SOUTH SUDAN – THE UNSEEN EMERGENCY?

Introduction

At the beginning of 2015 two humanitarian crises dominate the world's headlines. They are the deepening and extremely violent conflicts in Iraq[1] and Syria, and the Ebola public health crisis in West Africa.[2]

In the meantime, the world's largest aid operation is taking place in South Sudan, where millions of people are experiencing the most severe hunger crisis on the globe. The scale of suffering and violence in South Sudan is extreme. However, without media coverage, this emergency goes largely 'unseen,' and, without a higher global profile, there is a risk of too little being done too late to address the emergency. This resource aims to throw light on one of the world's 'unseen emergencies', promote critical thinking and asks young people to raise awareness of South Sudan's crisis.

Internally Displaced Person (IDP) Camp in Bor, South Sudan.
Photo: Kieran Doherty/Oxfam

On 9 July 2011 there were jubilant celebrations across South Sudan as the world's newest country gained independence from Sudan. South Sudan possesses enormous potential with 70% of its land suitable for agriculture and large reserves of oil. However, the Sudanese Civil War between 1985 and 2005 had brought destruction and human displacement on a vast scale, disrupted markets and led to a lack of investment in infrastructure and public services.[3] The country faced daunting security and development challenges right from Independence Day.

---

[1] http://bit.ly/11FlGWZ
[2] http://bit.ly/1HNCM5Z
[3] http://bit.ly/1y9dvPw pg6

OXFAM

Sign warning of unexploded munitions next to farmland
Photo: Kieran Doherty/Oxfam

The international community had viewed the long-running civil wars in Sudan as primarily a conflict between the 'Muslim north' and the 'Christian south.'[4] Therefore, at the time of independence attention focused on addressing outstanding issues and repairing relations between Sudan and the newly independent South Sudan, and on building the institutions of the new state. Far less attention was given to resolving local conflicts within South Sudan, tackling the proliferation of arms or providing basic services for all of South Sudan's people. These issues pose challenging questions about international support and the focus on state building at the expense of reconciliation and nation building.

On December 15 2013 new fighting erupted in Juba, South Sudan's capital, between soldiers loyal to President Salva Kiir and those loyal to his former deputy Riek Machar. Violence quickly spread across the country.[56] What started as a political dispute between the two leaders quickly turned in to a conflict with ethnic dimensions. Despite this, many South Sudanese people risked their lives to protect their fellow citizens from across ethnic divides.[7] Although there have been repeated attempts at peacemaking, the military conflict was continuing in November 2014.[8]

The resurgence of violence in an already fragile new nation had devastating effects. In November 2014, 1.44 million people had been internally displaced by fighting and a further 474,000 had become refugees in neighbouring countries[9]. In South Sudan, and most other locations of forced migration, the vast majority of affected people become internally displaced within their own countries with a much smaller number becoming refugees in neighbouring countries and very few arriving in Western countries. Of the world's refugees, 86% settle in developing countries, up from 70% ten years ago.[10]

---

[4] For a critique of how the international community has framed Sudan's crises see Mahmood Mamdani's 'Saviours and Survivors: Darfur, Politics and the War on Terror' (Pantheon Books – 2009)
[5] http://bbc.in/1bDxVkz
[6] http://bbc.in/1bDxVkz
[7] http://bit.ly/1HSif0i
[8] http://bbc.in/1tEv047
[9] . http://bit.ly/1ybFteN
[10] http://bit.ly/1bRcqkj

The violence has severely disrupted crop planting, trade routes and markets. By the end of September 2014, 1.5 million people are severely food insecure even at the height of the harvest season - and 2.5 million people are predicted to be severely food insecure by March 2015. If the conflict continues up to 6.4 million people, that's half the country's population, could be in need of humanitarian assistance.[11] Malnutrition, particularly among children, has reached 'dire' levels.[12] The food emergency is not completely due to violence, but the conflict and displacement has exacerbated already high levels of food insecurity, and the most food insecure people can be found in conflict-affected areas. In 2013 South Sudan spent 55% of its budget on security and law enforcement, 6% on health and education and only 0.7% on agriculture.[13] In addition extreme weather, particularly flooding during the rainy season, has most severely affected agriculture in the areas hosting the largest numbers of displaced people.[14]

Sun rise over Mingkaman. Photo: Mackenzie Knowles Coursin/Oxfam

The international response to this triple crisis of violence, forced migration and food emergency has undoubtedly had a significant and positive impact.[15] However it has also raised critical questions about how the global community responds to emergencies in fragile and conflict affected states.

