



Perspectives on Rural Recovery and Agricultural Rehabilitation in Post-conflict Southern Sudan

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Abstract

Numerous attempts have been made by aid agencies and policy makers in the Government of South Sudan (GOSS) to address food security issues in post-conflict Southern Sudan. Most of the attempts seem not be addressing the immediate needs of the local farmers. This paper attempts to examine the approaches of aid agencies and GOSS policy makers toward rural recovery and rehabilitation of agriculture. Based on investigations and findings undertaken between September – November 2006 in southern Sudan, aiming to “map food security and natural resources management”, it was found that much effort was exerted towards seed aid with little regard to promoting local agricultural production to enhance consumption, infrastructure and market linkages. There is a lack of institutional capacity coupled with continuous change of policies in GOSS. The new policy of GOSS towards rehabilitation of agriculture is in two phases: Phase I includes development and increase of agricultural production to meet internal food needs, and Phase II focuses on increasing production of surplus agricultural commodities for domestic, regional and international markets. These policies are not consistent with agricultural rehabilitation programs and rural development, and have shown little impact in both rural and urban areas. For agricultural production and marketing to succeed it should be supported by a sound policy framework involving all the relevant GOSS institutions. The paper advocates increased involvement of the private sector in provision of agricultural services, and allowing more freedom for research operations and extension services, so that the long run objectives of sustainable food security and economic growth can be realized in Southern Sudan.

Key words: Southern Sudan, agriculture, recovery, services, policies.

Background and institutional setting	decades of protracted war requires more than
Agricultural rehabilitation in regions like	mere distribution of seed aid and farm tools.
Southern Sudan that are emerging from	Such effort should focus on increasing

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agricultural production to enhance consumption, infrastructure and market linkages. The impact of conflict on production and markets are still being felt, even after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) on January 9, 2005. Although rehabilitation is often regarded as the process that links relief and development, this transition has been problematic in the context of southern Sudan, partly due to inadequate institutional capacity. Market linkages have remained poor due to lack of infrastructure and means of transport to link production areas to markets. Provision of easily accessible market information, either through well-developed media or transport networks, would help farmers to make better decisions based on market demand for agricultural products. Thus, as one step, improvement of the physical infrastructure in Southern Sudan will help to build a foundation for sustainable agriculture and economic growth, particularly in the rural areas.

The policy statement issued by the late Dr. John Garang after signing of the CPA clearly recognized that agriculture is the engine of the economy of Southern Sudan, and further noted that oil produced in the South should be used to fuel agricultural growth. However, the current administration has not followed up on these pre-CPA policies, including those that had been formulated by the then Secretariat of Agriculture and Animal Resources (SAAR) of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). Presently, a majority of the rural poor and the vulnerable continue to rely on non-agricultural livelihood activities such as providing hired labour and exploitation and sale of forest products, e.g. charcoal, poles, grass, etc. Nevertheless, the

potential of agriculture to contribute significantly to the development of Southern Sudan is still widely acknowledged. This contribution will depend, to a larger extent, on the intrinsic policies of GOSS that favour synergy between public institutions (research and training centers), the private sector as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to influence the potential of agriculture to produce enough to meet local needs, and a surplus that can spill over to drive rural development and feed into other sectors of the economy.

Institutions of the GOSS have existed since September 2005, but its agriculture and rural development policies are still in a formative stage. This could partly be attributed to inadequate manpower capacity at the senior management levels in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) and Ministry of Animal Resources and Fisheries (MARF), coupled with deficiencies in the requisite technical know-how. There is a perception that most administrators and policy makers in GOSS/MAF view agricultural research as a time and resource consuming activity that does not rank high in the top priority list of development strategies. Most activities of MAF have been geared towards seed aid while little attention has been paid to research and extension services, which are the prime movers of any agricultural system the world over. There seems to exist a mistaken belief that GOSS/MAF can solely and single-handedly provide numerous agricultural services, without the need to create conditions to encourage the growth of alternative service providers, including a vibrant private sector. This approach limits the options available to farmers, who have to depend on public sector agencies for many of their needs.

