South Kordofan and Blue Nile, Sudan 2010-15: Experiences with local and global responses to protection crises

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L2GP is an initiative, which works to promote effective, efficient and sustainable responses and solutions to humanitarian and protection crises with an explicit focus on enabling locally-led responses.

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Executive Summary

This paper reflects on the range of experiences of conflict-affected communities and international agencies responding to four years of devastating civil war in the South Kordofan and Southern Blue Nile regions of Sudan. The case study remains significant as an example of what can happen when international aid mechanisms (i.e. UN, bilateral and INGOs) do not formally respond to severe and protracted humanitarian and protection humanitarian crises. The paper aims to improve understanding of options and approaches available to organisations seeking to help populations to protect themselves when faced with armed conflict.

Following a brief introduction to the context, the paper describes the range of local initiatives and indigenous capacities that help local populations respond to the crises. A number of underlying attributes influence the degree to which the affected populations are able to respond to the crises:

i. the level of social solidarity and culture of sharing and self-help
ii. the environmental potential to allow physical protection and adaptive livelihoods (coupled with the extent of relevant indigenous knowledge of the local environment)
iii. the strength of (and space and resources for) genuine civil society initiative and action
iv. the level of 'good governance' and integrity amongst local duty bearers and leaders to respond to protection needs, prioritise public service delivery and walk-the-talk of accountability
v. the strength of markets and opportunities for continuing trade
vi. the opportunities for cross-conflict dialogue and local-level peace-building
vii. the strength of networks, connections and the ability to communicate with the outside world

These aspects of social protection can serve as a good entry point for both local and external actors to consider what more can be done to strengthen local civilian protection. It also informs a do-no-harm checklist to assess if any new intervention might inadvertently weaken one or more of these core components. Critically, they remind us of the importance of looking at protection in a holistic way, encouraging us to understand how interconnected are the different parts of the social protection/resilience system.

In Section 3, the paper summarises the experiences of trying to support and strengthen local self-protection and humanitarian responses in the extremely challenging conditions of an active war zone without negotiated access. Lessons from introducing Participatory Action Research (PAR), cash transfer programming (CTP), rapid small grants, and a range of demand-led coordination and capacity development services are shared. The means for developing mechanisms and protocols for enabling a holistic and diverse response at scale, responding rapidly to change, embracing risk, experimenting and supporting emergent ideas, strengthening accountability and doing no harm are also described.

Section 4 reflects on the general failure of international mandated agencies to respond effectively to the crises and discusses underlying reasons why this might be so. The problems resulting from lack of institutional creativity, inappropriate risk management, increasing corporate motivations and flawed peace keeping modalities and negotiation practices are discussed and options for addressing them are suggested.

The final section (5) pulls together key lessons from this and other case studies explored by L2GP to lay out an emerging practice for supporting locally-led protection responses. The section suggests that current humanitarian practice would be significantly improved by shifting its frame of reference from the current paradigm of an externally implemented- and coordinated-, UN/INGO dominated-,

response that only occasionally seeks to support local actors, to one that acknowledges the central and primary role of the autonomous response from within the affected population in all crises. It advocates support for local ownership of any humanitarian response should be the *starting point* of external intervention and not the optional consideration of "participation" that is currently the case in mainstream humanitarian programming. The role of external agencies would be to support, enable and participate in existing and emergent local responses, and fill gaps as necessary.

A combination of PAR, rapid micro-grants dispersal, CTPs (with complementary in-kind distributions if needed) and demand-led support services forms the core of an emerging practice for enabling effective local responses at scale. The core of this approach is to help an effected society rapidly understand and scale-up its own indigenous capabilities to address crisis problems, with external actors filling in gaps where necessary. The introduction of relevant mechanisms for delivering demand-led support services becomes especially important and is likely to include:

- disseminating and strengthening **existing community-based self-protection** activities that can be undertaken without external inputs and supporting the key role of women as local protection leaders and actors;
- introducing **new knowledge and skills** from outside (e.g. first aid, psycho-social healing)
- supporting continued **public service delivery** to better meet basic health, education, WASH and livelihood needs (e.g. seed, tools, livestock drugs, fishing nets);
- supply of inputs not available in sufficient quantities through local markets (in this case plastic sheeting and blankets, medicines and education materials);
- support for **local peace building** and peace education, both to reduce immediate levels of local violence and to contribute to wider conflict transformation;
- establishing independent, credible **humanitarian and human-rights monitoring** systems;
- providing **logistics support**, through management and maintenance of a pooled vehicle fleet;
- supporting **advocacy** and awareness raising of a forgotten humanitarian crisis, including support for local journalism and facilitating national and international media coverage;
- strengthening capacities and accountability mechanisms of **local duty bearers** and governance structures, community-based and administrative, recognising that these will at times include non-state actors working on a voluntary basis;
- strengthening local authorities' and civil society's role in maintaining civil law and order, **access to justice** and upholding human and civil rights.

Alternatives to current “industrialised” UN peace-keeping approaches are also suggested, based on similar principles, that can be both more effective and much more cost-efficient.

The paper concludes by considering what needs to happen for emerging practices that focus on supporting on local responses to become widely adopted. The biggest obstacle to change may well come from *within* the international humanitarian aid system itself. Too often agencies fail to admit that their current norms of intervention, management, coordination and funding are neither as effective nor as cost-efficient as they could be - whether in responding to immediate life-saving needs or in building longer term resilience. Stronger institutional incentives are needed to encourage external agencies to shift their focus from implementing *their* emergency programmes to participating in and enabling *local* humanitarian and protection responses.

Map of Blue Nile and South Kordofan, Sudan

http://endgenocide.org/conflict-areas/sudan-backgrounder/

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1. Background

1.1. Introduction

This paper reflects on the range of experiences of conflict-affected communities and international agencies responding to four years of devastating civil war in the South Kordofan and Southern Blue Nile regions of Sudan. This case study remains significant as an example of what can happen when formal international aid mechanisms (i.e. the UN, bilateral and INGO) do not formally assist populations experiencing a complex humanitarian crisis. Ironically, with minimal support, the resulting space allows for and incites communities to define and implement their own initiatives.

These reflections are part of on-going multi-country monitoring and action-research by the Local to Global Protection Initiative (L2GP) started in 2010.[1] The paper builds on the original research on South Kordofan communities' experience of the 1986 to 2005 conflict published in 2011, a subsequent Humanitarian Practice Network Paper 72 (2012), and two L2GP updates of the on-going community self-protection efforts precipitated by the tragic return to civil war in June 2011.[2]

The paper aims to improve understanding of options and approaches available to organisations seeking to help populations to protect themselves when faced with armed conflict in Sudan or elsewhere. The central premise documented through previous L2GP's studies is that much of international agency-led protection under-performs because it gives insufficient attention to strengthening indigenous protection capacity. Rarely are war-affected communities truly treated as equal partners in designing and implementing their own holistic protection responses - despite the rhetoric to the contrary. The study provides an example of what can and *could* be done when at-risk populations are enabled to inform, guide, manage and learn from their *own* protection programmes. These can then be supported by outsiders both directly where access is given, or indirectly where it is not.

Because of the complex political and security dynamics associated with the on-going conflict, sharing a complete *public* account of this rich learning opportunity will have to wait until the civil war is over[3]. This paper therefore contains significant gaps, unfinished analyses and incomplete recommendations. That said, even these partial reflections illustrate the disconnect between local and global protection efforts. It is hoped they will encourage mandated international agencies to better fulfil their responsibility to contribute to the protection of communities directly affected - and even targeted - by violent conflict.

1.2. The context - humanitarian access and space

Since conflict returned to Southern Kordofan (SK) and Blue Nile (BN) in 2011, negotiations for cross-line humanitarian access acceptable to both warring parties have failed. Thus the

[1] South Kordofan is just one focus area of L2GP's wider endeavour to improve understanding of interactions between local agency and international engagement in conflict and post conflict zones. It is also looking at Jonglei in South Sudan, Zimbabwe, Syria, Palestine, and Myanmar.

[2] All of these papers can be found on the website: www.local2global.info

[3] That said more detailed descriptions of self-protection mechanisms are available by contacting direct L2GP.

Government of Sudan (GoS) has allowed only very limited and tightly regulated access to areas under its own control while refusing independent cross-line or cross-border humanitarian access to areas under the control of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement North (SPLM-N)[4]. To date there has been no initiative from the UN Security Council to push for un-negotiated cross-border access, as occurred in Syria; not even for the briefest fact-finding mission, whether by the United Nations (or any of its agencies), the African Union or the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

Since armed conflict resumed in 2011, approximately one million people in South Kordofan and some 80,000 in Blue Nile remain within opposition-controlled areas cut-off from any formal international humanitarian access or national public services. At the same time these communities face a brutal civil war that targets civilians, villages, farms and other civilian infrastructure such as markets, hospitals, clinics, schools and water-points.[5] Around 50% of these people have been displaced at least once and many have lost all of their possessions. An additional nearly 300,000 are living as refugees in South Sudan, Kenya and Ethiopia.[6] Records of the total civilian mortality rates (from malnutrition, disease, bombing, shelling and land attacks) have yet to be compiled, but conservative estimates indicate numbers in the thousands.[7] Given analysis of the previous civil war, the number of civilians killed could have been (and still could become) far worse.[8] Some of the reasons, that the number of deaths is lower than expected, are the subject of this paper.

