

# Learning from the Nuba: Civilian resilience and self-protection during conflict

By Justin Corbett\*

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Local to Global Protection (L2GP) is an initiative intended to document and promote local perspectives on protection in major humanitarian crises. So far, community oriented studies have been carried out in Burma/Myanmar, Sudan, South Sudan and Zimbabwe.



\* Justin Corbett is an independent consultant with other 20 years of experience working with local communities, governments and aid organisations in Africa and Asia. With a background in natural resource management his work now focuses on community empowerment, civil society, governance and capacity building, whether in contexts of emergency relief or of longer term environmental and livelihood security. He remains worried that mainstream aid may be part of the problem and now seeks less hypocritical sources of income in window cleaning.

L2GP was initiated by a group of organisations within the ACT Alliance in cooperation with other organisations and individuals in the above countries. The initiative has been financially supported by Danida (Denmark) and Sida (Sweden). A paper summarising the initiative and synthesising key findings so far, will be published by the Overseas Development Institute's Humanitarian Policy Group (ODI HPG).

The analysis and opinions in this report are solely the responsibility of the credited author(s) and cannot be attributed to any of the above mentioned institutions.

L2GP studies from Burma/Myanmar, Sudan, South Sudan and Zimbabwe are available at [www.local2global.info](http://www.local2global.info)

Contact & further information:

L2GP manager, Nils Carstensen e-mail: [info@local2global.info](mailto:info@local2global.info)

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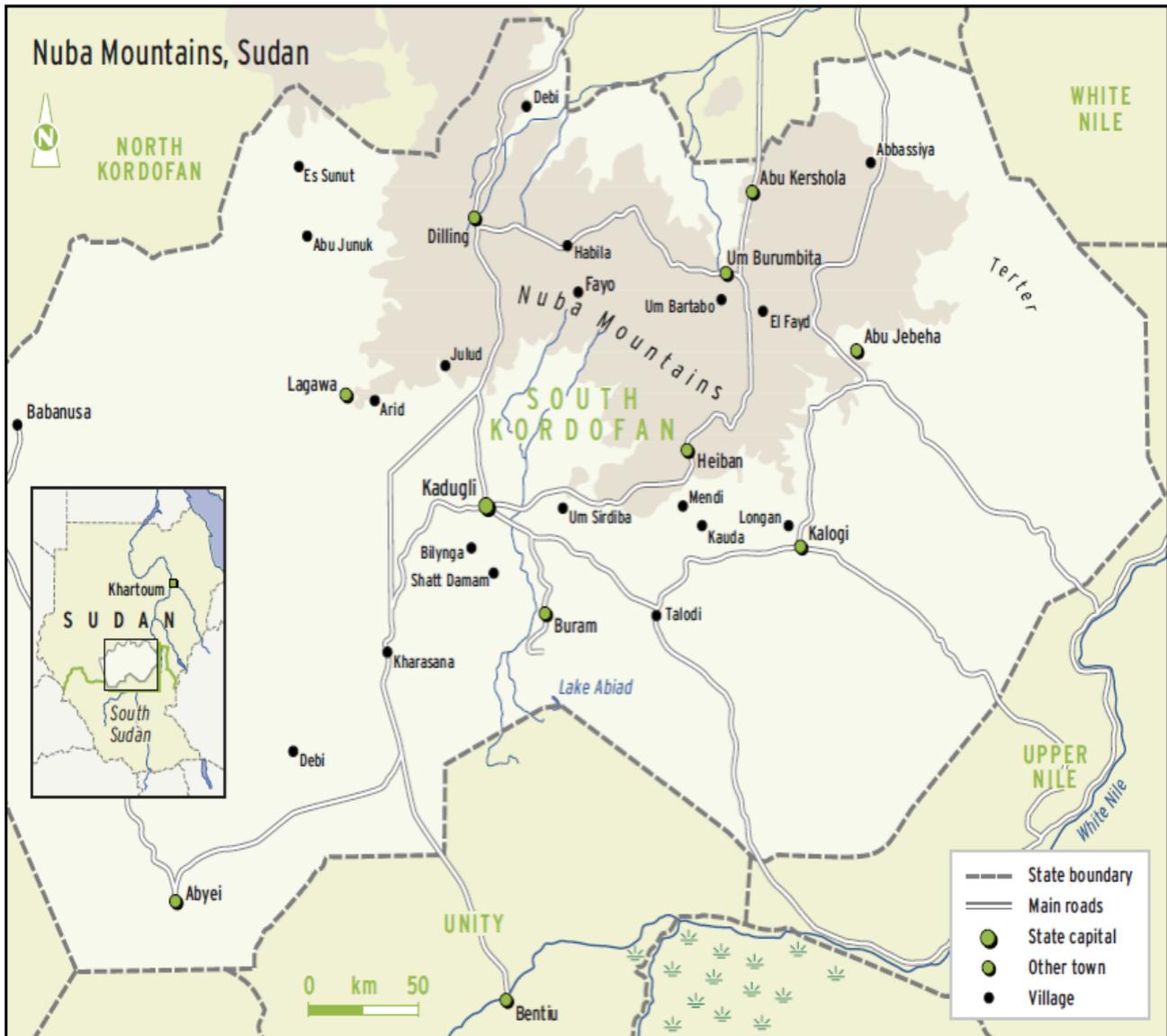
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## Acronyms

CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
GOS	Government of Sudan
INGO	International Non Governmental Organisation
JIU	Join Integrated Unit
JMC	Joint Military Commission
L2GP	Local to Global Protection Project
NAC	Nuba Advisory Council
PDF	Popular Defence Force
SPLA/M	Sudan People’s Liberation Army/Movement
UNMIS	United Nations Mission in Sudan
WFP	World Food Programme

## Map of the Nuba Mountains, South Kordofan, Sudan



Small Arms Campaign: *The drift back to war: Insecurity and militarization in the Nuba Mountains*, Sudan Issue Brief - Small Arms Survey Number 12 August 2008 p.2

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## Executive summary

The Local to Global Protection project (L2GP) was initiated in 2009 in order to learn more from populations that have lived through protracted periods of conflict or natural disaster with only limited access to outside assistance. The project seeks to improve understanding about how threatened people attempt to protect themselves, how they perceive the role of different actors and how protection efforts (both endogenous and external) might become more effective. The project was initiated by a group of aid agencies within the ACT Alliance working closely with The Overseas Development Institute's Humanitarian Policy Group (ODI HPG) and guided by initial advice from the Collaborative Learning Projects (CDA).

This paper presents a study of local experiences during the violent conflict that occurred across the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan in Sudan between 1986 and 2005. The case study of Nuba is important because of the range of protection threats experienced by people, the paucity of international protection and the remarkable levels of self-reliance. Interviews were conducted with 162 women, men and children in Nuba along with key informants from civil society, local authorities and international actors. The paper presents key lessons from the recent past, suggestions for protecting the current fragile peace and for how communities may prepare for possible future conflict.

The study highlights the inter-connectedness of threats experienced and suggests that protection interventions should be as holistic as possible to reflect the linkages between physical safety, livelihoods and rights. It suggests that the psychological needs of war affected people (including issues of self-esteem, belongingness and even opportunities to have fun) can be as significant as their physical hardships.

Numerous practical examples emerge as to how communities and individuals attempt to protect their physical safety, livelihoods and their rights in an effort to survive. Several of these actions could be strengthened by outside actors. However, such self-protection measures often have negative side-effects and they can not replace effective external civilian protection.

Despite the increased risks they faced during conflict, many women saw themselves more able to cope with the stress of war than men and all respondents

acknowledged the importance of their role in protection both at family and community level.

The paper illustrates the inadequacy of current mainstream aid mechanisms and international peacekeeping missions to provide protection to populations being targeted by ruling parties in their own countries. Support for good governance and the local provision of public services during conflict along with capacity support for local civil society is shown to have great, but under-exploited, potential to strengthen self-protection. The mixed contribution of the Nuba SPLA/M to civilian protection suggests ways of engaging with local parties that might be appropriate.

The study reveals the level of local concern that the underlying reasons for war in Nuba remain unresolved. In terms of 'protecting the peace' many felt more could be done to initiate the social, economic and political changes required to avoid a return to violence. Support for people-to-people dialogue was seen as particularly relevant both within South Kordofan and with the wider public of northern Sudan, not only for long term peace building but also during war as a contribution to self-protection.

Finally the paper explores how lesson learning and capacity building for self-protection could be facilitated within and between vulnerable communities.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose of the research and structure of this paper

The Local to Global Protection project (L2GP) was initiated in 2009 by a group of European Aid agencies to learn from populations that have lived through protracted periods of conflict or natural disaster with limited assistance. It seeks to improve understanding about how threatened people attempt to protect themselves, how they perceive the role of different actors and how protection efforts (both endogenous and external) might become more effective.

This paper describes one component of L2GP: a study of local experiences during the violent conflict that occurred across the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan in Sudan between 1986 and 2005. The case study of Nuba self-protection is important for a number of reasons, not least because of the duration of the war, the lack of international assistance, the remarkable levels of self-reliance demonstrated by people facing extreme hardships, and the variation of protection threats experienced by people according to where they spent the war. The background to the Nuba conflict is described in more detail below in section 1.2.

We ran to the top of the mountain to escape the violence – but many were too late: they were killed in terrible ways, raped, beaten and some were taken away and we never saw them again

Moro woman, 45 years

When the enemy came we did not all manage to escape to the mountain. That was the night my wife and 2 children were killed. I saw her on the ground. All of her body was just blood and same with the children in her arms. I thought god was really far from me that time.

Otoro man, 40 years

So many civilian people died from hunger. In Tulushi village I found 3 children all dead in 1 small bed from hunger and their parents killed by soldiers, lying dead and rotten on the floor outside the house.

Tulushi young man (he was 12 at the time of this incident)

For the whole war [displaced in GOS controlled areas] we lived with no rights and always in fear of the police. Work was very hard and paid very badly. My small daughter got sick and died because we could not afford the medicines. It was a bad time.....We were living in the dark We would rather die in the light.

Miri man, 50 years

How many Nuba died as a result of the war will never be known, but accounts suggest a figure of several tens of thousands<sup>1</sup> (many hundreds of thousands lost their homes and were displaced to different parts of Sudan). The number of deaths would undoubtedly have been much higher had it not been for the remarkable resilience and self-protection of the Nuba people. It could also have been significantly less with appropriate humanitarian and political interventions by relevant international actors. However, the purpose of this paper is not to pass judgement on what was done or not done in the past. Its aim is to draw lessons that might strengthen future efforts to assist people dealing with protracted periods of war. These lessons are described in section 3.

The civil war between the GOS and SPLA/M was officially ended throughout Sudan with the signing of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005. But many worry that a sustainable and just peace in South Kordofan has yet to be secured as many underlying drivers for conflict remained unresolved. Section 4 looks at how local communities perceive the transition between war and peace and how they think future threats can be averted by 'protecting the peace' that they have today. This study backs up findings from elsewhere that even under oppressive oligarchies the wider public may at times play an indirect protection role in curbing excessive use of State violence against innocent citizens. Section 4.4 explores the opportunities to help raise awareness among the public of northern Sudan of its potential, and responsibility, to protect minority groups in the north from persecution by the state. Such efforts at building on the natural compassion and humanity that exist in any society may represent an area of protection that deserves more attention.

This paper (English, lengthy, academic) targets an international aid audience with the aim of informing development of their policy and practice, especially in supporting local protection efforts and political lobbying. However, the research indicates that so much of the de facto responsibility for providing protection will always remain with the vulnerable civilians themselves. Since many of the lessons are of direct relevance to vulnerable, grassroots communities, it seems that we also need a separate means of sharing lessons learnt with them. How could effective experiential learning be facilitated across a scattered population like the Nuba (in case they ever face a return of insecurity)? Similarly, how could the experiences of the Nuba help strengthen the self-protection efforts of vulnerable communities in Darfur, or Southern Sudan or in other countries? And vice versa? These issues are explored in section 5.

## **1.2 Methodology of the research**

The basis of the research was the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions carried out between May 2010 and January 2011 with 162 women and men and children

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<sup>1</sup> The GOS head of security for Kordofan in the early 90s estimated that 60–70,000 Nuba civilians were killed in 7 months alone between 1992 and 1993. Quoted in *Cultivating Peace: Conflict and Collaboration in Natural Resource Management*; Buckles, D. IDRC, World Bank Institute, Washington DC, 1999.

from communities who lived through the conflict. Box 1 below summarises the approach used:

### **Box 1 Summary of research methodology**

- A total of 124 separate semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions covering a total 162 respondents from South Kordofan
- The interviews were carried out by group of 15 trained local facilitators (6 women and 10 men) from South Kordofan and the one expatriate researcher
- A highly conversational approach to interviews was adopted, using a very flexible question checklist that evolved during the course of the research (see Annex 1). Each interview commenced with participants being asked to tell their story of what happened to them during the war. These testimonies provide the base for the rest of the interview and the context for interpreting responses and (possibly) identifying patterns or trends.
- Average interview length was 2 hours
- About 25% of respondents were visited 2 or more times to allow a more in-depth dialogue to develop
- 57% of respondents were male, 43% female.
- The majority of respondents were farmers and housewives, between the age of 30 and 45 years. The youngest was 20 (not yet born when the conflict started and 13 years old when the ceasefire was signed); the oldest was 70.
- Key informants were also interviewed, including: teachers, nurses, traditional healers, local leaders, religious leaders, students, youth association leaders, traders, soldiers both SPLA and GOS Army.
- Interviews were carried out in 56 different villages and 10 nomadic cattle groups in 10 localities and in the towns of Kadugli, Lagawa, El Fula, Dilling, Heiban and Rashad.
- 18 distinct ethnic groups covered – 3 Arab tribes, the Falata (Hawsa) and 14 Nuba tribes, in addition to individual key informants of other ethnic backgrounds from North and South Sudan.
- 5 different local languages used: Arabic, Kawaliib, Otoro, Tira, Tulushi

A data base (using ACCESS) was set up to record and process all information that could be quantified or codified direct from interview transcripts. More qualitative and subjective feelings and lessons gleaned from each interview were recorded in long hand as interview notes. Direct quotes (italicised in text boxes) are coded for purposes of confidentiality.

