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Effecting Self-Sufficiency Through Food Aid in South Sudan: The Challenges of International Bureaucratic Humanitarian Relief

On January 9, an international milestone for ethnic identity-based government began in South Sudan with the start of a referendum on independence. The results were astonishing. Though affirmation of secession was widely expected, the 98.83% of voters who voted in favor of independence reflected an unexpectedly high level of enthusiasm (South 1). The enthusiasm, analysts were later to say, came from a populace ready for change, and one which hungered for an increased standard of living. Though three decades of conflict which rendered 4 million displaced and 2 million dead are now over, food security in South Sudan as a result of conflict and as a cause of conflict continues to threaten the integrity of the recently independent South Sudan (Background 3). Several transnational organizations have been highly involved in the effort to revitalize the devastated region, including the World Food Programme, the United Nations Commission for Human Rights, and other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). But with millennium development goals of hunger eradication set by the United Nations for 2015, the world community has a large task in front of itself should it seek to comply with these goals. South Sudan's conflict-based food insecurity can be improved by international aid in several ways. South Sudan needs increased food distribution efficiency, and it needs more long-term approaches from its NGO beneficiaries.

The path to food insecurity in South Sudan has been a long one. With the Second Sudanese Civil War which began in 1983, economic devastation was wrought across the area. The Northern government has used food deprivation as a war tactic, something which greatly inhibits enemy progress. The government sold grain reserves starting in 1990 to help finance the burden of war, but did nothing to replace reserves which were based mainly in the South, instead neglecting to declare a food emergency and refusing international aid to the region. In this capacity, the government of Khartoum used malnourishment from the resulting famine to weaken its enemy, in the process eliminating many of the food industry infrastructure in the South (Teodosijević 18). Not only were conditions of malnutrition worsening, but the implements by which the South could rectify its food security were being destroyed. This provides the foundation of food insecurity for South Sudan today.

Agricultural and Food Conditions: Post-acute phase - Present

The agricultural industry of South Sudan is one of great diversity due to varying ecosystems. In the South, farmers grow several principle crops, most notably sorghum, maize, millet, and cassava. Because of dry conditions, the soil in South Sudan is ideal for sorghum growth. In addition, on the northern fringes of South Sudan there are vast fields for sesame production (SOUTH 2). Additionally, Southern Sudanese farmers maintain self-sufficiency when possible through the keeping of livestock. Sheep and cattle are the most important members of this category. Hides of wet salted cattle constituted the seventh highest exported commodity in Sudan in 2008, despite subsistence-only practices common throughout tribes which revere cattle (SOUTH 2). Agriculture was difficult to maintain after war rendered corresponding infrastructure obsolete. ZOA Refugee Care estimated approximately 5.5 million refugees forced to flee their farming implements throughout the Civil War, and who are returning slowly to their homeland (North 1). Agricultural maintenance is sporadic at best.

After the acute phase of food insecurity, which occurred during the war, returning farmers had neither the plowing systems nor the necessary implements for agricultural subsistence. Starting farm sizes rarely extended beyond 20-30 meters in length (SOUTH 2). Larger farms were around 4.7 hectares on average,

with the average family size around 13 (Debrah et. al 4). Aid-provided tools were inadequate in the post-acute phase of the food crisis. As an example, push-hoes, in order to be used, had to be drastically altered by blacksmiths, who often times lacked the raw materials to make their own tools. Education levels severely inhibit good farming practices; many farmers use scorched-earth tactics in their agricultural techniques, and have not had proper training in farming systems most suitable to the conditions of the region in which they farm (Thompson 1).

Malnutrition and International Response

Severe acute malnutrition oscillates around 20% of the population, a major setback to the necessary labor for infrastructure renewal. In response to the severe malnutrition rates and the necessity for food aid, a conglomeration of several NGOs and transnational nonprofits came together to form Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS). The origins of OLS are surrounded by Southern Sudanese food emergencies, with its foundations in 1989 with a famine killing 250,000 (Minear, Abuam IX). As a consortium of NGOs and UN affiliates, OLS has since then brought around 360,000 tons of food to the region, saving thousands of lives (Bertini 1). OLS's services were not limited to food aid; indeed, its primary focus was keeping communities provided with basic relief services ranging from health care, safe water, and emergency supplies. In 1998, OLS was able to offer services to around 4 million people in South Sudan (Thompson 1-3). OLS was limited in its ability to deliver aid by insurgents who would not allow for the safe passage of the aid itself (Minear, Abuam 8). However, the limitations of OLS stem from its mandate. As a relief service, OLS focuses mainly on immediate relief in emergency situations for South Sudan. However, it does little to focus on long-term causes and prevention of food emergencies. Critics of the program advise increased attention to curing the causal relationships between conflict and food crises.