2. The Local Response - different examples of local agency

2.1. Unorganised civil action at large and local resilience

As is so many other areas of conflict and crisis[9] the spontaneous sharing of food, shelter, provision of care and in-kind help between households is probably still the single most important source of 'humanitarian assistance'. For many of the hundreds of thousands of people displaced by bombardment and land attacks, the impacts of such autonomous solidarity are life-saving. Such community and household-led initiatives have been further strengthened by purposely exhorting the underlying social norms from which they spring. Thus we can see: active messaging by traditional and administrative leadership calling for solidarity and sharing; respected figures leading by example; civil society organisations (CSOs) and religious leaders promoting self-help; and local musicians celebrating mutual self-help in songs. Importantly for external interventions, building on such indigenous self-help and social norms can also reinforce accountable community-based targeting and local management and implementation of external relief interventions.

[4] SPLM/A-N is the armed opposition movement banned by GoS.
[5] See Human Rights Watch at https://www.hrw.org/africa/sudan, SKBN Coordination Unit Humanitarian updates on http://reliefweb.int/ (2011-5), SKBN Protection Reports on http://www.sudanconsortium.org/ and Food Security Monitoring Unit (FSMU) Independent food security monitoring (2013-2015) for documented humanitarian and protection incidences and circumstances.
[6] http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4e43cb466.html
[7] http://www.nubareports.org, http://www.reliefweb.it/SKBN Coordination Unit,
[8] http://www.local2global.info/wp-content/uploads/SK_Nuba_L2GP_report_final.pdf
[9] Amos, Valerie, speech at the World Humanitarian Summit, 2014, Egeland, Jan, January 27, 2005, speech to Council on Foreign Relations, and ECHO (2015) Preamble of Enhanced Response Capacity Grant/Humanitarian Implementation Plan, at http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/funding/decisions/2015/HIPs/ERC_en.pdf

At the same time, it is also well documented that tribal tensions and division, or divided leadership, will lead to a reduction in solidarity and unity, restricting help to specific ethnic groups (which can be a particular problem with massive internal displacement).[10] Both factors may be at work in Blue Nile, where civil society action and self-help has generally been less pronounced, with a much larger percentage of the population moving to internationally-run refugee camps in Ethiopia and South Sudan.[11] The relationship between local governance and civil society action will be discussed later - suggesting that together the level of "social protection"(both unaided and with additional external support) is perhaps a useful way to think about more holistic types of protection programming.

2.2. Community-based self-protection

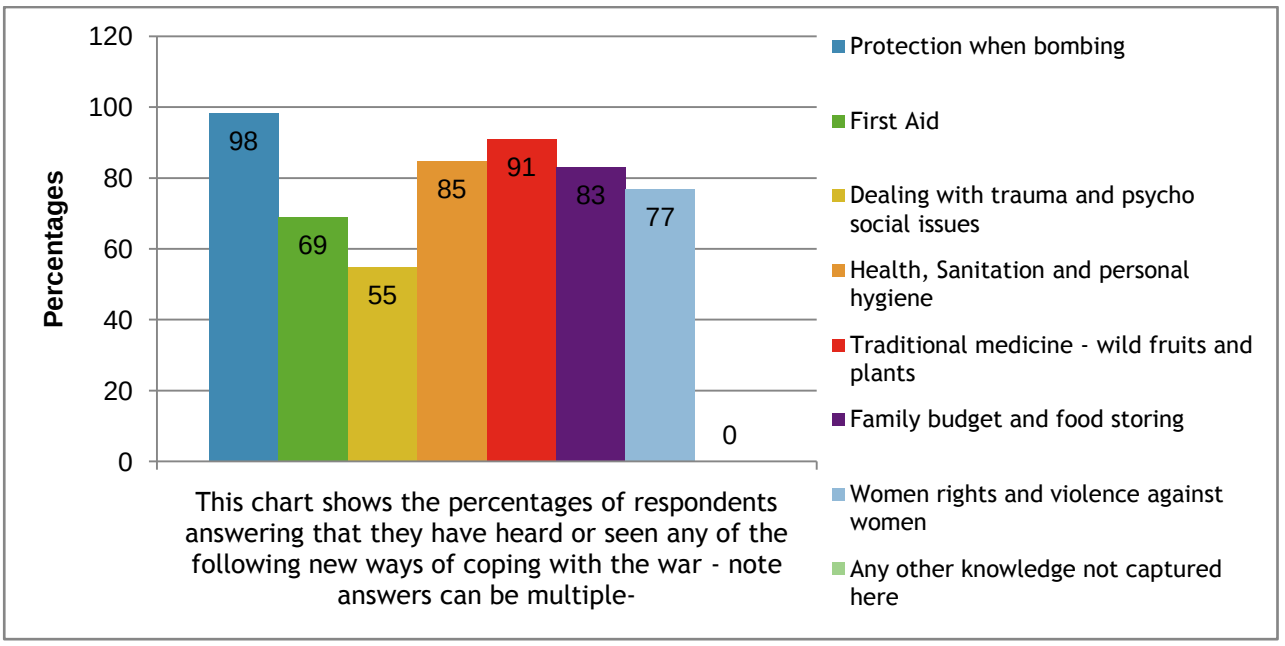
One of the "new" activities of CSOs in South Kordofan (initiated and already documented by L2GP in 2014[12]) has been the proactive dissemination of measures and skills for *self-protection* against key security, survival and livelihood threats. At very little cost, CSOs working with local Women's Associations continue to disseminate knowledge and practical skills on a range of protection issues, including: dealing with aerial bombardment and land offensives; food budgeting and storage; collecting and preparing wild foods and traditional medicine; first aid and wound dressing; sanitation and hygiene; understanding and responding to psycho-social trauma; and women's rights and broader human rights.[13] Some of these responses already existed (originating from previous conflicts), some were newly developed in-situ or introduced from outside.

The table below is taken from a 2014 evaluation of this work including 640 interviews and 32 focus group discussions with households that had not participated in any of the self-protection training sessions given by CSOs.[14] The results suggest an unexpectedly rapid and widespread adoption of new coping mechanisms contributing to increased resilience from the uptake of ideas introduced by village "disseminators" trained by a local CSO (in this case, the Nuba Women's Association).

An important point here is that much of the knowledge and practical skills being disseminated and found to be useful was *already existing* indigenous knowledge (e.g. use of wild foods, traditional medicines, fox holes, etc.) – but knowledge that was unevenly spread across communities –not least because at least half of the population had not experienced the last war.[15]

[10] UNHCR (2006) Handbook for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons, Posner, E.A, et al (2005) Divide and Conquer, Harvard School of Law, Discussion Paper no. 639, Pope John Paul II (1992) Refugees: A challenge to solidarity, Pontifical Council,
[11] http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4e43cb466.html
[12] See *Women-led protection in South Kordofan* (2014) on www.local2global.info
[13] For the latter two see http://www.local2global.info/area-studies/sudan "Women-led protection in South Kordofan, Sudan" and "Fighting bombs with Perfume".
[14] Contact L2GP for a full report.
[15] More than half of the population had returned from the north (Khartoum) since the signing of the "Comprehensive Peace Agreement" between SPLM/A and the Government of Sudan.

Table 1 New coping mechanisms disseminated by the Nuba Women's Association, South Kordofan



The experiences from South Kordofan, suggest that much can be achieved by supporting local CSOs to help strengthen communities' indigenous capacities to protect themselves within an active war zone. External inputs are very low: initial encouragement and facilitation for local programme design; some injection of new knowledge or skills to fill gaps; basic training of trainers; and support for logistics and communication. Central to the success of the programme is the core role of women to whom fall the traditional responsibilities of family- and village-based protection.[16] Acknowledging and supporting the role and status of women as key agents of social protection, and not just as vulnerable victims of violence, was a key finding of the original multi-country research looking at indigenous capacities for protection.[17] It is just one example of increasing the effectiveness of protection interventions, by grounding them in existing local strengths and opportunities.

Such investments in local protection capacity include responding to the psychological impacts of unrelenting violence and the denial of basic human and civil rights increase. Training local facilitators to recognise and help treat the consequences of psycho-social trauma has been perceived by communities as relevant and useful new knowledge and skills. Equally appreciated has been support to local actors to promote cultural events and celebrations; supporting musician and dance groups; providing civic education for adults, including introducing human rights concepts (see below); ensuring schooling for children; and establishing communications with the outside world. These initiatives have all been perceived as having positively contributed to the resilience of local communities under extra-ordinary pressures. Indeed, the very fact that

[16] This point also comes through clearly from the video 'Fighting bombs with Perfume" found here: http://vimeo.com/nilscarstensen/fightingbombswithperfume#t=0s

[17] South and Harragin (2012) Local to Global Protection in Myanmar (Burma), Sudan, South Sudan and Zimbabwe, Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN) Report No. 72, February 2012.

local CSOs are actively moving between communities inquiring, experimenting and promoting different ways to strengthen hope, self-belief and self-respect, solidarity and social cohesion, good humour, determination and leadership, is a sign of resilience. The evaluation noted that the multiplier effects of supporting local agency and self-help are probably more significant than are realised.