In addition to these community-based interviews, discussions were held with a wide range of external actors from UN agencies, international NGOs and donors, journalists and individuals with particular insights into the local context. The expatriate researcher was able to draw on many years of living and working in northern Sudan, and direct experience of providing humanitarian assistance in the Nuba Mountains during the conflict. Many secondary sources were also used, cited in the footnotes.

### **1.3 Background to the conflict**

The Nuba Mountains rise from the semi-arid savannah and woodlands of South Kordofan, one of the largest states of northern Sudan bordering what is now the Republic of South

Sudan. These rugged uplands – granite outcrops, plateaus and escarpments rarely exceeding 1500 metres in height – are found over an area of some 88,000 square kilometres. The fertile plains in between the mountains and (historically) good tree cover provide some of the best rain-fed arable and livestock production of northern Sudan. The population is dominated by over 50 distinct and diverse ethnic groups of black African origin collectively known as the Nuba. The date of their first settlement in the region is not known – most historians suggest at least 500 years ago, and possibly much longer. They live alongside a number of Arab pastoralist tribes<sup>2</sup>, indigenised Falata (of West African origin) and small numbers of ‘Jalaba’ (Arab trading elites from the north) who have moved into the area over the last 200 years. More details of the people of the Nuba Mountains relevant to the recent conflict is given in Annex 2.

For generations the policies of successive Khartoum-based governments have been to marginalise the people of South Kordofan, Nuba and Baggara alike. The effects of such policies (e.g. restricted educational and employment opportunities; loss of traditional farm and grazing land to outsider mechanised schemes; social discrimination; lack of political rights; banning of local languages from school curricula) led to increasing frustration, especially amongst educated Nuba in the seventies and eighties. Failure to bring about any changes through political process and alarm at the undemocratic imposition of Sha’ria law (in 1983) led to increasingly open opposition by Nuba leaders<sup>3</sup>. In response, the Government of Sadiq al Mahdi began arming local Misseriya youth (typically impoverished and marginalised groups themselves) and encouraging them as local “*murahaleen*” militia to attack Nuba communities and take land and property by force. It was at this time that the emerging leader of Nuba opposition, (the late) Yusef Kuwa Mekki, announced the decision to align with the SPLA/M and embark on a period of armed resistance against Government attacks and policies<sup>4</sup>.

Military escalation was rapid and brutal. Extrajudicial execution, torture and imprisonment of educated Nuba and everyone suspected of supporting the resistance was widespread. The Misseriya militia were increased, trained, rearmed and established by law as the Popular Defence Force (PDF)<sup>5</sup>. Nuba villages were attacked and burnt to the ground, women raped, youth conscripted, community leaders shot. The newly formed Nuba SPLA forces attacked a few smaller garrisons of the Government and militia groups. Sudanese army forces moved in high numbers in to South Kordofan (with helicopters, fighters planes and bombers and

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<sup>2</sup> Especially the cattle-herding Hawazma, Hamr and Misseriya tribes collectively known as Baggara; also the camel-herding Shenabla

<sup>3</sup> See “Marginalisation and violence –Considering origins of insurgency and peace implementation in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan” Aleksí Ylönen; Institute for Security Studies, Paper 201, October 2009

<sup>4</sup> An insightful interview with Yousef Kuwa, carried out a few weeks before his death in 2001, can be found on [www.occasionalwitness.com](http://www.occasionalwitness.com)

<sup>5</sup> For a useful analysis of the PDF and their origins see: “A Paramilitary Revolution: The Popular Defence Forces” Jago Salmon, Small Arms Survey, 2007

foreign military advisors and combatants), effectively encircling the mountainous areas where the opposition forces were based.

By the early 90s the Government had acquired a fatwa from Muslim clerics to legitimise a jihad against the Nuba people and commenced a campaign that was implicitly genocidal, involving: targeted destruction of Nuba villages by ground and air forces; promotion of rape and insemination of Nuba women by Arab soldiers; planned relocation of half a million Nuba to controlled holding camps within Kordofan and to other parts of northern Sudan and (over a third of which was achieved by 1993); and use of starvation as a weapon of war. Massive displacement of Nuba civilians to other parts of North Sudan occurred, with perhaps 400,000 fleeing into the mountains where they remained besieged by the Sudanese army and the PDF. Boreholes and wells in the villages were either destroyed or poisoned. Cut off from any form of outside contact (markets, supplies, services) the people faced up to 15 years of isolation without transport, money or access to formal health care, schooling, and basic needs such as salt, soap, clothes and agricultural inputs.

Meanwhile the Nuba SPLA forces were engaged almost exclusively in defence of the besieged mountain areas, attempting to repel attacks despite very limited arms and ammunition. Remarkably, they were never completely overrun. Thus in 2002, when a ceasefire was signed as an initial step towards the CPA between the Sudan Government and the SPLA, there was still a significant force of Nuba SPLA holding core positions in the mountains where several hundred thousand civilians were still surviving.

### International action

Right up to the signing of the CPA in 2005, Nuba was excluded from the Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) agreement that allowed humanitarian access to threatened civilian populations. For the first 10 years of the war, no international aid or protection of any sort was available to the civilians living in areas under the Nuba SPLA and only very minimal assistance to those living in the so-called “peace camps” (tightly controlled camps established by GOS security in South Kordofan where Nuba civilians suspected of sympathising with Nuba SPLA were held for many years during the war). Indeed, it was only after the first visits into the Nuba Mountains by African Rights in 1995 and an independent journalist and the subsequent release of a book (“Facing Genocide, the Nuba of Sudan”) and BBC documentary that the international aid community became aware of what was happening in the Nuba Mountains. By the mid to late 90s a small number of international NGOs and Church groups had begun to brave the considerable security risks of flying in small amounts of aid – food, salt, medicines, soap, clothes, school books, agricultural inputs and small amounts of cash for local purchase. Because of the military dangers they maintained a minimal presence on the ground, often working through indigenous NGOs and church based groups that maintained a constant presence in the SPLA-controlled areas during the war.

Given the costs and risks of flying into the Nuba Mountains at that time (relief planes were targeted by GOS artillery and aerial bombing) and the difficulties of the work environment (no transport of any kind, communications only by satellite phones, no electricity, real risks

of ground attack and ambush), external aid remained minimal until the Nuba Mountains ceasefire was signed in 2002 between the GOS and SPLA/M. The brokering of the ceasefire itself was a crucial intervention<sup>6</sup>, as was its subsequent supervision by the JMC (Joint Military Commission), successfully undertaken by just 75 unarmed ceasefire monitors<sup>7</sup>. At the same time, a strategic framework and coordination structure was established by a group of NGOs and the office of the United Nations Resident Representative and Humanitarian Coordinator. Known as the Nuba Mountains Programme Advancing Conflict Transformation (NMPACT) this was designed to facilitate a “phased, multi-agency, cross-conflict programme of interventions” to respond to the opportunities for interventions generated by the ceasefire agreement<sup>8</sup>.

In 2005, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the SPLA/M and the GOS was signed, and the Nuba Mountains won special autonomous status as a result. Its future now depends on the aftermath of the referendum in which southerners voted for independence, the South Kordofan state elections (scheduled for May 2011) and how the Government of Sudan responds to the process and findings of the subsequent popular consultation in South Kordofan.

## 2. Experiences of war and perceptions of protection threats

### 2.1 Core experiences

The majority of respondents were living in South Kordofan throughout the war. Depending on the location of their homes at the start of the conflict, they either moved to escape attack (up in to the SPLA/M controlled mountains or into the GOS-controlled towns), or remained in their villages in areas that remained outside of the immediate combat zone and under GOS control. A minority of interviewees were resident in Khartoum or other parts of northern Sudan throughout the war, with a smaller number either moving to the north to escape the fighting or returning to the Nuba Mountains from the north to be with their family and to escape increasing discrimination.

This was not a war in which civilian casualties were the result only of crossfire between opposing armies. Nuba civilians were directly targeted by the Sudanese army and militias (through ground attack, artillery and aerial bombing) and by internal security (imprisonment,

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<sup>6</sup> Mason, Simon A, 2007, “Learning from the Swiss Mediation and Facilitation Experiences in Sudan” Working paper, online at <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/news/dossier/mediation/pubs/pub.cfm>

<sup>7</sup> History of the JMC, Lisa Ibscher; [http://janerikwilhelmsen.com/docs/sudan/History\\_JMC\\_2.1.doc](http://janerikwilhelmsen.com/docs/sudan/History_JMC_2.1.doc) ; see also: “JMC Supervision of the Ceasefire Agreement in the Nuba Mountains, 2002–2005”, a presentation prepared for the SSRC Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum by Jan Erik Wilhelmsen

<sup>8</sup> Pantuliano, S. 2005. A ‘Principled’ Approach to Complex Emergencies: Testing a New Aid Delivery Model in the Nuba Mountains. In Disasters. Volume 29. ODI. London.

torture and execution). While SPLA forces were mostly involved in defending claimed territory and positions, they also occasionally counter-attacked Sudanese garrisons, militia camps and Baggara livestock camps, where civilians were among the casualties. Similarly, there were occasions when the presence of Nuba SPLA forces significantly increased risks to civilians by provoking attacks from GOS forces. Human rights abuses, to varying degrees, were committed by GOS, PDF and SPLA forces and, as in any war, civilians suffered at the hands of armed combatants on both sides of the conflict.

Over half the interviewees had lost close family members as a result of the war, either being killed during attacks or dying from war-related famine and disease. Almost all respondents who were present in the Nuba region during the war witnessed death from killing or starvation/disease as well as destruction and loss of property (houses, land, cattle, crops, grain stores and community assets such as churches, mosques, schools, clinics and wells). Most mentioned family separation as a core component of their war-time experience.

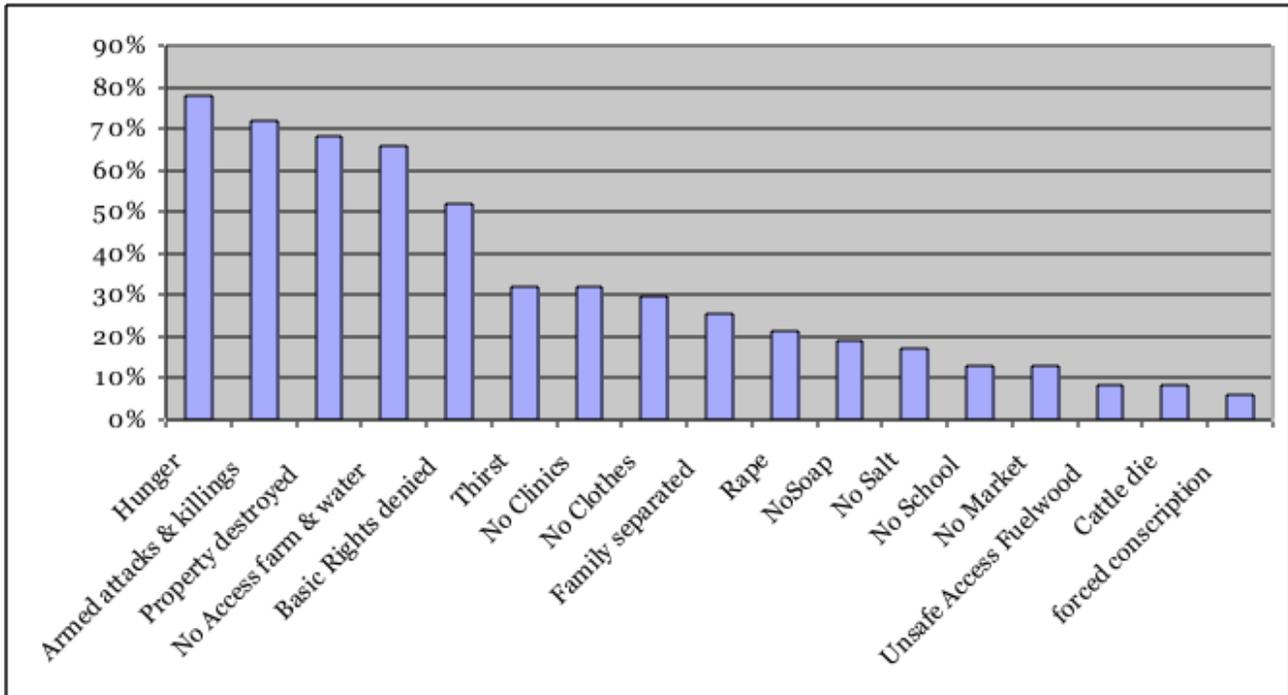
## 2.2 Perceptions of key protection threats

The perception of problems and priorities obviously depends on where the person was during the war and what exactly they experienced. It will also depend on the nature of the person, their age, sex and background. And, especially during protracted conflicts like this one, they will change over time. Despite these variables however, it has been possible to recognise some key patterns from the interviews conducted.

Chart 1 shows the responses to questions concerning protection threats. The core problems most commonly raised were related to

- **hunger** , due to restricted or unsafe access to farm land, forced displacement, loss of livestock, and agricultural inputs, death of family labour, lack of access to markets, loss of employment, lack of disposable income
- **security** risks, injury and death due to military attack through ground forces and militias, artillery and aerial bombing, mines, poisoned wells, abduction, rape
- **destruction of property**
- **lack of services** (health, water, education, markets, communication, transport)
- **rights** related issues (imprisonment, torture, rape, restricted freedom of movement/speech/association, heightened discrimination, lack of right of appeal, forced conscription, alienation)

**Chart 1 Frequency of responses related to core protection threats**



For those living in the besieged mountains (i.e. SPLA/M areas), **security, hunger and loss of property** were the problems most frequently raised. For those living the other side of the ‘front’ line, or elsewhere in North Sudan, security was much less of an issue. Instead most of the problems mentioned were (what we would classify as being) **rights**-related: discrimination, lack of free speech and movement, imprisonment, rape, torture, extra-judiciary executions.

Many of the interviews revealed first-hand accounts of appalling suffering and distress. Civilian casualties were high especially during the first 10 years of conflict and most had witnessed high death rates from starvation, disease and warfare – people being shot, burnt alive, killed by machete, beaten to death, blown up by mines and bombs, killed by poisoned well water. Many incidents of rape were recounted and for those Nuba living in northern Sudan, heightened discrimination was the norm, with imprisonment, torture and witnessing violent execution not being unusual.