Policy perspectives and current interventions

The vision of the late Dr. Garang and his colleagues for the development of rural sectors was to "take town to the village". The guiding principles for this vision were: (1) to encourage rural farmers to undertake market-driven agriculture; (2) provide infrastructure and; (3) provide market information, that would create market linkages between the rural and the urban

areas, and consequently bring about economic growth and rural development. Hence, the consortium of Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) was invited to support the rehabilitation of agriculture in Southern Sudan, with its mandate being endorsed during the Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) meeting in March 2005. The JAM proposed transformation of agricultural sector and promotion of private sector

development that are central to addressing the challenges of sustainable peace and development in Southern Sudan backed by sustainable policy and program efforts. However, the implementation of this vision has considerably slowed down, partly due to changes in leadership but also due to the dominant position taken by GOSS in provision of agricultural services.

The new policy of GOSS towards rehabilitation of agriculture is split into two phases (Kenyi, 2006). Phase I includes development and increase of agricultural production to meet internal food needs, introduction of high yielding pest resistant crops and tree varieties, improved agronomic practices and soil-water management, breeding of livestock/fish tolerant to diseases and adoption of best livestock/fish feeding and management practices. Phase II focuses on increasing production of surplus agricultural commodities for domestic, regional and international markets, training farmers in marketing skills (negotiation skills, value addition, etc), and GOSS-managed safety network for emergency relief. However, nearly all of these policies have not been well understood at the level of farmers, who need to appreciate and support them to ensure success in their implementation, especially in coordinating some of the relatively simple tasks, e.g. formation of farmers associations or cooperative societies at the rural level.

One appropriate question to pose is, 'if the main objective of the GOSS is to increase agricultural production in Southern Sudan, what does this mean in operational terms, to agricultural research, extension and rural infrastructure development?' One yardstick to measure the success of government policies towards rural development is to determine whether such policies have resulted in an increase in the incomes of the rural populace. Unless the GOSS involves the private sector to provide agricultural services and, gives more freedom for research operations and extension services, it seems unlikely that in the long run the objectives of agricultural rehabilitation and rural development (taking town to village) can be realized in Southern Sudan. The continued engagement of external actors, e.g. donors, is crucial to the achievement of the desired development. Since the signing of the CPA, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), under the auspices of the Participating Agency Service Agreement (PASA) has been fully supportive, focusing on capacity building in agriculture, natural resources

management and economic development (USAID-USA PASA, 2006). In 2005, PASA's key support areas were on forestry research, research on agricultural economics, and training of ministry staff.

Vulnerability, poverty and rural needs

Upon close examination, the GOSS strategy to address rural needs and poverty alleviation in Southern Sudan reveals considerable weaknesses. For example, the definition of vulnerable groups should be broad and inclusive of subsistence farmers, the landless poor, widows and orphans of war, and returnees/displaced who are in dire need of services ranging from health to agriculture. Basic survival needs of these vulnerable categories need to consider shelter, food and water as the key priorities in the immediate aftermath of war. For agricultural recovery, and the peace, which depends on it, to be durable, lasting solutions are needed to build rural life and get farmers back in the fields. Restoring agriculture is usually the first step in creating economic growth and laying the foundation for durable peace (Ian Johnson, CGIAR chairman cited in Spore, 2005). One possibility of addressing such needs in Southern Sudan is to provide agricultural inputs to help the vulnerable find more remunerative livelihoods to reduce the poverty that may fuel frustration and anger leading to a reversion to war.

Following decades of war that limited access to technological advances in crop, livestock, fisheries and forest production, farmers generally use traditional farming methods and work in a low-level productivity trap, with very low yields and in deep chronic poverty. Their needs include agricultural technology, information, inputs, and means of production (farm implements), infrastructure, marketing and credit. A combination of research and extension services may be considered appropriate responses to these needs to integrate the delivery of services in agriculture to rural smallholders and the vulnerable.

The JAM underscored development of a credit program for small-scale farmers as key for economic recovery and development (JAM, 2005). It was assumed that such a program would not only provide grants to farmers to undertake market-driven agricultural production but also identify the potential markets for their commodities. Market-driven agriculture requires a steady supply of quality agricultural products and production costs to be sufficiently attractive for local as well as for international markets (Spore, 2005). The

experiences of USAID funded activities in Southern Sudan demonstrate that the local resources can be mobilized with some pump priming from donor to rehabilitate agriculture and redirect it toward local and regional markets (USAID-USDA PASA, 2006). In most developing economies such a strategy has led to increases in surplus agricultural production, the opening of regional trade routes for agricultural commodities and the establishment of regional commercial links among the agriculture, livestock and manufacturing sectors (Guvele, 2001). However, the lack of institutions in Southern Sudan that could efficiently deliver credit to the rural farmers in a sustainable way makes it even more difficult to plan for credit for the rural poor.