2.3. Peace education and local peace-building

Communities across conflict-divides have demonstrated interest and initiative in local-level peace-building and related peace education. The increasing loss of lives and livelihoods is a driving factor to find solutions, including inter-tribal non-aggression agreements. Traditional mechanisms for conflict resolution are still relevant and local CSOs have experience in facilitating such dialogue.[18] The work is highly sensitive and not without risk, but requires relatively small amounts of support. The protection impacts are very significant: in addition to improved levels of local security, such non-aggression pacts often lead to increased cultivation, better access to water sources and wild foods and improved trade –while also contributing to longer term reconciliation. Communities see local-level peace-building as one of the most effective humanitarian interventions that can be taken.

However, since the return to armed conflict, local CSOs have found it much more difficult to locate donors willing to support the low cost inputs needed to facilitate cross-line peace-building between tribes.[19] As a result, many opportunities have been lost. Similarly, local groups have been able to find only very limited support for peace education programmes to help counter increasing trends of ethnic-based polarisation and lay the grounds for peaceful inter-tribal coexistence. The evolving peace education programme is working with traditional community leaders, youth groups and women's association, schools, local authorities and other duty bearers (including justice and law enforcement). While there is support and demand from all levels of local society, expansion of these programmes continues to be hindered by the lack of global support.[20]

Similarly, prior to the return to war, international protection actors (humanitarian agencies and peacekeeping missions) failed to develop the relationships needed to understand local security dynamics.[21] These efforts provide a striking example of the consequences of globally led missions not allowing themselves to be guided by local insights at best and at worse denying their relevance, thereby - in some cases - undermining them.[22] Thus, during the latter part of the 2005-2011 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, local communities were well aware of the

[18] See the work of a local CSO in UNHCR's article "South Sudan: Restoring peace between refugees and villagers in Maban county," News Stories, 27 March 2014.
[19] In March 2011 just before the war restarted, L2GP was able to leverage the small funds needed by local CSOs to facilitate a highly effective series of peace-building conferences between Nuba and Arab pastoralist leaders; the positive livelihood and protection impacts of these low key efforts can still be seen today with tribal leaders from both sides of traditional conflicts collaborating to prevent outbreaks of violence.
[20] See similar criticisms in http://worldjusticeproject.org/opportunity-fund/open-justice-initiative-0 and http://www.peacefulchange.org/uploads/1/2/2/7/12276601/2014_03_policy_brief_syrian_peace_resources_final_eng_1.pdf.
[21] See "UN Whistle Blower Decries 'Cover-up of a cover-up' Over Darfur Debacle"; Foreign Policy, October 29, 2014; .
[22] See similar issues in forthcoming L2G reports on Myanmar among returnee communities Joliffe (2015) Report Briefer- Letting Communities Take the Lead and Shiss (2015) Potential refugee return in eastern Myanmar: Exploring the relevance of a study into local protection concerns, plans, and aspirations

likelihood of a return to full-blown war, while many UN agencies (including UNMIS, the mandated peace-keeping mission) remained much more complacent, some right up to the very last moment.[23] At that time, several opportunities were lost to support local initiatives that would promote positive relationships between communities that today are divided by a war being driven by distant political interests.

2.4. Good governance and local public service delivery

Local civil administration in opposition-controlled parts of SK has prioritised maintaining public service delivery despite being cut off from national or external resources and despite being frequently targeted by aerial bombardment. Many of the civil servants, health workers, teachers, water technicians, veterinary staff, judiciary and civilian police (who were part of the government service during the peace agreement) remain at their posts on a voluntary basis and continue to do what they can. With no transport, communications, electrical power, and only the most ad hoc and limited supply of essential material and equipment, they are of course unable to adequately meet the needs of the communities. Much depends also on the particular motivation and capacity of the individuals who are in key positions. However, in all sectors one finds examples of action that has contributed to local communities' resilience: be it with limited and sporadic health services, efforts to keep schools open and oversee examinations; distribution of limited spare parts for hand-pumps; efforts to respond to outbreaks of both human (including measles) and livestock disease. Their present impact may be limited, but their potential to do more given the right support is significant.

2.5. Local mechanisms for humanitarian planning, coordination and accountability

Linked to the commitment to public service delivery, the local administration and civil society in opposition-controlled parts of the Nuba Mountains recognised the need from the start of the war to lead their own humanitarian response. Building on experiences from the last war they saw the importance of self-reliance and the likelihood, yet again, of little or no international assistance.[24] Within days of the onset of renewed conflict in 2011, national staff from INGO operations, local CSOs and local (SPLM-N) government offices came together to establish their own set of humanitarian, planning, implementation, coordination, monitoring and accountability systems. In those first few weeks and months, they were able to work with the humanitarian inputs left by the evacuating agencies. Since then access to relief items has become much more difficult. Even so a multi-sector group still meet on a regular basis (at least twice a month) to share information on changing needs (new security incidences, displacements, disease outbreaks, crop failure, livestock problems) and discuss how to make optimal use of whatever few relief items they have. These meetings also address issues of accountability and respond to

[23] See United Nations Mission in Sudan, January 2009 wherein Keren Tchalian, Head of UNMIS in South Kordofan, notes "*The UN system has around 2,000 civilian, military and police personnel physically on the ground in UNMIS Kadugli's area of operations on any given day. And these are not individuals given to complacency. Based on our knowledge of the area, we do not see the situation in Southern Kordofan as sliding towards renewed conflict*."While conflict recommenced in 2011. Another expatriate head of one of the major international NGOs then in South Kordofan also reported he saw no reason to expect a return of hostilities (direct personal communication, June 5, 2011).

[24] de Waal, Alex (2015) Conflict in the Nuba Mountains: From Genocide-by-Attrition to the Contemporary Crisis in Sudan, Chapter 4, ed. Totten and Grzb.

reported incidences of ineffective use of aid (exclusion or inclusion targeting errors, complaints of misuse etc.).

This locally-established planning and coordination system has added real value to the protection response. It allows much better sharing of information, identification of priorities, joint planning of responses and increasing efficiency of resource utilisation, sharing of personnel, logistics and equipment – thereby saving lives[25]. The fact that local humanitarian planning and coordination meetings continue autonomously and systematically - with meaningful attendance and minuted decision-making - is insightful. The meetings are happening because local actors find them relevant and useful and have real ownership of the process. They have taken the lead in shaping how the meetings are managed, who attends, where they take place (under a particular Tamarind tree) and the role of the small (one person) Secretariat to set agendas, convene and facilitate, take minutes and follow up on decisions. No externally imposed system is required. There is no infrastructure, outside managers and "experts" or costly overheads. The system works within the local context because it grew out of the local context. It also provides an important psychological support, serving to inspire and motivate local actors to do their best even when resources are so scarce and the means to respond are limited. That is not to say that scarcity of resources should drive efficiency and effectiveness, but rather that by allowing local actors to dictate what information is useful and make decisions about priorities and use of existing resources holds important potential for more efficient humanitarian response.

2.6. Humanitarian monitoring systems and related advocacy

From the onset of the war, there has been a need for a reliable and independent monitoring system acceptable to the international community as a source of accurate data and analysis of the humanitarian situation. Without very credible indications of need, few donors or agencies were prepared to embrace the political complications of (illegally - from a national sovereignty perspective) responding to the crisis. However, without negotiated access, no UN agencies or INGOs were willing to support or undertake any sort of humanitarian monitoring within the opposition-held areas. The resulting 'Catch 22'(no access, no monitoring; no monitoring, no action) allowed for - and continues to allow for - an inertia that effectively excludes vulnerable communities' from the internationally-recognised protection mechanisms and life saving assistance which is their due in accordance with International Humanitarian Law.

Considerable efforts were therefore made by a small group of local and international actors to develop workable mechanisms and capacities for regular data collection that can accommodate the access issues, while providing the evidence-based analysis needed by external agencies to inform their response. Current efforts are focused on refining systems using a third-party, reputable technical contractor to design the quantitative and qualitative methodologies, process and analyse the data (which has included over 1,000 household questionnaires every month from across the affected areas) and produce the technical reports. However, with no external agency willing to collect field data, a whole set of management, coordination, communication, and quality control structures and mechanisms was established to support these monitoring activities. The small team undertaking these functions also facilitates networking, liaison,

[25] Reference to internal reports USAID, Danida, etc.

information management, advocacy and external outreach and in many ways fills the gap left by lack of mainstream (UN-led) coordination structure.[26]

Given the access and operational constraints, the challenges are considerable; but they are also surmountable. Despite the difficulties, credible, independent and cost-effective humanitarian monitoring is proving possible –by building on local capacities. Very high levels of cost efficiency have been achieved and logistical and communication constraints are being overcome.[27]

Very different but equally innovative efforts by national and international actors to improve access to information have resulted in the establishment, training, and equipping of local journalists. These teams fill the gap left by the paucity of national and international media in the opposition-held areas. Journalists work on local, community-based radio programming; national and regional audiences through Arabic language web-based and radio broadcasting; even reaching an English-speaking international audience. These different groups play an increasingly important role in ensuring that the outside world (Arabic and English speaking) can access news, articles, images and video of what local people are experiencing during the conflict. These efforts also help counter the feelings of isolation and hopelessness that many communities talked about during the last war when such journalist and media initiatives were not undertaken. For the wider Sudanese public, these initiatives provide the only source of reliable information about what Sudanese citizens are experiencing in the opposition-controlled areas. Circumstantial evidence from the last war suggests that even with an authoritarian regime, such as the one currently found in Sudan, public concern arising from increased awareness of mass civilian suffering can play a protection role by bringing social pressure to bear on duty bearers and perpetrators of violence.[28]

2.7. Human rights monitoring and promotion

The original L2GP research of 2010-11 noted the level of community interest in learning more about human rights (HR), partly as a means of rebuilding self-esteem and a sense of dignity in the face of great suffering and partly as a means of holding perpetrators of violence to account. Within 6 months of the onset of war, the most active young men and women involved in the community self-protection programme formed their own HR Monitoring and Promotion teams, an initiative replicated in Blue Nile. These teams attended a series of professional trainings (in human rights conventions and law, monitoring and defending) and have become increasingly active not only in data collection (primarily concerning aerial bombardment and land attacks targeting civilians) but also in defending human rights within their own communities. They are now in process of establishing themselves as indigenous, autonomous HR associations and are actively seeking support to increase their capacity and impact.

