

"Breaking the Cycle: Pursuing Sustainable Solutions for the Crisis in South Sudan"

Picture Wembley Stadium - the largest venue in the United Kingdom - packed to the brim with people. Now, picture that stadium filled not once, not twice, but over 77 times with individuals in desperate need of aid. This is the scale of the humanitarian crisis in South Sudan: two-thirds of the entire population - over 7 million people. With the lives of individuals hanging by a thread - displaced, hungry, vulnerable - intervention through foreign aid, ostensibly offered to mitigate suffering, has too often been entangled with ulterior motives: to advance countries' economic agendas and establish a philanthropic status for themselves, unnecessarily prolonging the crisis. 'Intervention' can be defined as interfering with the outcome or course, especially of a condition or process, to prevent harm or improve functioning - an altruistic gesture ("Intervention"). However, 'intervention' in conflict often overlooks the aim of ensuring its effects are truly sustainable. Despite short-term alleviation efforts, the pressing need for enduring, transformative solutions remains glaringly evident.

The crisis in South Sudan stemmed from the beginning of their independence from Sudan on 9 July, 2011. Independence was supposed to herald the birth of a nation, a beacon of hope, a supposed happy ending to a long-reigning tug of war. Yet, beneath the surface of jubilation and newfound freedom lay the stark reality of a nation torn apart by the ravages of civil war ("South Sudan Country Profile").

The civil war broke out in December 2013 when an internal political dispute between South Sudanese President Salva Kiir and then Vice President Riek Machar exploded into a lengthy ethnic conflict. Longstanding ethnic divisions within South Sudan's security forces led to the easy fragmentation of the military on each side of the dispute. Those from the Dinka ethnic group supported Kiir, while those from the Nuer ethnic group joined Machar. The conflict spread quickly, and ethnically motivated violence between the Dinka and the Nuer engulfed large parts of the country (Quarcoo). While South Sudan has been formally at peace since 2018, localised violence between rival communities with a 'winner takes it all' mentality persists in the forms of shelling and sexual violence - that is why aid is now more imperative than ever ("Fresh Fighting in South Sudan Kills 26 People, Officials Say").

Responses to the crisis are exemplified through a multitude of countries lending a hand in emergency aid - the EU has recently allocated 49.5 million euros for humanitarian aid

("South Sudan"), Sweden contributed USD 1.4 million in 2023 (Nygren), and other countries such as the United States, Norway, and the United Kingdom continue to pour money into South Sudan without adequate planning on what it will be used for ("History"). While organisations such as Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust, International Rescue Committee, and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees collaborate with local entities to assist at a grassroots level, it remains inadequate. Despite the influx of aid, the crisis persists unabated; attaining a long-term solution appears increasingly elusive due to the perpetuation of this relentless cycle.

However, the opportunities for international intervention are countless - a long-term plan must be devised to set South Sudan on the right track to prosperity. A strategic approach involves addressing this issue from two fronts: economically and socially, targeting each barrier separately. Rather than the mere provision of 'aid', organisations and countries must give their assistance a purpose to ensure aid is placed in the right hands and allocated towards essential priorities. Economically, support must focus on building new infrastructure to create jobs and stimulate growth - only by doing so can one be truly liberated from the shackles of poverty. Socially, investment needs to be focused on healthcare and education. Investing in healthcare can significantly reduce the currently poor health indicators and high rates of preventable deaths, cultivating a more productive and capable workforce (Lajul and Morton). Alongside that, investing in education can facilitate greater access to learning for the population, equipping them with valuable skills for work. These fronts are intrinsically interconnected; targeting aid allocation into a specific front can positively ripple effects across both areas.

The term 'intervention' holds the promise of mitigating harm and fostering improvement, yet its application in conflict zones like South Sudan often deviates from its noble intent. The challenge of providing assistance lies in the inability to see what countries truly need. Intervention must avoid symbolic gestures that will land them the latest headlines and engage in long-term rebuilding. We can only truly help South Sudan reclaim its rightful path to prosperity and peace through sustained and strategic intervention, fulfilling the aspirations envisioned in its independence and making taxpayers' money worth it. It's time to move beyond rhetoric and confront the harsh reality with unwavering resolve. For the people of South Sudan, aid isn't just a statistic; it is the difference between life and death, prosperity and destitution.

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