Death, destruction and displacement was everywhere. It was not our fault to demand our rights, our relatives were killed. We left our villages and ran to the mountains as they were the only shelter. When we go to market government agents harass us, and if they suspect anyone, they immediately kill him.  
*Tira woman, 50 years*

By 1987 war had started in our villages; innocent citizens were targeted and assassinated by the army and security forces. People were forced to join the GOS army, youth and students became soldiers

against their wills. Schools were closed, girls and women raped in front their families. Many educated people from Nuba were killed just because they were brilliant and full of knowledge.

Tima man, 46 years

When we were attacked in 1998, the enemy came at night, took all our cattle and goats, burnt all the villages and markets, and many people were killed. This is when I lost my first born who was killed by landmine while we were running to save my life and the life of my three children.

34 year old Moro man

My advice to international to give support for livelihoods because during war most people died due to food problems.

Tulushi woman, 38 years

The enemy came killing us and destroying our village, raping the women, burning the houses. They killed my husband and my son. I saw four soldiers raping my neighbour and this all makes me lose my interest in my life. But we ran to the mountain and hid ourselves amidst the stones, me with my two surviving children.

Otoro woman, 42 years

When our village was attacked there was massive killing – every house was burned to the ground and many people died. That was when I lost my two legs [she was 11 years old at the time].

Tira woman, 32 years old

There are significant differences in perceptions of protection threats when we disaggregate them according to variables such as sex, age, location:

- Women mentioned unsafe access to water, lack of clothes and soap as core problems far more often than did men.
- Lack of health services was a major problem for those in the mountains as was separation of families, while these were much less frequently mentioned by those in the plains
- Similarly, no safe access to farm land and water sources was a key problem for civilians displaced to the mountains to escape fighting
- Systematic and approved discrimination in schools, workplace, markets etc was commonly mentioned by those who remained in garrison towns, but not by those who fled to the hills.

For many of the Baggara groups dependent on grazing areas cut off by the war, livelihoods were significantly affected by the conflict. To avoid risk of attack from SPLA forces they had to move to other areas, experiencing (in some cases) significant loss of livestock as a result.

We lost many animals because of the war. Now we are in debt and facing poverty and hunger. Our life is so difficult now.

45 year old Misseriya man

Because of the fighting we could not find the grazing for our animals. Many of them died. Even my two brothers were killed in attacks from SPLA.

38 year old Hawazma woman

Problems clearly changed over time during protracted hostilities. In many cases, interviewees would describe terrible security-related experiences at the start of the war, but then list hunger as the dominant problem which characterised the conflict for them. Thus one person (MJ1) recounted:

“... when war started our village was attacked several times, our properties were burned and all the cattle, my father and brother were killed and we run away from our land to Tongoli mountain to seek safety...”

But when asked to list what he felt had been the core problems, he made no mention of security issues and spoke only of hunger and lack of services, problems which came to dominate once people had fled the worst of the security risks by moving up into the mountains. Others pointed out that mortality increased during the dry and hungry months of March to June not only as a result of malnutrition but also because of the increased risks of having to travel to insecure dry-season wells (which also resulted in increased incidences of rape and abduction).

**Lesson 1** People will perceive protection threats differently according to their location, livelihood, gender, age and socio-economic status. Threats will also change significantly with time during the course of a conflict and with changing seasons. When assessing local protection priorities, outside actors must take such variables into account.

The research reveals the significance attached to rights-related issues and the stark contrast between the perceptions of communities depending on which side of the ‘front line’ they spent the war. Thus in discussion with those that remained in GOS-controlled areas, whether in the “peace camps” or in their original villages or elsewhere in northern Sudan, the curtailment of civic rights was often mentioned as a significant problem. Apart from the acute rights abuses mentioned (summary execution, imprisonment without trial, rape, torture, and conscription), more chronic cases were recounted too: exploitative employment, withholding of salaries, harassment and abuse from security forces, greatly restricted entry into higher education, higher fees for school, failure in exams. Several interviewees mentioned that local education became a problem because teachers were targeted and executed by the GoS.

During the war many Nuba people were targeted especially the educated. Many were killed, and some were forced to leave the country. Numbers of Arab tribes were armed by the government during (El Sadig El Mahadi) period. These experiences made anger among Nuba people and pushed them to take weapons to get back the lost dignity and rights.

Tima woman, 45 years

In middle 1987 the information come that Nuba people in the Mountains have joined with SPLA/M. After that GOS treat us badly, put some people in prison, torture those who have education. Nuba people faced a lot of problems in Khartoum: no employment, no freedom of movement like before. The GOS forced Nuba youth to join GOS Army and tell them go and kill your brother there in the mountains.

Nuba man living in Khartoum during the war

Similarly in the GOS-controlled garrison towns in the Nuba Mountains, rights were a key issue:

No movement was allowed at all; you must keep quiet not asking about any things, only soldiers have rights to move, no one can help or protect you, because our relationship with security forces were very bad.

Nuba living in GOS Garrison town in Nuba

Apart from these more 'conventional' rights-related threats, the interviews also revealed how displaced Nuba living in the North were so strongly affected by the sense of alienation and loneliness they experienced there. The psychological need to feel respected, to belong and be part of an understanding and supportive community, came through very clearly in the research, as did the pain that is felt when these needs are denied (section 3.4 below). Some felt so compelled to respond to the lack of belongingness and esteem that they took enormous risks (often fatal) to attempt to return to their communities in the war zones. Behavioural psychologists would not be surprised by this – these needs correspond exactly with those described by Maslow's classic "Hierarchy of Needs"<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, the protection threats described by the respondents in this research (physical insecurity; lack of food, water and basic services; lack of belongingness, love, esteem, respect, social acceptance) match almost exactly those described by Maslow as fundamental needs of stable and healthy human beings.

**Lesson 2** The psychological needs of displaced people cut off from their own communities and forced to survive in alien and discriminatory societies are highly significant. Similarly, the benefits of nurturing a sense of belongingness, friendship, respect and understanding should not be under-estimated.

This research has not attempted to make a thorough assessment of how different effected communities apportion blame for the protection threats that resulted from the 20 or so years of civil war in the Nuba Mountains. The initial decision by a group of opposition Nuba leaders to join the SPLA/M to seek political, economic and cultural rights through armed struggle is recognised as the key event that provoked the start of the war. However, no interviews either with Nuba or Baggara suggested that the responsibility for the nature and scale of the GOS's subsequent response lay with anyone except high-ranking decision makers in Khartoum. Similarly all combatant forces- whether SPLA/M, PDF or GOS – at times played protective roles, and at times were guilty of human rights abuses. But the nature of the war (considered by many as genocidal in approach) meant that it was Nuba civilians who were exposed to by far the greatest protection threats from GOS security forces and militias. This is why it is their experiences in self-protection that form the core of this research.

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<sup>9</sup> For a brief introduction to Maslow's work visit: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow's\\_hierarchy\\_of\\_needs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow's_hierarchy_of_needs); while the rigidity of his proposed "hierarchy" is questionable, his recognition of the importance of psychological needs along side physiological ones is not.

## 2.3 Gender, vulnerability and ability to cope

While the most commonly perceived vulnerable groups were predictably orphans, elderly, single-parent families, discussions around vulnerability raised some interesting insights into gender and ability to cope.

From one set of perspectives, the numerous accounts of rape highlighted the particular vulnerability of women. Rape was common during attacks on villages, while gender-ascribed duties of water and firewood collection exposed many women to risk of rape and abduction by soldiers. To deal with this risk, women sought armed protection from aligned forces, or at least an armed male family member. When this was not possible, they tried to reduce the risk from fetching water (or fuel wood, or weeding sorghum fields) by working at night. There were some indications that at times women made the desperate decision to submit to sexual abuse in order to be able to collect water. However, women were reticent to discuss these experiences. Further research would be needed to explore in more depth issues of stigma and shame associated with rape and subsequent pregnancy. However, the few insights that this study was able to glean into such sensitive issues suggest that raped women were treated with compassion and understanding. Several interviewees mention that neither raped women nor their resulting offspring were blamed or discriminated against.

Many women were raped and even girls. When we were attacked I saw a girl of 10 being raped by many – she was crying and covered in blood.

Moro man 34 years

Sometimes we knew when we went to get water that they [enemy soldiers] might be waiting to rape us. But we had no choice.

Otoro woman 40 years

Several analysts write convincingly that rape was used by GOS forces as a policy of war, to subjugate and to weaken local identity<sup>10</sup>. The accounts of rape as an official policy of the GOS campaign against the Nuba in the “peace camps” are wide spread. The African Rights investigation<sup>11</sup> in 1995 documents the evidence at that time and concludes that: “Rape was ubiquitous in the campaign.

This was not just soldiers’ license. There was an official policy of segregating men and women in the “peace camps.” Khalid el Hussein [brother of the Governor of South Kordofan in the 90’s, exiled in Switzerland] explained: “the reason for the men and women being distributed in different camps is to prevent them marrying, the reason being that if the men and women are together and get married and have children, that itself is contrary to government policy....The members of the Arab tribes are allowed to marry them in order to eliminate the Nuba identity.” The phrase

<sup>10</sup> See for example Social Science Research Council 2006; <http://howgenocidesend.ssrc.org/>

<sup>11</sup> Facing Genocide: The Nuba of Sudan, Alex de Waal, African Rights, 1995.

“allowed to marry” amounts to “encouraged to rape” in the context of the absolute power held by the camp officials and guards over the females in their charge.”

**Lesson 3** The effects of rape on Nuba women remain poorly understood, at least by outsiders and further, sensitive research would be needed to rectify this. However, it does seem clear that rape was tragically widespread and except for instances where armed resistance was possible, women had no effective means of protecting themselves. This issue requires more attention. Enabling advice and help from women in other rape-affected societies is one option. In some cases, it might also be worth investigating the relevance of some of the anti-rape devices and measures used by women living in industrial inner-city societies.

However, while acknowledging this harrowing reality, many women respondents also observed that in other ways women were better able to cope with the challenges of war than were men. They explained that they were by nature more adaptable, flexible and patient. Psychologically they felt much better equipped to endure the mental hardships of the war, without wasting energies on getting angry or depressed. They also felt that they not only had sufficient physical strength to cope, but that they often had more stamina and physical endurance than men. They were thus able to focus on their (gender ascribed) role of caring for the family. Women saw men as being much less able to deal with the situation and therefore more prone to getting depressed and angry, often resorting to drink to forget their problems. Many told how men were less able than women to deal with hunger crying children, and bad living conditions.

Women have ability to cope with all problems as they are more tolerant [than men] to bad conditions.

39 year old Otoro man

Women can go all day with out food and keep working - we men can not manage like that.

41 year old man from Tulushi

Women were different from men. They could build house, bring dying person from far and still be strong. They do not suffer like men. We women can focus on looking after the household and deal with each problem as they come, but men just get angry and give up.

35 year old Moro woman

When women got any information about forces coming, they collect all their property and children and move straight away to somewhere safe. They do this without men.

35 year old man

The wisdom of the women interviewed was remarkable. More than one mentioned how their husbands became “nervous” because of the war resulting in the wives getting beaten because of problems with the children, or lack of food on the table or just being drunk. However they recounted these episodes with a sense of generosity, explaining that this was a result of men being weaker than women and less able to cope. One woman (Rj5) mentioned wife-battering during war (as a result of men getting angry about hunger and children’s needs) and suggested that counselling for men was needed.

Although many male respondents prioritised women at first when describing groups that they considered 'vulnerable', through discussion they often modified their thoughts, conceding that women were often better able to cope better than men. And all Nuba men interviewed admitted without exception the crucial role of women in caring for the family as well as their wider contribution to protection: whether in feeding the SPLA forces, working as porters, or caring for the injured. Several women also pointed out that traditionally they had less rights than men, which they felt was unjust, especially when it came to decisions being made at communal level.

**Lesson 4** While orphans, elderly and single-parent families were considered the most vulnerable, most women respondents considered that women were better able to cope than men. All agreed that women have a crucial protection role to play. The importance of their role must be acknowledged and their ideas for helping to strengthen family and community-level protection strategies should be central to developing holistic protection interventions.

#### 2.4 External interventions

The majority of interviewees considered that international assistance during the war had been negligible or completely lacking. The main exception, cited repeatedly, was the hospital services provided by an INGO that remained operational in SPLA-controlled areas throughout the war SPLA-controlled. A small number acknowledged some relief support from INGOs and WFP (on both sides of the conflict) but considered it to have been too little and far too late.

Internationals did nothing to protect us during the war. They promised things to us but did nothing – we could only depend on ourselves. Tira man, 41 years

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the war (i.e. from the mid 1990s onwards) a small number of INGOs did manage to start airlifting some basic commodities into the SPLA areas: food, salt, soap, medicines, some agricultural inputs and educational materials. However, because of the risks (physical and political) and costs of the airlifts, the amounts were always far too small to make a prolonged or significant difference. Cash injections were piloted with some success, but again the operational difficulties in setting up any externally regulated programmes tended to put off most donors and INGOs from pursuing such innovative approaches. As a result, few respondents recognised anything but a small contributory role of international agencies during the war.

**Lesson 5** The Nuba case study, as so many others, reveals the inadequacy of current mainstream aid mechanisms to provide protection to oppressed populations, especially those being targeted by the ruling parties in their own countries.

### 3. Self-protection strategies

#### 3.1 The core strategies

We survived because of three things: the mountains, the forests and the unity of the people. 48 year old father of 4 children (Tira)
Our safety was from the mountains, our food and medicine from the trees and wild plants, our support was from one person and to another. 55 year old grandmother (Moro)
The mountains protected us. We ate wild food and treated ourselves with traditional medicines. We depended on our communities, collaboration and unity to help each other to survive and not give up. 43 year old man (Otoro)

For those who had to flee their homes due to direct security problems, the most common protection strategies mentioned were:

- i) Displacement: seeking physical safety from military attack by leaving their homes to live up in the **mountains**, or moving out of the war zone altogether to live elsewhere in northern Sudan.
- ii) Making extensive use of **trees and plants** for many key livelihood necessities disrupted because of war (not just food and health, but also for soap and salt substitutes and even clothing – along with the more common use for construction and firewood).
- iii) Depending on social networks and a new-found sense of strong **communal unity** and cooperation to provide not only for physical needs but also for equally important mental needs relating to sociability, information, belongingness, courage, hope, culture, fun, spirit, dignity, humanity and the will to persevere.
- iv) Almost all Nuba civilians who were displaced to the mountains also mentioned the **armed protection** provided by the Nuba SPLA against military attack from GOS forces
- v) Reducing risk of exposure to violence when undertaking livelihood activities by **working at night**.

