ loom large and are sometimes used as arguments to shift approaches and move away from general food distribution modalities. There are also, however, concerns that reductions in levels of food aid may not be justified in a context of high levels of ongoing food insecurity and continuing or recurrent needs for emergency relief in some areas. These issues are clearly linked to wider questions about the appropriate roles and responsibilities of relief and development actors and modalities of assistance, the difficult distinctions between emergency needs and chronic poverty and the role of longer-term social protection policies and programmes.

This study, commissioned by the World Food Programme, examines both the process of reintegration and the role WFP food aid and other forms of WFP food assistance have been playing in assisting returning households since the signing of the CPA. It also explores the influence of the concept of dependency on policy and programming, and whether dependency on food aid is influencing the livelihood

² Pantuliano, Buchanan-Smith and Murphy (2007), Pantuliano et al. (2008), Duffield, Diagne and Tennant (2008).

strategies of returnees and host communities. Specifically, the study aims to:

- Describe and analyse the process of reintegration of returnees in Southern Sudan, and how it has evolved over time.
- Examine the ways in which food assistance is incorporated into the integration and livelihood strategies of returnees and their host communities, including the impact of food assistance on processes of return and reintegration, and whether particular programming activities promote or inhibit reintegration.
- Describe and examine the current discourse on food aid dependency within aid agencies and NGOs and among government officials involved in relief responses, and how dependency influences the policy and programming of food assistance and programming decisions.
- Make recommendations on how the food assistance programming activities available to WFP can best be used to support the process of reintegration.

The fieldwork for the study was conducted during November 2008, concurrently in Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Jonglei, two states of Southern Sudan that have received large numbers of returnees since the signing of the CPA. Annex 1 details the methodology of the study.

1.1 Structure of the report

The study report is divided into six chapters: Chapter 2 provides basic background information; Chapter 3 describes and analyses the process of reintegration in Southern Sudan and how it has evolved over time; Chapter 4 examines the ways in which food assistance is incorporated into the integration and livelihood strategies of returnees and host communities and its impact on reintegration; Chapter 5 describes the discourse on food aid dependency and its influence on policy and programming; Chapter 6 concludes the report and provides recommendations.

2. Background and Context

The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in January 2005 ended 21 years of civil war, with a referendum on independence for Southern Sudan scheduled for 2011. To date, the ceasefire has largely held. The peace is fragile and particularly so in the transitional areas, as evidenced by an outbreak of violence in Abyei in May 2008 and continued clashes in Jonglei, Equatoria and Upper Nile.

The CPA opened the door for the return of the more four million people who had been displaced by the conflict. At the close of 2008, an estimated 2,237,934 people had returned to Southern Sudan, the vast majority of them 'spontaneous' returnees who had made the return without official assistance from the GoSS or humanitarian agencies (UNMISS/RRR, 2009). The massive influx has placed great strain on the communities in which returnees have settled. Given that many of these communities are still suffering from the effects of the civil war, there is real potential for tensions between returnees and hosts as basic services are placed under increased pressure (Maxwell and Burns, 2008).

The focus of assistance programming in Sudan is shifting from the relief programming that predominated during the war to programmes that focus on recovery, as evidenced by the establishment of funding mechanisms such as the Sudan Recovery Fund–South Sudan (SRF–SS) and the downsizing of traditional humanitarian activities. The GoSS is prioritising activities that contribute most to the areas of security, infrastructure development and basic service provision (GoSS, 2008). Top expenditure priorities for the period 2008–11 will be in the six areas of safeguarding security, rehabilitating road infrastructure, improving primary healthcare and primary education, improving access to safe water and sanitation and 'improving rural livelihoods and income through development of agriculture, animal resources and fisheries' (GoSS, 2008: 10). One of the key areas of the National Strategic Plan of the Government of National Unity (GNU) is 'sustainable development' (GoSS, 2008: 11), which accounts for 34% of the budget, while poverty alleviation and the Millennium Development Goals account for 24%.

2.1 State background: Jonglei

The state of Jonglei has historically been a volatile area, and substantial security concerns remain. The Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) was formed largely as a result of an army mutiny in Bor in 1983; this event proved to be one of the catalysts of the civil war. During the war a number

of different armed groups, such as the White Army³ militia, fought for control of the region; gun ownership levels increased substantially as the effects of the war – including reduced access to resources such as land and cattle – exacerbated existing ethnic tensions. Both sides in the civil war provided arms to groups in the region over the course of the conflict.

While there have been a number of flashpoints between different tribal groups in the area, the minority Murle group are believed to be a cause of particular concern (Pantuliano et al., 2008). The Murle believe that they have historically been discriminated against by other groups in the region, and that this marginalisation has continued in the aftermath of the CPA. In contrast, many neighbouring groups accuse the Murle of raiding their farmlands and abducting their children. While the Murle may be at the centre of some of the most pressing disagreements, a number of other ethnic groups are also involved in disputes, such as the Dinka and Nuer. These divisions are of particular concern given that rule of law has remained weak and there is a high number of small arms in circulation. This volatile situation has been complicated further by a slow and frustrating recovery from the effects of the civil war, as well as extensive flooding in 2007 and 2008.

In 2006, the SPLM/A took steps to improve the security environment, including implementing a plan for the forced disarmament of civilians. Although a reduction in the number of small arms in circulation might have been expected to have a positive effect on the security situation, in reality the disarmament programme brought about an often violent response. According to some estimates, the resulting clashes left 1,600 people dead, equivalent to one death for every two guns that were recovered (Garfield, 2007). More peaceful disarmaments have since followed. However, sporadic violence has continued, such as the killing of a number of Dinka herders by the Murle in late 2007. Some have expressed concern that further attempts to forcibly disarm the Murle will end in widespread bloodshed (Berman, 2008).

Insecurity has been cited as a primary concern of most returnees to Jonglei, with some local community members noting that the reintegration of returnees is likely to prove difficult in a context of instability and if the host communities themselves remain heavily divided (Pantuliano et al., 2008). For example, around Ayod and Twic counties, cattle-raiding and banditry continue from the east (said to be mainly instigated by

³ Many local armed groups emerged during the war to protect their land, cattle and communities. In the early 1990s, youths in Nuer areas began obtaining small arms and light weapons to protect their property and cattle and to acquire cattle and other goods from neighbouring communities (Young, 2007).

Murle, but also by Lou and Gawaar Nuer⁴); as a result, large wet-season grazing areas are not being used.⁵ Farm sizes have also been affected as people congregate around court centres for security, and in the east large areas around the Jonglei canal – which used to be cultivated – lie idle.⁶ While Jonglei has not experienced the level of overall returns seen in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, the state received the third-highest number of returns in 2008 (UNMIS/RRR, 2009) and is expected to receive about 20,000 returnees in 2009 (UNMIS/RRR, 2008a).

2.2 State background: Northern Bahr el Ghazal

The inhabitants of Northern Bahr el Ghazal have paid a high price for the state's position on the front line of the civil war, and thanks to the presence of the railway line across the state, both of which led to extensive outward migration. In addition to the general disruption caused by the fighting, *murahileen* horsemen from the north repeatedly carried out raids in the state, often abducting civilians. The levels of migration peaked in 1988 and 1998, when a combination of conflict and environmental factors led to famine and drought. The state was also hit by severe flooding in 2007 and 2008.

Northern Bahr el Ghazal is politically important due to its substantial and largely homogenous population, which is likely to have a considerable impact on future elections (Pantuliano, Buchanan-Smith and Murphy, 2007). As the state is mainly populated by members of the same Dinka tribe (the Malual), it has not experienced the same levels of ethnic violence that have occurred in Jonglei and other states. However, tensions have historically run high between the Dinka groups and the Arab Misseriya to the north; the latter have traditionally driven their cattle into Northern Bahr el Ghazal to graze during the dry season. Much of the fighting during the civil war was sparked by the encroachment of northern militias into traditional Dinka territory (Pantuliano, Buchanan-Smith and Murphy, 2007). The Dinka have habitually maintained close links with the SPLA, while the militia to the north are said to have the support of the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF). The area is of vital strategic importance, lying as it does on the border between North and South, and having significant oil reserves.

The security environment in the state improved notably following the end of the civil war, leading to a high level of returns. However, sporadic violence has continued, with a notable deterioration in security occurring towards the end of

⁴ During the period of the Murle truce in 2008, there was no Murle raiding for four months in Twic East, but attacks from the Wuror/Duk County border area continued.

⁵ The Baseline Bor Counties (2004: 28) notes that Murle raiding was observed during the 1960s; however, the first punitive raid against the Murle for their attacks on the Bor Dinka took place in 1912. See Collins (1960: 51).

⁶ The local commissioner has encouraged an initiative to resettle in the area around Payom, north of Panyagor, but only with a heavy security presence.

2007, when renewed fighting broke out between the SAF and SPLA around Abyei. This hostility had a notable impact on Northern Bahr el Ghazal, as the state has played host to a large share of the 50,000 people who fled from the violence to other areas in Southern Sudan (UN, 2008). Prices of staple food commodities spiked in the whole state as a result of the closure of supply routes from December 2007 to mid-April 2008. Tensions between the Dinka people and the militias to the north remain high, and it is likely that Misseriya groups will continue to require access to grazing land in the south. The state's close proximity to Darfur and South Kordofan and potential unrest in the lead-up to the 2011 referendum pose threats to stability in the near future.

2.3 Food security in Southern Sudan: a changing picture but continued needs

While the accuracy of the data on food security has been a source of much discussion, it is clear that the CPA and massive return movements have changed the overall picture compared to what it was during the war. Food security and livelihood indicators in the 2007/8 Annual Needs and Livelihood Assessment (ANLA) conducted by WFP show a general improvement in conditions in Southern Sudan (WFP, 2008a), and levels of overall cereal production have improved since the end of the war.⁷ Consumption indicators point to a general improvement in the food security situation, with the proportion of adults eating only one meal a day dropping from 31% in 2006 to 24% in 2007/8 (WFP, 2008a). Market and road infrastructure are improving in many areas, but this improvement is measured against an extremely low base in an exceptionally large country, raising questions about the extent to which food access has improved.

The ANLA conducted in 2007 provides a figure of 22.2% for the overall global acute malnutrition rate for Southern Sudan, well above the emergency threshold of 15% (WFP, 2008a). This figure reflects an improvement in many areas, but this inevitably means that there will be pockets where the prevalence of acute malnutrition is much higher. For example, a figure of 39.3% was noted in Jonglei as recently as 2005 (WFP, 2006a), which is on a par with wartime levels.

Central to determining appropriate food programming are the controversial questions of the primary causes of malnutrition and the impact of food aid on malnutrition. The relative importance of various causes of malnutrition in Southern Sudan (food insecurity, poor health environment, social factors and infant/child care practices) is subject to much debate. Sharp acknowledges that more work is required to understand the real nature of malnutrition and the nature of the 'hunger season' (Sharp, 2007: S112). Alongside other

⁷ The average gross cereal harvest in Southern Sudan between the 1999–2000 and 2003–04 seasons was 591,000 MT (WFP, 2005), while the 2007 harvest was believed to be in the region of 859,000 MT (FAO/WFP, 2008).

factors, the lack of a nutritional surveillance system in Southern Sudan (Maxwell and Burns, 2008) and the absence of an effective forum for food security decision-making and analysis (Sharp, 2007) make it difficult to assess the impact of food aid on malnutrition. It is in this context that the following discussion on food aid and reintegration needs to be

considered, as neither the argument about the negative effects of food aid nor its counter-argument is supported by substantial reliable data. This explains how the situation observed during the current fieldwork – that policy-makers and food aid recipients have such different perspectives – can come about.

3. The Process of Return and Reintegration

The term 'return' is being used to describe the dynamic process of more than two million people from different areas and life experiences going back (or going for the first time) to Southern Sudan, using various means to make their journeys, and returning to states that have divergent social and political contexts. Significant time and resources have been invested in 'organised' return, with international aid agencies and the GoSS providing transport and meeting most needs during transit (Pantuliano, Buchanan-Smith and Murphy, 2007; Pantuliano et al., 2008). However, as Table 1 shows, the vast majority are 'spontaneous returnees': people who have organised their own resources and transport. These people account for an estimated 93% of IDP returnees and 87% of all returnees (UNMIS/RRR, 2009).

The return movement has triggered a growth spurt in urban areas and village centres where returnees settle; many returnees have headed to Juba and to other state capitals such as Bor, Malakal and Wau, which offer superior services, more economic opportunities and a better lifestyle than rural areas (Pantuliano, Buchanan-Smith and Murphy, 2007; Pantuliano et al., 2008). The government is resistant to this process of urbanisation, urging people to settle in rural areas even though basic services in these areas remain inadequate. Consequently food aid and other assistance have been concentrated in the countryside. In addition to personal motivations to return to Southern Sudan, political incentives to accelerate the return process before the 2008 census also played a role in the large numbers returning in 2007 and early 2008 (Pantuliano, Buchanan-Smith and Murphy, 2007;

Pantuliano et al., 2008). Such incentives may continue to play a role in accelerating return ahead of the scheduled elections in February 2010 and the planned referendum on the secession of Southern Sudan in 2011.

It is important to note from the outset that statistics on returnee movement are far from perfect. While figures per state are readily available for people whose returns were facilitated by UN agencies, understanding the movements of spontaneous returnees is difficult. In 2006, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) took over from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) the task of tracking and monitoring spontaneous returnees, an activity implemented in close collaboration with the South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (SSRRC). The Tracking Programme uses enumerators to determine the number of returnees in a certain percentage of villages in each state, and then extrapolates this information to generate data on the state as a whole. Coverage (and presumably accuracy) varies widely between states: in Southern Kordofan, enumerators have conducted this work in nearly 100% of villages, while in Jonglei they have done so in only 3% of villages (IOM, 2008).

The IOM/SSRRC system for monitoring IDPs is said to have improved recently, but many aid agency workers interviewed for this study expressed serious concerns about the accuracy, efficiency and coverage of tracking activities; they also readily acknowledge that the task faces notable obstacles in terms of logistics, resources and capacity, as well as difficulties in proving whether someone is a returnee. While verification

Table 1: Total estimated returnees (2004–08)

	IDPs	Refugees	Total	%
Organised return 2005		212	212	0.0%
Organised return 2006	7,432	25,811	33,243	1.5%
Organised return 2007	45,355	50,932	96,287	4.3%
Organised return 2008	28,645	62,185	90,830	4.1%
Other organised ^a			67,362	3.0%
Total organised returnees			287,934	12.9%
Estimated spontaneous returnees ^b			1,950,000	87.1%
Total			2,237,934	100%

a 'Other organised' refers to IDPs returning outside of the UN/IOM organised returns, mainly returns organised by the GoSS.

b To arrive at its estimates, UNMIS/RRR collected data from RRR field offices, IOM, UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, a return and reintegration working group convened by the RRR, and partners in the south in coordination with the South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (SSRRC). The estimate of 1,950,000 spontaneous returnees from UNMIS/RRR at the close of 2008 is different than IOM's estimate of 1,847,056 provided in the Table 2. IOM's estimate only covers the period until June 2008 and was obtained through its Tracking of Spontaneous Returns project.

Source: UNMIS/RRR (2009)

often takes place on a weekly basis in Bor, for example, coverage in the rest of Jonglei state is dependent on when a verification team can convene and access areas that are often cut off for half the year (no verification had been done in Akobo between May 2008 and the end of 2008). The figures provided on spontaneous returnees in this report therefore should be understood as estimates rather than precise statistics. However, they do indicate a trend that is accepted among aid agencies and governments, namely that Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Southern Kordofan, Central Equatoria and Jonglei have received the highest numbers of returnees. Table 2 combines estimates compiled by the UN Mission in Sudan's Return, Reintegration and Recovery section (UNMIS/RRR) on organised returnees, and by IOM on spontaneous returnees.

3.1 What is reintegration?

As noted in *The Long Road Home*, a common understanding of reintegration is lacking in Southern Sudan; this lack has ramifications for agencies seeking to support it (Pantuliano, Buchanan-Smith and Murphy, 2007; Pantuliano et al., 2008). Not only do activities vary according to the particular agency's views and mandates, but the absence of a common understanding also makes it difficult to attract funding to support reintegration activities. That said, aid agency and government staff interviewed for this study generally

recognise the importance of shifting the focus from the logistics of return to the complex process of reintegration between returnee and 'host' populations – a shift that they feel is finally underway.

'Reintegration' means different things to different people, and in interviews and questionnaires during the fieldwork government and aid agency staff offered definitions that included elements of 'assimilation', 'reunification', 'becoming part of their communities socially', 'taking part in the political processes of home areas', 'having equal opportunities for employment', 'having sustainable livelihoods', 'being enrolled in schools' and 'living in peace with local host populations'. Some interpret the absence of camp-like settlements as physical evidence that reintegration has taken place. This study uses UNHCR's definition of reintegration as the ability of returnees to secure the political, economic and social conditions to maintain their life, livelihood and dignity (UNHCR, 2004).

3.2 Life and livelihoods in exile

The process of return and reintegration should be situated within the broader story of displacement and life abroad. In Jonglei, the experiences of exile and return have varied according to the circumstances in which people left their home areas. Returnees interviewed for this study explained that

Table 2: Organised and spontaneous returnees by area of return

Area	IDP organised		Refugee organised		Total organised	Est. total spontaneous as of June 2008	Total returnees
	2006–07	2008	2006–07	2008			
Northern Bahr el Ghazal	19,145	7,552	337	50	27,084	401,763	428,847
Central Equatoria	792	1,465	23,192	6,955	32,404	178,050	210,454
Jonglei	5,212	4,300	3,134	5,905	18,551	182,000	200,551
Upper Nile	675	2,404	9,967	5,157	18,203	143,600	161,803
Warrab	9,974	5,634	361	228	16,197	125,933	142,130
Western Equatoria	1,146	98	11,739	35	13,018	124,325	137,343
Unity	6,509	2,849	1,015	137	10,510	113,148	123,658
Eastern Equatoria	0	1,072	8,370	38,203	47,645	53,395	101,040
Lakes	820	587	503	85	1,995	91,405	93,400
Western Bahr el Ghazal	692	1,883	563	50	3,188	62,304	65,492
Southern Kordofan	4,849	801	21	4	5,675	298,098	303,773
Blue Nile	2,973	0	16,047	4,816	23,836		23,836
Abyei					0	73,035	73,035
Khartoum & others			1,706	560	2,266		2,266
Total	52,787	28,645	76,955	62,185	220,572	1,847,056	2,067,628*

* Statistics from UNMIS/RRR do not yield the same number of total returnees as included in Table 1, where the number of spontaneous returnees is larger by 102,944 and also includes 67,362 coming through non-UN-organised return processes (though the IOM tracking of spontaneous returnees is meant to include the latter). One explanation for this is that the UNMIS/RRR statistics cover all of 2008 and the IOM spontaneous returnee statistics only cover up to June 2008.