[26] A separate study will be made at the right time of this Coordination Unit, its work and interactions with the wider international aid community.

[27] The approximate total costs of all data collection (requiring a **monthly**, 45 minute 5 page household questionnaire for over **1,000** randomly selected rural households spread out across 30,000 square kilometers in an active war zone with no roads, no main electricity, very limited communications) and data entry , is less than USD 350,000 per year. This includes all costs of training, supervision, communications, logistics, materials and equipment, and staff payments and incentives.

[28] Averting Genocide in the Nuba Mountains, Alex de Waal 2006 Social Science Research Council http://howgenocidesend.ssrc.org/

Significantly, as emergent civil society organisations (CSOs) within the opposition areas, the HR teams have promoted and championed human rights among the opposition "non-State" duty bearers, both in civil administration and military forces, even in the midst of an ongoing civil war. Specifically, in South Kordofan, the HR teams are responding to incidences of local human rights violations against civilians by local duty bearers (e.g. theft, grievous bodily harm, sexual violence, infringements of child rights). The same teams have themselves provided human rights training to local civilian police and prison staff and facilitated workshops with formal judiciary and traditional courts, aimed at improving access to local justice, especially for women and children.[29] Even when all they can do is document and disseminate reports to raise awareness of conflict-related violations, which they cannot stop themselves (e.g. aerial bombardment and shelling of civilian targets, abduction, destruction of villages etc), these actions appear to have a wider positive psycho-social impact. There is a sense of pride that local communities have produced their own human rights CSOs, reinforcing their role as active agents and leaders in search of their own solutions, rather than becoming labelled (and eventually labelling themselves) as victims merely waiting for external assistance.

This increased sense of responsibility by local duty bearers has also enabled external agencies to work more effectively. Between 2013-2015, Geneva Call, a Swiss-based INGO that works with armed non-state actors to promote adherence to international humanitarian norms during conflict, has held a series of discussions with the SPLA-N. As a result deeds of commitment for the total ban of anti-personal mines and the protection of children have been signed[30] and mechanisms for monitoring and verification put in place.

2.8. Bringing it all together – potential and limits of autonomous social protection

This case study points to a mixture of seven social, political, economic and environmental attributes that influence the degree to which a society can protect itself during armed conflict:

i. the level of social solidarity and culture of sharing and self-help
ii. The local topographical and ecological contributions to physical protection and adaptive livelihoods (coupled with the extent of relevant indigenous knowledge of the local environment)
iii. the strength of (and space and resources for) genuine civil society initiative and action
iv. the level of good governance and integrity amongst local duty bearers and leaders to respond to protection needs, prioritise public service delivery and walk-the-talk of accountability
v. the strength of markets and opportunities for continuing trade
vi. the opportunities for cross-conflict dialogue and local-level peace-building
vii. the strength of networks, connections and ability to communicate with the outside world

[29] Traditionally in communities throughout Sudan, justice is provided by a network of tribal community leaders, usually *sheikhs* and *Mecs*. The workshops facilitated by the HR groups bring together these traditional dispensers of justice with formal judiciary and local police to explore division of roles and responsibilities and capacity building needs as related to HRs.

[30] See: http://www.genevacall.org/first-african-signatory-deed-commitment-protecting-children-armed-conflict/

Whether we refer to these attributes collectively as a society's ability for 'social protection' or treat them as components of its 'resilience'[31], they can serve as a good entry point for both local and external actors to consider what can be done to strengthen local civilian protection.[32] They also provide an important do-no-harm checklist to assess if any new intervention might inadvertently weaken one or more of these core components. Critically, they remind us of the importance of looking at protection in a holistic way, encouraging us to understand how interconnected are the different parts of the social protection/resilience system.

Again and again, positive feedback loops seem to develop between different protection capacities that continue to evolve organically. For example, we've observed how: community-protection leads to a greater focus on human rights promotion; community animal heath work encourages local administration to take action on vaccination; peace-education increases opportunities for trade; accountable targeting mechanisms lead to (and arise from) increased efforts to demonstrate good governance; good governance leads to greater connectivity with the outside world. An intervention strategy is clearly needed that seeks to understand and support local protection as holistically as possible.

The multiple variables that define each context will greatly influence what can and cannot be achieved through supporting autonomous social protection. Thus in South Kordofan, where local society already has relatively high levels of good governance, civil society action, self-help, volunteer spirit, civil rights, and a cultural tradition of democracy, there have been many opportunities for reinforcing social protection. These qualities have also attracted positive attention and support from external actors (whether donors, INGOs or individuals) and inspired the greater commitment and personal effort needed to overcome the enormous constraints in such a challenging context.

For many historical, demographic, political and socio-economic reasons, southern Blue Nile re-entered the war with less developed good-governance and civil society, and with weaker social cohesion. Local communities have been able to do less by themselves and external actors have been slower to respond. That is not to say there are still not inspiring examples of local agency. In one area for example, frustrated youth and parents have initiated four community-run schools using contributions from all households. Following lobbying by communities, also secure a contribution from the local Administration. There is huge potential to help strengthen local agency but it requires a greater emphasis on helping local civil society grow, enabling good governance, strengthening social cohesion, and promoting self-help. The implications for external agencies is not to impose a blueprint but to develop the necessary understanding of what strengths are there to build on (strengthening what is already being achieved autonomously) and what capacity gaps might most usefully be addressed.

[31] Clearly there is considerable overlap here with current work being done on resilience –see for example: Levine and Mosel (2014) *Support Resilience in Difficult Places* HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.

[32] Probably a fancy diagram could be developed to present this (indeed there would be many similarities with the existing "Sustainable Livelihood framework") but it is not clear that yet another western intellectual framework would really make any real difference to the actual work carried out.

3. Supporting local protection responses - key steps

3.1. Participatory Action Research (PAR), piloting, learning by doing

The **participatory action research** (PAR) facilitated by L2GP proved a critical first step to much of the subsequent ideas for strengthening local protection. It helped identify a range of critical areas for intervention (supporting community self-protection, establishing human rights teams, development of local coordination and planning tools, using market interventions, exploring psycho-social issues, investing in good governance). The PAR also helped create a sense of local ownership that animated local actors to take up emerging ideas themselves. As researchers from the start, local CSOs and youth/women groups spontaneously assumed leadership roles as active promoters and facilitators of different activities. This in turn informed external planning and support.

3.2. Strengthening opportunities for local decision making

Cash transfer programming (CTP) represents a central component of the approach, putting decision making directly in the hands of the affected families. South Kordofan and Blue Nile represent some of the most challenging of circumstances for CTP and yet markets are usually able to provide many of the core needs, at significantly lower costs and with far greater multiplier effects than external aid. High levels of accountability have been maintained, with adequate market assessments, robust community based targeting, post distribution monitoring, even complaints mechanisms.[33] Equally important has been the extensive use of pilots to test ideas, proto-type interventions on a small scale, and allow for learning both from success and failure. The use of **rapid, small grants** with low bureaucratic 'up-stream' demands but high focus on 'down-stream' learning have been important in developing almost all of the interventions mentioned above. It is no coincidence that enabling effective responses to emerge from the local context by trying multiple ideas to see what works and what doesn't is increasingly understood as good practice in operating environments that are classified as *complex* or *chaotic*.[34]

3.3. Embracing holistic responses

As the original L2GP research pointed out: safety, basic needs, rights, livelihoods and local governance are seen as inextricably linked by locals for whom the **sector distinctions imposed by global actors make little sense**. An important part of supporting the local response in the two areas has been to work with local priorities and mix what outsiders separate out as relief, rehabilitation and development. This has led to programmes in which one might find, in the same locations at the same time, all of the following interventions: emergency relief (both cash and in kind); support for primary and secondary school education; training for local health technicians; livestock vaccinations; leadership training for community leaders; psycho-social

[33] The positive interconnections between market interventions and local peace building will be described in detail in future papers
[34] See for example the Cyenfin framework on http://cognitive-edge.com/

trauma healing; capacity building of local civil society; human rights training for local authorities and duty bearers; distribution of emergency non-food items to IDPs; cash transfers; peace-building and peace-education linked explicitly to reconciliation; maintenance of bore-holes; support for accountable and effective public administration; community training by a women's association on family planning. External agencies and donors need to be ready to enable effective local responses that transcend their notions of "relief-development continua", that challenge the more siloed thinking of what is needed in an emergency situation and bring in expertise as required to fit the emerging needs rather than what reflects their technical focus.