The Nuba living in GOS-controlled areas of South Kordofan and elsewhere in North Sudan could do little to tackle the increased persecution that they experienced (as a result of the war) except keep as low a profile as possible. Similarly the non Nuba civilians interviewed (from Falata communities) attempted to avoid problems from either side by remaining as removed (politically) from the conflict as they could, not opposing the GOS while not fighting the SPLA. The Baggara respondents talked mainly about seeking alternative grazing and pastoralist routes to avoid insecure areas; some mentioned joining or forming armed militias (whether in self-defence or in a more aggressive mode not always being clear).

As citizens of Sudan do we have no right to grow food for our family to live? To drink water? In the war, we risked being shot, raped or imprisoned when we go to our fields or wells. We die because we have no rights. Moro woman, 40 years
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Our advice to internationals is that they should focus on providing basic needs [food, medicines etc], while also protecting the civilians so they can gain their safety and rights.

Otoro woman 38 years

The safety of citizens is our priority along with basic needs [food and water] and having our life together in our community.

Otoro woman 40 years

We need citizen safety because it allows us to work for living and protect our dignity and rights.

Otoro man 40 years

When discussing core protection strategies, respondents did not see the relevance of trying to separate out issues of physical safety from those of livelihoods or of rights (that include those intrinsic, but hard to define, set of human needs for friendship, compassion, belongingness, dignity, justice – that transgress just basic survival). Such findings reinforce similar conclusions from other studies of the connections between protection and livelihoods<sup>12</sup>. This more holistic perception of protection was particularly striking among respondents who had remained at greatest physical risk for the greatest length of time. Many responses reveal how most see security, livelihoods and rights as inseparable, with all three aspects being priorities intertwined. Where starvation of civilians, denial of basic services and removal of rights are implicit (and not uncommon) tactics of war, this makes perfect sense.

**Lesson 6** The tendency of external analysis to separate out protection issues between physical safety, livelihoods and rights does not reflect the perceptions of local people who see these issues as being fundamentally connected. When planning any protection interventions, external agencies should keep this in mind and focus on providing a much more holistic and coordinated response that covers physical safety, livelihoods and rights and the inter-relationships between them.

### 3.2 Safety from physical attack and insecurity

#### Fleeing to the Mountains

Many communities who had the option to run when exposed to military attack from GOS forces or militias fled to the mountains. For generations the Nuba people have sought physical safety from armed attack by fleeing their homes in the plains to live up in the mountains. Indeed, the Nuba tribes are thought to have settled this uniquely mountainous part of northern Sudan many centuries ago for precisely this reason. With their knowledge of the area and its hidden paths, caves, sources of water, forests and cultivatable areas, they have proved time and again the efficacy of such a strategy. During this last war, possibly as many as 400,000 people were at times seeking refuge in the mountains. There is little doubt

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<sup>12</sup> See: Challenging choices: protection and livelihoods in conflict; Susanne Jaspars and Sorcha O’Callaghan; HPG Report 31, May 2010; and Changes and Resilience of Food Systems in The Nuba Mountains Conflict; Sarah Pantuliano, IDS 2005

that if they had not had their mountains to flee to, the death toll from the war would have been orders of magnitude worse.

Our mountains saved us. Without them we had nowhere to run from the killing.	Tira man, 45 years
We can escape from the fighting on top of the mountains and find water in caves and food in the [mountain] woods. We can depend only on ourselves and the mountains.	Moro woman
In the mountains we can still be free.	Tima man, 50 years

However, while providing protection against insecurity, there were significant drawbacks to this strategy when used over protracted periods of time. The weak mountain soils severely limit agricultural production – when large numbers of people are displaced, they soon start to suffer from hunger and lack of access to any basic services (health, education, markets, agricultural inputs). When, as during this last conflict, the attacking forces barricade the mountains to use starvation as a weapon of war, the situation can become critical. It seems certain that in the end many more Nuba died from malnutrition and disease than they did from being killed by combatants.

This study thus agrees with the findings of Oxfam’s research into self-protection in DRC that:

“Unfortunately .... there are few truly successful self-protection mechanisms, in the sense of something that people can do to reliably keep themselves safe with few negative consequences”.<sup>13</sup>

Thus many interviews revealed the harmful effects of basic survival choices such as fleeing to the mountains. Many died from starvation; others continue to have serious health problems from poor diet. The lack of formal health and education services for almost 20 years clearly effected many as would the trauma associated with having to leave people behind or accept rape as a means to access water, food and access to farmland.

**Lesson 7** Civilians protected themselves from prolonged insecurity by moving up into the mountains. However, this self-protection strategy had terrible consequences for livelihoods and resulted in high levels of mortality and suffering from hunger, disease and lack of basic services. With timely and appropriate livelihood support, many lives could have been saved over the course of the war among these displaced communities.

Another problem associated with rapid flight during hostilities was that in most cases the affected people had no time or capacity to take anything with them. More often than not their homes and villages were looted and set on fire by the attacking forces, so that many lost everything except the clothes they were wearing. However, once communities had become aware of the potential risks of attack, simple forms of early warning were adopted in some villages. These involved positioning lookouts who could warn of approaching

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<sup>13</sup> Self-protection in conflict: Community strategies for keeping safe in the Democratic Republic of Congo; Oxfam GB in DRC; April 2009 Katherine Haver

hostile forces (using whistles, bells, horns, waving flags, or just shouting) and/or sending out scouts to get even more notice of enemy troop movements. In some cases, this information was provided by SPLA scouts who then warned the local civilian populations of pending attacks.

Shooting of guns was the immediate warning and a special kind of shouting, as well as drums. Smoke signals could be used for longer distance warning.

Otoro farmer

Cow horns were used for communicating early warning over distances – also whistles.

Tulushi man 40 years

This research reveals the sporadic adoption of many of the self-protection measures being tried across the threatened population. Early warning tactics, although valuable, were not common to all communities. Some villages made use of them and some didn't, depending, it appears, on the presence of someone with the idea and initiative to organise a lookout with a means of communication. Several respondents mentioned that the barking of their dogs gave forewarning of night attacks, but only in one case did this actually provide enough time to make a difference. While supply of conventional early warning aids such as telescopes or binoculars, flares or sirens may have made a difference, it would seem that just spreading the core idea would have the greatest impact in helping to save lives and property.

**Lesson 8** Simple early warning measures did make a difference. More lives could have been saved by helping appropriate local actors to spread the core idea of basic community-managed early warning.

Once the reality of the conflict and the risks of attack became more apparent, some people began to bury precious possessions (e.g. seed, money, clothes) so that if forced to run they could dig them up and recover them if ever able to return. Again, such protection measures appeared (at least from this research) patchy – those that thought of it, did it; those that didn't, did not. No instances were found of possessions being transferred to safer areas higher in the mountains. However several interviewees anticipating insecurity in coming months and years did suggest they would, this time, pre-position stores of basic essentials (e.g. seed, salt, soap, food, tools) in the mountains.

**Lesson 9** People benefited who had taken the trouble to bury possessions in areas from where they could be later retrieved. It would be worth helping to spread this idea and also that of prepositioning important survival possessions (e.g. food, soap, salt, seed, tools, matches, money) in areas of refuge.

While communities' own early warning systems helped save lives that would otherwise have been lost in surprise attacks, the concept of a 'run-bag' was absent. This research came across no examples of anyone having a pre-prepared, portable bag of essential possessions with which they could run when necessary. On the contrary, many respondents told stories of fleeing without taking anything and returning later to find everything destroyed. Since the

majority of Nuba store their grain in traditional household silos, they do not use sacks or bags for storing grain at all. It would not be uncommon for a Nuba home to have no sacks or bags to hand with which to carry possessions. While recognising that poor rural families often have no surplus possessions to keep aside a ready stocked run-bag, several interviewees thought the idea could still be relevant for communities living in high risk areas.

**Lesson 10** Introducing the idea of ‘run-bags’ and supplies of appropriate sacks could be considered by local agencies working with communities who remain at risk of armed attack.

### Fleeing elsewhere

Many Nuba were unable, or chose not, to flee to the mountains. Instead, their physical protection strategies were to distance themselves from areas open to attack and/or to align themselves (at least superficially) with the attacking forces – i.e. the Government of Sudan. Many hundreds of thousands of Nuba moved north to live in the urban slums of towns and cities controlled by the GOS and to find seasonal work in northern agricultural schemes. Many others remained in the GOS-controlled areas of the Nuba Mountains, but made efforts to comply with all demands made of them. Forced conscription into the GOS army was not uncommon, and in some cases into the local Popular Defence Force (paramilitary groups trained and armed by Khartoum).

In terms of providing protection from armed attack, these strategies were successful. And although the economic opportunities for internally displaced Nuba in northern Sudan were very limited, this strategy did not have the same negative livelihood consequences of fleeing to rebel-held areas in the mountains. They did not face starvation or acute water shortages; they could access basic services (albeit with difficulties sometimes); they had some opportunities for paid employment.

However, many respondents highlighted the curtailment of rights involved in moving to the north during the war: racial discrimination, lack of free speech and movement, persecution by police and security forces, lack of access to justice. Even more apparent from their responses was the acute sense of alienation and marginalisation they felt, the lack of belongingness and community. The interviews gave a strong sense that although physical suffering may have been less, emotional and mental suffering might have been more pronounced.

Many accounts were told of Nuba trying to cross over from GOS-controlled areas during the war, despite the known hardships of such journeys (many were shot on the way or died, usually of thirst, having lost their way in ‘no-man’s-land’) and the enormous difficulties associated with the final destination. There are no records that show whether more civilians moved from rebel to GOS-controlled areas or vice versa. And surely many of those who died from starvation and disease in the mountains must have wished to be elsewhere, however restricted their rights might be. But, at least in the relatively small sample of people interviewed, significantly more respondents indicated that given the chance to replay their

decision, they would elect to run the risk of dying in the mountains, among their own people rather than live alienated, albeit in greater safety, in the north.

**Lesson 11** At times, the relocation strategies of threatened families (to protect safety and livelihoods) resulted in severe psychological suffering associated with alienation and lack of belongingness. Agencies that seek only to meet physical needs should bear this in mind<sup>14</sup>.

### Information

Access to information about movements of armed forces was mentioned again and again as a critical life saver. However, communication during the war was a challenge. Mobile phone networks in the Nuba Mountains were either non-existent or non-functional and the only transceivers were the few used by the SPLA for military purposes. Many of the displaced communities living in the mountains appointed youth known for their stamina and speed as 'runners' whose express role was to run between villages with security information (e.g. enemy troop movements, recent attacks or ambushes) as well as important social news (e.g. arrival of people cross-line or plans for inter-village meetings or social events). Although provided some support in kind by communities, these runners, despite their importance, operated essentially as volunteers. One of those interviewed suggested that they could have been more effective if provided with running shoes, backpacks and water bottles.

During the time of conflict, there was no way of communication except by traditional means. People used runners to pass the information from village to village and take messages even to the places in a far distance.

Tulushi male farmer

We remained strong during the war because I was active in following news and getting information. When I hear of likely attack I hide my family and cows and sorghum.

Moro man 45 years

We also have some men in the bush who were just following all the activities carried out by the enemies wherever they wanted to go, our men in the bush are already know and the will give announcement concerning the movement.

Tulushi male farmer

Radio was so very important. It give us information about the outside world. Also it give us information about our own situation. I did not know that ceasefire was signed until I heard by radio - the jalaba never told me.

25 year old man who was abducted during the war and used as cattle-boy for 10 years

**Lesson 12** Where communities are depending on runners to provide life-saving information, agencies might be able to help by providing lightweight shoes (with ankle protection), small adjustable backpacks and water bottles. The supply of solar-charged satellite phones might

<sup>14</sup> A relevant quote from the same behavioural psychologist Abraham Maslow: "Who is to say that a lack of love is less important than a lack of vitamins?" in the paper: The Theory of Human Motivation; Psychological Review (50), 1943.

also be considered, although it would be impossible to guarantee who used them and for what purposes.

### Armed Protection

All respondents<sup>15</sup> among Nuba who fled into the mountains perceived local SPLA forces as being important providers of protection against military attack from GOS and militia (PDF) forces. Their protection role was not only in repulsing armed attacks but also in protecting civilians during risky livelihood activities (i.e. collecting water, gathering fuel wood, cultivating fields, grazing livestock). While there is little doubt that the presence of SPLA forces at times provoked attacks by GOS, all of those interviewed from the SPLA areas considered that their protection role more than outweighed any negative effects on their security.

At the same time, the research does not suggest that the Nuba SPLA was above criticism itself. Interviews revealed a number of cases of exploitative and threatening relationships, both with the Nuba civilians they were charged to protect and with civilians of perceived hostile forces (whether in GOS garrison towns or Baggara settlements and cattle camps). Examples included unregulated commandeering of food, looting livestock, drunk and disorderly behaviour, and sexual harassment including rape. However, these were not portrayed as being dominant threats, but rather as secondary negative consequences of the wider crisis of the conflict.

The international did nothing to protect us. The GOS was trying to kill us. We depended on ourselves and the SPLA. If we did not fight to defend ourselves we would be dead.

Otoro woman

External analysis of the conflict confirms the key role that the Nuba SPLA played in terms of repulsing sustained GOS attacks. Outnumbered and poorly supplied, Nuba fighters demonstrated extraordinary resilience in defending the 'liberated' areas against a relatively well-equipped and salaried modern army. During the first half of the 90s, when GOS attacks against the Nuba were most vicious – with no international aid for and little knowledge of the unfolding tragedy – the protection offered by the Nuba SPLA was critical. Had the GOS been able to overcome the Nuba resistance, there can be little doubt that the humanitarian and human-rights consequences would have been far worse than those actually experienced.