As a result of limited food aid programs, the conditions for food insecurity in South Sudan are still ripe for the emergence of crises. Increased food security is contingent upon the food relief services. In the run-up to the crisis in 1998, NGOs and the UN failed to anticipate the crisis and failed to preposition aid and bulk items for efficient relief efforts. As in Bahr al-Ghazal, a state in the north of South Sudan, OLS set up many stations for emergency relief throughout the area. A majority of internally displaced persons (IDPs) congregated in highly dense areas, creating problems mainly in sanitation and in crime. With the chaos from these more dense areas, proximity to disease increased, and health services were overwhelmed. Similarly, food aid packages were difficult to deliver to those in need because of widespread looting patterns throughout the region (Thompson 1-3).

However, after violence decreased and a 2005 peace agreement was signed between the northern government in Khartoum and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) in the south, food security increased slightly (Though 1). In many areas, the status of food emergency was upgraded from that of acute to secure. However, there were still areas in the northeast and in the state of Bahr al-Ghazal where food security remained an emergency (Thompson 1-3). It was not international coordination which was the primary executor in facilitating a faster food aid delivery. It was the fact that deliveries were now being made in more peacetime areas than in conflict zones. A lack of violence enabled food aid, whereas the goal of international food aid should be to provide said aid and access to nutrition *in* such times of violence. After all, it is the violence which necessitates the aid in some regions, anyway.

Recent Developments in Food Security

More recently, food security in the region has worsened. In January of 2010, food security was downgraded in a majority of the eastern portion of southern Sudan. It was predicted that this food security would only last until the end of the sorghum-growing cycle, when harvests would be exhausted and irrigation systems limited. In addition, it was reported that 350,000-400,000 were displaced in 2009 due to ethnic infighting between the Murle pastoralists and the Nuer, straining food security due to the

subsequent chaos and mismanagement of resources. The independence of South Sudan, which was voted on by a 99% majority in a January referendum, was expected to decrease conflict, and therefore decrease the number of IDPs, and subsequently the amount of necessary food aid (SOUTH 1). However, Reuters reported on April 27, 2011, that the World Food Programme was forced to halt its food aid efforts after one of its staffers was killed in attacks between the north and the south in the Jonglei region. This forced the WFP's largest food aid mission in the world to be halted temporarily. The rekindled violence was spurred by a desire for coveted oil reserves in the south. Another reason presented for the WFP's project suspension in the South Sudan was because a Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) lorry commandeered a truck full of food aid meant for schools (Clarke 1).

General Constraints on Food Aid

It would appear that food aid to South Sudan is largely ineffective so long as the roots of conflict are still in place. Should the WFP seek a more long-lasting solution to food insecurity in South Sudan, it must implement more causally oriented programming. At current, no amount of food aid to South Sudan can effectively place Southern Sudanese with the necessary tools and infrastructure to be able to obtain self-sufficiency. As conflict escalates; indeed, President Omar al-Bashir of Khartoum has threatened civil war, so does the inefficiency of food aid, preventing the access to sources of nutrition to an already harvest-lacking population in the south. Mary Daniel lives in Ezo, an area of Western South Sudan. She states that due to recruitment efforts by the Lord's Resistance Army of Sudan (LRA), farmers have vanished and chaos has erupted throughout the region. As farmers become more scared to begin agricultural endeavors, food security decreases (Mulama 1). Reducing conflict and/or creating stronger coordination in food aid efforts would be able to increase access to food aid packages for the people of South Sudan, providing immediate relief. More long-term approaches could provide long-term relief and sustenance. Contingency planning coordinated by a multinational effort is key to the solution.

Solutions

First, better coordination at the time of the actual violent crisis is necessary to provide better immediate aid. Often, food is available to the population at large, but due to widespread looting, as soon as the food packages have left their original place of storage, it is often predestined for inaccurate targets. Closer monitoring of food distribution at the centers for distribution would improve this discrepancy of food targets. Additionally, increased supervision of household food security and management of nutrition levels would do wonders in improving the average household's food security and coping capacity for the various risks associated with conflict in the region (Child). This could potentially be done by allotting more personnel to the region, with more security as well so as to bring a semblance of stability to the region. More personnel who are able to teach basic agricultural ideas and who are able to simultaneously distribute aid and supervise homegrown progress can help to encourage self-sustenance in the future.