3.4. Adaptive management & embracing risk

Being able to turn the initial research findings, and funding, rapidly into action was crucial –not only to save lives but also to further build the "can-do" culture of creativity, optimism and vision among local actors. The L2GP platform provided a space to move quickly, to try new ideas, and to take risks. It also had enough flexibility within its budget and institutional management to allow plans and budgets to be rethought quickly as the context changed rapidly, from peace to conflict, and new unanticipated opportunities emerged. When looking at the local leadership and management styles of the other agencies that have responded effectively to the crisis, a similar pattern is apparent: **visionary leadership, adaptive management, readiness to take risks, supporting emergent ideas and flexible budgets** are key to success.

The approach to risk management seems particularly important. The centrally-imposed security protocols of the UN and most INGOs have proved largely irrelevant as they often prevent more effective and appropriate local risk management practices to emerge in response to the local context. In contrast, agencies that engaged successfully invested immediately in understanding the local realities as deeply as possible, building local relationships, developing local information networks and identifying different options for managing risk in different ways. Such **adaptive risk management** is not ad hoc and can still follow guidelines and protocols, but ones that promote the discovery of local solutions rather than the imposition of predefined responses. It also allows for more flexible organisational cultures to evolve that maintain high output of teams by reducing the stress that can arise from agencies with more rigid programming demands[35].

3.5. Developing local relationships

Successful local interventions remain to a large extent dependent on the attitude, commitment, skills, integrity, respect and networks of **key local individuals** found in CSOs, local authorities and communities. Recognising such individuals, developing relationships and helping expand their opportunities to design, plan, lead and act has been critical: whether through capacity development or mentoring, or by creating opportunities to take bigger roles, or finding support to allow them to implement their ideas or other forms of encouragement. This requires a level

[35]For more on this see Anne-Meike Fechter (2012): The Personal and the Professional: in Third World Quarterly, 33:8, 1387-1404 (link: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2012.698104). Investigating levels of stress and trauma in aid workers she points out:"*The stress which such mostly office-based aid workers experience, it emerges, is partly caused by the frustrations of aid bureaucracy, including that of their own organisation. It is also brought about by the contradictions inherent in aid, such as the discrepancies between their personal values and aspirations, and the realities of everyday work…"*

of immersion in the local society not commonly seen by many external aid workers. It also requires a level of flexibility that understands that sometimes, local actors coming from different cultures may work in different ways - ways that will not always 'fit' with external expectations, such as local work-norms. Nonetheless they still have much to offer. Even if not as efficient as possible, they may still offer a more context-effective option than trying to impose a western system to management.

3.6. Supporting local agency

Supporting the work of local actors has been critical: whether established NGOs on the ground – familiar to local communities and donors alike, such as those that took a key role from the beginning in many of the social protection pilots (and the original PAR) in South Kordofan; or the emergent and more ephemeral self-help groups, even individual actors, so often pivotal at community level in undertaking local protection functions;[36] or the civil authorities of the opposition administration whose positive engagement has been critical for all that has been achieved to date; or the traditional leadership and tribal governance structures which still have much influence on community attitude and practice. All of these local actors are performing protection roles autonomously and all, with appropriate support, have the potential to do more. A real commitment to **capacity development** of local actors has therefore been crucial, especially when helping successful pilots go to scale. Given the emergent nature of many of the interventions, capacity development needed to supply a wide range of new skills (e.g. humanitarian monitoring, first aid, psycho-social trauma response, defending human-rights and documentation, design and delivery of peace-education programmes). It also needs a strong focus on downward accountability - transparency and introduction of community checks and balances to minimise risks of bad practice. As local actors have taken on increasing loads of implementation at scale, grant and financial management capacities also has become more important, often requiring not just training but also establishment of new systems and engagement of professional accounting staff.

The issue of supporting core costs of CSOs remains complex: few local actors receive any 'normal' reimbursement, most see little more than subsistence contributions, many are purely voluntary. As discussed below (section 3.2), support for increasing local agency requires care to avoid inadvertently weakening autonomous action by introducing different levels of personnel support that create divisions and expectations on externally-provided benefits. No magic formula exists for resolving this tension (and it becomes increasingly difficult to resolve over protracted crises) but transparent and open discussion to find solutions has definitely helped. As has maximising the provision of non-financial forms of human resource motivation (e.g. training, supply of materials and equipment, public praise of services, treating people with high levels of respect, acknowledging the constraints that people are facing etc.).

[36] The role of emergent self-help groups in the local responses to both Cyclones Nargis and Giri in Myanmar is documented by the *Paung Ku* initiative which drew many similar lessons: see ALNAP (2009) Innovations Case-studies: "Supporting community-based emergency response at scale: innovations in the wake of Cyclone Nargis" and also Paung Ku (2011) "Reflections from the Giri Response"

3.7. Go-betweens and building relationships

To support many of the nascent protection interventions required rapid funding at a time when most donors were closing their doors to even the most risk-free aspects of an integrated response. What proved crucial in helping the few donors who did take those initial visionary and courageous decisions to provide funding was to have a small group of actors who could act as trusted and convincing **messengers**, bridging the gap between the local and the global and who could help local voices be heard in a language and manner appropriate to targeted global audiences. This required the involvement of practitioners –be they expatriate or local –who were familiar and effective both at village level and at international HQ and Boardroom level. They helped both sides by interpreting and understanding each others' realities[37]. Similarly, much has depended on the development of closer-than-usual relationships between local and global actors, to build the levels of trust needed for enlarging space for accountable and transparent humanitarian action.

3.8. Doing-less-harm

Responding in any complex political emergency involves the risk of inadvertently doing harm, whether by causing unhelpful shifts in local power dynamics, weakening local resilience, generating additional security threats, enabling protracted conflict or in some way negatively affecting opportunities for shorter and longer term peace-building and reconciliation. Because of the particular political and security challenges involved, considerable efforts have been taken to avoid doing harm and ensure that a sufficiently accountable and conflict-sensitive response is achieved. Box 1 below summarises the core measures implemented - some of which are already described in detail above.

Box 1 Systems introduced to reduce risks of doing harm

1. Establishing an **independent Advisory Group** of Experts, carefully selected because of their recognised in-depth knowledge of Sudan and their experience of conflict-sensitive engagement. The voluntary membership of the Group (all of whom hold full time senior management and policy level positions in other organisations) function as a mix between a Board of Trustees and a Review Panel. Focusing on humanitarian-conflict-political dynamics and providing advice accordingly, they act as one important check mechanism to reduce risks of conflict-insensitive engagement.
2. Proactive interaction with a **wider pool of practitioners and observers** (INGOs, UN agencies, donors, think tanks and local civil society) to seek their opinions and perceptions and respond to their concerns. This requires effective –but often confidential and sensitive –inter-agency communication that allows internal cross-checking between the operational (and donor) agencies, as well as establishing relationships with a wider network of agencies not directly involved.
3. Establishment of robust systems and capacities for independent and reliable **humanitarian and human-rights monitoring,** to allow evidence-based programming and to better understand the risks of *not* responding.

[37] It is insightful to read S. Lister who suggests that the quality of personal relationships is the key to successful organisational collaboration between Northern and Southern NGOs, as well as donors and Northern NGOs. (see: Power in Partnership? An Analysis of an NGO's Relationships with its Partners, London School of Economics, 1999) and is quoted by Meike as questioning "whether the current emphasis on organisational partnership is useful or whether, in practice and in theory, greater recognition should be given to importance of relationships between individuals".

4. Development of a locally informed, **integrated response that emphasizes local resilience** by strengthening livelihoods and self-help, civilian-rights and non-discrimination, local peace-building and peace education, and capacities of local actors
5. Strong **coordination and information-sharing** mechanisms between participating agencies and local structures that also focus on issues of accountability.
6. Capacity building of CSOs and humanitarian counterparts with a focus **on accountability**.
7. Extensive use of **piloting** and learning-by-doing before going to scale on different interventions.
8. Cultivation of close **working relationships** with local actors to allow genuine promotion and monitoring of humanitarian principles, good practice, transparency and accountability.
9. Introduction of, and support for, a wide range of **community-based mechanisms** to act as checks**,** including: targeting verification committees, anonymous complaints mechanisms, systematic post distribution monitoring (PDM) and evaluations or ad hoc reviews.

It will require some historical analysis and a more thorough independent evaluation after the war is over to assess to what extent these measures have succeeded or failed to minimise negative consequences of support. This continues to be an issue that demands critical attention – a readiness by both external and internal actors to be challenged and to learn. However, to date indications are that these checks and balances are enabling the levels of accountability and conflict sensitivity required to guide the response. Illustrations include:

- In some areas, high level of interest, receptiveness and willingness of local authorities to discuss measures to strengthen accountability and transparency, including constructive critique and generating demand for improvement;
- Examples of communities not accepting initial targeting lists (due to both inclusion and exclusion errors) resulting in new improved lists being drawn up;
- Extensive and independent post-distribution monitoring successfully carried out and revealing high levels of accountability;
- Community complaints mechanisms and inter-agency monitoring picking up incidences of post-distribution mal-practice; challenging local authorities to take remedial action;
- In other areas, where piloting reveals insufficient, capacity or willingness to ensure accountability and transparency, decisions have been taken *not* to scale-up interventions and instead focus on developing local priorities and capacities for good practice.