Since so many young Nuba men joined the SPLA to fight and so many Nuba women volunteered to support the soldiers with food and water during protracted operations, the distinction between civilians and combatants was not always as distinct as outsider

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<sup>15</sup> Among those interviewed who remained in GOS-controlled areas, only a very small proportion perceived either the GOS Army or the PDF as having a role in protecting their safety from SPLA counter-attacks (this is largely because SPLA were not targeting civilians and for most of the war were only ever in a defensive position).

observers might think<sup>16</sup>. After abuses in the early years of the insurgency, the Nuba leadership made a concerted effort to improve discipline and discourage SPLA fighters from abusing civilians or commandeering their property<sup>17</sup>. More remarkable were the efforts made to involve the civilian grassroots in key decisions, military and civilian, during the war – including whether to continue fighting or surrender, and on issues such as local elections, education curricula and cultural practices (including easing of restrictive ethnic and financial marriage customs).

**Lesson 13** The Nuba who fled to the mountains perceived the Nuba SPLA as a legitimate civilian protection force, defending them against military attacks and facilitating livelihood activities that exposed civilians to risk. When planning protection interventions in active war zones without international peacekeeping forces, international agencies could usefully consider developing frameworks that allow analysis of the legitimacy and human rights standards of local protection forces. There may be occasions where opportunities present themselves for appropriate engagement that might strengthen their contribution to upholding civilians' rights, supporting civilian livelihoods, providing services and upholding laws and justice.

When asked how armed self-protection efforts could have been strengthened, most respondents urged supplies of arms and military hardware – an option outside the scope of a humanitarian response, Yet one schoolteacher who expressed his great appreciation of the educational materials and books flown in during the war by an INGO nevertheless considered that arms and ammunition would have been more useful. Such thinking is also found among civilians finding themselves on the other side of the conflict line: several interviews with Misseriya groups indicate their conviction that their survival depended on all their men being armed throughout the war.

If we had guns we could protect ourselves and families from ambush while we search for water and food.

Tira man

Next time, brings us arms and ammunition. We can defend ourselves when they attack and go to collect food with less danger.

38 year Moro Farmer

If we cannot defend ourselves with weapons we would not be able to survive.

39 Misseriya cattle owner

There are perhaps options, however, as to how humanitarians might go some way to satisfying demands of this type, despite the sensitive nature of the subject. . During their

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<sup>16</sup> See a recent study on how civilians take up arms to protect themselves in SE Burma: Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State; Karen Human Rights Group 2010

<sup>17</sup> These efforts were often successful; several cases were reported of civilians whose property (typically grain or goats) when pilfered by SPLA were recompensed and the perpetrators punished.

operations, the Nuba SPLA depended on civilian support for food and water. This was almost always supplied by women, some of whom (how many, this research cannot estimate) lost their lives as a result. While none of the interviews indicated that women were forced to take on this role, there was, apparently, social pressure to do so.

Many women indicated that they accepted this role willingly, even as they acknowledged how tough it was. Several however expressed bitterness and even anger with the leadership's behaviour once the conflict was over. Many felt that their sacrifice had not been acknowledged and that the developmental gains that they had fought for seemed no nearer.

We walked so many miles and carried so many loads for the soldiers and risked our lives. But now there is peace, they forget all we did. Otoro women 38

Next time, I will not bring the soldiers water and food again when they fight. We sacrificed our lives for them and now we get nothing. Tira women 31

Discussions with women involved in supporting the fighters provide some ideas about how their work could have been made less dangerous and more effective, within the remit of humanitarian aid. Supply of backpacks and back-held jerry cans would have reduced risk by allowing them to run and dodge more easily even as they carried food and water. Plastic bottles – indeed any lightweight containers with tight-fitting tops – would have made a real difference to the women involved in supporting front-line combatants.

**Lesson 14** Discuss with the women involved in feeding front-line defence forces how their roles could be made less risky and less arduous. Provision of simple items such as lightweight sealable containers to ease carrying of food and water could make a real difference to their work and chances of survival.

### Perceived efficacy of different protective forces

Following the 2002 ceasefire between the Nuba SPLA and the GOS forces in the Nuba Mountains, the Joint Military Commission (JMC) took responsibility for monitoring the ceasefire agreements and providing a rapid response mechanism for 'defusing' volatile situations. Then, when the full Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was finally signed in 2005, the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) peacekeeping force was established to remain operational for the duration of the CPA (projected at six years). At the same time, the Joint Integrated Units (JIU), police and army forces divided equally between government and SPLA forces, came into existence.

It has been instructive to learn the local perceptions of the comparative efficacy of these protective bodies. For civilians living in SPLA-controlled areas, the response is unanimous: the Nuba SPLA played a crucial role in providing protection against attack by GOS forces and paramilitary groups. For civilians living in GOS-controlled areas, this role was hardly

mentioned: the GOS army was rarely seen as a protective or defensive force, but rather as one seeking to defeat the Nuba opposition forces.

The interviews revealed that the JMC (operational from 2002 to 2005) gained a good reputation among most civilians as an effective peace-keeping initiative, even if there was a steep initial learning curve with some associated problems. Although small in number (only about 75 monitors) it had a good communications network, was able to move rapidly to flashpoints using helicopters and four-wheel drive vehicles, and spent time and effort in getting to know all relevant military and civilian actors. Many respondents praised the JMC: the speed of its response, its contact with local communities, neutrality and objectivity were mentioned several times as key reasons for its success. The full operational costs of the JMC were about US\$ 1,000,000 per month<sup>18</sup>.

The UNMIS peacekeeping force in South Kordofan (operational from 2005 to present) is perceived in a much less positive light. Most respondents consider it ineffective, uncommunicative, highly over-resourced and deeply uninformed about local realities. Many questioned its objectivity and expressed the belief that it is influenced by the GOS. These concerns are shared by some international observers, including within the UN itself. Several Nuba respondents went as far as to assert that they feel more insecure and vulnerable to attack since UNMIS and the JIUs replaced the JMC. Although this research has been unable to confirm the cost of UNMIS peacekeeping operations in South Kordofan, no informants estimate it at less than US \$10 million per month.

They [UNMIS] have no understanding about the Nuba people or about the war or about what happened. They do not care. They have no knowledge of us. But JMC were good – they talked with us and listened.

Tira 43 year old man

We do not feel that UNMIS people really care. They are only interested to sit in their cool office and take their money. They are friends of NCP.

Otoro man 57 years

The UNMIS people only sit in their camp. They do nothing except eat money. JMC were not like that. They were active and moving here and there and stopping problems.

Tulushi man 35 years

They can do nothing. Even when militias come with guns, they do nothing. Why are they here? UNMIS does what those of Khartoum [GOS] tell them to do.

Moro woman

JMC protected us – if problems happen between the two sides they know and they go and solve it straight away. They were much better than UN.

Kawalib man, 40 years

<sup>18</sup> History of the JMC, Lisa Ibscher; [http://janerikwilhelmsen.com/docs/sudan/History\\_JMC\\_2.1.doc](http://janerikwilhelmsen.com/docs/sudan/History_JMC_2.1.doc) ; see also: "JMC Supervision of the Ceasefire Agreement in the Nuba Mountains, 2002–2005", a presentation prepared for the SSRC Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum by Jan Erik Wilhelmsen

This research has not attempted to assess UNMIS efficacy in South Kordofan; its scope is only to report on local perceptions. But even senior UNMIS staff acknowledge that the peacekeeping operation in South Kordofan has serious weaknesses. Discussions indicated a pervasive despondency that this is how UN peacekeeping forces are, a sense of “having to make the best of it”, of lack of political willingness to change even though the reasons for the success of the JMC are well analysed and documented<sup>19</sup>. They reveal a totally different model and structure: leaner, more nimble and sensitive, more dependent on relationships, local knowledge and confidence– building than on large forces and military hardware. They show what can be achieved with a different institutional framework that allows a much tighter chain of command and speed of response. It is striking that SPLA and GOS officers who served with the JMC not only retain a high level of pride and satisfaction in their contribution to peace, but also a positive relationship with their opposing counterparts that remains unique in cross–conflict military relationships in South Kordofan to this day.

With such a striking comparison so apparent, there is real value and relevance in challenging the status quo. As General Erik Wilhelmsen, head of the JMC in South Kordofan and a highly experienced peacekeeper) said in one of his evaluation briefings: “I also want to underline that this kind of mission [the JMC approach] is far more effective than huge UN industrial peacekeeping missions, which I really do not believe in”<sup>20</sup>. Perhaps the debate should not be how to improve UN peacekeeping forces but how to replace them with an alternative model.

**Lesson 15** Good relationships with local communities, real understanding of local situation and people, an ability to act rapidly with clear impartiality, efficient use of resources – these are seen by civilians as key attributes of a successful peacekeeping force in South Kordofan. UNMIS peacekeeping has been unable to demonstrate these qualities in the way the JMC did, despite its far greater cost. The reasons for such under–performance need further investigation, as do opportunities for helping UN peacekeeping initiatives to become more effective in the eyes of those they are being paid to protect. The successful model developed by the JMC could represent a real alternative to the top–heavy, bureaucratic and costly option of conventional UN peacekeeping forces.

### **Increasing international awareness of civilian protection needs**

Along with the extraordinary resilience of the Nuba self–defence and the impenetrability of the mountains, raising awareness (public, international) of the brutality of GOS policies in the Nuba Mountains may ultimately have been the most significant means of protecting civilians. In 1993, the leader of the Nuba opposition Yusef Kuwa Mekki travelled to Kenya and then a number of European countries in an attempt to raise awareness of the plight of the Nuba people and seek political and humanitarian assistance. While many were sympathetic, there was insufficient political will to challenge the GOS and its actions in South

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<sup>19</sup> See variety of documents on <http://janerikwilhelmsen.com/history/sudan-2002-2005/>

<sup>20</sup> See <http://janerikwilhelmsen.com/history/sudan-2002-2005/>

Kordofan or to organize humanitarian intervention. Turning to alternative lobby groups, Yusef eventually found that African Rights and the BBC, working together, were willing to visit the war zone in the Nuba region and document what was happening.

The resulting book (“Facing Genocide, the Nuba of Sudan”) and BBC documentary were launched simultaneously in 1995. They played an important role in raising international awareness about the catastrophe in the Nuba Mountains, prompting a small number of INGOs to support a secret and unpublicized humanitarian airlift. This in turn led to increased awareness and greater INGO involvement. Eventually this contributed to humanitarian assessment by the UN and finally IGAD, the EU and a number of donor countries brokering the ceasefire which ended military activity in South Kordofan in 2002.

Similarly, several Church groups played a very important role in international awareness raising and advocacy. Different branches of the Catholic Church, the Sudan Ecumenical Forum and several Protestant groups all made very significant contributions, not only by promoting humanitarian interventions but also by increasing political pressure for wider action.

**Lesson 16** Raising international awareness of civilian protection needs was an essential precursor to the provision of humanitarian assistance and eventual international brokering of a ceasefire. The initial involvement of reputable media and human rights organisations in publicising the plight of the Nuba people played a key role in galvanizing an international response.

The level of relief and livelihood assistance provided by INGOs during the war remained very small and poorly distributed, representing a fraction of what was needed. Because of the dangers of operating in SPLA-controlled areas during the war, there was little international presence; most aid was channelled through local CSOs and Churches. However, even with such a limited intervention, it does seem that this growing international involvement in the war zone played a crucial role in protection by making it increasingly difficult for GOS attacks on civilians to go unnoticed and by increasing pressures for (and thus speeding up) brokering of a ceasefire. This is one of several shared findings between the L2GP research in Nuba and that carried out in Burma.<sup>21</sup>

**Lesson 17** An international humanitarian presence may contribute to a reduction in security threats (eventually) simply by bearing witness to what is happening. In such cases local and international groups must be ready to prioritise awareness raising and advocacy activities. Use of the media to tell the story of unprotected civilians (especially with film) should continue to be prioritised as a means of galvanising the international political pressure needed to protect civilians.

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<sup>21</sup> Conflict and Survival: Self-protection in south-east Burma; Ashley South with Malin Perhult and Nils Carstensen; Chatham House, September 2010

### Increase local awareness of need for protection of civilians

In 1992/3, the Nuba SPLA came close to defeat.. The Nuba were vastly outnumbered and out-resourced by the GOS army and militias, and were cut off from logistical support from the SPLA in South Sudan. The blockaded Nuba population was facing starvation and many were dying from disease and dehydration. There was little international awareness of what was happening and little serious pressure on the GOS to stop its campaign to crush the Nuba opposition.

There is evidence that a growing awareness among northern Sudanese of the unfolding tragedy in the Nuba Mountains may have played a protective role prior to any international involvement. In his article “Averting Genocide in the Nuba Mountains”, Alex de Waal suggests:

A supplementary reason [in addition to internal split in GOS high command and the extraordinary resistance by the Nuba people themselves] for the defeat of the genocidal project was wider opposition in Sudanese society. The leaders of the Kordofan jihad tried to keep the real nature of their activities secret. But, by relocating destitute and starving Nuba civilians to the outskirts of northern Kordofan towns, the authorities brought their activities to wider attention. Shocked by what they were witnessing, the citizens of these towns began to bring food and medicine to the Nuba dumped on their doorstep. They were still more shocked when the security forces stopped their charitable activities. The ground-swell of popular disgust expressed through social networks rather than openly, contributed to the retreat of the militants.<sup>22</sup>

This research found evidence to support the view that the wider citizenry of the ‘oppressive’ north may have provided an important protective function during the war by curbing the worst intentions of decision-makers at the top. Interviewees who spent some of the war in El Obeid confirm that as the atrocities committed by GOS forces become more widely known, a growing sense of condemnation by the general public became apparent. They also suggest that this popular alarm could have been sufficient to influence decision-makers and at least helped reduce the opportunities for hardliners to pursue such flagrant inhumanity against civilians.

Family connections and informal networks still count for much in Sudanese society and can have as much (if not greater) impact than more structured, official systems of communication and lobbying. Tolerance, compassion and generosity are highly prized. While there may be a tendency to avoid unpleasant realities, when directly confronted by clear injustice and unwarranted violence (especially against women and children) the norm would be to object. As it became increasingly difficult to hide what was actually happening in Nuba villages, it is possible that such unstructured, societal objection could have had some influence on decision-makers at the top of government.