Free distribution of seed in selected areas, e.g. northern Bahr El Ghazal, Unity state, through NGOs continues to be one of the ways of increasing food security. Currently, the GOSS/MAF is also involved in importing relief seeds from different sources ranging from FAO, northern Sudan and seed companies in the neighboring countries. This has made some of the rural people, particularly in northern Bahr El Ghazal, Warrap and Unity states to become dependent on humanitarian aid. There is a real danger that such type of relief aid has created receipt dependency. This might inhibit or slow down initiatives and efforts of both GOSS and NGOs to rehabilitate agriculture in these regions once the emergency is over.

Multiple transitions

The vision of GOSS of raising incomes of the rural population through increased agricultural production and marketing of surplus produce is only the first step in the process of rural development. Once the majority of the rural population has achieved food security, they can begin to play a more active role in the planning and implementation of rural development programs. Although the prime objectives of GOSS/MAF for agricultural rehabilitation are to strengthen the organizational, institutional and policy analysis capacity within agricultural institutions for development to enhance the livelihood of the people of Southern Sudan, agricultural productivity continues to be constrained by frequent change of policies, the lack of infrastructure, market incentives, and social insecurity (particularly in the Unity, Eastern Upper Nile, Eastern Equatoria and Northern Bahr El Ghazal states). The demand for efficient services being expressed by the rural population of Southern Sudan will require the consortium of CGIAR, PASA, donors (including the

World Bank) and NGOs, to deliver rural services and to coordinate with each other in formulating programs. In turn, these agencies may exert pressure on the GOSS ministries concerned with agricultural rehabilitation and rural development to develop and coordinate policies, which could further facilitate the delivery of rural services.

In spite of the difficult task, some progress has been achieved. Since March 2006, the PASA through its USAID-USDA funds contracted three monitors for food security, IDPs and returnees in the ten states of Southern Sudan over a period of one year. The monitors are based in Malakal, Aweil and Juba, have worked in liaison with the USAID humanitarian and food security advisors. Similarly, three engineers supplied by the PASA for the WFP managed Southern Sudan road and Dyke Rehabilitation Project have provided critical input to the roads project and play a fundamental role in the project implementation and success since March 2006. The PASA has also supported an environmental impact assessment (EIA) of the Bor Dyke area, coordinated by the Center for Economic and Environmental Policy in Africa at the University of Pretoria, South Africa.

A recent study (Oyiki and Meseka, 2006) on “mapping food security and natural resources management in Southern Sudan” revealed that farmer seed systems continue to meet about 47% of the crop varietal needs in most areas in Southern Sudan. The remaining 53% are complemented by NGOs and the Government of National Unity (GONU). In Bahr El Ghazal, for example, the main sorghum varieties commonly grown by farmers include Mabior (late maturing), Bende (early maturing), Nyithin, and two flood tolerant cultivars Nyandoc and Nyanjang. Whereas the Nuer early maturing sorghum variety Akorachot (introduced from Ethiopia), was the most popular grown in Upper Nile. The World Vision International (WVI), is currently implementing three agricultural projects in Western Equatoria region on improving the production capacities, processing and marketing of the local farmers (Mbogo, 2005). The WVI is also collaborating with FAO in the provision of vegetable seeds to vulnerable farm families including the returnees.

It is clear that for agricultural production and marketing to succeed in Southern Sudan it needs to be supported by a sound policy from relevant GOSS institutions (MAF & MARF). Some of the interventions should include sustainable delivery of improved seeds, production packages, seedlings of tree plants, agricultural tools, hands-

on job training, drugs and vaccines for livestock that will enable farmers to re-establish their production capacity quickly. Other valuable contributions should include sustainable management of the environment and clearing of landmines in vast agricultural and grazing land of Southern Sudan.

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