Sources: For organised returnees: UNMIS/RRR, 2009; for spontaneous returnees: IOM, 2008.

those who left most recently found it easiest to return as they had laid down fewer roots elsewhere. For example, they are less likely to have taken property abroad, intermarried with local people or secured jobs or herds.

Most departures from Bor South took place in 1987, when the Government of Sudan (GoS) stepped up its campaign around Bor town. In Twic East county (formerly North Bor) there were also some departures around this time, especially the mass exodus of mainly young boys collected from Bor North and South to pursue education and military training in Ethiopia (they were forced to leave Ethiopia after the fall of Mengistu; becoming the so-called Lost Boys, they trekked to Boma, Kapoeta and eventually Kakuma). The majority of Twic East's departures took place in 1991, when the split in the SPLA led to the takeover of Bor by SPLA–Nasir troops and the loss of the majority of the cattle in the county; many people from Bor subsequently moved to displacement camps in Equatoria, or became refugees in Kenya and Uganda. Some children in Ayod were reportedly left with the Lost Boys in the late 1980s, but the major waves of displacement took place either when GoS convoys drove through Ayod on their way from Malakal to Juba, or during raids or periods of tension between the Gaawar and the Lou Nuer. In these cases, some people would seek exile deep in the toic (seasonally flooded grasslands), while others crossed over the Ethiopian border. As the border is porous, many of these people have been able to visit or return to their home areas.

Most returnees in Northern Bahr el Ghazal had been displaced to Southern Darfur, Khartoum, Western Kordofan and Southern Kordofan (IOM, 2008). A small number of those returning to Northern Bahr el Ghazal were displaced outside of Sudan; between January and June 2008, 50 refugees returned (UNMIS/RRR, 2008b). Northern Bahr el Ghazal has received the largest number of returnees in Southern Sudan, with an estimated 401,763 spontaneous returnees (IOM, 2008) and 27,084 organised returnees (UNMIS/RRR, 2009), constituting one-fifth of all returnees.

North Sudan

Since 1983, an estimated 1.8 million Southern Sudanese have sought refuge in Khartoum (Hutchinson, 2005: 140).⁸ In Khartoum, interviewees explained, people had access to skilled and unskilled labour opportunities, often in construction (for men), house cleaning and clothes washing (for women). Women who brewed alcohol – considered a profitable activity – reported that they faced the constant threat of arrest by the police, prompting many to pursue other activities, such as selling tea. For men engaged in skilled and semi-skilled labour, activities included carpentry, manufacturing pots in factories and working as drivers. Some women whose husbands were employed in Khartoum said that it was not necessary for them to work, or that they did small activities on the side for extra money.

⁸ Of these, 250,000–400,000 lived in the four official camps of Wad al Bashir, Mayo, Jebel Awlia and As Salaara, but most remained in makeshift shanty-towns in Greater Khartoum, such as Kartoun Kassala, Soba Aredy and Shigla (Hutchinson, 2005: 142).

Children had access to primary and secondary education in Arabic, as well as the possibility of further studies. Returnees from Khartoum also spoke of discrimination and the perception that Northerners did not accept them.

In South Darfur and Southern Kordofan, livelihoods were more geared towards agriculture, though women sometimes worked washing clothes and cleaning houses. Many gained skills in new farming techniques, such as working with tractors and ox-ploughs. Those working as sharecroppers and on the land of Arab farmers reported that they had little influence over their working arrangements, and they felt uncertain about whether they would receive the promised payments once the crops had been harvested. People living in camps in South Darfur had access to regular food distributions; however, those with access to assistance often pursued employment outside of camps, working on farms or as cleaners. People who were living in Darfur and Southern Kordofan reported threats to their safety, security, assets and livelihoods, as well as a general feeling of discrimination.

Equatoria

In Equatoria, the presence of Bor Dinka IDPs has created tensions over land. In the 1960s, when floods hit Bor, some residents left for Equatoria, setting up a pattern whereby Bor Dinka were attracted by the better agricultural potential in areas such as Kajo Keji, Lobone and Angutwa. Having built up large cattle herds in those areas, they are often unwilling to return home, leading to conflict with local people, who feel that they are occupying their land. The situation is especially tense now that local people are returning home from camps in Uganda, to which they had fled during the war.

Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia

Former refugees who spent time in camps in Kenya and Ethiopia described access to varied sources of assistance and livelihoods. Camps provided regular food distributions, except during post-election violence in Kenya or when food pipelines broke down through logistical or other problems. For refugees living in Kakuma camp in Kenya, life was reportedly dangerous because of the constant threat of banditry by Turkana groups. For example, some feared that a marriage might attract robbers intent on stealing the bridewealth. For those in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Uganda, there were opportunities to pursue agriculture. Refugees usually had access to educational opportunities, including secondary school and the possibility of continuing with further studies. Returnees interviewed in Jonglei reported that many children in the last year of primary or secondary school remained in camps in Kenya and Ethiopia after their families returned in order to complete their studies.

3.3 Reasons for return

Most returnees interviewed for this study explained that they had returned to Southern Sudan because of the CPA and through

Box 1: Case study of village life on return: Paliau village, Twic East county⁹

Paliau is the court centre for Ajwong Payam in Eastern Twic county (the having been created in 2005 when Jonglei Payam was split in two and Ajwong and Paker Payams created). It is made up of four *bomas*—Paliau, Pawel, Wunkiir and Ngawai—and has 20 chiefs. It lies on the southern part of the Duk ridge, which runs north through Kongor, the Duks and Ayod. It is lower-lying than the other areas on the ridge, so is more prone to flooding and does not share the fertile clayish soils found further north. It does, however, have the same configuration of high ground (along the Jonglei Canal), middle ground (Paliau village) and extensive low-lying seasonally flooded grasslands (*toic*) that provides extensive grazing as well as fishing opportunities.

Eastern Twic saw massive displacement and loss of livestock in 1991–92 after the the SPLA–Nasir faction split from the SPLA. For months, the few residents of Paliau who did not flee to Equatoria found refuge in the *toic*, surviving on water lilies, fish and even hippopotamus meat. After the SPLA–Nasir had been driven out of their village, they returned home and slowly began to rebuild their lives, notably without the cattle that had been the basis of their economy (agriculture was just seen as a supplement). Most families that remained had members in IDP camps or refugee camps, while the lucky ones had an individual in the United States or Australia.¹⁰ Returnees started to trickle back after 2005, but intense political pressure needed to be applied to raise returns to a steady flow. By October 2008, there were a total of 17,049 registered returnees in Twic East county, surpassing the 2007 total of 15,821.

Ajwong Payam Returnees – registered by SSRRC Panyagor

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
2007	60	143	150	360	242	115	67	153	72	67	92	120	1,641
2008	73	251	211	378	136	90	186	389	230	264			2,208

The changes that took place in Paliau between 1998 and 2008 are as follows: from having a village centre (*rook*) of 170 huts, seven rectangular buildings and 17 cattle byres/sheds (*luak*), the village has grown by 95 huts, with 14 more rectangular buildings and ten new *luak* (see diagrams in Annex 3). This equates to a growth of about 55% in houses and cattle byres. The three-fold increase in rectangular buildings, usually with corrugated iron roofs, shows an increasing level of development. There are also now a row of shops along the road on the western side of the village and a shop in the east whereas during the war there was no commercial activity in the village. Three of these shops were being run by people who had been in the village in 1998, so it is not an activity restricted to returnees. Nor were returnees necessarily considered ‘rich’ by the host population, especially as they had often not cultivated land. Returnees have settled on what was swampy land to the west of the village, but since the completion of a dyke by GTZ, Paliau has been much less prone to flooding.

Another important change is the total abandonment of the village to the east of the road and the OLS-era airstrip. Here 37 huts and three cattle byres have been abandoned and the occupants moved nearer into the village centre. This was due to the threat of insecurity coming from the uninhabited area to the east of the village (towards the Jonglei canal), from where suspected Nuer and Murle raiders and other bandits come to attack. The people of Ngawai Boma to the north of Paliau all moved to Paliau following an attack on Jiir village. In the latest attack on 23 October 2008, two children and 39 cows were taken (though they were all later retrieved). To the east of the village, there is a new clinic stocked by CARE, but there were no drugs at the time of field research. The primary school has not changed in ten years but the once-vibrant church has collapsed. The water pump from 1998 is now broken but two new wells have been dug elsewhere in the village. A battalion is posted permanently at the eastern edge of the village.

It is important to note that insecurity has increased since the signing of the CPA; areas that were inhabited throughout the war have now been abandoned. Insecurity reduces the speed with which reintegration can take place as returnees have reservations about returning to insecure villages and news of insecurity travels fast to refugee and IDP camps. They might also find their old houses or settlements abandoned – as in the case of Jiir. What is clear is that Paliau is not the same village it was during the war. Returnees are finding and creating a new and more vibrant place with a wider range of livelihood strategies, but greater investment is needed to improve services and provide security.

⁹ See Harragin and Chol (1999) for an in-depth description of Paliau’s history.

¹⁰ These are often the individuals least likely to return – or as one individual visiting to arrange a family wedding from Australia explained, there is no means to get a job in Sudan, and even then ‘working [in Sudan] is like doing nothing’. They nonetheless maintain close links – by phone, internet and regular visits.

a desire to be in their home areas, as well as in response to the insecurity, discrimination and mistreatment they faced in their areas of displacement. The return process itself has been highly political, with the GoSS prioritising return to the South ahead of the 2008 census and 2011 referendum. Those coming by organised return were informed that they would receive

assistance of various sorts (mainly food, shelter and non-food items), would be given services and economic opportunities and were told generally that the government and UN agencies would take care of them. Expectations were raised in particular concerning food aid, with people being told that they would receive it for periods of one to six years, when in reality WFP

Table 3: Livelihood strategies upon return

For women	For men
Agriculture	Agriculture
Brewing	Pole-cutting
Collecting water, firewood, grass	Brick-making
Weaving grass mats	Rope-making
Washing clothes (though there is not much demand for this service)	Fishing
Collecting wild foods	Small business activities
Milking cattle	Joining the army
Tea-making	
Small restaurants	

provides rations for three months only. However, it is difficult to tell who made such promises and how seriously these promises of food aid were taken. Although there was a degree of ignorance about real conditions in home areas, in general there was enough to-and-fro for people to know what the situation back home was like. While expectations of assistance were not emphasised by those interviewed as being a primary reason for their return, levels of services and assistance are nevertheless a source of frustration and disappointment.

Both returnees from North Sudan and those who had been living in camps outside of Sudan noted the importance of returning ‘to our place’ and ‘feeling at home’. Returnees in Darfur cited fighting and increasing insecurity; a minority said that they would have stayed in Darfur were it not for insecurity there. It was felt that one could move more freely in Southern Sudan and there would be fewer problems with the authorities, though people returning to Jonglei face as much if not more general insecurity. Some said that at least in Southern Sudan it was easier to defend oneself (perhaps referring to easier access to arms). Returnees from Northern Sudan who risked arrest because of their brewing activities, faced discrimination in employment or unequal sharecropping arrangements said that their livelihoods were more secure in Southern Sudan, even if there were fewer economic opportunities.

In Northern Bahr el Ghazal returnees were asked why a number of people were currently staying behind. Returnees from Khartoum said that some young men were staying in and even going back to the North because of employment and educational opportunities. A minority of those interviewed – particularly but not exclusively men – expressed the desire to return to the North because of the lack of services and opportunities in Southern Sudan. One woman explained: ‘life in the South is difficult, we left Darfur because of hunger but now we face the same hunger here. At least in Darfur we could work to get food. Now we are thinking of going back’. Most people interviewed said that they expected relatives still in the North to return to Southern Sudan, probably in the next couple of years. The study team in Northern Bahr Ghazal was

told by several returnees that the police were not letting women cross the border from Southern Sudan to the North (but they were letting men through) in order to stop families from returning to the North. Several women said that they would be arrested at the border if they tried to return to the North. In Jonglei, educational opportunities in refugee camps were mentioned by former refugees as one of the main factors keeping people in camps.

3.4 Livelihood strategies upon return

Returnees in Jonglei and Northern Bahr el Ghazal are faced with livelihood opportunities and constraints that tend to vary from those of their areas of displacement, requiring many to seek out new ways of meeting basic needs. Those who engaged in agricultural livelihoods in areas of displacement most easily clear their land and plant; the process of clearing land, planting and harvesting can take from several months to two years. However, in parts of Jonglei and Northern Bahr el Ghazal in particular the last two years have seen heavy seasonal rains and flooding, which has been disastrous for both residents and returnees who lost their crops. Returnees who had been engaged in non-agricultural skilled and unskilled labour and small business activities find substantially fewer opportunities than were available to them abroad or when they were displaced. The lack of economic opportunities is a source of frustration. In both Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Jonglei, many returnees are staying close to village and town centres (with relatives or in camp-like settlements) to maintain access to services or for security reasons, meaning that they are not yet planting. A minority brought assets that they are using to pursue business activities, such as grinding equipment for milling. Table 4 lists the activities regularly cited by interviewees.

Figure 1 (from the recent ANLA) indicates that more returnees and IDPs are involved in casual labour and petty trade than are residents, but that agriculture remains a prominent livelihood strategy for returnees (WFP, 2009). Along with the large amount of time and resources required to clear land and plant, access to land (and the fact that some choose not to go to their own land) is a key factor explaining why returnees are engaging in agriculture less than host communities. In Northern Bahr el Ghazal, people whose land is in remote locations lacking access to education, water and health services seem the least inclined to go to their land. In Jonglei poor security often prevented people from accessing some of the most fertile land along the Jonglei canal, although the county commissioner of Twic East was providing transport and security to escort people back to their homes in Payom and protect them.

Certain economic activities are rapidly becoming less viable as more newly arrived returnees enter into them, including selling poles, making grass mats and tea and collecting water and firewood. Tea-sellers interviewed said that they faced stiff competition, with some women having abandoned their tea

shops as unprofitable. Women selling grass mats and firewood reported the same problem. Activities relying on natural resources (such as collecting grass, firewood and wild food) have in some cases created tension with residents over concerns that returnees will ‘bring desert to the land’ and ‘finish their source of life’. In Northern Bahr el Ghazal, returnees feel that they are at a disadvantage compared to residents in terms of local knowledge that can support their livelihoods, such as knowing where to gather wild food.

In Ayod, Jonglei, many recent returnees spent their first year in the toic consuming milk, fish and wild foods such as water lily rather than grain, awaiting the next dry season when more economic opportunities are made available with improved road access. This is by no means an unusual or new strategy; in Mogok, just north of Ayod, 70% of the population and their animals are estimated to have moved to the toic in the dry season of 1998 (WFP, 1998: 2).

Brewing, which can be done without the fear of arrest that women faced in the North, is seen as a particularly profitable activity. In Jonglei, food bought at SDG 34 in the market in Ayod can be sold as beer for SDG 200 (SDG 250 being a decent monthly salary for a teacher). The attraction is obvious, but it has caused anxiety for some, such as the governor of Jonglei state, who views it as creating a culture of idleness and crime. A presidential decree has called on bars in Juba to impose a curfew to avoid what was seen as an epidemic of drunkenness.

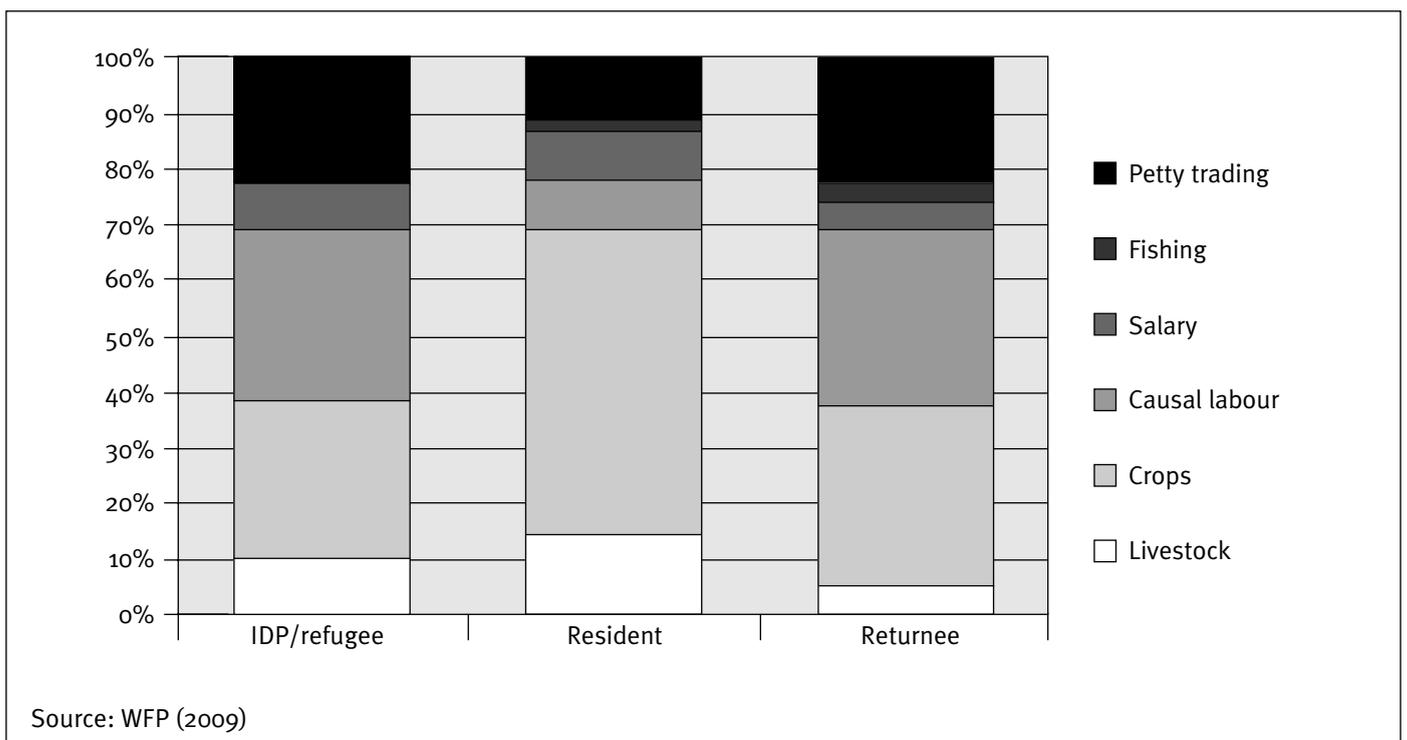
Those interviewed for this study frequently compared the advantages and disadvantages of their life elsewhere with

their recent experience of returning to Southern Sudan; one unambiguous message from those who were displaced in the North is that the opportunities for both employment and education were substantially better there than in the South. Whether these people really are contemplating returning to the North, or whether they are simply venting their frustration and disappointment, it is clear that the high degree of mobility of populations must be taken into account. Families are rarely fully settled in one place, and movement back and forth across borders will probably continue at least until 2011. For some, the return to their villages was always considered temporary, as the experience of being displaced or living as refugees has shown them the economic benefits available in other parts of Sudan, including access to differential trading prices. Nonetheless, it was noted that cross-border trade into Jonglei and Juba was dominated by foreigners who took advantage of their contacts in East Africa and the easy flow of goods across the borders to the South.