This was too late to prevent the terrible levels of death and suffering already experienced, and it was too little to stop the war (which continued for another 9 years). But it may

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<sup>22</sup> Social Science Research Council 2006; <http://howgenocidesend.ssrc.org/>

nonetheless have contributed to a respite in the intensity and brutality of the campaign against civilians. And interestingly, this public condemnation arose without any overt attempt to raise awareness among the northern Sudanese public – indeed it happened despite the efforts of the GOS to prevent knowledge of its attacks against Nuba civilians. A majority of respondents in this research considered that increasing understanding among the wider public was important and relevant. Many of them recognised that most Sudanese were unaware of what was happening in the Nuba Mountains during the war. It is conceivable that if the suffering of Nuba civilians had become known earlier and more widely, the ferocity of the GOS attacks might also have declined earlier. The original international exposé of the Nuba tragedy in 1995 (Justice Africa’s “Facing Genocide” and the BBC documentary) was delivered in English. Perhaps if it had been also delivered in Arabic and targeted a northern Sudanese audience it would have had even greater impact.

**Lesson 18** The wider public of northern Sudan may provide a protective function through curbing Government actions that are seen to be unacceptably violent. Agencies (national and international) should therefore explore options for awareness raising among the wider public of the level of suffering experienced by civilians as a result of Government policies.

#### Communication with enemy forces during war – Possible? Useful?

The interviews also sounded opinion about the potential value of communication with the opposing forces during the war. Surprisingly, many (about 40%) felt that if it had been possible to communicate directly with the soldiers of the GOS army it might have helped to reduce violence and conflict. No one overall rationale emerged as to how communication (if possible) could help, but responses included the following ideas (which resonate with similar feelings of oppressed civilians recorded in DRC<sup>23</sup>):

- the more that hostile forces are made to think about the impact of their actions on innocent communities, the less easy it would be for them to continue.
- the more that hostile forces understand the real reasons behind the conflict and the aspirations and ideas of the Nuba opposition, the more they might question their actions and the harder it might become for the authorities to justify them.
- the more that people are able to communicate with each other and understand that they are being divided by the ruling NCP, the more they can start to unite.

It could have been useful if there was a way to send messages to forces that threatened our lives. And I can make more questions to them like ‘why do we fight’, ‘why do we kill each other’ and I am sure this can bring difference, because they are human like us.

Atoro man 38 years old

This would be difficult to do in practice. But if possible it would be good. Many soldiers are our sons and brothers, they would listen if they could hear the voices of mothers and sisters.

57 year old Tima woman

<sup>23</sup> Self-protection in conflict: Community strategies for keeping safe in the Democratic Republic of Congo; Oxfam GB in DRC; April 2009 Katherine Haver

The soldiers were told to kill us like we were animals. If they know we are equal to them and innocent and praying 5 times a day and fasting would they kill our women and children?

Nuba Muslim cleric

Very few respondents could suggest how such communication be carried out in practice. Those displaced in the Mountains could not see how they could ever get close enough to opposing forces to actually talk to them, while those living in government-controlled areas said it was too dangerous to even discuss the possibility.

**Lesson 19** International and national agencies could explore opportunities for helping civilians to communicate in the middle of conflict with the hostile forces that are threatening them. These could include short videos, messages, stories disseminated through the internet (U-tube, Facebook, email) and radio broadcasts.

### 3.3 Livelihoods

#### Wild foods and medicines

All people interviewed who had sought refuge in the mountains talked of the crucial importance of wild foods and medicines during the war. For the worst part of the war (1990 to 1995), the effective blockade of the GOS coincided with a three year drought. Many people starved to death, but many more survived because of their use of wild foods. Fruits, leaves, roots, tubers, grasses, bush meat (including snakes and rats), fish and insects were all consumed providing not only core staples of carbohydrate, protein, oils and fats but also vitamins and micro-nutrients. A salt substitute was made with the ashes of the burnt bark and roots from certain trees; oil for lamps was extracted from the seeds of a number of different species; soap substitute from certain leaves (notably *Balanites aegyptica*); even a sanitary pad for menstruating women was made from the fibrous root map of a particular tree. Until the late 90s when basic medicines started to be supplied by a few INGOs, people depended entirely on local natural medicines to treat all diseases and wounds. For several years, many communities depended on leaves and fibres to make rudimentary clothes (in addition to traditional animal skin clothes).

Several interviewees told of people dying through eating plants they didn't realise were poisonous. Those that arrived from urban centres without local knowledge of wild foods reckoned that they would die if war returned because of their ignorance. "What made people more to cope is the love of their area...people who belong to the area know how to find the natural benefit."( Tm1)

At the same time as highlighting the value of wild food and medicines, many respondents mentioned the negative side effects: death from eating toxic plants (either for food or medicinal reasons) and chronic gastric problems that persist to this day. It is apparent from this research (and other studies) that ethno-botanical knowledge is not uniformly spread out across all communities: knowledge of different plants and experience of their uses differ

markedly from person to person. Several respondents considered that assistance in spreading correct information and skills in use of wild foods and medicines would have been a relevant intervention. While the medicinal concoctions of traditional healers are often closely kept secrets, the healers we interviewed said that they would be happy to share at least some of their knowledge to help people survive war.

There was no food to eat. We depend on wild trees but so many died from hunger. In almost every part of our home area the water was poisoned.

36 year old Moro man

We were very poor family. We were hungry the whole war for 18 years. We survived by asking from neighbours with livestock so we could share a little milk into water and drink water with the smell of milk. Sometimes, my mother had to tie me down like an animal because I used to try to run away because of my hunger.

35 year old Tira woman

We had no clothes, no soap, no salt, no shoes, no medicines, nothing – salt was really a problem, many died because of lack of salt ... people were killed by soldiers from both sides if they were found carrying quantities of salt, either because they wanted it themselves or because they wanted to stop us taking it to our villages.

Moro women 51 & 44 years

We treated malaria with neem leaves, fever with tamarind, dysentery with guava leaves – some tree seeds cleaned water, some made soap, some bark and roots made something like salt.

36 year old Moro man

**Lesson 20** Use of wild foods and medicines was an essential coping mechanism; an ecologically rich natural–resource base and strong ethno–botanical knowledge are clearly very important protection assets. Where communities are having to depend on wild foods and medicines for many years, explore options for improving local knowledge and practice, including opportunities for collating and disseminating reliable, verified indigenous knowledge on identification and appropriate use of plant products. Photos and pictures of recommended (and toxic) species and applications could be used by local experts and health workers to spread good ethno–botanical practice.

### Agriculture (cultivation and livestock)

For almost all the half a million or so Nuba living in the mountains during the war, access to productive farm land was either impossible or very dangerous. The shallow, rocky mountain soils have very low fertility and poor moisture retention. In some areas with a relatively high density of displaced communities, there was insufficient land for even brief fallowing. Declining soil fertility and increasing weed infestation (especially by parasitic weeds of the *Striga* genus) became serious problems in many areas. During the war, almost all locally available seed of the staple crop (sorghum) was of the longer maturing varieties suited to cultivation in the traditional, fertile farming areas of the plains, and not the poor soils of the mountains.

That said, traditional subsistence agricultural kept many people alive even without external inputs. In some areas, farmers made much effort to construct terraces, but these were not

well contoured and other forms of soil and water conservation were unknown, including water harvesting and composting. It was also apparent that indigenous knowledge related to steep-slope, upland agricultural was patchy – some groups (the minority) demonstrated much higher levels of expertise than others. Local blacksmiths manufactured farm tools using traditional techniques, initially with all available recyclable metal and then by collecting metal from exploded bombs, artillery shells and burnt-out military vehicles.

When questioned about vulnerability, many considered that the ability to retain livestock during the war was a very important asset for the family. Indeed, livestock ownership was rated by many as the single most important asset to improve coping ability (not least because of the purchasing power that livestock had in cross-conflict markets). The larger, more demanding lowland races of cattle, goats and sheep were unable to survive the tough conditions in the highlands – either they were unable to climb the steep paths up or they died once they had. Those who had the traditional mountain-adapted races (including pigs) fared much better, although disease remained a problem (there were of course no veterinary medicines). While most families had poultry, Newcastle's disease lowered mortality and production rates.

Please and please, I do not want to hear that we go back to war...but if we do I will sell my big cattle straight away and get small mountain cattle.

38 year old Tira man

The families that survived best were those that had cattle which were adapted to living in the mountains. They could drink milk and sell a bull for lot of grain and other things

47 year old Farmer

My father took all our [lowland] cattle that cannot adapt to the mountains and changed with the local mountain type which is smaller but good to survive.

Kawalib man, 34 year old

In some areas farmers who experimented with planting rice in seasonally flooded areas had considerable success and, despite little experience of rice cultivation, were able to achieve significant levels of production. One farmer managed to establish productive fish ponds (again with no previous experience of pisciculture), stocked with fingerlings of cat fish that he caught himself from seasonal rivers. Traditional honey collection also made an important contribution to income and nutrition. Productive bee-keeping would have made a significant difference during the war if widespread among communities besieged in the mountains.

Towards the end of the '90s, some INGOs were beginning to carry out livelihood interventions in the SPLA-controlled areas of the mountains, some of which generated positive impact and all of which generated useful lessons. These included: introduction of appropriate seed and some new crop types (including cassava and potato); provision of blacksmithing tools; introduction of Kenya top-bar hives and bee keeping skills which

showed potential; introduction of Ethiopian mountain ploughs; provision of tractors; improved grain storage techniques.

**Lesson 21** Good, on-the-ground livelihood analysis will quickly reveal opportunities for helping displaced communities improve agricultural production and household nutrition. In this case, seed of quick maturing sorghum, leguminous cover crops (to speed up fallow and reduce Striga infestation) appropriate vegetable seed, simple water-harvesting and composting techniques, relevant veterinary medicines and associated skills training and blacksmithing tools would all have positive impacts. Introduction of appropriate technologies and skills for bee-keeping and fish-farming are also relevant.

### Cross-line markets

An enormously important initiative for livelihood protection by the besieged Nuba was the clandestine negotiations with Arab traders from GOS-controlled areas that led to the establishment of covert (and transient) cross-line markets and opportunities for trade. The existence of these markets depended on local agreements between groups across conflict lines – often highly complex and always very sensitive and fragile. The markets were risky from a security point of view and were very expensive for the besieged Nuba, but (until INGO interventions started towards the end of the war) they provided the only supply of basic commodities. These included life-saving items such as salt, soap, matches, some medicines (paracetamol, broad-spectrum antibiotics, anti-malarials) as well as more ‘luxury’ basics such sugar, tea, needles and razors, mirrors, cooking utensils, batteries (for transistor radios and torches), clothes, wheat flour, yeast, some vegetable seed, bicycles, tools and weapons. Since there was little or no cash for many of the war years in the opposition areas, barter with livestock was the main currency of trade.

Interviews with Arab traders revealed that they suffered badly as a result of the war, not surprisingly since they had lost well over a million Nuba clients – through the blockade, internal displacement and loss of disposable income. These clandestine markets were dangerous and expensive for them as well as for the Nuba (necessitating considerable bribes, sensitive and risky negotiations and the threat of imprisonment or attack from either side). That they were held at all demonstrates the power of trade to overcome the logistical difficulties and physical risks involved.

It should also be noted that apart from a few light-weight, high-value commodities (e.g. razors, needles, torch bulbs, matches) the terms of trade were still many times less than the corresponding cost of airlifting in the same commodities as some INGOs started to do in the late '90s. It was as a result of this that some experimental interventions with cash distributions were made towards the end of the war. The rapid (but transient) impacts that these had on local economic activity was very clear – existing local markets expanded dramatically and new ones were formed as the new disposable income almost immediately promoted an increase in flow of basic commodities. At the same time, some voiced concerns that because cash transfers were only sufficient to benefit a few they had a

negative effect on community solidarity, while also generating significant temptations for local corruption.

The existence and importance of such local, cross-conflict arrangements can also be seen in Darfur, as explored by a recent study<sup>24</sup> made in the Jebel Mara area. This study also suggests that there may be possibilities for very sensitive and cautious intervention, while providing a very pertinent caveat: “Early recovery programming in Darfur should be cautious and based on a thorough and iterative analysis of the context. If there is a chance that an activity may do harm – end it. Never hesitate to do nothing or to call a program off.”

**Lesson 22** Unofficial, secret, cross-line markets played a crucial role in supplying basic commodities to blockaded civilian populations. While exploitative, such markets still represented a far more risky, less profitable option to powerful traders than regular, peace-time trading. Only with enormous care and sensitivity should opportunities for supporting such local trade opportunities be explored. Cash injections should also be considered but only if the associated risks of provoking communal discord and petty corruption can be adequately managed.

### Transportation and carrying loads

Throughout the war the blockaded population in the SPLA-held areas had no access to transportation of any kind, except the very few bicycles, donkeys and camels that communities were able to save during the chaos of displacement. The cross-line markets eventually allowed very limited access to bicycle spare –parts but at great cost. A great deal of energy was spent, especially by women, in carrying heavy loads on their backs and heads often over great distances on steep, rocky paths over challenging terrain. Lack of lightweight containers (grain sacks, jerry cans) increased the difficulties, particularly for carrying water from afar (sometimes more than 10five km to a safe, dry-season water source) as women had to use the locally made, but heavy and uncomfortable, clay urns. The indigenous production of pottery products, rope, baskets and mats was crucially important during the war. However, there were no locally known appropriate technologies for easing load carrying.

**Lesson 23** When exploring opportunities to assist isolated populations displaced and blockaded by conflict, do not overlook the opportunity for introducing appropriate inputs, skills or technologies for easing local transport and load carrying (e.g. bicycles and/or spare parts, trailers, lightweight water containers, carrying poles etc).

### Public services – education, health, agricultural extension

One of the remarkable features of the Nuba opposition was the attempt made by the leadership to support provision of local services within blockaded areas. Thus even before any inputs became available through NGOs, the Nuba SPLM had established networks and systems for rudimentary schools, clinics and agricultural extension centres staffed by

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<sup>24</sup> The Emergence of Grassroots Security and Livelihood Agreements in Darfur; USAID, April 2010

voluntary teachers, health workers and individuals with relevant technical backgrounds in crop and animal production. As the war continued, some of these services became more sophisticated, with civil technical authorities developing detailed sectoral policies and strategies and (with donor funds) flying in a range of inputs including school books and educational materials, medicines, vegetable seeds, blacksmith tools, hand pumps for shallow wells, veterinary medicines, seed and cassava cuttings, nursery materials and equipment, block making presses, latrine slab moulds. By the end of the war, expatriate teachers (from Kenya) were even being flown in to provide English lessons. At the time the CPA was signed many Nuba considered that the education available in the besieged opposition areas of the mountains was actually superior to that available to Nuba living in GOS-controlled areas with access to mainstream (but limited) education services.

