

## **THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF HUMANITARIAN AID AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PEACE MEDIATION: THE CASE OF SOUTH SUDAN**

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### **INSTITUTIONAL LEAD**

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### **MODERATOR**

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### **OVERVIEW**

This session explored the interaction between humanitarian operations and mediation efforts in South Sudan and the impact of aid on the political economy of conflict. It examined issues such as: (a) the extent to which the aid operation in South Sudan affects the legitimacy of political and military actors; (b) whether aid has been instrumentalized by the warring parties in support of their political and military strategies; (c) which strategies for collective diplomatic action have succeeded in addressing efforts at political manipulation; and (d) whether concern about retribution against aid staff by belligerents has led to international reticence to exert the political pressure required to advance a sustainable political settlement.

### **FOCUS**

The session focused on larger lessons for both the diplomatic and humanitarian communities about effectively navigating the challenging dynamics of peace processes in the context of large-scale humanitarian emergencies.

### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

It is unavoidable that humanitarian aid has political consequences because the allocation and distribution shapes power dynamics between international and local actors on the ground.

Accountability for aid effectiveness tends to be upwards to donors rather than downwards to air recipients. To address this asymmetry, donors and humanitarian partners must integrate political economy and conflict analysis into their operational planning. They must also draw upon local experiences and knowledge to adapt the use of humanitarian aid to different contexts and minimize the potential harm due to an emphasis on the speed and quantity of aid delivered rather than the quality of that aid.

Safe spaces for sustained inclusive dialogues among donors, humanitarians, local communities and other stakeholders are essential for ensuring that humanitarian principles are respected equally and that the complexities of the humanitarian environment are addressed rather than ignored.

There is a need for long-term planning of humanitarian aid operations. The constraints for humanitarian aid workers to work cost-efficiently and show positive results within a short time frame has a negative effect on the ability to help populations in the long term. Moreover, there is a need for short turn-over of personnel to allow aid workers to develop an understanding of the local context.

The indicators that are used by the humanitarian aid community to measure success must therefore be reconsidered. Measuring success by the amount of money spent on aid or the quantity of food delivered is inadequate in tracking effectiveness over time, particularly in an environment such as South Sudan where, despite a peace agreement, the humanitarian emergency persists unabated.

## SESSION QUOTES

'Aid is not a bad thing. It is the way it is managed'

## RESOURCE LINKS AND DOCUMENTS

Maxwell, D. et al., *Constraints and Complexities of Information Analysis in Humanitarian Emergencies: Evidence from South Sudan* (Tufts University, Feinstein International Center: Somerville, MA, July 2018), <<https://fic.tufts.edu/publication-item/identify-famine-south-sudan/>>.

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Sullivan, D. P., *Displaced Nation: The Dangerous Implications of Rushed Returns in South Sudan* (Refugees International: Washington, DC, Nov. 2018), <<https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2018/11/29/displaced-nation-the-dangerous-implications-of-rushed-returns-in-south-sudan>>.

Yayboke, E., *Accessing South Sudan: Humanitarian Aid in a Time of Crisis* (Center for Strategic and International Studies: Washington, DC, Nov. 2018), <<https://www.csis.org/analysis/accessing-south-sudan-humanitarian-aid-time-crisis>>.



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