3.5 Assistance to reintegration

The 2007 UNMIS/RRR Framework for Reintegration Strategy outlines principles for supporting reintegration that include building government capacity, developing ‘early reintegration activities’ to meet immediate needs, ensuring that activities benefit communities of return (e.g. residents and returnees), providing assistance to both organised and spontaneous returnees in rural and urban areas and addressing medium- and longer-term needs through recovery, reconstruction and development actions (UNMIS/RRR, 2007). ‘Early reintegration activities’ are meant to meet the immediate needs of returnees

Figure 1: Livelihood strategies of IDPs/refugees, residents and returnees



and support reintegration in two ways: by providing support to returning individuals and households (a ‘reintegration package’ of three months of food aid supplied by WFP, seeds and tools provided by FAO and household items from UNHCR, UNICEF and the UN Joint Logistics Centre) and by providing area-based support to reintegration through increasing access to basic services and livelihood opportunities in areas receiving returnees (UNMIS/RRR, 2008b).

This assistance programme seems to promise a ‘package’ of interventions to support returnees upon arrival and broader area-based support to recovery, but the reality falls short of this. The assistance given upon and after arrival is uneven and uncoordinated – only a handful of IDP returnees interviewed for this study received all of the ‘reintegration package’ components of the food ration, seeds and tools and non-food items. Most returnees from refugee camps who came as part of the UNHCR-led returns programme did receive a reintegration package. For the majority who returned on their own, the process was ‘hit and miss’: they were not certain to be registered, and those who were registered were not informed about when to expect a distribution.

The ‘reintegration package’ is based on assumptions rather than assessed needs: that three months of food will be enough to enable people to restart livelihoods (and that households will receive the full three-month ration), that the different package components will be delivered in a way that promotes their complementarity, and that the traditional humanitarian interventions of distributing food, seeds, tools and non-food items are the most appropriate in the context of return and reintegration. These assumptions are not firmly grounded in analysis of the needs of returnees and people who never left. Even staff at WFP noted that the three-month ration size has become their automatic response to returnees in Southern Sudan, rather than one based on assessed food gaps.

Food aid and seeds/tools have been the most visible and far-reaching form of ‘early reintegration’ assistance to returnees. As Table 4 shows, food distributions to returnees have reached more than one million (approximately half of all returnees) since 2006 (food assistance is described in detail in Chapter 4). In 2007, 141,064 households in Southern Sudan received the kits, with approximately 67% going to returnees and 33% to host communities (UNMIS/RRR, 2008c). It has been estimated that 350,000 households in Southern Sudan received agricultural kits between 2005 and 2007 (UNMIS/RRR, 2007). However, the timing of distributions has been an issue; a 2007 evaluation noted that 75% of the distributions had been conducted in June and July, which farmers consider late (though not impossible) for planting (FAO, 2007).

There is a lack of synergy between food rations and seeds and tools interventions, which is at least partly explained by the fact that different targeting methods are being used for the different activities. Whereas WFP and its partners register

Table 4: Number of returnees receiving WFP rations

Year	Returnees receiving WFP rations
2008	308,726
2007	367,000
2006	398,000
Total	1,073,726

Source: WFP South Sudan

returnees for food aid through lists of organised returnees and lists generated from inter-agency verification of spontaneous returnees, FAO uses a different approach, targeting areas of high return and providing assistance to residents and returnees in these areas.

While the above UNMIS/FAO figures for seeds and tools suggest good coverage, this did not appear to be the case with returnees interviewed for this study. Informants described support to livelihoods – including seeds and tools – as severely lacking, particularly for returning IDPs. Of the several hundred people who participated in discussions in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, only a small fraction said that they had received seeds and tools. In Jonglei this was also cited as a major problem. In Malakal, for returnees who had left tools as well as other non-food items before boarding transport home, the promised equivalent items were not distributed on their arrival. Access to credit, agricultural technology and other support to livelihoods was nearly completely absent in the areas visited for this study, except where some NGOs operated training, agricultural support and micro-credit projects to provide much-needed livelihoods support. These projects are however very limited in their coverage.

While aid agencies and the government have concentrated heavily on the logistics of return and ‘early reintegration’ assistance, this focus is shifting to incorporate a more holistic approach. On the one hand, there is substantial appetite for fora to discuss and develop reintegration policy and strategies, as evidenced by requests from both the GNU and the GoSS to hold workshops related to reintegration (specifically with reference to The Long Road Home report), and an emphasis within the SSRRC in Juba on including reintegration in the overall strategy. Organisers of a planned UNHCR-led conference on reintegration noted high levels of participation in their planning meetings, providing an opportunity to discuss priority issues related to reintegration. However, the conference, originally scheduled for February 2009, was postponed for reasons that are not entirely clear.

Overall leadership and strategy for reintegration remain severely lacking, and reintegration working group meetings focus heavily on basic coordination issues, rather than strategy. UNMIS/RRR, which is mandated to provide leadership and coordination for reintegration, has suffered from critical staffing gaps that are only now being filled, and

there remains general scepticism as to whether UNMIS/RRR will 'step up' in terms of leadership. While assessments and data on returnees are often circulated through working groups and email lists, aid agencies are not always circulating useful evaluations and research that they have conducted or commissioned related to reintegration. For example, at the time the research was conducted several people working on issues related to reintegration were not aware that UNHCR had conducted an insightful evaluation of its reintegration programming¹¹ (Duffield, Diagne and Tennant, 2008), or that the second phase of ODI's reintegration study (Pantuliano et al., 2008) had been completed and published. All of these factors have generated more interest in reintegration, particularly among aid agencies, but this has not fed through to the design of concrete initiatives nor has funding been secured.

3.6 Trends and stages of return and reintegration

One particular question of interest to WFP is whether there are 'stages' of reintegration and how WFP can best assist households at different stages. Although reintegration is not a linear process, certain trends for return and reintegration can be thought of in stages. These are return, arrival, settling in/re-establishing livelihoods in the short term and securing the conditions necessary to maintain life and livelihoods. After all, people who arrived in 2004, 2005 and 2006 have had longer to get settled, find their relatives, claim (and pay) old debts and begin farming, in comparison to those who have arrived in 2007 and 2008. At the same time, people who arrive with assets and networks in place will clearly be able to restart livelihood activities and (re)activate social networks more easily than those lacking these resources. Those who invest their initial resources in activities that have not yielded results (such as a failed harvest) can see themselves going in the reverse direction. Finally, some returnees go back to their areas of displacement or to new areas to secure better access to services and opportunities.

Return from areas of displacement

Households return either with all members or in a staggered fashion by sending someone ahead, usually a male member of the family, to clear land (in rural areas) or find accommodation and a job (in urban areas). Families may split up to maximise their livelihood opportunities, including allowing children to finish school. Those who come through organised returns receive a food ration and sometimes other assistance; others rely on their own food, assets and money for their journey. The manner in which people return is one of several factors that influence what physical assets they bring. Organised returnees may bring their belongings, such as furniture and

clothes, though there is a limit to how much they can bring, prompting those who can afford it to hire a lorry. Refugees were more likely to have brought more items with them if they returned overland by truck, compared to the small amount that organised returnees could bring by plane. Some of those fleeing violence in Darfur left in a rushed and unplanned manner, taking few or no assets with them.

Arrival

Once people arrive in either their home area or another location, their priorities are familiarising themselves with the environment, locating kin and building temporary shelter, in addition to meeting their basic food needs. Some go to their areas of origin, while others stay in more central and more urban and central locations for reasons of security, kinship and access to markets and services. Some in Jonglei were said to go to home areas, then return to towns immediately on receiving their three-month ration, as they would not have been eligible for assistance if had they remained only in urban areas. In Aweil and other towns in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, a number of small camp settlements have been established by returnees who prefer to stay with the people they know and who potentially attract assistance. Food assistance received during this period can help in repaying debts to kin and others who assisted returnees on their arrival. Kinship assistance and people's own assets are primary sources of income and food during this stage, as is food aid for those who receive it early. Some of those who do not receive food aid sell assets or borrow food, which must be repaid at a later date.

UNMIS/RRR identifies this stage as the 'early reintegration phase', where people are unable fully to engage in the agricultural cycle and are at their most vulnerable (Pantuliano et al., 2008: 51). It is also when spontaneous returnees in particular describe gaps in provision of support for the first-line needs for food, cooking utensils and shelter, as well as seeds and tools and other support to livelihoods. Against the backdrop of limited immediate assistance by aid agencies, returnees emphasised the importance of kinship and community support (particularly when they first arrive), and relying on their own assets and livelihood activities.

Settling in/(re)-establishing livelihoods in the short term

Once people have secured food and shelter, they focus on building more permanent shelter, clearing land and planting, claiming debts, finding a source of income and putting children in school. Those who choose not to go to their own land must seek out non-agricultural livelihoods or rent/borrow land. Particularly for returnees who had pursued casual labour and skilled farming elsewhere, there is a mismatch between the skills that returnees have acquired and the opportunities available to them. Those who do not plant meet food needs through other activities, such as collecting firewood, water or grass, brewing, fishing, herding livestock, kinship assistance and making tea. Because planting requires secure access to land, agricultural inputs and enough food to cover the several months (or more)

¹¹ Duffield (2008: 19) is critical of the leadership of UNHCR and UNMIS RRR. Activities within UNMIS are divided among more than 12 departments (including Protection of Civilians, Gender, Human Rights, Rule of Law, Child Protection) that often overlap with specialist UN agencies. The UNHCR monitoring system for refugees is separate from the recently developed IOM system for IDPs and, at the time of writing, Duffield felt 'there is still no coherent system for returnee monitoring' (Duffield 2008: 29).

involved in the wholesale clearing of land before planting, many returnees do not plant within the first agricultural season.

Securing the conditions necessary to maintain life and livelihoods

People's assets and access to power/ representation/ leadership structures, land, basic health, sanitation and education services all have a significant bearing on integration and the extent to which people (re)start viable livelihoods. For example, someone coming from Khartoum to Northern Bahr el Ghazal with various assets, whose land is close to an area that is generally secure and has services, and who can rely on assistance from kin who have cattle and food, will be in a substantially better position than a family that fled Southern Darfur without assets, whose kin are relatively poor, and whose land is far from areas with schools, water and other vital services. Land ownership and secure access to land, which is fundamental to food security, pose significant problems in Juba, as well as Central Equatoria and Southern Kordofan (Pantuliano et al., 2008), though less so in the areas of Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Jonglei investigated for this study. The arrival of returnees has placed additional stress on the already poor level of basic health and education and water and sanitation services. For aid agencies, a variety of complementary interventions is required, and ultimately it will be the responsibility of the nascent government of Southern Sudan to meet expectations by improving levels of services.

3.7 Problems associated with reintegration

There are evident social tensions surrounding return. One government director-general spoke of the need for 'social reconstruction'. He cited the example of his own brother, who had remained in Juba from the age of four; he was now 21 and continuously argued with the director-general, who had gone to the bush. A commissioner said that some returnees 'even look like foreigners'. Another commissioner in Ayod said that returnees came back 'with a different culture', adding that there were sometimes problems if local families had taken over land; in those cases, the situation must be resolved by the Town Planning Land Registrar and the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure. Some people said that returnees had to learn how to walk in the floods when they returned to Bor, as well as having to acquaint themselves with local courtship customs. Hutchinson notes that there are religious tensions with the new Protestant denominations supported by southern Sudanese populations in the United States and elsewhere (Hutchinson, 2005: 137). Returnees from Kenya also said that the church in Sudan was much more traditional (and less fervent) than in Kenya. Hutchinson writes that there will be 'major difficulties' in reintegrating host and IDP populations given the way their day-to-day lives have changed over the past 25 years (Hutchinson, 2005: 150). One commissioner thought that returnees from refugee camps had become 'more intelligent than aid workers', so well-developed were the ruses they used to access aid. There was a notion, expressed in interviews in Bor, that returnees

'don't know about being hungry' because they were supposedly used to monthly (or fortnightly) distributions in camps – this despite many Kakuma refugees having experienced great hardship during the flight to Ethiopia.

Pantuliano, Buchanan-Smith and Murphy (2007) describe how the lack of government services, as well as insecurity, might cause returnees to re-evaluate their opinion of the capacity of the GoSS to meet their needs despite the expressed desire to 'rebuild their country'. Many returnees are dissatisfied with 'poor service infrastructure', especially water but also poor secondary school and other school facilities, as well as lack of teachers. The study confirms that expanding basic services has failed to keep pace with the surge in population resulting from the return movement. Teachers and government officials describe schools as over-crowded; returnees and residents repeatedly emphasised the need for more water points, even though in many areas visited the number of points had increased in the last few years. For returning refugees, UNHCR's original aim was to match services given to communities in returnee areas with the type of services received in countries of asylum (Duffield, Diagne and Tennant, 2008). This approach was then revised to concentrate on 'primary or basic levels of service provision', which again failed due to the lack of NGO implementing partners and the inability of the government to cover the recurrent costs of services (ibid.: 15). The focus shifted from creating 'conditions conducive to returns' to simply organising the returns and maximising the numbers of 'assisted returns'. Duffield, Diagne and Tennant conclude that 'reintegration is not a UNHCR-led process' (ibid.: 44). One commissioner in Jonglei state said that no agencies were addressing reintegration issues, and that the government was finding it difficult to confront these issues alone.

In Jonglei, statistics for 2007 indicate that there are 88,036 students in school, taught by 1,398 teachers, yielding an average pupil-teacher ratio of 63 pupils per teacher (the same statistics show only 250 students for Ayod county compared to 16,216 for Bor county). In Ayod county, there are only seven primary health facilities for an estimated population of 321,000 (WFP, 2008b: 4). There are no rural secondary schools in Jonglei state, and, for the populations of Fangak, Pibor and Riek, secondary schools for displaced populations are located either in distant Juba or Malakal. These schools were transferred to Malakal or Juba during the civil war and have not yet returned to their original locations. In addition to a shortage of services, their provision across different areas is unequal, creating a political problem as well as a humanitarian one. Water facilities are a far cry from what refugees were used to in camps or IDPs were used to in the North; one commissioner compared the 100 metres that they were used to walking for water in the camps with the kilometre or more on average in rural areas. It is clear that, for any 'reintegration' attempts to bear fruit, returnees need services similar to those they experienced in exile.

Numerous informants and representatives of government departments reported that there was a tendency for returnees to gravitate to towns, mainly for better security or services. The government views this trend as a problem since it aims to promote repopulation of rural areas as a way to improve security and increase agricultural production. Observers note that this view might simply reflect reluctance on the part of the government to accept the ‘emergence of new livelihood strategies’ outside the rural agricultural sector (Duffield, Diagne and Tennant, 2008: 17). Some officials talked about rural ‘villagisation’ as a possible solution that would allow services to be provided to less decentralised populations (part of the legacy of the late Dr John Garang’s call to ‘take the towns to the people’). These are ambitious ideas, especially since the government has its hands full providing even the most basic security. Murphy describes how South Sudan has the ‘political will but not yet the institutional capacity to perform the critical functions necessary for the security and welfare of its citizens’ (Murphy, 2007: 3).

3.8 Other factors affecting reintegration

Reintegration is a gradual process which, viewed in terms of economic, political, legal and social components, will take some time to achieve. While there has been tension over resources such as land and water, many informants claimed that social reintegration with the local population had not been a serious problem in the areas assessed, as differences in behaviour and experiences were only superficial. Families might have some members who are still IDPs or refugees, an SPLA soldier, an NCP official in Khartoum, someone working for an aid agency, someone in the United States, children born in the village, a farmer, a teacher and so on. Many different livelihood niches are therefore covered – indeed, many more than can be explained in the WFP ANLA exercise – and this explains the resilience of these families. The fact that resources continue to circulate within such families explains how economic reintegration can be effected relatively smoothly, but the lack of meaningful support for livelihoods presents a major challenge that urgently needs to be addressed.

In the areas visited for this study the immediate needs of newly arrived returnees are often greater than those of residents and are recognised as such. However ‘returnee’ status is a political category rather than a needs category; there are numerous counter-examples of returnees who are better off than people who stayed behind. Having been displaced and having returned is only one of many factors that might make people vulnerable. It is a temporary status (and a category which groups of widely differing economic status pass through), while other vulnerable groups such as widows are less able to leave behind their vulnerable status. The vulnerability of people who never left – those who provide assistance and experience the additional stress on basic services – is increased by the arrival of returnees. Constraints such as insecurity in Jonglei or seasonal flooding affect both residents and returnees, yet while returnees might not be as accustomed to environmental conditions in their home areas, they will also have learnt some new skills in exile, such as new farming techniques. Still, in Bor and in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, both residents and returnees who farm in flood-prone areas were powerless to confront the inundations that destroyed their fields and houses. Supporting reintegration requires addressing the needs of the people returning, as well as those who never left.

People returning to Southern Sudan bring with them diverse world views, experiences, expectations, skills and assets, into a new situation whose livelihood opportunities and constraints differ from those encountered elsewhere. The findings of this study support Duffield, Diagne and Tennant’s assertion that ‘reintegration is not “reconstruction” in the sense of putting back together a condition that existed in the past; everything has changed’ (Duffield, Diagne and Tennant, 2008: 7). Aid agencies must therefore do more than simply drop off returnees in their home communities, provide a basic reintegration package and then pass on to a new ‘development’ phase. For local populations, the focus on moving to development has meant that they receive less direct assistance, and NGOs providing basic services are scaling them down before the government has filled the gap.