The quality and impact of these wartime, voluntary services varied considerably and even where successful, they could not begin to satisfy the needs of the whole besieged population. And of course examples of inefficiency, weak management, inequitable provision of services and petty corruption could be found. However, in terms of an indigenous effort to protect local livelihoods and provide services during a protracted war with almost no start-up resources whatsoever, they represent a remarkable achievement. They also present a striking counter to the propaganda of the GOS during the war that the besieged Nuba in the mountains were just abusive guerrillas living wild in the bush. Perhaps as important as the intended sectoral impact of these public services, was their contribution to strengthening local morale, pride, dignity and a sense of order among a displaced, insecure and isolated population facing an extremely uncertain future.

By the late '90s, a number of NGOs, Church groups, INGOs and donors were beginning to provide support for basic services in the SPLA areas, flying in (with considerable risk) material, equipment and at times technical advisors. The type of support varied enormously, from those who made a genuine effort to strengthen local capacities and build on existing efforts and ideas, to those who set up their own services (clinics, private schools, seed distributions etc) with no intention of integration. The besieged Nuba were grateful for whatever support that was offered, and often it was easier in the short term for INGOs to regulate use of resources and maintain quality control by delivering the services themselves.

However, there were negative consequences of such approaches – introduction of INGO pay-scales disrupted and eventually broke down existing systems of voluntary services; existence of uncoordinated parallel systems at times resulted in duplication of efforts; and opportunities were missed for strengthening resilience and promoting good governance<sup>25</sup>.

**Lesson 24** Despite chronic shortage of resources, the besieged Nuba in the mountains were able to establish a network of basic social services that had real and important impact, both physical and psychological. Donors and INGOs, even with limited field presence, should

<sup>25</sup> Similar findings in Conflict and Survival: Self-protection in south-east Burma; Ashley South with Malin Perhult and Nils Carstensen; Chatham House, September 2010

prioritise support to such local efforts during protracted conflicts but in ways that would not undermine local self-help initiatives. Wherever possible, priority should be given to adopting a capacity-building approach to strengthen indigenous services.

### Local civil society organisations and international aid

Recognising the security risks for international agencies to reach and operate in the SPLA-controlled areas, the Nuba opposition leadership established a local Nuba civil society organisation (registered in Kenya as an NGO) to implement relief and service delivery projects using funds channelled through INGOs. This proved an extremely important strategy for accessing international assistance and thereby strengthening local efforts to protect livelihoods and meet basic survival needs. It also contributed to the sense of self-reliance, unity and civic pride that meant so much to the besieged population.

Apart from the NGO mentioned above, a number of faith based groups also served as important conduits of international aid and played a significant role in providing local educational and health services. The faith based groups are important in having their own, often extensive local presence on the ground, while also having considerable international outreach, resources and influence.

Interactions between INGOs and these Nuba CSOs revealed the difficulties that international organisations had in providing quality capacity-building support to help these local actors provide mixed relief and development support in a war setting. There was enormous need since many of the local people involved in CSOs had little or no experience in programming and management, nor in the use of participatory approaches that genuinely involved local communities. However, little was achieved expanding the capacities of the Nuba CSOs to design, deliver and manage accountable projects. Too often, the technical advisors supplied by INGOs had inappropriate skills and experiences and tended to focus on issues related to their own operational and donor needs.

Many papers on livelihoods and protection conclude with recommendations related to prioritising local partnerships and supporting local self-help etc – see for example FAO's recent Food Policy Brief on food security in protracted crisis<sup>26</sup>. However, it seems that few INGOs are equipped to follow up such advice in practice.

**Lesson 25** Appropriate capacity-building support for local CSOs is a very relevant intervention when considering protection of besieged civilian populations. However, at least within the war setting of Nuba, many INGOs did not appear to be very effective in facilitating such capacity development. Until agencies start recognising and admitting their own organisational weaknesses in this area, it seems likely that nothing much will change.

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<sup>26</sup> Food Security in Protracted Crises: What can be done? EC/FAO Food Security Information for Action 2008; [www.foodsec.org](http://www.foodsec.org)

### 3.4 Protecting civic rights and psychological needs: belongingness, love, affection, esteem and fun

#### Unity and survival

As discussed above in section 2.2, respondents perceived their rights and associated psychological needs differently according to where they spent the war: those displaced up to the mountainous areas under Nuba SPLA control highlighted issues of physical safety, basic survival needs and livelihoods; those displaced to areas in the north focused far more on issues of civic rights and psychological issues of alienation and lack of affection, community etc.

An overriding message from the Nuba respondents who spent the war under attack in SPLA-controlled areas was the enormous importance they gave to the sense of belongingness, solidarity and unity that they experienced.

“Unity, cooperation and strong relationship among our community was what helped them to survive and remain strong enough to cope all problems...communication between us was very close during the war.

Tima man 39 years

The most important that helped people and remain strong to cope, they love and help each other, unity, cooperation, live together without discrimination.

Tira woman 40 years

During war if I have something and my brother has not, I can give to him and he can say thank and later when I have nothing he can give something to me.

Miri man, 42 years

The thing that made people strong was that they were staying together without segregation, they had unity.

Tira man, 50

It seems that this sense of belonging was not only answering a fundamental human need (as discussed above in section 2.2), but was also important in providing a boost to morale, self-help, courage, respect, determination, endurance, and all those other qualities needed to survive a protracted crisis. Many attached such importance to it that they felt that provision of small amounts of relief, however targeted, could do more harm than good by weakening solidarity. Perhaps they recognise that such unity is as fragile as it is precious – few felt confident that local community leaders had the capacity to manage such a difficult task as managing external aid without causing divisions.

**Lesson 26** The sense of belongingness and all that goes with it is clearly very important to people attempting to survive protracted periods of crisis. Interventions should do all they can to strengthen this and take great care not to weaken it.

To some extent, this sense of solidarity and collaboration was a purely natural phenomenon brought about by a common struggle for survival against a common enemy. But it seems

that it was also strengthened by several initiatives of the Nuba leadership to promote unity, social justice and prioritise civilian services. Examples mentioned by different respondents include:

- the formation of the Nuba Advisory Council (NAC), a representative, elected body of over 200 people from all tribes assigned the responsibility to discuss key issues and decisions affecting the society in SPLA areas
- the attempts to establish a civil administration that considered civilian rights, democratic principles and rule of law
- the introduction of a system of elected civil administrators
- the official proclamation (issued by the NAC) to remove traditional constraints to inter-tribal marriage and dispense with dowry payments
- the efforts to provide social services, so that even at the height of military demands, resources and personnel were allocated to civil affairs

One day, Yusef [Nuba opposition leader] came to our village to hold a meeting in order to tell us about Nuba Advisory Council [NAC] made to let civilians decide whether to continue with war or not. When I heard about that I was very happy.

Otoro man 45 years

The Nuba Advisory Council was something very important for us. It gave us [civilian population] a chance to help make decisions about the war and our survival.

Moro woman 39 years

It [the NAC] was formed so we could all decide on our future together – not just the leaders and soldiers but also the communities.

Tira farmer 45 years

Nuba advisory Council was very important as it allowed all communities to come together as one and make important decisions together through discussion.

39 year old Moro women

The big majority (80%) of those living in the mountains under SPLA control considered that there were means and opportunities to communicate with decision-makers and leaders, primarily through the local chiefs and to a lesser extent directly with security forces (45%) or directly with leadership (20%). Many interviews reflect the genuine “people’s” quality of the Nuba SPLA in which non-combatants supported combatants and vice versa. Conversely those living in garrison towns unanimously considered they had no opportunity to communicate with security forces or decision-makers.

While acknowledging these efforts, of course governance was not perfect and many interviews indicate wrong doings: examples of looting by SPLA soldiers, heavy-handed SPLA commanders, ineffective civilian administrators, and occasional imprisonment of civilians who complained too much about mistreatment by the military.

If SPLA soldiers did wrong, then we as civilians could complain and get compensation.

Tira man 50 years

[but the same woman also observed]....SPLA were good and protected us but if you complain too much about them then they not treat you well. Even you can go to prison.

Tira women 43 years

Sometimes our own [Nuba SPLA] soldiers took what they wanted and we never got it back and could not complain.

Toro man 38 year

My comment to the international agencies, they should giving training and support to strengthen local administration and leadership.

Kawalib man 42 years

However, it does seem that the public attempt to prioritise good governance and accountability (even if not always successful) promoted a sense of dignity, social justice, self-pride, order and determination that greatly motivated and inspired the besieged populations to cope with the physical hardships that persisted for so many years. Although isolated from the rest of the world, there was not the sense of alienation and loneliness that so many living through the war on the other side of the front-line experienced.

**Lesson 27** Efforts by local structures to prioritise good governance, rule of law, support for civil authorities and public services contributed greatly to meeting core human needs of unity, dignity and self-esteem while also boosting popular determination to overcome hardships. Support for promotion of good governance during a conflict should be viewed as a relevant intervention not only for protecting civil rights but also as a means of strengthening local self-help and resilience.

### Having fun during war

In addition to the positive effects of governance, there is also much evidence that the protection (or creation) of opportunities for leisure, entertainment, and fun were seen as being highly important. The “right” to have fun may not seem a humanitarian priority for many donors or INGOs, but it was clearly a significant felt need for the Nuba communities, whether besieged in the mountains or displaced in the north. Many interviews highlight how social events, weddings, sports events (especially wrestling), dance and music, traditional ceremonies (even just the weekly market to meet people) were all important in lifting people’s spirits and helping them forget some of their problems even for a short while.

The initiative of the Nuba NGO that acquired a TV, video player and small portable generator and showed entertainment films in different locations was appreciated by many. By 2000 they had even obtained a small satellite dish and were able to show the Africa Cup of Nations football, which was enormously popular. The simple set of microphones and speakers officially acquired for public meetings actually had a far greater role and impact when used by musicians for singing and dances. Several also mentioned the importance of carnivals, festivals, traditional celebrations etc as fora for communication with leaders and other communities and for sharing important information and experiences. As so often, the inter-connectedness of different aspects of survival is apparent.

We are not animals. We don't just need food and water to live. We like to make ourselves look beautiful and dance even when we are hungry.

37 year old Moro woman

Almost daily we risked our lives finding water and food for our family and for the fighters protecting us. We may die tomorrow. Can't we have some pleasures before we die?

Otoro woman 45 years

When prioritising needs of airlifts in the late '90s when a few risky humanitarian flights were making it to the SPLA-controlled mountains, the Nuba NGOs were perhaps better aware of such needs than their international partners. They therefore included, along with the salt and medicines and food relief, a small number of items such as hair-extensions, make-up and perfumes, razors, playing cards, dominos. These were greatly valued by the besieged Nuba although several times INGOs moved to exclude them from cargos.

The same group also managed to bring in a number of wind-up radios. Transistors were already highly prized possessions in the besieged areas and often large numbers of people would gather around one radio to hear the news or other programmes of interest. For many people, these radio programmes were their only contact with the outside world. However, batteries were in short supply and very expensive (via the cross-line markets), so the introduction of clockwork radios was greatly appreciated.

**Lesson 28** When selecting commodities for airlifting to besieged communities, do not under-estimate the importance of entertainment and creating opportunities for having fun as well as the value of including some "luxury" items. These can have a significant effect on morale and spirit and many are sufficiently lightweight so as to make no difference to payloads of conventional relief items.

### Knowledge about rights – useful or not?

One of things that allowed this conflict to happen and continue is that the people do not know about their rights – they are not taught about them in the school or in the community.

Tira man, 41 years

The [CPA] agreement spoke about right and responsibilities but workshop should take place to educate people and increase the communities' awareness.

Tira man, 35 years

If we know we have equal rights we feel proud and have dignity. We can face hardships with more determination. The agreement spoke about right and responsibilities but workshop should take place to educate people and increase the communities' awareness.

Tima woman, 45 years

Perhaps surprisingly, a majority of those who discussed the issue felt that raising awareness of legal rights as a citizen of Sudan was relevant and would have been an appropriate

intervention during the war and ensuing CPA years. Most of these indicated that awareness-raising of civic rights was needed across conflict lines and that this would bring people together and make conflict and violence more difficult (i.e. would make it harder for perpetrators of human rights abuses to continue if both they and those they threatened were knowledgeable about legal rights of Sudanese citizens). They also felt it would give them more confidence, self-respect and strength to resist abuses. Some even considered that it was important to know your rights so that you could “die with dignity” knowing that you were not inferior to those oppressing you.

If you have knowledge about the law and your legal rights it gives you voice to speak out to people and to call for help and for change.

25 year old man

It would be helpful if people of north come to talk and understand our problems as well as our rights.  
Tira man (soldier with Nuba SPLA during war)

It would have been helpful to get knowledge of our legal rights and the law, and our responsibilities, as citizens of the country – with this we could have called meeting with community of north and discussed with them.

49 male farmer

Of those who did not feel it was appropriate, most felt that it would make no difference and that no-one would listen. Those who considered that it could make matters worse by provoking additional problems with the authorities were all Nuba who had lived in NCP-controlled territory during the war. As one Nuba merchant who spent the war in Khartoum said: “Rights should be included in the school curriculum. But in reality during war, any talk of rights in Khartoum would get you in trouble.” Despite the wide recognition of their contribution to protecting the family during the war, many women complained that their social standing remained significantly lower than that of men.

If you are a man you have a right to talk about any ideas with the people, but if you are a woman you don't even have right to stand up in front of men and say something and give your ideas.

Tira woman, 41 years

Given the key roles of so many woman in basic survival activities (finding wild food and medicines, caring for the children, fetching water, running with household belongings etc), such constraints to women's participation in communal decision are an issue not only of rights issue but also of practical protection.

**Lesson 29** Both during and following war, seek out opportunities on both sides of conflict lines to raise awareness of the rights of citizens, focusing both on national legal rights and international human rights. In some cases, open promotion of such initiatives may be allowed by local power holders, but creative use of internet and radio) would still be worthwhile.

### Rights and oppression

For those Nuba who spent the war in GOS-controlled areas, the opportunities for protecting appeared minimal. Keeping low profiles, attempting to avoid any confrontation with the authorities, having secret meetings at night were commonly mentioned as being the only options. Joining the GOS army or paramilitary groups was a more radical way to avoid imprisonment or other unwelcome attention by the State. The perceived importance of rights-related issues is illustrated by the fact that some even attempted the hazardous journey across the front line in order to live in the physically challenging, mountainous SPLA areas.