Looking at the reality of interventions in other parts of Sudan, particularly those implemented by "main-stream" UN, INGO and local NGO interventions in areas under Government control, it is actually possible that the locally-led and globally-supported response to the crisis in the opposition-held areas has been able to achieve *higher* levels of accountability. The space for independent assessments and post-distribution monitoring has becomes so constrained in government-controlled parts of South Kordofan and Blue Nile that international agencies there often have to rely entirely on monitoring by Government counterparts.[38]

[38]Members of vulnerable communities, who have subsequently decided to move into opposition areas or refugee camps, report of significant levels of "leakage", in some cases involving GOS security forces. See 2015 - deaths during a skirmish between SPLM-N and SAF of Sudanese Red Cross workers travelling in SAF military convoys to monitor food distributions without appropriate signage (www.unocha.org/sudan and https://radiotamazuj.org/en/article/three-sudanese-aid-workers-killed-blue-nile).

3.9. What can't be done locally

While promoting a locally-led and implemented protection response, it is important to recognise that there will always be aspects of a successful response that cannot be achieved without external interventions. Regardless of the strength of local self-help, environmental assets, civil society, good governance, trade opportunities or outside networks, there are areas where external interventions are needed. These include:

- Importation of large amounts of relief commodities and logistics in instances where cash transfer programmes (which can be managed locally) are not an option;
- International advocacy involving international media and journalists;
- International political pressure and actions to limit violations by State level actors;
- The deployment of internationally mandated peace-keeping forces.

Even for a local response, external support is crucial in enabling local agency to realise its potential role and impact in responding to protection needs at scale. Most of the cases of self-help explored in this paper have needed assistance of one sort or another (whether financial, in-kind, managerial or technical). They do not suggest that *unaided* local resilience alone can cope with meeting all needs. While the potential may exist on the ground to do much more, the desperate lack of international funds and support prevents the great majority of food security, health, education, safety and human rights needs from being met.[39] It is not a question of either local *or* global but rather both. As discussed in section 3.1 above, what is critical is *how* the external support is provided and whether it is supporting a locally-led response that builds on local capacities or whether it imposes a global model for protection and assistance led by international agencies.

4. The global response –trends and lessons

4.1. General trends of inaction

The international response to the humanitarian and protection crises in South Kordofan and Blue Nile over the last four years has been very varied and continues to evolve. While it is still early to discuss in detail what all global actors have or have not achieved to date and why, it is possible to pull out some key underlying trends and issues that describe and partially explain the inadequate international response to this protracted protection crisis and to such blatant and targeted aggression against civilians[40].

The key feature to date has been how remarkably limited the global response remains. Within GoS-controlled areas, some distribution of humanitarian commodities has been possible but with significant restrictions on independent implementation or monitoring - whether of needs, delivery or impact. Formal efforts to negotiate humanitarian access to opposition areas have taken up considerable diplomatic time, effort and resources. However to date these discussions have led to no break-through, while current analysis indicates significant increases in military activity. With no officially approved humanitarian access from the Government of Sudan (GoS), a

[39] See Humanitarian Updates, Coordination Unit, Juba (2013-2015)
[40] See among others: https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/sudan, http://nubareports.org https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/08/sudan-attacks-in-south-kordofan-constitute-war-crimes,

majority of international actors has been largely paralysed. If anything these efforts to achieve negotiated access may actually have contributed to further delays of exploring alternative aid delivery modalities (for instance a UN Security Council-approved non-consensual cross border assistance as is the case in Syria, albeit also with much delay).

For many reasons, some of which are discussed below, very few bilateral humanitarian donors, multilaterals or INGOs have even explored options for supporting any sort of humanitarian response, whether direct, indirectly through local CSOs, or limited to remote monitoring and advocacy. Similarly, GoS statements denying a humanitarian crisis or any targeting of civilians by their forces often remain uncontested by international actors (UN, INGOs or donors). Recently the UNSC agreed to remove any mention of a humanitarian crisis in Sudan from a joint statement on the two Sudans - despite clear evidence as endorsed by the UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator.[41] Equally, the inability and unwillingness of the UN's peace-keeping force UNMIS to protect civilians during the first 6 months of the conflict remains deeply embedded in local consciousness and is a shocking reminder of how ineffectual these extremely expensive missions can be.

There are worrying similarities with what happened in Sri Lanka both before, during and after the massacres in 2011. A recent study on the Sri Lanka crisis published by the Feinstein Centre describes: "*a limited commitment to lifesaving in the face of indiscriminate bombardments*" and the "*repeated failure of the humanitarian collectivity to live up to its protection responsibilities*".[42]

4.2. Reasons for inaction

The challenges inherent in supporting an un-negotiated humanitarian response in an active conflict zone are of course very significant. Most external agencies are deciding that the risks to themselves (political, legal, operational, security and insurance) are too great to warrant intervention. However, despite the convergence of evidence that indicates a significant humanitarian crisis acknowledging the risk of not intervening seems strangely absent from most international agencies' thinking and discourse. Not that unlike the 6 months preceding the 2011-2012 famine in Somalia.[43] The real-politik of the humanitarian imperative is of course complex. But for many agencies, operational and donor alike, it seems that decision making in this case is driven by the calculus of risks *to the organisation* rather than the risks to the communities that they are mandated to assist.

Part of the problem seems to be the management of staff security-related risks, which rely on imported protection mechanisms (e.g. armoured compounds, UN security forces, centrally-developed security protocols, medivacs, etc). Are insurance and centrally developed security protocols becoming a new and significant constraint to humanitarian work? Security threats are significant, but they are manageable. By developing local relationships, reliable sources of information and robust networks for inter-agency collaboration, security risks can be mitigated

[41] For more see: http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=48285#.U-8ohfl_tFZ
[42] Norah Niland (2014). Inhumanity and Humanitarian Action: Protection Failures in Sri Lanka. Feinstein Centre, Tufts University,
[43] *See the* Special Issue on the Somalia Famine of 2011-2012*http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/22119124/1/1*

and brought down to levels comparable with those of other conflict zones where mainstream agencies are working.[44]

Very few mainstream aid agencies have even tried to think creatively of how they might overcome the immediate constraints to supporting a humanitarian response in South Kordofan and Blue Nile - be they programmatic, operational, political, or conflict associated. When informed of the wide range of opportunities for enabling discrete, accountable and relevant support (whether direct or indirect), very few aid agencies were interested to explore options. It appears that with no public pressure from the press, from public constituencies or from donors to act (including in the latter case, dedicated funds), the majority of international aid agencies have insufficient incentive to try to find solutions to the problems they are very well aware of.

4.3. International peace-keeping

The case of the **Joint Military Commission** (JMC) that provided peace-keeping during the highly volatile ceasefire of 2002-2005 that led to the end of the last war and preceded the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), provides a striking example of how effective initiatives can become when they reject the imposed, global blue-print approach.[45] The JMC instead embraced an approach based on proactive immersion in the local reality. The JMC relied on small, highly mobile, unarmed, cross-constituency teams to rapidly develop a deep understanding of the local context and build strong relationships with local actors. The driving force of the entire mission was to understand and work with local people, their capacities and knowledge, to predict and rapidly defuse conflict. External inputs were critical (vehicles, helicopters, expatriate personnel with many years of relevant experience). But these were simply additional tools to help harness and respond to local dynamics. The mission was many times cheaper and far more cost effective than the model of industrialised peace-keeping used by the UN peacekeeping mission that took-over in 2005. A mission that failed to even anticipate the return of conflict - let alone try to prevent it - until much too late.[46]

4.4. Access negotiations

While it is outside the scope of this paper to provide a critique of the international peace negotiation efforts, the lack of success to date has inevitably had a huge (negative) humanitarian impact. When using the L2GP optic to examine approaches employed so far, there has been little attention to "the local". The model used has been standard, elite-driven and **elite-focused peace talks**. That is, international mediators moving between the leadership of both parties to sign declarations and agreements, which are themselves produced by outsiders with little or no familiarity with what local people are experiencing and thinking. Until recently, civil society had very little chance to participate. Mediators have not even visited the two areas, while atempts to communicate with local communities about the peace talks have been completely absent. While there are of course many challenges facing such negotiations, it is

[44] See an example of a similar approached used by the NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq (NCCI) http://dev.icvanetwork.org/taxonomycountriesxml/iraq

[45] See 'Learning from the Nuba' at http://www.cmi.no/file/1908-Learning-from-the-Nuba-Civilian-resilience-and-self-protection-during-con64258ict.pdf and http://www.occasionalwitness.com/content/documents/Letters.htm

[46] See previous footnote on the United Nations Mission in Sudan (presently footnote 25).

appalling that so little effort is made to engage with the grassroots on either side of the conflict line.