4. The Role of Food Assistance in Supporting Return and Reintegration

This chapter examines the economic and social impact of food aid in the context of supporting the return and reintegration of IDPs and refugees in their home areas. It also explores how people perceive food aid, and the factors that may limit its potential impact. WFP has been providing food aid in Southern Sudan for more than 20 years and, until 2005, this assistance was largely offered to people affected by conflict. Since then, WFP has focused on transitioning away from emergency relief and towards livelihood recovery, with an emphasis on supporting returnees (WFP, 2006b; 2007b; 2008c). In order to support return and reintegration, WFP's strategy is to provide an initial three-month ration to returnees based on their household size. A second three-month ration can be given based on needs (WFP, 2008c), but programmatic constraints have usually prevented this. These constraints have involved difficulties inherent in assessments and registration as well as logistical restrictions associated with delivering a second three-month ration.¹² The main food aid programmes occurring in areas of high return are general food distribution (GFD) to returnees (to assist with reintegration); GFD to IDPs and flood-affected persons (to respond to emergencies); Food for Recovery (to

provide food assistance geared towards rehabilitation and fostering the transition from GFD to development); and Food for Education (to provide added incentives for children to attend school and improve their nutrition). The distributions are conducted by WFP partners and sometimes directly by WFP because of a shortage of NGO partners.

The delivery of assistance to returnees has been defined as one of WFP's key goals in Southern Sudan, in harmony with the joint strategy of the GNU and the GoSS (WFP, 2008c). The working definition of 'returnee' used by WFP is 'a person who was displaced within or outside of Southern Sudan specifically due to civil war causes [as distinct from inter-tribal clashes] and is returning to the area of origin (or preference) after the signing of the CPA'.¹³ WFP sees food assistance as potentially playing a vital role in assisting displaced persons to return and establish new livelihood strategies, while also relieving the pressure on host communities and thus smoothing the reintegration process. The 2008 Guidelines for WFP Support to Returnees, which provide strategic direction for programming, state that all returnees should have access

Table 5: WFP in Southern Sudan: estimated aid recipients and tonnage distributed (2005–08)¹⁴

Activity	2005 Metric tons	2006 Metric tons	2007 Aid recipients	2008 Metric tons	Aid recipients	Metric tons
General food distribution (GFD) for returnees			367,000		308,726	18,880
Other GFD			653,655		259,083	9,475
<i>Total GFD</i>	<i>109,920</i>	<i>96,549</i>	<i>1,020,655</i>	<i>28,527</i>	<i>567,809</i>	<i>28,356</i>
Therapeutic Feeding Programme	293	1,123	98,372	43	74,370	114
Supplementary Feeding Programme	963	4,812		1,233		875
Institutional Feeding Programme	1,458	6,179		1,902		3,647
Food for Education	2,284	3,363	313,947	8,165	421,192	10,095
School Feeding Programme	1,465				31,842	5,149
Girls Incentive			41,136	2,560		
Food for Work	4,253	8,871	50,407	3,259	12,000	1,497
Food for Recovery	1,557	16		22,101	370,609	30,956
Food for Training	724	3,264	31,045	2,836	36,120	2,735
Food for Assets	222					
<i>Total</i>	<i>123,139</i>	<i>124,176</i>	<i>1,600,000^a</i>	<i>70,625</i>	<i>1,399,408</i>	<i>83,424</i>

a Estimate from WFP South Sudan.

Source: WFP South Sudan

¹² Personal communication with WFP official. An exception is food aid programming to returnees in Southern Kordofan, where rations are tailored to last until the harvest. WFP South Sudan explained that Southern Kordofan presents a different (and generally easier) environment in terms of access, logistics and capacity.

¹³ Communication with Urszula Swierczynska of WFP.

¹⁴ Estimates for aid recipients from 2005/2006 were not available from WFP South Sudan.

to food assistance during their return and reintegration and that ‘support to returnees should be considered fundamental to and consistent with a peaceful period of political transition’ (WFP, 2008c). The same document suggests that returnees may require support ‘for the first three to five years of their reintegration as they develop self-sufficient livelihood strategies and asset bases’.

Organised returnees are to receive food upon arrival or shortly thereafter, while spontaneous returnees must be ‘verified’. The verification process, which can take several weeks to several months, involves the checking of lists obtained from local authorities, the SSRRC, and, in some cases, IOM by inter-agency teams and SSRRC officials. This lengthy registration process, combined with the time it takes to organise the actual distribution, means that spontaneous returnees rarely receive food aid within their first month of arriving. In fact, three to six months after their arrival is a much more accurate timeline. Importantly, an uncertain number of spontaneous returnees are also left out. The process of verifying and registering spontaneous returnees is an evident source of frustration for aid agency staff involved in it (who cite the difficulties in carrying out verification), aid agency staff who use the figures (who have serious concerns about accuracy and efficiency) and spontaneous returnees themselves (who are frustrated by the effort needed to register and be verified, given that assistance may not be granted after all). WFP staff often participate in the registration of organised returnees and the verification of spontaneous returnees, alongside governmental bodies and a number of other humanitarian actors, though WFP sees their participation as outside its mandate and responsibility. It is clear that the failure to conduct timely registration for spontaneous returnees is at the heart of the substantial delays they face in receiving food aid. However, disagreement prevails over precisely how to improve the registration process and adjust the responsibilities of different aid agencies accordingly. Registration is also the source of much inclusion and exclusion error.

4.1 General food distribution to returnees

WFP distributed food rations to 1,073,726 returnees between 2006 and 2008 (WFP South Sudan), which is roughly half of all those who have returned to Southern Sudan (UNMIS/RRR, 2009). In 2008, general food distributions to returnees accounted for 23% of WFP’s food programming by tonnage. See Table 5 for a breakdown of WFP’s food programming from 2005 to 2008.

WFP reports on food distribution activities focus heavily on statistics (e.g. the number of aid recipients) and less on monitoring impact. In part, this is due to the difficulty of monitoring how WFP food is used at a local level in such a massive and remote area. Based on discussions with aid recipients, the main use of the food ration is consumption by the household receiving it. There is also a certain amount of

Box 2: Diversion in Northern Bahr el Ghazal

WFP in Northern Bahr El Ghazal has increasingly faced problems of food being taken from storage sites by SSRRC and local government officials (sometimes for distributions not sanctioned by WFP or their partners). WFP suspended food assistance in Aweil West county after an incident in Maker, where officials reportedly arrived (accompanied by the police), opened the rub hall, and conducted their own distribution of 37 MT of WFP food rations. Similar instances occurred in other storage sites during 2008, resulting in the loss of 200 MT of food rations in Majok Yinthiew (January), 50 MT in Rumaker (April), and 1 MT of oil in Ninyiboli (September).

Returnees also reported receiving rations that were well under the amount that they should have received. While diversion of food aid has been long noted as an issue in Southern Sudan, those interviewed generally expressed that people involved in the diversion were not their local chiefs (who many felt would have some justification in redirecting assistance or ‘taxing’ it because they have some accountability to their populations), but certain NGO food aid monitors, enumerators registering returnees, and SSRRC staff involved in distributions.

The suspension of assistance in Aweil West county demonstrates that there are potential trade-offs between tackling diversion and adhering to the humanitarian imperative of providing assistance. In this case, returnees have been unable to access food rations during the suspension.

Source: WFP Aweil

sharing with other households (resident and returnee), which is not surprising given that the sharing of rations and subsequent difficulties in targeting assistance has been noted in many parts of Southern Sudan (Maxwell and Burns, 2008; Harragin and Chol, 1998). A small number of interviewees said that they had sold or traded some of the food for other items. In markets in Northern Bahr el Ghazal WFP goods for sale are plentiful, but separating out goods secured through sale as opposed to through diversion is a near-impossible task.

Households are meant to receive a full three-month ration tailored to their household size. While interviewees in Jonglei confirmed that this was generally the case, the same was not true in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, where returnees regularly cited amounts in interviews that were anywhere from 20% to 80% of what they should have received; nor were the rations always tailored to household size. When asked who they felt was responsible for the shortfall, returnees gave a mix of responses, blaming the SSRRC, NGO partners (in particular food aid monitors, whom some said were getting rich), and to a lesser extent local leaders. The researchers were not able to verify these claims, but WFP staff in Aweil acknowledged that diversion and outright theft had been a problem, leading them to suspend activities in one county (see Box 2).

While the main use of the general food rations is consumption, returnees noted that receiving food rations frees them up to pursue priorities other than meeting their immediate food needs. Given the multitude of demands returnees face in starting their lives in Southern Sudan, having food needs taken care of, even temporarily, provides an important window of opportunity. As one person stated: ‘having food removes the rope from around the neck’. What people choose to do with this ‘window’ depends on their own priorities and resources. Returnees stated that having the food ration or the window provided to them by the food ration allowed them to:

- Build a *tukl* (hut)
- Collect grass for roofing
- Start small income-generating activities (e.g. tea shops)
- Repay loans
- Share food with relatives who had helped them
- Prevent sale of assets in order to buy food
- Find time for calling in and paying debts (e.g. cattle that had been promised in marriage).

A returnee interviewed in Ngerjebi Village by IRIN in 2008 echoed the sentiments of many respondents about the need for food, but also the limitations of food aid in meeting the multiple needs of returnees:

The challenge is getting food. We have planted a little but it was hard coming back again: there were the fields to clear after such a long time, and it also took a long time to make the huts ... We were given food rations by the UN when we arrived but that has all long gone (IRIN, 2008).

Returnees repeatedly said that food aid – while useful at any point – is most useful when they first arrive in a location and are finding their bearings. It may prevent them from having to borrow food or sell assets to obtain it; they can focus their attention on priorities other than sourcing food. While it lasts, the food ration makes up a significant portion of their overall food consumption. Over time, however, food aid is less important than people’s own sources of income and food. Rations were incomplete in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, where they lasted anywhere from two weeks to a few months, depending on the amount received. Table 6 (page 24) summarises the various impacts described by returnees in relation to the different stages of return and reintegration described in the previous chapter.

In contrast to the regularity of food distributions that refugees and some IDPs experienced in camps while in exile, it is far from certain: a) whether returnees – especially spontaneous returnees – will get onto distribution lists; b) whether they will receive a ration immediately on returning; and c) whether that ration will be sufficient to take them through to their first harvest. As a result, the food distribution is not a resource upon which most returnees can depend immediately on their

Box 3: Food distribution in Ayod (13–14 August 2008)

An inter-agency verification team arrived in Ayod on 6 August 2008 for a mission that was expected to take a few days but ended up lasting 12 days because heavy rains made the airstrip unfit for landing. They verified 4,258 people as genuine returnees (who therefore had the right to receive food aid). While they were there, a separate WFP distribution team arrived on the ground to distribute a 90-day ration to 2,000 people: 90 MT of cereals, pulses and oil that had been stowed in the store in Ayod. Yet this calculation had made insufficient allowance for spontaneous returnees who had been verified. After meetings with the local community, the distribution began, but when a plane was announced with the names of the distribution team manifested, the distribution team rapidly packed up their things and left the task of selecting 2,000 out of the 4,258 returnees to the SSRRC secretary.

Recipients were supposed to get 40.5 kg per person. The distribution report noted that there was redistribution as people were leaving with 25-kg bags, but that could have been because it is not possible to carry 40.5 kg over any distance or that people were carrying unopened bags to be shared later. When returnees who had received rations were interviewed, most of them reported having received the correct ration. They were told that they might get food again if it was brought. Only one family received a further distribution (from Norwegian People’s Aid, which conducted food distributions separately from WFP).

Source: WFP (2008b)

return. They make use of other livelihood strategies such as the activation of kinship obligations that had become dormant with distance (including the recomposition of herds from loans, debts or bridewealth cattle), fishing and income generation through sale of grass mats, firewood, tea, beer, dried fish and water. Remittances from relatives in Juba or outside of the country are also of increasing importance. Insufficient, late or absent food aid means that households are preoccupied with the day-to-day task of sourcing food when they return. This causes them – or at least productive members of the household – to be away from home, thus hindering the reconstruction of houses and land clearing in preparation for the next planting.

Given that food aid now exclusively uses land corridors for transport – the same means as those used by traders – traders are now competing on a more level playing field than in the days when WFP could overcome seasonal isolation by airdrops, thus undercutting the seasonally high prices that resulted from natural supply and demand patterns. Astronomical fuel prices were noted during the fieldwork due to flood-induced obstruction, further adding to market costs in the wet season. Numerous kiosks were closed as traders awaited resupply in the dry season, but many were still open

Table 6: Impacts of food assistance during different stages of return and reintegration

Stage	Impact of food assistance
Return	Decreases the resources that people need to spend during their journey to meet their basic food needs.
Arrival	Contributes to or meets basic food requirements, enabling people to look for kin, build temporary shelter and pursue other priorities. Decreases the likelihood that returnees will sell assets to meet food needs. Reduces the stress of arriving in an unfamiliar environment. Decreases the burden on kin to provide food.
Settling in/(re)-establishing livelihoods in the short term	Frees people up to pursue activities other than looking for food. Shared with relatives or others. Used to pay back loans of food taken upon arrival. Lessens the burdens associated with meeting basic needs. Decreases the burden on kin to provide food.
Securing the conditions necessary to maintain life and livelihoods	Lessens the burdens associated with meeting basic needs. Food for Education: provides incentive for children to go to or stay in school. Emergency food interventions (responding to conflict and flooding): provides punctual assistance to meet immediate food needs following shocks (e.g. flooding, displacement).

– evidence of rapidly increasing commercial activity post-CPA. In other locations, government workers expressed satisfaction with WFP food distributions, as workers bought much of their food in the market, and they felt that prices were kept low by the distributions.

4.2 Food aid and social relationships

The role that food assistance plays in reintegration is not just a question of its contribution to livelihoods: it also involves the social networks that people are relying on, entering into and building. Some reports have raised concerns that targeting returnees with general rations could create tension between returnees and residents (Maxwell and Burns, 2008). However, only in areas where there were people affected by floods who were not receiving assistance did this come up as a point of contention, as flood-affected people saw their needs as more pressing compared to those of returnees. On the whole, in both the areas studied, residents, who shoulder much of the burden of assisting returnees, see food aid targeted to returnees as indirectly and sometimes directly (by redistribution) helping residents as well.

Residents and returnees generally view food aid as assisting social reintegration, as sometimes it is the only contribution returnees can make to the households in which they are staying until they can grow their own food. This is in contrast to the competition for scarce resources – namely water – which households report has been a frequent source of tension between returnees and residents. Hosts sometimes greeted returnees by slaughtering an animal, but then often left them to their devices unless they were close relatives, in which case everything the returnees received was shared with the host and vice-versa (though this was not the case for cattle). The precise extent of assistance depended on whether people belonged to the same unit for ownership of cattle (the *mac thok*).

In general, kinship makes a greater contribution to livelihoods than is acknowledged in the quantified sections of exercises such as the ANLA. However, that contribution is made at a complex social level where the benefits are hard to quantify. Relations of reciprocity regarding bridewealth cattle, for example, create webs of alliance that are often kept secret from people outside the immediate *mac thok*, helping to keep real levels of wealth away from prying eyes and sponging relatives. If livestock represent ‘banks on the hoof’, it is not surprising that few are willing to divulge details of their bank accounts.

Food aid seems to have little effect on the vitality or the functioning of the livestock economy as food rations are not enough to permit an individual to start restocking. Generally, the livestock economy has operated in parallel with food aid and has been systematically underestimated in terms of its contribution to livelihoods. Most court cases have trouble establishing the extent of the plaintiff’s livestock holdings and data collected during OLS could only take wild guesses on herd sizes based on vaccination coverage. The role of the first milk after the rains, which peaks as soon as cows have fed on the fresh grass and comes months before the first green crop has ripened, has also often been underestimated in covering the annual hunger gap. Livestock has always had a larger cultural function – with the role of *ghok ruai* (cows of relationship) underpinning the structure of the family, meaning that the acquisition of livestock is invested with greater cultural recognition than cultivation. At the same time, though, such attachment explains the high prevalence of cattle raiding in certain parts of Southern Sudan, even after the signing of the CPA. Food assistance, on the other hand, is consumed rather than circulated like bridewealth cattle. It is given away and shared more freely than cattle would be (hence the difficulties of ensuring that it is distributed only to certain target groups), but it is invested with less social

Box 4: Case study from Northern Bahr el Ghazal

Ayelle,¹⁵ who had been living in Khartoum, came to Mangok (Northern Bahr El Ghazal) in August 2008 in a government-organised convoy. Upon her arrival, she received 15kg of sorghum from her mother-in-law and 50kg from her brother. In October, she received three bags of sorghum (150kg) from WFP. The food helped her establish a small cooking and tea stall in a market. She said that if she just consumed the food, she would have problems meeting needs in the next several months because she had not cultivated. She used part of the food to grind it and make sauces similar to those in Khartoum, and her brother lent her money to buy grass and poles for the shop.

When her mother-in-law's land and house were damaged in the flooding, Ayelle gave her 3kg of sorghum. Her mother-in-law built a hut in the roadside camp. Ayelle also built a hut in the flood camp, even though she had not been flooded out herself. She said that she built the hut anyway because the fact that her mother-in-law's crops were destroyed meant that assistance was needed for the whole family.

When comparing her experience in Khartoum with living in Mangok, Ayelle said that she had opportunity to make money in Khartoum washing clothes. But there were sometimes quarrels when people would accuse her of stealing clothes, and Ayelle said that people did not apologise when they were wrong. People called her and her children names. Ayelle decided to come to Southern Sudan because she did not feel free in the North, and there was no respect for her and her family. She said that, although life was difficult in Mangok, she had the freedom to do what she chose, she could keep what she earned and no one could destroy her shop. From the three bags of sorghum, she still has 30kg. She does not know if there will be more food; she was told that the food ration was for three months. She has given another 6kg to her mother-in-law, and says that the ration will not actually last for the entire three-month period.

¹⁵ The name has been changed.

meaning than livestock. However, it can be used to lubricate a wider network than those that normally share animals, and therefore plays a useful role in enhancing community relationships.

4.3 Other food assistance activities

Food for Recovery (FFR), Food for Education (FFE) and emergency assistance cover larger numbers of the resident population than do the general food distribution activities that are targeted to returnees. FFR¹⁶ is meant to provide an opportunity for both residents and returnees to access food by working on community projects following the end of GFD. Whereas Food for Work (FFW) seeks to create assets and contribute to development, FFR is less technical, with an aim of helping households and communities restore livelihoods.

¹⁶ No Food for Work interventions had taken place in the areas visited.

Projects can be submitted by communities or organisations, in contrast to FFW, which is carried out by WFP partner organisations.

The reality is that FFR is not accessible or well understood; few returnees and residents are aware that communities can submit FFR projects to WFP. Some who have organised FFR projects said that they needed to pick up the food themselves from the warehouse and pay for the transport, which resulted in them receiving less food (as they used some of the food to pay transporters), and some people who participated in projects stated that they never received food. The condition that food is provided after work is completed makes it difficult for many vulnerable households to participate in most of the FFR projects; they prefer to collect firewood or grass to meet daily household food demands than to work for an unknown amount of food after project completion. When done through WFP partners there are some examples of positive impacts, as these partners have the confidence to put imaginative proposals (such as bridge-building rather than brick-making) to WFP and have technical inputs to contribute. Overall, however, communities lack the technical inputs and expertise for FFR projects, meaning that they generally resort to projects like brick-making and clearing of compounds. These projects are undertaken as a response to what WFP will fund rather than the community's own priorities. The registration of workers and delivery of food is usually handled by the same group of people who submitted and manage the project, so there is no accountability to those who receive food or to those who do not. FFR food recipients said that the amounts that they received were small – generally less than two bags of sorghum.