Simultaneously, more coordinated preparedness needs to be ensured for better efficiency in future food aid delivery systems. In times of food emergencies in South Sudan, a lack of administrative cohesion led to a prolonged crisis. NGOs and governmental agencies need to be on the page, for lack of a better term. The World Food Programme's initiatives need to be more communicative with local agencies for easier distribution and less bureaucratic red tape. Inherent to bureaucracy is the idea that predictability is necessary. But food aid needs to be accepted as a fairly unanticipated process, which means that better plans need to be in place (Waters 30). More food supplies and transportation systems need to be in place near and surrounding the potential regions of conflict for easier access to routes of transport and therefore faster delivery and efficiency. This can happen with better contingency planning which can be begun at a much earlier time, with more funds allotted to preparing items on the periphery of the conflict zone.

A better nutritional package can also ensure greater health to the targets of food aid programs. In previous food emergencies, there were deficiencies in oil and vegetable pulses, creating an imbalance nutritionally. Since it is malnutrition which is the illness in question which needs a cure, simply providing food will not suffice. The only counter effect to malnutrition is a more balanced and complete nutrition, which can be provided with more closely monitored and more varied options for food packages provided by NGOs and other food aid programs. Recently a report released said that U.S. food aid needed vitamin fortifications to be increased, as well as dairy supplements, citing that the nutritional value was too low (U.S. 1-2).

While these operations are useful in times of crisis, more thorough food aid programs are necessary for curing the perpetuation of food insecurity to future generations of Southern Sudanese. A main complaint by Southern Sudanese farmers throughout times of food insecurity and in eras of hunger was a dearth of proper seeds (Thompson 1-3). A lack of seeds simply means lower crop yields in an already abysmally impoverished area. Better and more proper tools are also necessary. It has been previously stated that conflict in South Sudan has disrupted the agricultural infrastructure of the region. A part of rebuilding infrastructure and the overall archetypal farm requires the usage of adequate tools. Often times farmers are equipped with the wrong sorts of plows or are not equipped with tools at all (Debrah et. al 7). Food aid programs can encourage household food security first and foremost as a stepping stone for societal food security by providing access to these agricultural implements. Another source of long-term success both agriculturally and financially could be secured through the provisions of increased livestock by food aid programs.

Another way in which the average household's food security can be improved upon by food aid programming is through improving diversification of resources and of relationships. Surpluses of food can be easily traded throughout the region to increase income flow and therefore encourage growth and confidence. Extending household planting beyond one crop and extending past sorghum and millet and maize creates less of a risk due to varied plant needs. These actions can be encouraged through teaching efforts from disaster-handling organizations and food security efforts from various NGOs and administrative teams (Thompson 7-9). Additionally, microcredit is a viable and proven solution. With a small cash startup which bypasses bureaucracy, women and men are able to begin investing in livestock or crops which give them a surplus and leads them to economic success (Success 1).

Investing in educational efforts is a keystone concept of food security development. As food insecurity and hunger is often a source of conflict and tension, as resource inequality encourages violence, putting money and capital into efforts such as these would make great bounds in the long term approach to ending food insecurity in South Sudan. Though poverty and hunger rates fell from 46% in 1990 to 27% in 2005, in Sub-Saharan Africa, of which South Sudan is a part, rates fell from 58% to 51% (We...). There is clearly a long way to go to eradicate extreme hunger and poverty, one of the Millennium Development Goals, in South Sudan. However, the World Food Programme and other NGOs have a wonderful opportunity in South Sudan because of decreasing violence and increasing coordination of food aid efforts.

Conclusion

Through increased investments in educational programming for South Sudanese agronomists, doubled efforts at preparedness and more closely supervised food aid centers and a better data-based knowledge and tracking of food aid packages, international food aid programs can look forward to successful prospects in South Sudan, by increasing immediate readiness and overall decreasing the probability for such a need of food aid to arise. Though the Millennium Development Goals may be lofty ones, recent years' improvements due to food aid of food security in South Sudan have indicated widespread progress in the region. These policy changes suggested above can increase the coping capacity for the average family and the overall household food security levels throughout the country.

As South Sudan prepares for its July independence, critics have become more and more worrisome about the livelihoods of some of the world's poorest residents. They point to increasing drought levels, a lack of confidence by foreign investors, and ethnic conflicts among the various tribes of the south, as being indicative of an abysmal future for South Sudan. However, that simply isn't the case. Improvements for South Sudan's household food security and subsequently its people's livelihoods, are clearly on the horizon with policy changes such as the aforementioned in mind. More administrative cohesion between the varying food aid factions, increased proximity of food supplies, and increases in investment in agricultural education and infrastructural installments will make a world of difference for the people of South Sudan. Not only do the people of South Sudan deserve food security, a life lived without the concern of perpetual hunger, but through the international community's actions, this kind of a life can be easily achieved in the future.

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