Furthermore, the lack of a strong international position on targeted violence against civilians has led to an increasing lack of trust among local populations in the global institutions mandated to promote humanitarian and human-rights law. This further weakens opposition forces commitment to, or conviction in the efficacy of, internationally-mediated negotiations for access[47]. Indirectly, such inaction can in itself become another driver of conflict.

5. Conclusions: emerging practice for supporting locally-led protection

In a recent seminar in preparation for the first World Humanitarian Summit (to be held in Istanbul in 2016), Valarie Amos, the UN's former Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) and Head of OCHA identified four key themes she considered "*we as a global humanitarian community needed to address*".[48] These were:

- How to deal with the issue of people caught in the midst of conflict.
- How to tackle vulnerability and manage risk.
- The area of humanitarian aid effectiveness. It's no longer just enough to say that we are saving lives.
- How to tackle the issue of innovation and particularly how to put innovation into practice.

Interestingly, the lessons being generated by the local protection and assistance responses, whether from these parts of Sudan or elsewhere, speak directly to all four of these themes.

5.1. Paradigm change

The evidence emerging from L2GP research (see also the recent webinars on http://www.local2global.info/area-studies/learning) adds to a growing body of evidence that suggests that current humanitarian practice would be significantly improved by shifting its frame of reference from the current paradigm of an externally-implemented- and coordinated-, UN/INGO dominated-, response that (sometimes) seeks to support local actors, to one that acknowledges the central and primary role of the autonomous response from within the affected population in all crises. The new paradigm would promote interventions supporting locally-led and coordinated humanitarian and protection responses that can build on local capacities, knowledge and practice and maximise the potential of local systems (social, economic, political, environmental) to drive protection, relief and recovery. The role of external agencies would be to support, enable and participate in existing and emergent local responses, and fill gaps as necessary.

[47] the author's personal communication with key opposition leaders, local CSOs and communities on the ground

[48] See Event Report of PHAP moderated *World Humanitarian Summit: The Future of Humanitarian Action - Live Q&A on the World Humanitarian Summit with Valerie Amos, 11 July 2014.* Copy of report available on this link*:* http://phap.org/system/files/WHS%20Valerie%20Amos%20-%20The%20Future%20of%20Humanitarian%20Action%20-%20Event%20report.pdf

At present, it takes either war[49] or political barring of access[50] to draw our attention to what affected communities, their organised civil society and leaders, can do when international aid mechanisms are unable to undertake business as usual. Even when access is not constrained, evidence indicates that supporting local protection is often the most effective and efficient response. Of course, there is still much to learn about how societies in crisis can realise their full potential for developing their own protection responses, what can or cannot be achieved, how international support can help or hinder and how the interface between local and global protection can best be managed. But the L2GP action-research adds its voice to what an ever-growing body of practitioner-based evidence is advocating for: **support for local ownership of any humanitarian response should be the *starting point* of external intervention and not the optional consideration of "participation" that is currently the case in mainstream humanitarian programming.**

This same mantra has been common in "development" aid circles for decades and it is gradually becoming more mainstream and many of the core issues would be very similar. A set of 6 guiding principles generated recently by the "Doing Development Differently" initiative[51] and endorsed by a wide range of actors from mainstream agencies provides a case in point (see Box 2). These guiding principles clearly resonate with the recommendations arising from the L2GP study of local protection in South Kordofan and Blue Nile. Given that local communities do not make the distinction between the 'development' and 'humanitarian' approaches that influence overseas aid thinking continue to reinforce, such overlap in guiding principles should come as no surprise.

Box 2 Principles for successful initiatives as defined by the "Doing Development Differently" initiative[52]

- They focus on solving local problems that are debated, defined & refined by local people in an ongoing process.
- They are legitimised at all levels (political, managerial and social), building ownership and momentum throughout the process to be 'locally owned' in reality (not just on paper).
- They work through local conveners who mobilise all those with a stake in progress (in both formal and informal coalitions and teams) to tackle common problems and introduce relevant change.
- They blend design and implementation through rapid cycles of planning, action, reflection and revision (drawing on local knowledge, feedback and energy) to foster learning from both success and failure.
- They manage risks by making 'small bets': pursuing activities with promise and dropping others.
- They foster real results –real solutions to real problems that have real impact: they build trust, empower people and promote sustainability.

Perhaps the closest we see to humanitarians' promoting local ownership and participation is in the area of disaster risk reduction and preparedness. Recent manuals on Participatory Capacity and Vulnerability Analysis[53] (prompted by increasing awareness of the consequences of climate

[49] See, for example, the L2GP reports from Palestine, Syria, Myanmar, South Sudan
[50] see the example of civil society response to Cyclones Nargis and Giri in Myanmar, presently footnote #14
[51] http://buildingstatecapability.com/the-ddd-manifesto/
[52] http://doingdevelopmentdifferently.com
[53] See for example: ACF 's "Practitioner's Manual for field staff: Participatory Risk, Capacity and Vulnerability Analysis"(ACF 2012); or Oxfam's "Practitioners Guide: Participatory Capacity and Vulnerability Analysis"(Oxfam 2012)

change) seek to encourage communities to identify the preparatory actions that they can take to reduce the negative impact of potential natural disasters. However, these still stop short of promoting locally-led and coordinated protection responses once a crisis has happened, leaving the existing paradigm of internationally-led disaster relief unchallenged.

5.2. Programming changes

A new set of programming tools, working methodologies and capacities need to be developed and institutionalised if agencies are to make this new paradigm a reality. Drawing on experiences from South Kordofan and other examples of locally-led humanitarian responses, we can perhaps begin to see, what this emerging new practice might look like.

While there is obviously much still to learn we tentatively propose the following core components:

a) Immediate support to local actors to carry out their own **participatory action research (PAR)** in order to rapidly:
   - identify and spread relevant existing knowledge and skills for local protection responses ;
   - understand best ways of supporting local actors and interventions with minimal risks of doing harm;
   - identify key gaps (knowledge, skills, management, inputs) not locally available that could be filled with support from external agencies;
   - better understand role of markets and potential impacts (positive and negative) of cash transfers;
   - ensure that the response keeps learning and being informed by real-time experiences, including the real-time evaluation of micro-grants and cash transfer programmes;
   - identify means for meeting local coordination, information and capacity building needs.

   Initiating and supporting such PAR will require the rapid deployment of sufficiently experienced resource persons to the target areas, or as near as possible, to rapidly identify and start to build relationships with existing CSOs, key institutions, structures and individuals who might be involved in, or identified by, the action research. This is NOT the usual process of many INGOs who seek out local "partners" who can then be sub-contracted to implement externally-driven plans. Rather it is the basis on which to initiate, develop and continue to learn from interventions for supporting local agency. While the local political and security dynamics will dictate to what extent relationships can or should be developed with the local authorities (be they national government representatives or non-state actors), the PAR process should aim to engage with all sections of the society.

b) Developing systems that allow **rapid disbursement of micro-grants** at scale to enable crisis affected actors to implement their own local emergency responses.[54] This requires field teams trained in advance to use an agreed methodology and standard operating procedures

[54] See examples of this type of programming in Myanmar, Ethiopia, Sudan and Cote d'Ivoire: ALNAP (2009) Innovations Case-studies: "Supporting community-based emergency response at scale: innovations in the wake of Cyclone Nargis", Paung Ku (2011) "Reflections from the Giri Response", http://www.odihpn.org/humanitarian-exchange-magazine/issue-41/helping-the-heroes-practical-lessons-from-an-attempt-to-support-a-civil-society-emergency-response-after-nargis.

(SOPs) that ensures speed, relevance and effectiveness and are matched by accountability, targeting and inclusion. At scale, these micro-grants will enable life-saving aid to reach affected populations far more quickly and cost-efficiently than externally led interventions, while strengthening to role of "victims" as active 'first-line' responders. They also represent one of the strongest tools for identifying successful, emergent initiatives, which can then be used to inform an evolving strategic response and in effect represents much of the "action" within the PAR. A well-prepared team of 3 people can fund the first micro-proposals from local actors among affected populations within 24 hours of a crisis event. Before the end of week one, this team can be disbursing $150,000 per week, supporting hundreds of micro-proposals.

c) Rapid piloting of **Cash Transfer Programmes** (CTPs) as soon as sufficient market analysis has been completed to understand key parameters for introducing cash. CTPs can then be gradually scaled up as understanding of changing opportunities and constraints of market-based interventions become clearer through continued market analysis and lessons being captured through PAR. Simultaneous **in-kind transfers** will need to be included as complementary interventions to the CTPs for commodities not available through local markets.[55] Notably, the PAR is essential to understand how to enhance (and not damage) the key role that local trade and markets play in local protection and other positive multiplier effects linked to promoting non-violent interactions across conflict lines.

d) Delivery of demand-led, context **coordination and support services** that are accessible to local actors *and* which can better support holistic, cash/micro-grant responses that are inherently cross-cutting in nature. These could include all or some of the following:

- establishment of local humanitarian monitoring systems and capacities[56];
- information-sharing and context analysis;
- strategic and programmatic coordination and planning;
- linking and networking;
- introduction of new ideas, skills-training and OD services;
- capturing and dissemination of lessons and experiences;
- logistics support; and
- advocacy and awareness raising (national, regional or international).
- the provision of **rapid impact monitoring** of humanitarian interventions on the ground and sharing of lessons (such evaluation services could complement or grow out of the PAR to ensure that lessons are captured locally and rapidly and made available to inform ongoing programming).