FFE projects were underway in a small number of primary schools in the areas visited for the study. Teachers and parents described how returnee children (alongside resident children) were benefiting from these activities, and that returnee families place a strong emphasis on educating their children. Returnees identify the main constraints to accessing education as distances to schools, overcrowding, the cost of uniforms¹⁷ and, for children coming from the North and schooled in Arabic, language. Teachers and returnees stated that children from the North routinely drop several levels in primary school and secondary students have little opportunity to continue their education. These converging challenges to accessing education are part of the overall problem of insufficient and stressed basic services, something that FFE is not intended or able to address.

Residents in areas affected by severe flooding in 2007 and 2008 said that their capacity to assist returnees has been severely undermined by the loss of crops. In flood-affected areas people often observed that they were happy to share their food with returnees, but that crop losses from floods undermined their ability to do so. Many returnees who had

¹⁷ In some areas returnee children were not required to buy uniforms; in one village the chief had purchased some for them.

planted during the last agricultural seasons in lowland areas of Northern Bahr El Ghazal and Jonglei lost their crops and homes, and so witnessed the unravelling of progress they had made in re-establishing their livelihoods since their return. Several said that their unfamiliarity with the terrain and flooding areas had put them at a disadvantage compared to residents, though the reality is that the floods were much more severe than usual.

4.4 Factors limiting the impact of food aid

Southern Sudan is an operational context fraught with challenges for aid agencies: lack of suitable partner organisations, high staff turnover, diversion, severe logistical constraints caused by rains and flooding in the rainy season, unpredictable funding and the near-impossible task of targeting assistance. In providing assistance to returnees, there is the additional challenge of the timely and accurate identification of spontaneous returnees. The following issues limit the potential impact of food aid:

- *Predictability*: For spontaneous returnees in particular, food aid is unpredictable. Many people claim to have been registered but that their names were not called out at distributions. Some people who borrowed food thinking that they would receive a food ration later on had to find alternative means to pay back the food loan. The unpredictability of food assistance makes it difficult for people to plan for it and incorporate it into their livelihood strategies.
- *Diversion*: This problem was noted in Northern Bar El Ghazal, where returnees routinely stated that they received only two or three bags of sorghum for households with five or more, which is less than half what they should have received. They blamed NGO food aid monitors colluding with local leaders and officials. Corruption and poor governance make this a huge challenge, with no easy solutions. The lack of accountability and correct information on entitlements at the distributions is a related problem, though given the apparent involvement of some authorities in diversion and the lack of complaint mechanisms it is clear that there are many factors involved in explaining why they do not complain to WFP.
- *Timing*: Delays in food aid mean that spontaneous returnees do not receive it when they need it most. When food arrives several months after people themselves have arrived, they have already used other resources to meet their immediate food needs, such as borrowing or receiving food from kin, selling assets, using their own funds or using food that they brought with them.
- *Duration*: The duration and amount of food aid are not determined based on assessed needs, returnees' time of arrival or the time remaining until the next harvest. In general, food aid does not appear sufficient to cover food needs until the harvest. While the *logic* of providing a three-month ration is grounded in the idea of tiding people

over until they are able to harvest or pursue other livelihood activities, the actual *calculation* of the ration is not: the period between when people arrive until they harvest can be up to two years. Those arriving in December receive the same ration as those who arrive in March, despite the fact that there are evidently different periods of time between their arrival and the harvest. For households receiving reduced rations because of diversion, rations covering food needs for a few weeks cannot sustain several months' worth of clearing land and harvesting.

- *Coverage*: It is obvious that many spontaneous returnees are left out of distributions. The system of verifying spontaneous returnees is broadly acknowledged as a complicated process: lists coming from communities and the SSRRC are often inflated, organising inter-agency verification missions requires time and resources,¹⁸ and there is an uneven presence of IOM and other enumerators who can register newly arrived spontaneous returnees in an organised process. Aid agencies appear to more focused on inclusion errors than on the exclusion of legitimate returnees. In addition, urban areas are not being targeted for food activities or even assessments to determine their appropriateness, even though urbanisation has gone hand-in-hand with the return process. Many returnees are living in urban centres, and there are indications of high levels of vulnerability. Spontaneous returnees in Juba town should be eligible for the reintegration package items, but few appear to be receiving them (Pantuliano et al., 2008).

4.5 Local perceptions of food aid

Food aid is perceived as an important resource when people are impacted by conflict, flooding or displacement and during other difficult periods. When given during the planting season, it provides energy to allow people to produce their own food. Residents feel that food aid was necessary during the war, when they were displaced by fighting and unable to harvest crops (conflict has a greater disincentive effect on farming than does food aid). By and large it is viewed by those who stayed in Southern Sudan as having prevented some displacement. For those who lived in IDP and refugee camps in exile, with access to regular distributions, rations were a reliable and critical source of food, but one that they supplemented with their own means when possible.

With such a long history of food aid and the many NGO and UN assessments that take place on a regular basis, people are very 'aid aware': they know that food aid might be distributed during difficult times, and they want to be included if it is. There is a prevalent feeling among returnees, residents and local authorities that aid agencies – especially the World Food Programme – should distribute food in certain circumstances, particularly for returnees and people affected by emergencies,

¹⁸ For example, when teams undertake assessments in parts of Jonglei during the wet season, they must take a plane. The plane transits via Juba rather than flying non-stop, wasting valuable days in both directions.

such as people who have lost their crops because of floods. Returnees emphasised that ideally they would like food rations for a finite period (usually up until the harvest) and are not 'asking' for food to be given to them indefinitely. In fact, many said that any amount of assistance would be useful to them – however much or little – and that they recognise that aid agencies decide on the terms on which relief is provided. As one woman put it: 'It is for the provider to decide. A beggar does not give conditions'. This also conveys the lack of power returnees have in trying to get assistance from aid agencies.

The Dinka population has maintained a seemingly paradoxical relationship between the careful husbanding of resources associated with animal herds (whereby assets are rarely given away and actual stock numbers kept secret) and the generosity associated with sharing food (caam/raap). One informant said that some things in the life of a pastoralist were 'more important than food'. In times of hunger, more belt-tightening was required in the use of food. In these cases, the wife would be expected to communicate in code to the husband that there was no food; he would thus invite fewer or no guests in order to avoid the embarrassment of not being able to feed them properly. This duality is also evident in the positive way in which generosity is viewed, versus the advice passed down 'from the grandfathers' always to keep a little food aside (such as a reserve to eat during the heavy planting season). However, these contrasting values between sharing and guarding one's resources would be evident in almost any society, and the stress put on generosity could be seen as closely associated with the ever-present spectre of food shortages, as well as a way of spreading investments widely in times of plenty so that they can be drawn on during times of shortage.

Policy-makers are concerned that populations may view food aid as never-ending, especially in the context of returnee children who were reared in camps on food aid for two decades. They see a need to change what they consider the food-aid recipient 'way of life'. Some informants in Northern Bahr El Ghazal indicated a lingering expectation of some potential return to GFD, but most people have 'got the message' from aid agencies and the SSRRC that those days are over.

4.6 Food aid versus other forms of interventions

While examining the appropriateness of food aid compared with other forms of assistance was not part of the terms of reference for this study, it is evident that the dearth of support to livelihoods means that food rations are not being combined with other assistance that could better enable households to meet their basic needs and pursue productive livelihoods upon their arrival in Southern Sudan. On its own, food aid is capable of enabling people to meet basic needs and conduct the various activities already mentioned, such as constructing a hut, but a three-month ration alone (or less, in the case of Northern Bahr el Ghazal) is not a launching point for sustainable livelihoods. This should not be taken to mean that

it is not useful or important to the returnees who receive it. Giving a ration for a longer period – or more precisely, one that is calculated according to the food gap that returnees are probably going to experience prior to planting, which is likely to be longer than three months – would allow returnees to re-establish themselves more quickly as farmers, as would ensuring that agricultural and other livelihood interventions operated in tandem. For those who wish to pursue different livelihood strategies, start-up loans and micro-credit for small businesses or capital purchases, employment creation and vocational training would probably be most useful.

In interviews in Jonglei the more educated urban people sounded more confident of getting by on their own and, as they usually have higher skill levels than the farming population, it would not seem fair to target food to this group purely on vulnerability criteria. Assisting with services – education, water and healthcare – would benefit this population as well as assisting farmers. This is one of the areas where the government has been unable to make significant inroads since the signing of the CPA, but it is generally outside the mandate of WFP to intervene beyond school feeding or activities such as Food for Training. Similar limitations for WFP apply to agriculture and livelihood interventions, though it is clear that improved training and extension services in the agricultural sector are a more cost-effective long-term strategy than food aid. The fact that food aid is not always cost-efficient does not change its popularity with local populations.

Cash transfers are a potential complement and alternative to food aid; the increase in economic activity and availability of goods in markets make the use of cash transfers more feasible than it would have been in the past. ECHO will be piloting a project that distributes cash to late returnees (who do not return in time to plant the subsequent season), and in terms of livelihoods this could provide substantial flexibility for beneficiaries and have useful knock-on effects on the economy. Cash also has significant potential to allow recipients to invest flexibly in livelihoods and to meet basic needs. There has not been a great deal of support from the government for cash distributions, partly because of perennial targeting problems in Southern Sudan. Returnees interviewed in Northern Bahr el Ghazal also expressed concerns that cash would 'end up in the pockets' of officials and NGO workers, and that men in particular might spend the money on alcohol. While these concerns are not unique to Southern Sudan and other experiences indicate that they can be overcome in practice (Bailey, Savage and O'Callaghan, 2008; Harvey, 2007), the ECHO pilot project will undoubtedly shed more light on the appropriateness of cash transfers as a complement or alternative to food rations upon arrival. As WFP globally is increasing its cash transfer programming, ECHO's pilot will present WFP Sudan with an opportunity to explore its potential, to meet food aids and also to support livelihoods.

There is evident potential for Cash for Work to address infrastructural needs, especially as most infrastructure work takes place in the dry season, when rural areas and markets are accessible and there is less agricultural work to be done on people's own plots. As with Food for Work, however, the constraint of this intervention is that the infrastructure of Southern Sudan needs wholesale construction by machinery and technicians rather than patching up with manual labour, limiting how much rebuilding can be channelled through Cash for Work and Food for Work. Alternatively, labour-intensive projects can be designed, but in most cases the benefit of such projects lies in the cash or food provided, rather than the work carried out.

Overall there remains an important role to be played by food aid, albeit a supporting rather than a starring role, and one that is likely to be neglected or downplayed until a major food crisis occurs, possibly in the run-up to the 2011 referendum.

While transport and procurement costs are high, the benefit to the end user is tangible. Policy-makers with a long-term view realise that people's future interests lie in self-sufficiency and the building up of solid emergency preparedness institutions, usually governmental, that ensure that food aid will not be necessary. However, local people see little immediate benefit from the huge costs of constructing institutions of government from scratch in Southern Sudan (and thus see little 'peace dividend'), while they can see the benefits of food aid and assistance that directly supports their livelihoods, the latter of which is severely lacking. As will be shown in the next chapter, many policy-makers and high-level government officials see food aid as inefficient at best and, at worst, as potentially causing populations to become 'dependent' if continued indefinitely. The following chapter describes how these concerns are seen as less of a problem by food aid recipients and by government representatives who maintain regular contact with local populations.

5. Food Aid and Dependency

The means by which aid agencies can best support reintegration in Southern Sudan –and the role of food aid within this – is influenced by numerous factors. These include the long history of relief assistance; changing needs; the current hope for a transition from relief to recovery and development; perceptions of how certain types of assistance promote or inhibit reintegration; and concerns about ‘dependency’ – namely that the provision of relief assistance may discourage people from meeting their own needs right away or in the future. This chapter examines the current discourse around food aid dependency within aid agencies, NGOs and donors and among government officials involved in relief responses, how the concept of dependency is influencing food aid policies and programmes and whether dependency on food aid exists.

5.1 Dependency and relief: an emotive topic

Some people use the word ‘dependency’ as shorthand for the many negative things they think about someone or a group of people: they do not work, they think only of satisfying their physical needs, they don’t plan ahead, or they are not self-sufficient. Spoken by aid workers, this kind of description has an element of cognitive dissonance,¹⁹ which seems to say, ‘These people whom I am trying so hard to help are not recognising my effort by making a similar contribution on their own behalf. It is therefore their fault that my efforts are not working’. A concrete example might be: ‘If people continue to live in inaccessible locations that are prone to flooding, then it is their own behaviour that is at fault rather than the logistical capacity of the aid apparatus’. More experienced aid workers might recognise that aid agencies such as WFP are not likely to eradicate hunger. In Sudan, people’s own hard work, the presence of an accountable government and the might of oil companies look far more likely to bring about change than the assistance that has been ongoing in the South for two decades (Matus, 2007: S101). They are also more used to the double-speak of beneficiaries who claim to be dependent on assistance to provoke the emotive reaction described and encourage an intervention, when in reality they are far from being ‘dependent’.

In an emergency programme, aid workers generally shelve concerns about dependency, and the need to recognise the capacities of a beneficiary as a competent development partner is also put on hold in the race to provide emergency relief. At this stage the ‘partner’ in development becomes a ‘recipient of relief’ (although confusingly both are covered by the term ‘beneficiary’), and the aid worker takes on a more supervisory role in defining beneficiary numbers, reducing cheating and excluding recipients who are deemed to be not in need. Many aid

¹⁹ See Marriage (2006: 488) for an analysis of the psychological basis of ‘denial’ and the transference of blame in humanitarian work.

workers are not comfortable excluding recipients who would often be seen as legitimate beneficiaries by observers outside the context of Sudan; given the small amount of aid available, however, most accept such a role. When the chance comes to move back into more developmental programming, it is not surprising that beneficiaries are quickly redefined as ‘partners’. It is at this stage that the concept of ‘dependency’ is likely to resurface. The new phase triggers an avalanche of expressions from the development glossary concerning the need to move away from relief programmes: they are ‘unsustainable’, there is no element of ‘cost recovery’, they do not build the capacity of local structures to take over, there is no ‘exit strategy’ and they breed ‘dependency’.

Much of the power of these expressions lies in their vagueness, which can be called into question (as the following section explains) when a precise definition is called for. Their other weakness is that they provide an explanatory framework that responds to the discomfort of outsiders but does not take into account that such local people might not see themselves in such terms. Whether food aid is classified as relief, recovery or development makes little difference to the aid recipient, but the debate can have a profound influence on whether the food supply is turned on or off. Indeed, it has become a bone of contention among policy-makers and governments that make decisions on behalf of such people. Pantuliano et al. describe the risk of ignoring basic needs and note that ‘some actors highlight the danger of even discussing “recovery” whilst minimum humanitarian needs are still not being adequately addressed’ (2008: 75). So, while the debate is an emotive one, decisions made on the basis of it have practical implications at a local level – such as reducing the volume of food aid in an effort to promote self-reliance and development.

5.2 What is dependency?

A major challenge inherent in discussing dependency and whether people are ‘dependent’ on food aid is that ‘dependency’ means different things to different people. This study defines ‘dependency’ as the inability to meet basic needs in the absence of external assistance.²⁰ Lentz, Barrett and Hoddinott, 2005 suggest that dependency on food aid can be viewed both from a positive and negative perspective: ‘positive dependency’ is when a population in acute need can reliably depend on the provision of assistance, whereas ‘negative dependency’ is generally viewed in relation to disincentive effects or potentially negative impacts of food aid on certain groups and the economy, whereby their capacity to meet needs in the future is undermined (Lentz, Barrett and Hoddinott, 2005). The latter includes fears that prolonged

²⁰ Taken from Harvey and Lind (2005).

food aid will reduce local initiative or capacity to find alternative sources of food, as well as the potential for food aid to undermine the economy through disincentive effects on production and by lowering food prices. In exploring whether returnees and residents are ‘dependent’ on food aid, this study addresses these various aspects of dependency.

5.3 Food aid dependency: views of aid agencies and governments

Humanitarian agencies are reducing operations and budgets as they move from relief to development interventions. A desire to avoid ‘dependency’ is sometimes used in describing a paradigm shift in the approach to programming. The shift is often associated with unease at the long-term use of humanitarian aid, and it is used to argue against the possibility that food assistance could have a positive ‘developmental impact’.

Aid agency and donor views on dependency

The information given to aid agencies conducting assessments in Sudan has often given the impression that, without their assistance, the whole society would collapse. Given the long history of humanitarian assistance and the assessments that accompany it, it is unsurprising that local communities emphasise the (sometimes exaggerated) emergencies that take place in their areas, rather than structural and chronic poverty. The long list of needs that communities give to those conducting assessments – among which food normally features prominently – gives aid agencies the sense that their assistance is greatly needed. However, it is important to bear in mind that, after many years of needs assessments, informants may be playing a well-rehearsed role to convince assessment teams that they are ‘desperate’, thereby improving their chances of receiving aid. The passage from ‘desperate’ to ‘dependent’ is short when agencies’ ambiguous relationship with beneficiaries is taken into account. For example, an FAO assessment observed that there is a ‘propensity, at all levels, to sustain the dependency syndrome established during the OLS years whereby regularly reported disasters lead to all manner of hand outs that must be obtained in order to survive’ (FAO and WFP, 2007: 10).

Those interviewed for this study have diverse and divided views on dependency. They range from viewing it as an inevitable result of years of food aid provided under Operation Lifeline Sudan to not seeing it as an important issue. The term ‘dependency’ pops up in policy documents and promotional material as an assumed problem without being qualified (WFP has a poster that states ‘from food aid dependency to self-sustainability’ displayed in its Juba office). The donors interviewed for this study wanted to ensure that food distributions and other relief assistance were used in limited circumstances, such as in response to floods, for returnees when they first arrive, for IDPs and in response to outbreaks of conflict.

Dependency was cited as a problem no less than five times in a recent report by the Academy for Educational Development

on the future of USAID food assistance (known as ‘Title II’). While providing no evidence, the Sudan Food Assistance Transition Study notes that ‘the long history of food assistance delivery throughout south Sudan has created a sense of entitlement and dependency amongst beneficiaries’. The report also includes eliminating ‘attitudes of dependency’ as part of its justification for suggesting ‘conditionalities such as labor contributions or attendance in training or education programs’. With reference to Upper Nile and Jonglei states, the study claims that ‘dependency on food assistance is still a major problem in the region and will have implications on public works strategies’ (Frankenberger et al., 2007: 8, 9, 26).