One model sees the primary priorities beginning with emergency humanitarian aid, progressing alongside and through a phase of peace building and finally concentrating on long-term development once peace is established.[16] This linear model has been questioned by many experts. They suggest that delivering humanitarian aid and development together is an important precondition of peace building and that the voices and active support of those who have not resorted to violence or represent the elite should be given much greater prominence beyond seeing them as 'victims' or 'beneficiaries'.[17]

---

[11] http://bit.ly/1yGxbu3
[12] http://bit.ly/1y9dvPw pg8
[13] http://bit.ly/1y9dvPw pg 6
[14] http://bit.ly/12kCN0r pg4
[15] http://bit.ly/1y9dvPw pg13
[16] http://bit.ly/1wUS3hP
[17] http://bit.ly/1B799vl

OXFAM

Measuring global 'peacefulness' is a controversial question, let alone considering how to achieve peace. One assumption is that the world has become more peaceful following the carnage of two world wars during the last century. However, the Global Peace Index claims the world has actually become less peaceful since 2007, with only 11 nations judged totally free from conflict.[18] If this is the case it poses urgent questions about how the world community responds to humanitarian crises in the world's least peaceful nations; Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Iraq, Somalia, Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This resource asks young people to consider these questions.

Curriculum making

UNCHR – 'Facts and Figures about Refugees' http://bit.ly/1bRcqkj
This website provides useful global facts about Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Internally Displaced People (IDPs)

UNCHR – 'South Sudan Situation – UNCHR Regional Update' http://bit.ly/1w4LBn1
Numbers of IDPs and Refugees affected by a crisis change from month to month and quickly become out of date. The numbers used in this resource were accurate in November 2014. To find out up to date statistics locate the most recent 'South Sudan Situation – UNCHR Regional Update' report on the UNCHR website.

Guardian Global Development – South Sudan page http://bit.ly/18WPQFK
The Guardian provides regularly updated news stories from South Sudan and maintains a useful archive. The BBC provides a historical overview and a similar archive at http://bbc.in/1dM3P3Q

IPC – 'Evidence and Standards for Better Food Security Decisions' - http://bit.ly/1wnCQGG
Food security issues are frequently presented in highly technical terms. The IPC follows this practice, but its reports do present accessible overviews of the numbers of people facing food insecurity. These numbers will change over time, so check for the most recent South Sudan report.

Oxfam - 'Improving the Safety of Civilians: A protection training pack' (2008) - http://bit.ly/1FNQcwW
This pack was designed to train workers responding to overseas humanitarian emergencies. However many activities, such as the 'Vulnerability Game on pgs 59-68, could be sensitively adapted for UK classroom use.

Oxfam schools resources on conflict - http://bit.ly/1yPl7H4

Oxfam schools resources on food - http://bit.ly/12hV8LL

Oxfam Educational Guide to Fundraising http://bit.ly/1rTo3C2

---

[18] http://ind.pn/VnySwB

OXFAM

Background reading

Oxfam – 'Getting it Right from the Start: Priorities for action in the new Republic of South Sudan' (2011) http://bit.ly/1vn5Tlt briefing paper

Oxfam – 'From Crisis to Catastrophe: South Sudan's man-made crisis – and how the world must act now to prevent catastrophe in 2015' (2014) http://bit.ly/1w6kyXe briefing note

Oxfam – 'Above & Beyond: Voices of Hope from South Sudan' (2014) http://oxf.am/B9F
This illustrated report contains powerful personal testimonies from the many South Sudanese who helped those from ethnic groups different from their own during the current conflict.

Mahmood Mamdani 'Saviours and Survivors: Darfur, Politics and the War on Terror' (Pantheon Books – 2009) book.
Mahmood Mamdani's thought provoking book is about Darfur, not South Sudan. However it throws light on the complexity of Sudan's conflicts and the potential damage done by Western nations and NGOs interpreting the conflicts in over-simplistic terms.

Terms of use

OXFAM