It is this combination of PAR, rapid micro-grants dispersal, CTPs (with complementary in-kind distributions if needed) and demand-led support services that forms the basic core of

[55] A more detailed study on the use of cash transfers in areas of active conflict with constrained access will be produced by L2GP in the future. For more information in the short term contact the L2GP Coordinator.

[56] Out-sourcing of technical oversight to reputable third-party consultancy groups with no stake in the humanitarian response may be more costly and complicated (as opposed to building in-house expertise), but may add value by increasing perceived legitimacy of monitoring outputs. See example from the Somalia Cash Consortium who outsourced monitoring to ODI; http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8521.pdf and http://www.unicef.org/somalia/SOM_resources_cashevalfinep.pdf

the emerging practice for enabling effective local responses at scale. At the core of this approach is the aim to help an effected society rapidly understand, realise and scale-up its own indigenous capabilities to address crisis problems, with external actors filling in gaps where necessary (see Box 3).

Box 3. The basic approach for supporting local protection

The strategic priorities and modalities of the PAR, micro-grants, CTPs and support services will be different in every context, but the basic approach remains the same. Thus in this case study of South Kordofan and Blue Nile, particular attention was given to using the PAR, micro-grants and support services to support the following:

- disseminating and strengthening **existing community-based self-protection** activities that can be undertaken without external inputs and supporting the key role of women as local protection leaders and actors;
- introducing **new knowledge and skills**, such as first aid for bomb wounds, psycho-social healing;
- supporting continued **public service delivery** to better meet basic health, education, WASH and livelihood needs (e.g. seed, tools, livestock drugs, fishing nets);
- supply of inputs not available in sufficient quantities through local markets (in this case plastic sheeting and blankets, medicines and education materials);
- support for **local peace building** and peace education, both to reduce immediate levels of local violence and to contribute to wider conflict transformation;
- Support local efforts to establish independent, credible **humanitarian and human-rights monitoring** systems
- providing **logistics support**, through management and maintenance of a pooled vehicle fleet;
- supporting **advocacy** and awareness raising of a forgotten humanitarian crisis, including support for local journalism and facilitating national and international media coverage;
- strengthening capacities and accountability mechanisms of **local duty bearers** and governance structures, community-based and administrative, recognising that these will at times include non-state actors working on a voluntary basis;
- strengthening local authorities' and civil society's role in maintaining civil law and order, **access to justice** and upholding human and civil rights.

5.3. Institutional changes

To achieve the paradigm shift being advocated for here, donors, UN agencies and INGOs[57] need to change institutional incentives from prioritising externally-led and designed humanitarian responses to incentives that maximise opportunities for effective locally-led responses. The current norms that prioritise organisational growth, grant-capture, market-share, upward accountability, and being risk averse as acceptable organisational priorities will need to be replaced by another set of priorities around enabling genuine local agency, grassroots empowerment, creativity, risk management, learning, networking, ultimately doing oneself out of a job. Without these changes in organisational culture, the programmatic changes summarised above will be unable to emerge.

[57] Such organisational realignment will be just as relevant for larger established local NGOs, many of which are built in the likeness of their international counterparts.

Similarly, changes would be needed in the current cluster systems for coordination (as overseen by mandated UN agencies) that remain inaccessible to much of local civil society and emergent self-help groups[58], especially where the sovereign state prevents mainstream humanitarian access. OCHA could still take the lead in facilitating such adaptive, demand-led coordination mechanisms to emerge, but allow the particular institutional make to evolve more organically to fit the local context. A working model in South Kordofan and Blue Nile and elsewhere is the establishment of a small secretariat answerable to a steering committee made up of key local and international agencies committed to responding from the beginning.[59] Administratively, this secretariat may be hosted by any one of these agencies. The formation of an additional (possibly voluntary) Advisory Group of recognised experts with particular knowledge of the target area can provide an important source of guidance in what will often be extremely complex and challenging operating environments. They can also provide important reputational legitimacy to the evolving operation, which helps with fund raising. L2GP aims to produce a special paper on practical recommendations for such locally-led coordination.

5.4. Peace-keeping and human rights

Radical changes are also needed in the peace-keeping structures, mechanisms and methodologies to allow a much greater engagement with and support for community-led processes for protecting peace. By far the most important humanitarian and protection intervention in South Kordofan would have been to prevent a return to war in the first place – and it is possible that with a different mechanism to that provided by the UN DPKO and UNMIS form 2005 to 2011, a resurgence of conflict could have been avoided.[60] With the possibility to learn from alternative peace-keeping experiences that have invested much more in local actors, knowledge and relationships (the Joint Military Commission in South Kordofan is just one example[61]) such changes in approach to the "industrial" peacekeeping norm of DPKO missions need not be difficult or expensive –many lessons are already out there.[62] What is needed is the political willingness to prioritise and accelerate such changes in the approach.

New institutional incentives are needed to encourage international humanitarian leaders to expose and denounce violations of humanitarian law by the State, even when this might challenge their continued presence within in the country. There is a time and a place for the strategic or tactical compromise or appeasement, but if this becomes the norm then it can only encourage perpetrators to continue unchecked. As the Feinstein Centre report[63] on protection failures so eloquently puts it:

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[58] See http://www.odihpn.org/humanitarian-exchange-magazine/issue-41/support-to-local-initiatives-in-the-nargis-response-a-fringe-versus-mainstream-approach

[59] The experiences of the Coordination Unit in the current response to this crisis are complemented by those of the Local Resource Centre (LRC) established in Myanmar to cater for the needs of the local civil society response that remained largely excluded from the UN/INGO cluster coordination mechanisms. For more on this, See ALNAP Case-studies 2010, no 4: Supporting community-based emergency response at scale: innovations in the wake of cyclone Nargis

[60] See Chapter 4 "Protecting the peace" within original study Learning from the Nuba on www.local2global.info.

[61] *Ibid.*

[62] See also the work of the "Future of Peace Operations Program" of the Stimson Centre. Just one relevant example can be found on: www.insightonconflict.org/2014/07/working-safely-communities-mitigate-risks/

[63] Norah Niland (2014). Inhumanity and Humanitarian Action: Protection Failures in Sri Lanka. Feinstein International Center, Tufts University: Medford, USA.

"...relief actors need to be emboldened rather than emasculated when confronted with anti-humanitarian agendas. This means making a meaningful commitment to prioritizing protective humanitarian action including, but not only, when warfare is designed to maximize the suffering of civilians....The Sri Lankan experience shows that the humanitarian system needs to determine, on an urgent basis, why protection in the context of humanitarian action is routinely misunderstood and relegated to Cinderella status to the detriment of those in need of life-saving action."

5.5. Funding mechanisms and grant management

A recent report from L2GP highlights the current inequalities in the global humanitarian funding system and the remarkably small percentage of funds that are channelled through local humanitarian actors.[64] The transaction costs (financial, administrative, and managerial) of accessing and managing most humanitarian grants have become so large that few local actors can compete with grant-savvy INGOs.[65] This needn't restrict locally-led responses if grantees then use funds to support the core approach, (e.g. PAR, micro-grant dispersal at scale and CTPs). However, for this to happen, donors will need to provide *pre-financing* to establish rapid funding mechanisms that are immediately mobilised when crises hit. Donors will also need to ensure that their own compliance regulations are compatible with micro-grant disbursal to local actors.

At the same time, local NGOs will also need to strengthen their own financial and grant management capacities, if donors are to start investing more directly in them. While in some contexts it may still make sense to leave the bureaucratic and administrative burden of managing donor relationships to friendly INGO partners, in the long run this will perpetuate power imbalances and slow down the institutional changes needed for locally-led humanitarian action to go to scale and become mainstreamed.

5.6. Final thoughts

Many of the above conclusions focus on programmatic, organisational and institutional changes that demand a shift in power and in relationships. These are logical transformations required to allow for locally-driven humanitarian and protection responses. But how to overcome the inertia within the international humanitarian aid and peace-keeping systems to such changes remains a challenge. The annual reports of any major bilateral donor, UN agency or NGO give the impression that we are all more or less on the right track - that the challenges we face are external (not internal) and that the biggest problem is one of insufficient resources to do more of what we are already doing. There is little call from the Directors, CEOs and Representatives to challenge this, no suggestion that our current *modus operandi* may be part of the problem rather than the solution.

[64] Read the full briefing note "Funding flows to national and local humanitarian actors" at www.local2global.info

[65] At the time of writing, for example, one of the INGOs involved has had to send several of its senior programme staff (English speaking graduates) on a 3 day course in Nairobi (at $2,700 per person, without accommodation, meals, flights etc) to learn the donor compliance regulations required for grant management of just one donor (using a 471 page manual).

It seems likely that change will be incremental and based on gradually building a body of practical experience that demonstrates in practice how things can be done more effectively and cost efficiently. This will require convincing small networks of individual practitioners, policy makers, and donors to try to do it differently, take risks, observe what happens, share results of what works and what doesn't and gradually build a body of practice that can be institutionalized and taken to a larger scale. It is hoped that some of the experiences described in this paper, of local protection efforts being supported by global resources, might contribute in a small way to such a process of change.