Food aid has often been associated with transient consumption that leaves nothing tangible, particularly by people involved in delivering assistance. In one monitoring assessment from Mogok, north of Ayod, in May 1998, when a reasonable crop seemed to be growing in the fields, it was recommended that ‘any food intervention [would] be at the cost of future self-reliance’ (WFP, 1998: 1). Such an observation is commonly a reflex reaction based on how food aid is perceived even by WFP staff (after a three-day assessment), rather than a verified phenomenon based on long-term longitudinal examination.

Some development agencies in Southern Sudan are concerned that free food – and even food in compensation for work – undermines incentives to contribute to community projects on an unpaid basis. Staff at one NGO said that they specifically avoided giving food to people who contributed labour to school construction projects – even though WFP would willingly provide food for such purposes – because they viewed community labour as their one significant ‘contribution’ to the project. One could also argue the other side of this coin: this shows little respect for the beneficiary, who is asked to contribute labour as a display of good faith to projects that often require skilled technicians and machines, when the genuinely needy have many more useful things to do with their time.

Government views on dependency

Government officials are keen to encourage self-reliance (‘having a country means producing one’s own food’), stressing productive agriculture rather than food relief as the means of achieving food security. Using the analogy of ‘stopping people looking to the sky for relief’ is part of their justification, together with encouraging people to work to rebuild the country now that the war is over. The government seems eager to support farming and income-generating projects since these produce profits, permitting initial investments to be quickly paid off, whereas food is just consumed. This view of food aid implies that there is something wrong with the main objective of food aid – that it should be consumed by people who are hungry – and that there is something shameful about being a recipient of food aid.

While there are strong political arguments in favour of self-reliance, in practice there are many associated problems. An evaluation of WFP’s livelihood recovery interventions describes

how objectives of phasing out of food assistance as people become more self-reliant can be unrealistic in countries that have suffered from years of chronic poverty and where people are subject to recurring shocks (Harvey, Burton and Wilkinson, 2009). In this context, the annual ANLA exercise establishes the needy and less needy by comparing areas within Sudan, but without establishing a baseline whereby the great needs of Southern Sudan as a region are established by comparing it with more developed, less war-affected countries and thus being able to justify high levels of continued funding. Harvey, Burton and Wilkinson view WFP as needing to engage in longer-term strategies with a more open-ended use of relief food, with important recovery as well as relief aspects (2009).

Asked what contribution food aid played in sustaining Southern Sudan's population during the war, many government officials say very positive things, particularly how it helped avoid the kind of mass displacement seen in 1989. This often makes them unwilling to criticise it. Yet if asked to project forwards, they tend to portray circumstances today as radically different and conclude that there is no future for food aid. While WFP intends food aid to be a form of livelihood support, officials do not view it this way, and seem unable to recognise that food aid could potentially play a developmental role. There is a certain amount of wishful thinking in the belief that food shortages are a thing of the past given continued needs on the ground, though it may well be in the long-term interests of Southern Sudan to stigmatise 'relief-food' in this way. In the past, donors have found it useful to stigmatise relief when they want to advance to a more developmental level of budgeting. They took this approach to reduce funding levels in the years leading up to the famine of 1998, only to find that they did not have the capacity to respond to an emergency – capacity that is imperative in Sudan and needs at all costs to be maintained.

While concerned about dependency, government officials interviewed generally accepted that food assistance was likely to continue to be needed, though restricted as much as possible to emergencies; several stressed that it could be given to those who work the land, using it as a lever to try to usher in more progressive ways of farming in the form of Food for Training and other initiatives.

Food aid was occasionally portrayed in terms of an addiction away from which people must be gradually weaned: one director general described with approval a Catholic Relief Services project with IDPs in Eastern Equatoria that cut down the food ration over a period of six years, starting with food sufficient for 12 months, then reducing to ten months the next year, followed by eight months, and so on.²¹ He had no

²¹ The same informant's personal opinion on dependency (based on having a brother perceived to be 'lazy') is that it is a problem that the government and aid agencies will now have to manage because they created it in the first place by giving able people who could have used their labour to grow food the option of relying on 'easy food'. He said that these people eat well, marry 'ladies' (requiring their host to produce the bridewealth), live in the houses of those who work and exhibit a number of signs of laziness, believing that 'the time of peace is a time of rest'.

problem with the six-year timeframe and approved the phased and predictable nature of this intervention. Another government officer – an acting SSRRC secretary – said that, in the manner of a son consuming his father's assets, people 'want to eat from the government'. This comes in the context of government efforts to reduce overheads and the phantom staff on the books;²² the official clearly wanted to give the impression that the government is competent enough to deliver the awaited peace dividend and address the problems of Southern Sudan as the legitimate public authority.²³

The word 'dependency' was applied not only to recipients of food aid, but was also occasionally used to describe the rapidly growing non-agricultural urban population that does not farm to live. The government is keen for these people to repopulate rural areas, but they continue to stay in towns. Such accusations of 'dependency' tend to arise when populations are not doing what government officials want. It was also noted that some local staff members who work for a living with NGOs often see relatives who depend on their salary as 'lazy'. These staff members are at times heard to criticise a lack of initiative on the part of local populations, sometimes owing to their difficulties in mobilising populations to contribute labour and resources for community projects. In one county, the commissioner discourages the development of urban slums by telling people that there is no UNHCR within Sudan to help people in 'camp-like' settlements. He had, however, expected WFP to provide a full ration up until the harvest (nine months' worth), and did not see this assistance as likely to create camps of aid-dependent people. In many conversations with officials, the use of 'dependency' concepts contradicted many other statements, suggesting that labels are being used out of convenience rather than conviction.²⁴

Lower down government hierarchies there is less talk of 'dependency' and more requests for WFP to respond to particular crises affecting their locality in the short term and to provide assistance to returnees. They, of course, gain political advantages from encouraging food distributions; the unscrupulous among them also have the possibility of personal enrichment. One commissioner in Jonglei felt that he was being criticised by the population on the grounds that he was not able to mobilise as much food aid as his predecessor, but this demonstrates the local popularity of food aid. In Northern Bahr el Ghazal, the government and SSRRC lobbied heavily for WFP to assist those affected by floods; food aid was not only seen as wholly appropriate in these circumstances, but the government's general criteria for who should be assisted were much wider than WFP's. In Jonglei, there was an explicit acknowledgement by

²² See also, Pantuliano et al. (2008:18).

²³ Data from the World Bank and GoSS shows that there were 125,000 civil servants employed in 2008, up from 62,000 in 2005, as figures from SPLM areas have now been integrated and teachers and health workers included. GoSS intends to transfer sufficient funds to each state to cover only 5,000 staff, but political considerations will make it difficult to lay off staff inherited from the previous era before the 2009 elections. See Pantuliano et al. (2008: 18).

²⁴ See also Wood (1985).

one high-level government official that the government was weak and that change would only come about over many years, especially in view of the sheer scale of the destruction and lack of development caused by the war. Another government informant explained that, due to limited capacity, the government was concentrating on security issues and telling people to ‘cultivate’ without actually being able to assist them. There is acknowledgement at this level that basic needs are still not being met for the population at the grass roots. Rather than fears of dependency, the concern is that the reduced presence of humanitarian agencies on the ground will not improve matters sufficiently and might have negative effects.

Some government officials saw merit in Food for Work and Food for Recovery. One minister interviewed expressed the view that food aid should be given only to those ‘who really deserve it’ – specifically after participating in some activity – even if the activity is purely symbolic. It is unclear whether such ‘work’ contributes to recovery, or whether the symbolism is more important for the food provider and the government than the recipient. Another government official, working in the SSRRC and familiar with FFR programming, said that shifting to recovery food programming and away from free food was at present an empty effort because of the lack of oversight of FFR activities.

Influence of ‘dependency’ on programming and policy

In Southern Sudan, concerns about dependency have been used as a justification for changing the way food aid is programmed, as part of a broader move away from relief interventions towards programming that promotes recovery and development. There is a strong drive to get away from the

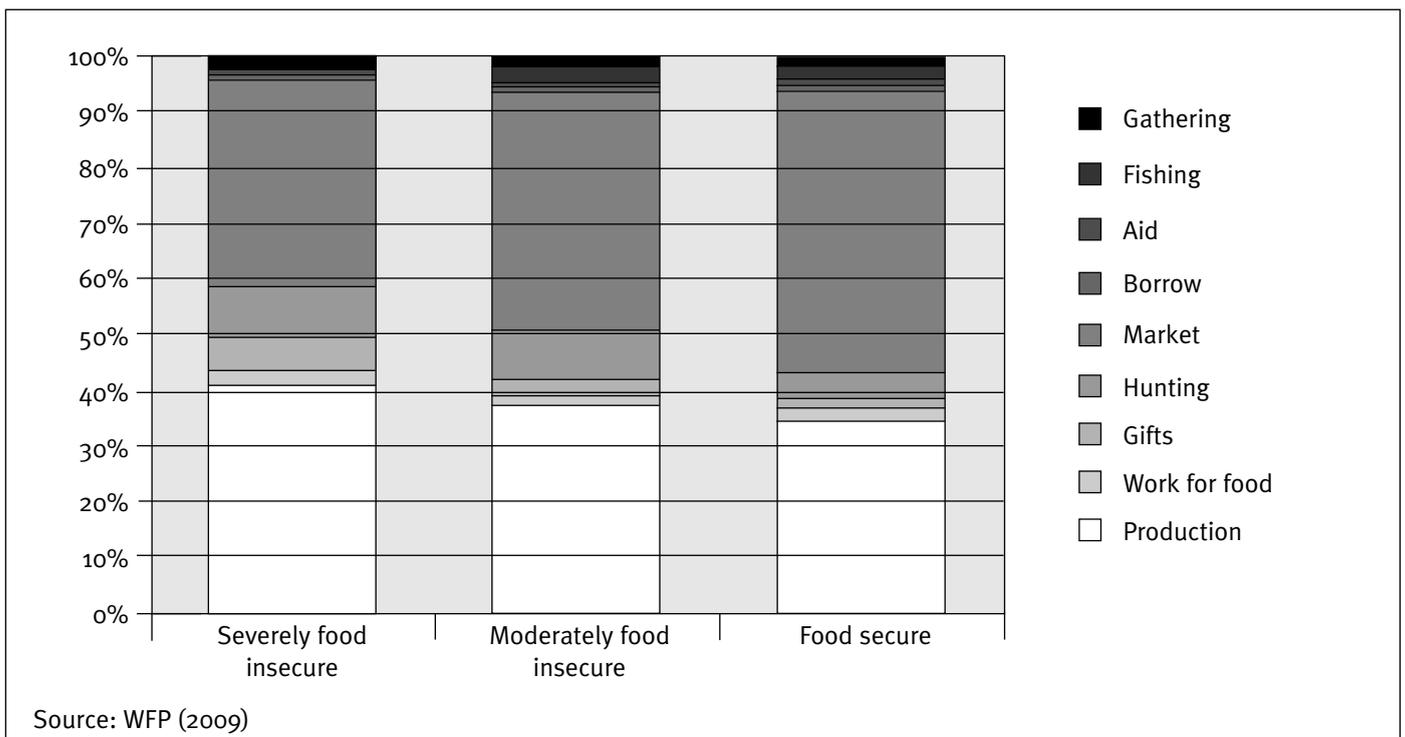
attitudes and programming modalities of the OLS era. Even with research suggesting the contrary,²⁵ dependency is assumed to have been a problem of this era and therefore an ill that must be combated in the push towards recovery and development. Despite their reservations about food aid, most parties agree that it is important to maintain the capacity to respond to food crises. The government, donors and UN agencies see no problem with targeting food at vulnerable households in specific interventions or larger general food distributions to those affected by displacement and disasters; there has been no incident akin to when the government of Niger initially discouraged emergency response to the food crisis in 2005 for fear that it would undermine development programmes. If anything, the dominance of food programming within the response to the 2008 floods suggests that there is a tendency to continue to look towards food aid as a primary response because of its extensive use in the past. Unless the desire for a clean break with the ways of the past becomes politically expedient, there will also be a useful role for food aid in the future, for example in the context of providing safety nets or as part of social protection programmes.

5.4 Are people dependent on food aid?

To address the concerns raised by government officials, donors and aid agency staff, it is useful to ask whether food aid discourages initiative and whether it may undermine efforts towards development. These questions are addressed below, along with the other possible aspects of dependency: that people are unable to meet their basic needs in the

²⁵ See Duffield et al. (2000).

Figure 2: Sources of food in Southern Sudan (by degree of food security)



Box 5: 'Fake' camps: evidence of dependency or need?

After the severe floods in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, dozens of camp-like settlements containing hundreds (if not thousands) of temporary shelters have sprung up by the roadside. A large number of the huts lack roofs, while others are too small for even a small person to lie down in. Aid workers who visit these camps will be told that all the people there have lost their houses, crops and belongings in the floods; in reality, the flood waters rose slowly, allowing most to move their assets, even if their houses and crops were destroyed. Many aid agency staff members express exasperation at having been giving inflated numbers of those affected by floods, claiming that local leaders and others submitting lists are including people who are not actually affected by floods. Some aid workers see the inflated numbers and 'fake' camps as examples of a behavioural change caused by humanitarian assistance.

Residents and returnees see these camps in a different light, namely as their way of 'letting aid agencies know' that they have been affected by floods and need assistance. When pressed, the majority of returnees questioned about the camps admitted that not all of the people who have built huts are actually flood-affected, but that they have done so in hopes of also receiving assistance. One returnee man who had lost most of his harvest because of the flood described how many of the women (including his wife) went to the camp during the day in case aid agencies arrived to register people. Other women described how they had built structures in the camps (a process which takes approximately a day) in case aid agencies did registrations. They were not counting on their efforts resulting in assistance, but they did not want to be left out in case they did. They were, however, using the aid agencies as part of a portfolio of strategies. Though the deceit and lack of honest communication undermine the concept of development 'partnership', they also challenge assumptions of 'dependency' or other similarly paternalistic concepts.

absence of food assistance and that food aid could undermine social safety nets.

It is important to point out that food aid is not and has not been as significant a source of people's overall food consumption as many might suspect. The most recent WFP ANLA estimated that food aid accounted for only 2.4% of people's food consumption across Southern Sudan. (Figure 2 shows the contribution of different food sources by degree of food security.) Even if this estimate is low, it underscores that food aid is a minor source of overall food consumption. Food economy analyses estimate the impact of relief assistance over the many years of Operation Lifeline Sudan as contributing less than 5% of household food, though the majority of OLS relief came in the form of food aid (Coutts and Sharp, 1998: 17). Duffield et al. estimate that, for the period 1997–98, relief food contributed 7.5% of annual food requirements for each targeted recipient (2000). By contrast, Collier describes welfare dependency in the United States as

coming into play when more than 80% of household income comes from welfare payments (1999). The official definition used by the US Department of Health and Human Services cites welfare dependents as those who receive more than half of their total family income from welfare.²⁶ One can agree or disagree with efforts to quantify dependency, but the disparity is still worth keeping in mind.

Can returnees depend on food aid in order to meet their basic needs?

The previous section demonstrates that, while food aid is an important and extremely useful resource for those who receive it, returnees and residents alike are meeting most of their needs from sources other than food aid. This is most clearly demonstrated by the fact that, while most returnees must wait between one and six months before receiving a ration, some spontaneous returnees never receive a food ration but do not end up dying; they locate their own sources of food, mobilise kinship resources, rely on assets that they brought with them and use income earned from activities such as selling firewood, fish and grass. Returnees spread their risk and depend on a variety of sources of food and income, most notably kinship, rather than relying solely on one source of income and food.

Food aid is simply not reliable enough for returnees to depend on it: there is inconsistency in the timing and quantities of food distributions; verification of spontaneous returnees by UNMIS/RRR, IOM and partners is limited in its coverage and reach, especially in isolated areas; and food rations are not designed to cover the time until a prospective harvest, nor do they take into account whether returnees missed the planting season. Food aid is a significant and important source of food for a household during the one- to three-month distribution period, but over time returnees rely much more on other resources.

Does food aid undermine the ability to meet future needs in the absence of assistance?*Food aid and initiative*

In the current context of limited food assistance, people are unlikely to refrain from productive livelihood strategies in order to wait for a resource that has not been dependable or readily available. This situation stands in contrast to that experienced by some returnees who were living in IDP and refugee camps with access to very regular assistance, which they could incorporate into their livelihood strategies. Despite this predictable assistance, many interviewees noted that they worked on farms and undertook casual labour in order to earn money to supplement food rations, purchase clothing and meet other basic needs; some even take risks by engaging in brewing activities and not receiving full payment in sharecropping arrangements, instead of relying exclusively on food assistance. They said that one factor that helped convince them to return to Southern Sudan was that they could 'keep everything that they

²⁶ See <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/indicatorso8/ch2.shtml>.

earn'; moreover, residents describe returnees as being extremely hard-working. It would therefore seem unlikely that they would be guilty of seeing the time of peace as 'a time of rest', as one government official feared.

This study found no evidence that past or current food distributions have discouraged participation in public works projects. Returnees and residents alike were adamant that even though free food has been provided in the past, they would be eager for opportunities to work for food or cash. Particularly for returnees used to doing casual labour, works projects would provide sought-after income. In one discussion, a woman removed her head scarf to show the lump on her head that had developed from carrying firewood, stating that she would prefer different work. One exception comes from some informants who participated in Food for Recovery projects but received little or no food for their labour. They expressed scepticism that they would actually be paid for their efforts in future projects.

In several of the communities visited, returnee and resident households reported that they made contributions to initiatives that responded to their priorities, such as paying for the repair of water pumps and constructing churches. There was also evidence from Bor that, when communities really want a task performed – in one case the repairing of the GTZ-constructed dyke that had kept Paker and Ajwong payams dry for a number of years – they will do it themselves without any official incentive (but with the sanction that a fine of one bull be paid for failing to contribute labour for this task).

When asked directly about dependency concerns, aid recipients found it illogical and even insulting that aid agencies or the government would believe that food aid would discourage initiative or make them 'lazy'. For them, food is associated with work and productivity. This is consistent with the findings of studies of the 1998 famine: 'Sudanese people did not lay down their tools and wait for UN food to arrive' (Harragin, 2004: 321). As one man stated, rather than food aid making people lazy, 'a hungry man is a lazy man' (raan nekcok yenkeya dakrot). Another noted that the concept of 'dependency' did not make sense when they were given such limited food assistance: 'You cannot give something and say "We don't want you to be dependent"; you can give something and say "Don't depend on it because it will end" – that is okay'. Some young men described how they had returned by their own means, had not registered and intended to live by getting a job and relying on themselves. While they have been depicted as being 'prone' to dependency, people returned and struggled upon arrival, in the absence of timely and targeted assistance.

Food aid can increase risk-taking behaviour (Lentz, Barrett and Hoddinott, 2005), which may be positive in the sense that it may lead to greater investments in livelihoods as short-term food needs are taken care of; it may thus reduce

the need for assistance in the long term. Evidence from other parts of Sudan shows that receipt of adequate food aid rations has provided people with greater bargaining power in negotiating wage rates and in securing farming arrangements on more positive terms (Buchanan-Smith and Jaspars, 2006). This study revealed little evidence of assistance reducing initiative; however, it has not permitted 'risk-taking' behaviour as it was generally too unreliable to allow a good chance of the risk coming good. Reductions in food aid where needs still existed were shown as far back as 1996 in Sudan as leading to increased vulnerability, exploitation and violence, and consequently an increased risk that people would need assistance in the longer term (Karim et al., 1996). This widely respected study (The OLS Review) did not, however, prevent the reduction in food aid volumes that preceded the famine of 1998.

Food aid and social safety nets

Kinship and clan networks are an important source of assistance for returnees: they act as local safety nets that people use to support one another. If assistance were to undermine or disrupt these networks, people might not be able to rely on them in the future. Although evidently the food support that many returnees obtain from their kin is reduced when they receive food aid (because they need less), there is little evidence that food aid 'crowds out' social safety nets. Returnees and residents noted that food aid enables returnees to share and pay back loans. However, informants gave mixed feedback on the potential for tensions resulting from targeting only certain groups for assistance (e.g. returnees); some were adamant that assistance – targeted to the community at large or to returnees specifically – relieves some of the burdens imposed by the enormous population influx, while others were concerned that tensions could develop as a result. The sensitivity and complexity of the topic make it difficult to draw conclusions one way or another. Yet overall, in many societies experiencing crises, including Southern Sudan, mechanisms to share local resources with the poorest continue to function within social or clan networks. Food aid is generally considered as external, although it contributes to such local resource sharing networks, with everyone affected by a crisis seen as being entitled to a share.²⁷

5.5 Food aid and dependency: not a new question

Food aid features prominently in debates about dependency in relief and development assistance, mainly because it is conspicuously associated with 'consumption'. Whereas other interventions can be portrayed as physically enhancing a community's capacity to care of itself, such as building an irrigation network, food by its very nature can only be consumed – and thus the appetite for it will be constantly regenerated. Officials frequently remarked that food aid was 'never-ending'. In reality, though, the supply of food aid is far

²⁷ See, for example, Harragin (1998) and Maxwell and Burns (2008).

from being ‘never-ending’: ruptures in food pipelines, funding difficulties and exclusion error mean that the majority of eligible food aid recipients have to depend on their own resources for the majority of the time. Nor is food aid only about consumption. Even when people are consuming food aid, that food aid can permit the conservation of livelihood assets and the preservation and accumulation of resources that would otherwise have to be converted into food.²⁸ If food aid prevents the distress sale of cattle or the sale of the family fishing net, then these assets will remain when food aid is stopped. To be able to play that role, food aid must arrive in time (before recipients begin to resort to selling assets) and must be provided in sufficient quantities (so that people can build up the assets on which they will have to depend when food aid is no longer distributed).

There is a widespread feeling that regular distributions – especially over an extended period of time – can cause people to become dependent as they come to expect food aid to continue. This is evident from the interviews conducted with

²⁸ See Rangasami, quoted in Keen and Lee (2007: S12).

government officials, aid agency staff and donors as part of this study. However, no evidence was uncovered to indicate that recipients were dependent on WFP food; the same may be said of previous studies (Duffield et al., 2000; Harragin, 2004; Maxwell and Burns, 2008). In 2000, Duffield et al. concluded that ‘there is no evidence that people [in Sudan] are becoming dependent on food aid in any prolonged or permanent way’ (Duffield et al., 2000: 47). Maxwell and Burns second this conclusion, adding that care should be taken to keep the focus of food assistance on the issue of vulnerability, rather than on the assumed problem of dependency (Maxwell and Burns, 2008: 16). However, what was not evident, until explicitly noted in this study, was the transferable nature of the label ‘dependent’. Furthermore, such concepts can be just as useful to aid agencies and the nascent government of Southern Sudan, which seeks to exhibit early and evident signs of a ‘peace dividend’ and an obvious break with modes of behaviour associated with the past. Emphasising that people should contribute to the rebuilding of the country, settle in rural areas and not depend on others to provide for them is a useful philosophy in light of the government’s limited capacity.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

Reintegration

The arrival of more than two million returnees in Southern Sudan is contributing to rapid change since the signing of the CPA. Without downplaying the substantial progress that has been made towards peace, serious obstacles must be dealt with, including addressing insecurity and land issues, supporting urbanisation in a strategic manner, expanding inadequate basic services, improving infrastructure and promoting the livelihoods of returnees. International agencies and the GoSS, which have been actively involved in – and pre-occupied with – the logistics of return, are beginning to turn their attention to the much more complex process of reintegration. This is resulting in increasing opportunities to develop strategies and implement activities to support reintegration in a holistic manner. However, notable gaps remain: there is a need for improved leadership, strategy and coordination, for more timely assistance to returnees upon arrival, for better provision of basic services and for increased support to livelihoods.

Cities and towns are growing as a significant number of returnees choose not to settle in rural areas, a trend that the government is resisting and that aid agencies are struggling to address – or are avoiding. Population growth in both urban and rural areas has been accompanied by a deterioration in services, at a time when many humanitarian agencies that had been engaged in the delivery of services are reducing their activities and in some cases withdrawing entirely from certain areas. Along with better levels of basic services, returnees report that employment opportunities were more plentiful in areas of displacement than in Southern Sudan. Unskilled returnees seeking employment face a saturated labour market; those with skills are held back by a lack of opportunities, language barriers and limited access to credit.

While this report focuses on food assistance because it is an under-explored dimension of reintegration programming and because of WFP's mandate, successful reintegration needs more than food assistance and will take time. The lack of support for returnee livelihoods is concerning on multiple levels, but for WFP in particular the need for food interventions that support reintegration will continue to depend in no small part on the ability of returnees to establish or re-establish meaningful and productive livelihoods. Support to livelihoods is both a crucial component and something that aid agencies can promote, but there is a need for specialist expertise and approaches that are based on local knowledge and strategies. At present, the focus is on seeds and tools, which are often delivered late in the planting

seasons; other livelihood support, such as vocational training and microfinance, are extremely limited in their reach.

The lack of both leadership and a strategy to promote reintegration has hampered the reintegration efforts of agencies involved in reintegration programming and has prevented others from becoming more engaged. At a very basic level this is evident in the struggle to coordinate the different components of the 'reintegration package' of assistance, but more importantly there is a need to agree on clear priorities among aid agencies and the government, assign responsibilities and link potential initiatives with funding. Momentum is gathering, but sustained attention and commitment on behalf of the government and aid agencies are required.

As the 2007/2008 flooding in Jonglei and Northern Bahr el Ghazal and violence in Abyei showed, emergencies can severely undermine the livelihoods of returnees (as well as residents) and the capacity of resident communities to support returnees because their own food sources are damaged or destroyed. Insecurity remains the primary threat to reintegration – both localised insecurity and the possibility that the CPA could collapse in the run-up to the planned referendum. The need for agencies to maintain the capacity to respond to emergencies – and for donors to provide funding – cannot be overemphasised.

Food assistance and reintegration

Reintegration may be thought of in terms of stages: return, arrival, settling in/re-establishing livelihoods in the short term and securing conditions necessary to maintain life and livelihoods, though reintegration is not a linear process. Returnees express the greatest need for food assistance upon arrival. 'Early reintegration' activities – including the delivery of food aid, as well as seeds and tools and non-food items – is in a sense a misnomer because of the time it takes to register spontaneous returnees and organise the subsequent delivery of assistance.

The three-month ration distributed by WFP through general food distribution is the only form of food assistance specifically targeted at returnees, though returnees do access food assistance in much smaller numbers through other activities, such as the Food for Recovery and Food for Education programmes. Food aid is undoubtedly a very popular intervention on the part of returnees receiving it. Immediately after they have received a food ration, it has a tangible impact on their livelihoods (even if the short duration of the ration makes the impact less significant over the long term). When returnees first arrive, food aid allows them to pursue important tasks, including building houses, calling in

debts and in some cases clearing land, without having to worry about where their next meal will come from. Food aid can also be sold, traded and shared with relatives, all of which can serve to promote reintegration. When returnees share with relatives who remained at home, thereby reducing the burden returnees place on their families, it serves to support local coping mechanisms, which are the first line of defence for any future hardship.

Food aid can therefore play a role in reintegration, but it is often too little and too late. The duration of three months is widely viewed as insufficient. The three-month ration alone does not allow people to rebuild viable livelihood alternatives, unless they already have networks and assets of their own in place. The benefits of food aid are also compromised by under-coverage and unpredictability for spontaneous returnees. In the case of Northern Bahr el Ghazal there is the added problem of diversion, which is neither a new problem nor one with easy solutions. The suspension of food in response to diversion in one county makes it clear that combating diversion and supporting reintegration raise certain trade-offs. Closely related to the issue of coverage is the fact that WFP's efforts to support reintegration have been nearly entirely focused on rural areas. The question of what role food assistance should play for returnees in and around urban centres has been conspicuously absent. There are other well-known challenges to programming food assistance in Southern Sudan, such as limited reach related to a dearth of capable NGO partners, the feasibility of delivering food during the rainy season and the impact of food distributions on market activities when distributions coincide with harvests following the rainy season.

If food aid arrives late, is insufficient or is not delivered at all, returnees must rely on other sources of food and income. For those coming back with few assets and limited income opportunities, the lack of food aid can result in the sale of assets, the taking on of debts and delays in pursuing important activities (such as calling in debts, setting up small businesses or clearing land). This increases the burden on residents and contributes to the multiple factors prompting some returnees to leave once again.

Returnees call for the timely distribution of food aid: 'the earlier the better'. For organised returnees this is more straightforward as they are registered upon arrival, but for spontaneous returnees everything depends on the verification process, which can take several weeks to several months. IOM has been working to improve the process by training SSRRC enumerators/IOM partners and expanding the reach of its tracking activities, but the fact that spontaneous returnees continue to be left out effectively eliminates them from the possibility of receiving food aid.

It is by no means clear that more developmental food programming – in the form of FFR or FFE – transfers resources to a local level at a rate sufficient to have a significant impact

on livelihoods, even in the long run. Food for Recovery has been meant to serve as a way both to move away from GFD and provide the means for residents and returnees to continue to access food assistance to support livelihoods and recovery. In 2008, FFR comprised 37% of WFP's food assistance activities in Southern Sudan,²⁹ an even greater proportion than that of total GFD activities. In the areas visited for this study it appears to be falling short of its objectives, with communities having limited understanding of how to access FFR, projects rarely corresponding with their own priorities, people receiving small amounts of food for their labour, no accountability and little access to technical inputs, with notable exceptions in certain NGO-organised projects. Proposals must be written, activities organised and outputs verified, and in some instances communities must organise the collection and transport of food from WFP storage sites. In addition, Food for Recovery is fundamentally biased towards communities that have the capacity to design and submit projects, or where WFP partners are already present. Even within WFP the objectives, achievements and shortcomings of FFR are not always well understood. Food for Education was not closely examined for this study, but it is clear that, while beneficial, promoting access to education requires addressing the multiple barriers to such access, including the need for more schools and teachers.

Some populations in Southern Sudan continue to experience high rates of malnutrition, which is at least in part due to food insecurity, as well as the health environment and social factors. Returnees and residents alike face threats to food and livelihood security as a result of loss of assets and lack of infrastructure and services; they continue to be affected by periods of acute food insecurity as a result of localised insecurity, floods and drought. The arrival of returnees further impacts the vulnerability of residents because of the burden that residents face in supporting them. However, the needs of host communities are largely being ignored in reintegration food programming: being a 'returnee' is the primary ticket for receiving assistance. This makes for a very one-sided picture of reintegration; host communities receive benefits through the sharing of food aid or because their burden is decreased, not because food aid was designed to assist them.

It is likely that food aid volumes will be reduced drastically over the next few years. Though in a very different political context, this downward shift mirrors what happened in the years before and after the 1998 famine, when food aid volumes seemed related more to political and donor agendas than to needs.³⁰ WFP's reduction in capacity in coming years is closely related to the funding environment and moves towards recovery and development programming. However, there are some population groups facing acute needs who may require food assistance. Food aid is seen as an inefficient use of

²⁹ This figure is based on tonnage of food aid used per activity (WFP Southern Sudan), See Sharp (2007: S107).

³⁰ A food security assessment was undertaken by Solidarités in Juba in late 2008.

declining resources, and in this context justificatory arguments about ‘dependency’ may be used.

Dependency

Concerns and assumptions about dependency influence food aid programming in a number of ways. The dependency argument provides an excuse for limiting food aid as part of a broader logic to ‘get away from relief’ and promote interventions focused on recovery and development. While many actors incorrectly assume that dependency characterised the OLS era and that it is likely to take root again unless current aid programming is modified, this study concludes that food aid is not causing dependency, not least because it is too little and too unreliable to do so.

Some policy-makers are making decisions based on their aspirations for Southern Sudan rather than what they observe in the present. These policy-makers are the ones most likely to use ‘dependency’ arguments to explain why the South must aim to be self-sufficient. At the same time, they expect food aid to achieve ‘more with less’ in line with the erroneous belief that giving people less will make them more productive (perhaps using the logic that productive areas rarely require food aid).

In many conversations with officials, the use of ‘dependency’ concepts contradicted other statements that were made, suggesting that labels are being used out of convenience. No food aid recipient argued that food aid should be stopped due to its inability to effect long-term development goals. Often, government officials have learned not to turn down what they are offered even when they would prefer interventions with a more production-based emphasis. They also recognise the dilemma inherent in defining what is in the long-term interests of the Sudanese people, when most of these people can incorporate food aid into their livelihood strategies with no evident long-term damage.

Despite plenty of research providing evidence that food aid has not caused dependency in Southern Sudan (to which this study is adding), the fear of dependency remains associated with food aid, raising the question as to why this perception is so persistent. Indeed, the fact that WFP sought research on dependency is evidence that humanitarian agencies feel the need to show that their assistance does not create dependency. The persistence of dependency as an assumed problem caused by current or past relief assistance indicates a worrying disconnect from the reality that assistance is unpredictable and is just one of many strategies that people draw on in times of crisis. The dependency argument ignores the initiative of local people and the way in which aid is imaginatively utilised and incorporated as a resource or a coping strategy. The question should not be whether food assistance has undermined the current and future livelihoods of people living in Southern Sudan, but how best to support their livelihoods and the complex reintegration process. This question does not fall neatly into humanitarian, recovery or development categories.

While the push towards recovery and development is a response to a shift in context and opportunities, substantial needs and vulnerability are ongoing, and food assistance is helping returnees in the absence of more structured and longer-term livelihoods support. The fragile peace in Southern Sudan and the Three Areas will continue to face serious threats in the lead-up to the referendum and beyond. Most agency programming in Sudan pays lip-service to emergency preparedness should widespread insecurity become prevalent, but does not consider the real probability that this will be the case leading up to 2011, and that building up people’s capacities to withstand such conditions will be more efficient than reacting after the event.

6.2 Recommendations

- *Engage with reintegration processes and advocate for livelihoods support.* WFP should place a high priority on continued engagement with processes supporting reintegration, including through active participation in the working groups, workshops and meetings that are increasingly taking place in Juba and other towns. Not only do these fora provide a way to feed into broader reintegration strategies, but they also present opportunities to continue to lobby for more and better interventions to support livelihoods. Lobbying should not be limited to the timely provision of seeds and tools by FAO, which, while important, is only one means of livelihoods support and not always the most appropriate one. Microfinance activities, vocational training, support to small businesses and labour-intensive public works programmes would be extremely valuable in creating short-term and longer-term opportunities for employment and income. WFP should also determine how Purchase for Progress (local purchasing of food) can be used to support reintegration and livelihoods.
- *Promote understanding of reintegration within WFP.* This report is an opportunity to promote understanding within WFP about reintegration and how WFP can support it. WFP should use it to promote dialogue within its Sudan offices (including sub-offices) focused on three key themes: reintegration (what it is and the challenges it presents); the current role of food assistance (WFP’s policies related to reintegration, the benefits and limitations of the three-month ration and FFR), and how to improve the impact of food assistance in supporting reintegration (assessing the feasibility of report recommendations, prioritising them and developing an action plan).
- *Compare WFP Sudan’s approach to reintegration with WFP approaches in other countries.* Many of the challenges to supporting reintegration in Southern Sudan (e.g. determining the type and duration of support, addressing the needs of returnees and host populations, coordinating assistance with other agencies) are faced in other contexts. WFP Sudan should engage with other WFP offices (for example, Uganda and Burundi) to promote

learning on the use of food assistance to promote reintegration and potentially organise exchange visits between staff.

- *Maintain emergency capacity.* WFP is downsizing its presence in Southern Sudan as the humanitarian components of its operations are reduced, but it is imperative that WFP maintains the capacity to respond to emergencies and advocate to donors for the funds necessary to do so. In the light of the threats posed by insecurity, WFP South Sudan should also improve its capacity to undertake political analysis, and use it to inform programming and contingency plans.
- *Provide rations to returnees based on needs.* Many informants noted that there was no logic to food aid programming unless it was tailored to the specific length of time remaining until the harvest. While these informants are unaware of the logistical and procedural difficulties such tailored solutions entail, this 'intervention logic' is watertight. WFP should without doubt continue to provide rations to future returnees as food aid has been a key source of assistance, particularly in the absence of substantial support to livelihoods. WFP should base these rations on assessed needs, specifically regarding how much food is needed by households to enable them to pursue key livelihood activities such as clearing land and harvesting. While this need varies according to degrees of food insecurity, it is apparent that three months is often inadequate. The 2008 *Guidelines for WFP Support to Returnees* makes provision for conducting assessments to determine the need for further rations beyond three months; WFP should therefore commit the resources necessary to undertake these assessments, as well as the resources to carry out further food assistance activities as needed.
- *Design reintegration programming to address the needs of returnees and host populations.* For food assistance to promote reintegration through contributions to food security, livelihoods and social cohesion, it must be programmed in a way that also addresses the needs and food insecurity of host communities. Changing from an approach of blanket targeting of returnees to a more area-based approach that includes host population needs, such as supporting households hosting returnees, can hardly be done overnight. However, WFP must make a shift in the near future to reintegration programming that more holistically considers the needs of host communities.
- *Support verification and registration of returnees.* While participation in the verification process is voluntary and falls outside of WFP's mandate, promoting the efficiency, accuracy and coverage of verification activities is necessary if WFP is to address the challenges of coverage, timing and predictability in food assistance, and therefore increase its impact. WFP should continue to support IOM's efforts to improve the identification and registration of spontaneous returnees and seek out new ways to do this. WFP should continue to make staff and logistical support available for verification activities and should liaise with IOM to determine how WFP can best support the verification and registration of spontaneous returnees.
- *Consider cash transfers.* ECHO's decision to pilot a project using cash transfers for returnees and WFP's expansion of its support and capacity for cash transfer programmes have created an opportunity for WFP South Sudan to explore the potential of cash transfers as a complement or substitute for food aid for returnees. WFP should follow up on the implementation and results of the pilot to learn whether and how cash transfers could play a role in its programming to support reintegration, as both a complement or substitute for food rations and as a means to support livelihoods.
- *Promote accountability.* WFP should continue to push its partners to put in place basic accountability mechanisms, such as communicating entitlements at distributions; follow up on reports of unauthorised taxation, diversion and other forms of corruption; and urge sub-office managers to share their approaches to dealing with corruption in their areas.
- *Review Food for Recovery.* While FFR is set to be less significant in the years to come, an internal review of the programme is necessary to ensure that it can actually support reintegration and recovery. Issues include: awareness within communities about the potential for FFR programming, understanding within WFP offices about what FFR is supposed to achieve versus its present impact, problems of communities retrieving food themselves, lack of awareness within communities and organisations about the non-food inputs available from WFP (e.g. tools), absence of accountability, the impact of projects implemented by communities compared to those implemented by organisations (e.g. NGOs) and the overall administrative hurdles involved in the process.
- *Urban programming.* WFP should examine the potential for programming in urban areas to support reintegration. The organisation should review existing assessments of food security³¹ and reintegration in urban areas of Southern Sudan (particularly related to Juba because of the large number of returnees there); take stock of its own activities in urban areas (e.g. FFT); and, in consultation with other actors supporting reintegration (e.g. SSRRC, UNMIS/RRR), expand or pilot activities where appropriate and feasible. Because of the presence of strong markets in urban areas, cash transfers should definitely be considered.
- *Efficiency of food aid.* While this study did not delve into the complex debate around how to improve the efficiency of food aid delivery in Southern Sudan, improving speed and reliability would have obvious gains for returnees receiving food rations. Making sure that the ration reaches the bulk of dry-season returnees promptly on arrival before the cultivation season would make it as useful as a larger

³¹ See also Harragin and Chol (1999: 73), Maxwell, Sim and Mutonyi (2006: 34), Maxwell and Burns (2008: 17).

ration later on. This supports previous recommendations from studies on food assistance in Southern Sudan.³² Other potential areas to explore are the composition of rations, local purchase (which is already being pursued by WFP) and the use of cash and vouchers.

- *Stay focused on vulnerability and supporting livelihoods.* WFP, like many other aid agencies, is looking to make a clean break from how aid was provided during the war, and 'getting away from dependency' is sometimes part of this logic. However, WFP should keep its focus on reducing vulnerability and protecting livelihoods, and should not base recruitment and organisational decisions primarily on

³² See Collinson (2003).

getting away from the past 'era'. Otherwise, it will find itself without institutional memory.

- *Promote dialogue on dependency.* WFP should use this report as an opportunity to promote informed dialogue about concerns that relief tools such as emergency food aid could cause (or are causing) dependency; to listen to concerns of agencies and governments; to discuss different understandings of dependency, and the extent to which concerns about dependency inform the decision-making of individuals and organisations; and to share the evidence in this report and others that dependency is not actually the problem that it is often assumed to be in Southern Sudan.

Annex 1: Study methodology

The fieldwork for the study was conducted during November 2008 concurrently in Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Jonglei, two states of Southern Sudan that received large numbers of returnees since the signing of the CPA. The states saw heavy fighting during two decades of war and today economic conditions for receiving and reintegrating returnees remain difficult. Each of the two study teams was made up of one ODI researcher and two to four national and international members from WFP Southern Sudan (Juba office, Aweil sub-office, and Bor sub-office). One team conducted the field research in Northern Bahr el Ghazal on 12–24 November (in Aweil East, Aweil West, and Aweil North counties); the second conducted the field research in Jonglei on 12–26 November. Interviews were conducted in Juba with staff and representatives from the government, donors, UN agencies and NGOs. The field research was facilitated by various NGOs, notably the International Rescue Committee, Save the Children, Pact and IOM. Staff from the IRC and IOM participated in the research in Northern Bahr el Ghazal.

The research approach is qualitative, based on a review of available secondary data, interviews and focus group discussions. The analytical framework for addressing the issue of food aid dependency has been informed by *Food Aid and Dependency: Implications for Emergency Food Security Assessments* (Lentz, Barrett and Hoddinott, 2005) and *Dependency and Humanitarian Relief: A Critical Analysis* (Harvey and Lind, 2005). The *Adapted Sustainable Livelihoods Framework in Situations of Conflict and Political Instability* (see Annex 2) was developed by HPG in 2003 and builds on DFID's sustainable livelihoods framework;³³ the framework also guided the study approach. The livelihoods model provides an entry point for understanding the wider dynamics around reintegration and food aid dependency, including government policy, agency policy and practice, traditional institutions and markets as well as processes such as economic trends and security. This model has been used successfully to inform the methodology of HPG reintegration

³³ See Pantuliano, Buchanan-Smith and Murphy (2007) and Pantuliano et al. (2008)

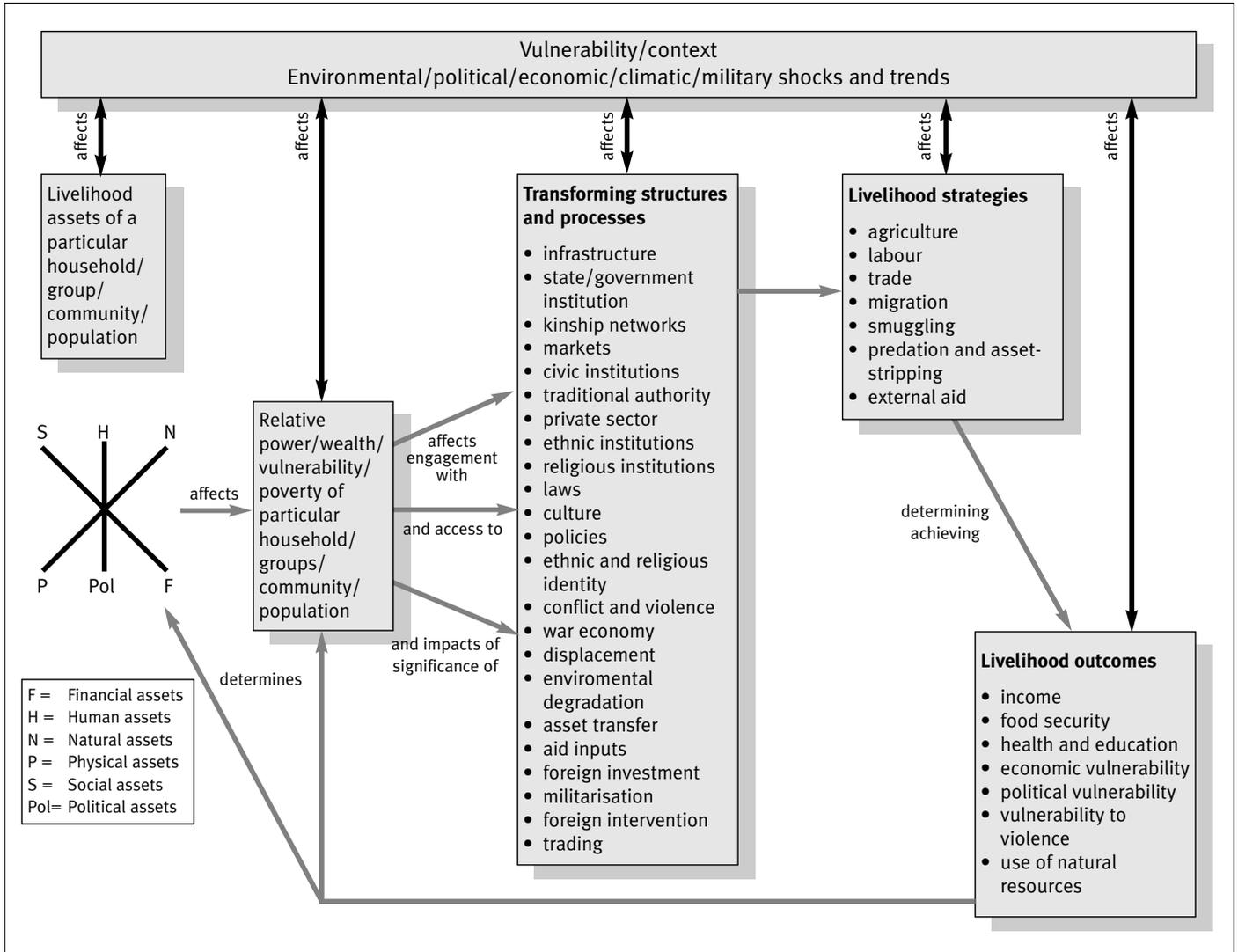
studies carried out in Sudan and designed to explore key factors of successful reintegration.³⁴

Individual interviews and focus group discussions were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire and checklist. Focus groups were typically divided among different categories of returnees and residents (women and men, recipients and non-recipients of food aid, youth and different livelihood groups). The groups and individuals were interviewed about their livelihood strategies, how people met their basic needs, what community and other support they received, how livelihood strategies have changed as a result of high levels of return to Southern Sudan and their main concerns related to the return process. Returnees and residents were asked about their experiences receiving food aid: if and when they had received it, how much they received, how they used the food, how it has supported meeting basic needs and livelihoods, challenges in accessing food aid, and factors limiting its impact. The phenomenon of 'dependency' was studied through (often subtle) probing in the light of the above answers, and the topic was addressed directly with officials from government and aid agencies. Those who participated in discussions were made aware that the researchers were not there to register people for assistance and that speaking to the team was voluntary. Leaders and key informants (e.g. teachers) were also interviewed about reintegration issues and the experience with food assistance in their areas.

There are evident constraints to conducting a study in the vast and diverse context of Southern Sudan. First, severe flooding limited the movements of the team in Jonglei. Second, it is difficult to represent adequately the many varied scenarios to which people have returned. Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Jonglei are only two states within Southern Sudan. Third, the research teams faced a common issue in areas where people have been subjected to multiple assessments and studies that rarely result in them actually receiving assistance. Populations use the opportunity to highlight their needs, expecting that the information will potentially impact future food programming.

³⁴ See Pantuliano, Buchanan-Smith and Murphy (2007) and Pantuliano et al. (2008).

Annex 2: Livelihoods framework



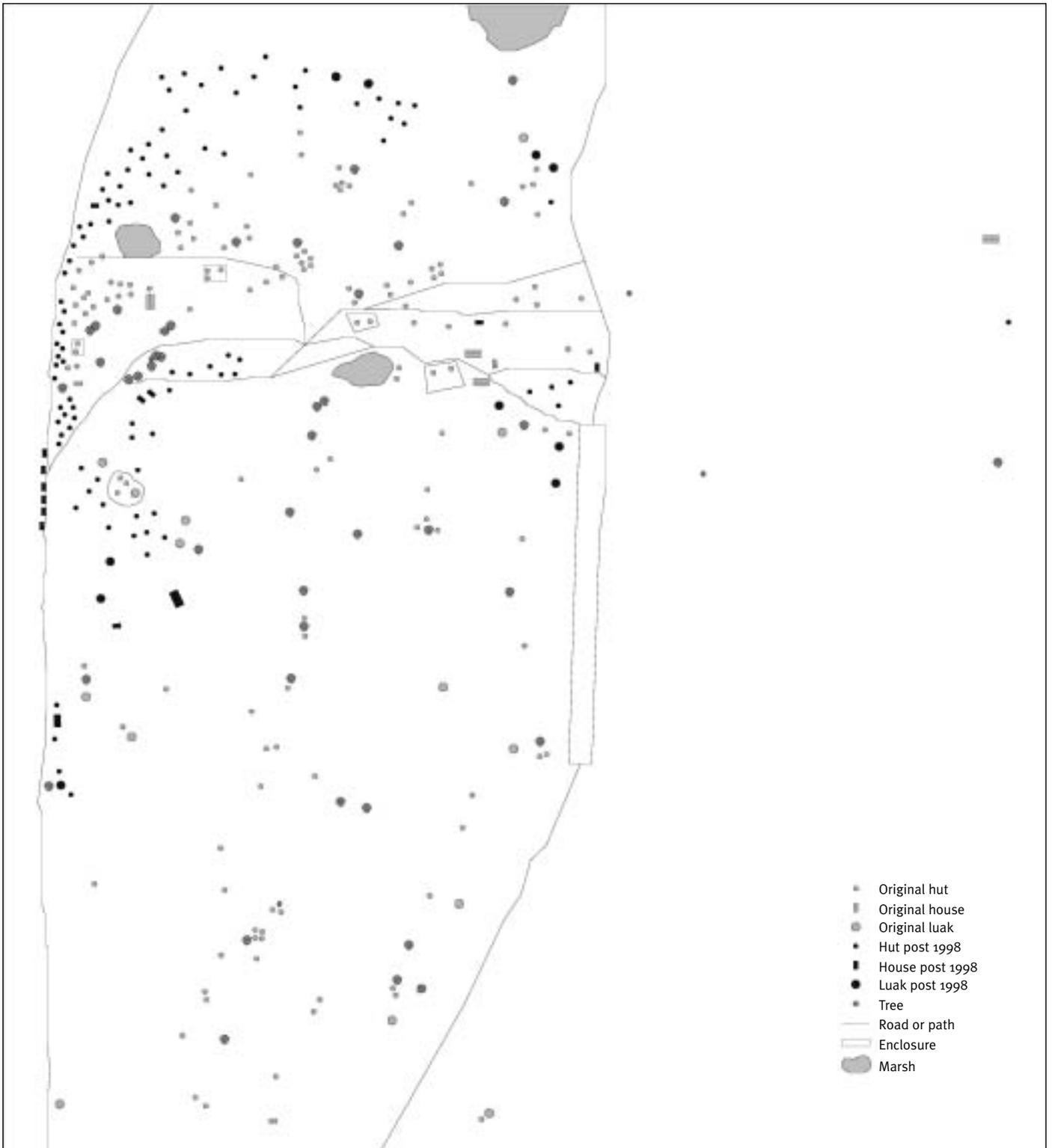
Source: Collinson, 2003: 20.

Annex 3: Maps

Paliau 1998



Paliau 2008



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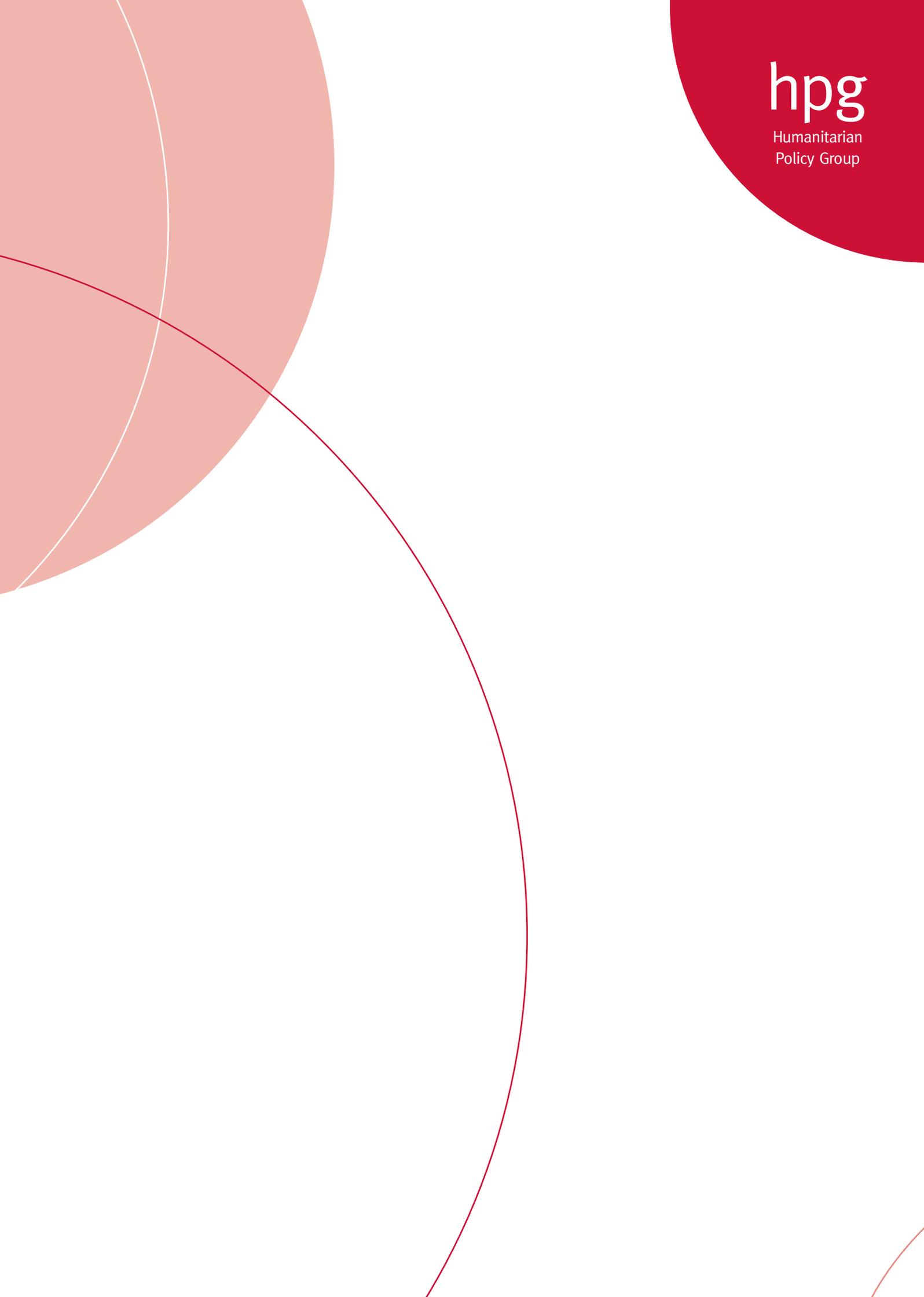
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