If you are in Khartoum, you will be treated as a slave, you will not be paid as the rest of Arab people while you are working in the some office and same job. In Khartoum, there was high discrimination to Nuba people – no rights at all.

Tulushi man 45 tears

Here [in the Mountains] we are better than Khartoum where there are no rights for Nuba people. There if you try to talk they will take you and maybe you will never see the sun again.

Rj6 – who crossed the front-line into SPLA areas during the war

We were living in the dark [in NCP controlled areas]. We would rather die in the light.

Miri man, 50 years

**Lesson 30** The psychological suffering experienced by many Nuba living in GOS-controlled areas was pronounced. Some considered it worse than the physical hardship of living in the war zone. While there may be little that anyone (insiders or outsiders) can do to alleviate this during conflict, the underlying lesson is important: we must all recognise that, during protracted crises especially, humanitarian needs cannot be restricted only to physical considerations.

## 4. Protecting the Peace

### 4.1 Post-conflict protection needs and threats to peace

#### Unresolved drivers of conflict

The great majority of respondents confirmed the overriding benefits of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in terms of the cessation of hostilities and return to some sort of 'normal' life with freedom of movement and speech, access to land, reuniting of families, some degree of economic recovery and resumption of services. However, they also felt that the underlying causes of the war had yet to be addressed and that the likelihood of a return to conflict was therefore considerable. Their disappointment in the implementation of CPA is pronounced – they consider that not only was it breached but that the body put in place to uphold it, UNMIS, continues to perform very poorly. Many expressed concerns that they remained vulnerable to increasing harassment and even attacks from armed militias and GOS security forces as the CPA period draws to an end. Political leadership on both sides

were blamed for not taking advantage of the CPA to strengthen peace. Similar conclusions are reached by independent studies of the situation in South Kordofan<sup>27</sup>. The fact that key issues of land and natural resource tenure<sup>28</sup> as well as local political representation<sup>29</sup> have yet to be addressed cause serious concern among many.

There was a strong sense that lasting peace would come only when the rights and needs of the marginalised people of SK (Nuba and Baggara) were properly respected. Justice and freedom (“hurriya”) were mentioned almost unanimously as being prerequisites for long-term peace, but were used in a broad sense to include: equal rights to services, educational opportunities, land security, choice of religion, language, employment opportunities – in addition to more narrow meanings of legal justice and statutory rights.

War will return as long as GOS don't respect Nuba as equal – the current leaders can never accept Nuba to be treated same as Arabs.

Tira man, 45 years

While the current president in Khartoum remains, people can't getting any rest or be comfortable, because he support some Arabs by giving them money and guns to kill the black people – now we are very fearful because the [Nuba SPLA] soldier were taken away and no one can protect us and unfortunately people in Sudan they don't have rights to talk.

Otoro man, 39 years

If the government [in Khartoum and Kadugli] committed on providing chances of living, took care of different communities' issues and provided the needed services, I think there will be no chance for return to conflict. But otherwise we are not hopeful.

Tima man, 41 years

There is a strong possibility for conflict return as the government in Khartoum is not serious on CPA implementation and there is no respect toward the partner [i.e. Nuba SPLM].

Kawalib man, 50 years

There is a possibility for return of conflict because the reasons of war still existing. No equal development, No actual or realistic authority for Nuba , no fair CPA or elections.

Tira woman, 38 years

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<sup>27</sup> See Marina Peters article “Blue Nile, Nuba Mountains and Abyei” in the Heinrich Böll Foundation publication: Sudan – No Easy Ways Ahead (2010); also Pax Christi's recent CPA Alert “The Nuba Mountains – central to Sudan's stability” by Julie Flint (January 2011); also HSBA's “Drift back to war – insecurity and militarization in the Nuba Mounatins” HSBA Sudan Issue Brief, no 12, 2008.

<sup>28</sup> See “Communal Land Rights, Identities and Conflicts in Sudan: The Nuba Question” Guma Kunda Komey, 2009 (Paper presented at —The Human Rights Dimensions of Land MENA Land Forum Founding Conference, Cairo, 10-12 May 2009)

<sup>29</sup> “Marginalisation and violence –Considering origins of insurgency and peace implementation in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan” Aleksis Ylönen; Institute for Security Studies, Paper 201, October 2009

It is very easy for conflict return due to many reasons, such as; the CPA implementation was not full; citizen and their right is not protected and clear indicator for militias movements and train them to terrify people. This is the main problem facing the security situation in the state.

Kawalib man 40 years

There is a high possibility for war again as the government didn't implement the CPA. Now we're in an emergency situation: the government is training Arab militias and giving them weapons and that is a clear indicator.

Tulushi man, 38 years

The biggest threat to peace is injustice of GoS.

Otoro man, 40 years

Overall, there was a strong sense that the civilian population was feeling disappointed, frustrated, even angry, that it had been ignored. The lack of progress in responding to basic livelihood needs (schools, clinics, wells and roads), coupled with the lack of change in central political positions has undoubtedly weakened popular confidence in the on-going peace process. In addition, almost all feel that the CPA agreements are being undermined and that the body established to uphold them (i.e. UNMIS) is either unwilling or unable to do so. In such cases, perceptions (whether accurate or not) can count for a lot. This conclusion that the failure to address underlying drivers of conflict can not be compensated for matches the findings of recent studies in Afghanistan concerning the relationship between security and aid<sup>30</sup> and by more local assessments in Central Sudan<sup>31</sup>. These studies all agree that attempts to secure peace through purely developmental interventions are unsuccessful if core political grievances remain unaddressed.

**Lesson 31** While welcoming the cessation of hostilities, the civilian population does not feel that nearly enough has been done to build a lasting peace. Civilians are nervous about the future, disappointed with all power-holders (local, national and international) and grow increasingly worried about protection issues. Their key message is that the initial reasons for the war remain. It seems that all involved must accept responsibility for wasting the opportunities provided by the CPA to cultivate a much stronger peace. The lack of popular confidence in the peace process can itself contribute to increased protection threats. Much more could have been done to involve the civilian populations of South Kordofan in strengthening and protecting peace. The consequence of the fragility of the current peace is that civilian protection remains a priority need – and a very significant challenge to address.

### Leadership, peace-building and post-conflict protection

Many (of the Nuba respondents in SPLM areas) perceive an increasingly large gap growing between the leadership and the civilian grassroots from the time of the CPA. This is in

<sup>30</sup> Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan's Faryab Province; Geert Gompelman 2011, Feinstein International Center, Tufts University

<sup>31</sup> Making peace impossible? Failure to honour land obligations of the CPA in Central Sudan; Liz Alden Wily, 2010

contrast to what so many had felt to be a much closer, more communicative and even accountable relationship during the conflict. The Nuba communities that lived through the war in the SPLA-held areas felt that they had much less communication with their authorities now than they did when at war. They explained how their only contact with decision-makers now is the very occasional visit by officials in cars from Kadugli who make pronouncements but never stop to ask for opinions or to listen to ideas. Some of the messages they gave to their own leaders are shown below:

- come back to grass roots, stop your divisions and promote unity (ao1)
- talk with us! (at2)
- sit with us and bring people together (ij9)
- Sit with the people and listen to their ideas and point of view (mj3)
- Bring development, don't forget us (ri3)
- make peace (ri5)
- Our Government should come down to the civilians' level (tm1)

Many felt that international agencies had a legitimate role (as well as a chance of impact) to encourage and support decision-makers in Government to communicate with their own people and constituents. This gap was seen as a real problem. Many consider that an unconnected, divided leadership that is not listening to the people will be unable to provide adequate physical protection, or help address issues of livelihood, social justice or long-term peace. The more that authorities were aware of what the grassroots were thinking and demanding, the less likely that they would overlook the important issues facing the people.

**Lesson 32** As soon as security situations allow, international agencies could do more to create and support opportunities for promoting communication between decision-makers in Government and the grassroots. The more distant and unaccountable the authorities, the less likely they are to respond to local protection needs.

#### 4.2 Prevention of future insecurity

In addition to the issue of unresolved drivers of conflict, almost all respondents considered that the importance of creating long-term peace depended also on the promotion of dialogue and unity, not only among the different communities and ethnic groups within South Kordofan but also with the wider population of Northern Sudan. One of the most striking findings of the research is perhaps the extent to which the civilian population considers the promotion of peace and reconciliation between Nuba and Arab peoples as being not only essential but also achievable. A surprisingly high number of Nuba from the opposition areas also mentioned the need for peace between the main political parties (i.e. the SPLM and the NCP). Given the terrible experiences that so many had had during the war, the expressed readiness to forgive was remarkable.

It appears that many Nuba civilians see the northern Sudanese public as having a key role to play in preventing a return to state-sponsored violence in South Kordofan. The interviews convey a complex and nuanced message which acknowledges social and cultural divisions but assigns causal problems to a minority among the northern political elite rather than to any inherent malevolence among the wider northern public. This would tie in with a common perception of northern Sudanese society as being essentially tolerant, easy-going and non-confrontational. Less than 5% felt that Nuba and Arab unity was inappropriate or impossible.

Unity is important between communities, tribes, the whole country. But now is not strong because of political actions and issues which make people separate and leads to conflict.

Otoro woman, 46 years

The thing that weakens unity is misunderstanding.

Tira woman, 40 years

In the past we thought that this who used to fight us were are our enemies but now it is different and we can coordinate to express our feelings on the injustice surrounding us all, them and us.

Tira man 45 years

Unity means living with different people and colours and religions. Unity should be between all, but the north must take responsibility to change.

Tima man, 48 years

I am asking for unity between Nuba and Baggara and all South Kordofan people.

Tira man 39 years old

North people need to learn not to look at Nuba Mountains people as inferior or second class citizens

Kaolib man, 40 years

People in north they do not understand our situation. Unity is important between Nuba and Arab, but now we do not know what they [northerners] have in their hearts.

Tira man, 37 years

Many northerners look at us as we're not human like them; since war ended, the peace protocol was not implemented, and no development has been provided. They just don't think about our needs, only theirs.

Moro woman, 42 years

Civilians in north still look at us with a racist's eyes.

Otoro man, 48 years

The northern factor is important because they still didn't understand the reason and nature of the conflict.

Tima man, 50

North civilians can play a big role by supporting the CPA and monitoring it plus providing the emotional support for Nuba people and accepting us as equals.

Tima man, 43 years

By accepting the possibilities of living with other and forget the war period, We should forget the past and work together for the future .... we must be accepting, learning how to live in peace and with equity, justice and freedom.

At7, who lost 14 family members lost in one attack by militia Misseriya

However, the research also shows that the status quo needs to change if northern society is to fulfil its potential for peace-building and prevention of state-sponsored aggression against civilians in the future. Thus, for long-term peace to develop in South Kordofan, an overriding majority of respondents considered that the proactive promotion of dialogue and understanding between northerners and Nuba is needed to challenge old perceptions and generate new levels of people-to-people understanding and respect. They want to see discussion around issues that many in the north still have difficulties admitting to: latent racism, inequitable sharing of resources, suppression of rights of those that don't conform to cultural and religious norms. The following ideas were raised as to how such dialogue might be facilitated:

- start by awareness raising and supporting adult education
- support government to take an active role while reducing opportunities for politicians to continue to divide and rule
- create the opportunities for prolonged people-to-people dialogue within common interest groups that have some basis for mutual understanding (e.g. bring together traders, or mothers, or artists, or sports people, or livestock owners)
- support CSOs (from the rest of North Sudan as well as from South Kordofan) to take an active role
- help northerners to listen seriously to what Nuba people say in the popular consultation

We need to build unity with northerners through discussion, we don't want war again

Tira man 46 years

Unity is a high priority: it is essential between the Nuba and other tribes, Baggara, Falata and the northerners. This could be achieved through increasing the awareness on rights and responsibilities and how we need fair [court] trial for anyone who breaks the law with same rules applying for all.

Unity is important between all Sudanese people.

We have to find a way to allow mutual understanding between both Nuba and north.

Tima man, 36 years

Internationals should bring awareness raising in both community that help local Government. This will be helpful because it can create common understanding between north and south Kordofan. It will be more useful to NCP to come and understand our ideas and attend workshop to facilitate the program

Kaolib man, 43 years

All the parties plus the international community, should help citizen understand the popular consultation, held workshop to choose the best cadre at tribe level and from different geographic localities to work together for knowing citizen's expectations. And also the commission and the

committee should be transparent accurate and honest in their reporting towards Nuba Mountain's rights.

Tira man, 41 years

To strengthen the unity, different communities should accept each other and the government should be responsible of this. Adult education is needed to take away racism and tribalism and promote unity.

Tima woman, 38 years

To bring people together in unity help is needed from the NGOs whom are responsible.

Tira woman, 40 years

It's helpful if local authorities bring community of north to hear our problems during the war time to share with us ,to bring new life for our coming generation..... It will be helpful for Nuba community to explain their problems to the north community and also put pressure on Gov through going to regional Gov and explain their points of view.

Tulushi man, 34 years

CSOs in north Sudan should promote unity and the possibilities of living with other communities in peace in one country without ethnic, religion and race discrimination because no one is better than the other.

“Unity can be back through awareness rising among Nuba people. To sustain peace in south Kordofan from my idea government can call up workshop or discussion between Nuba and Baggara tribes”.

CSOs should promote unity between tribes and communities by creating awareness of importance of unity and helping each other.

Community needs to organise meetings, meeting with other tribes. Community dialogues on conflict issues. J

Tira, 47 years

Local leaders should act within their tribes for showing the value of peace.

Tima man, 48 years

It must be born in mind that the great majority of the northern Sudanese public still have no real understanding of what happened during the war in the Nuba Mountains. From the onset of the conflict, few could access any alternative descriptions of the war other than those portrayed by the state-controlled media. These depicted the heroic GOS forces fighting to liberate a beleaguered civilian population from the terrorist activities of SPLA guerrillas attempting to destabilise the North, destroy property and undermine the economy. Much could be done by first exposing the northern public to a more accurate rendering of the reality. Once the implications of that have sunk in it may then be possible to start raising the underlying issues of ignored injustices within northern Sudanese society.

Both of the parties should implement the CPA with national guarantees. Legislative assembly should consider choosing our representatives to take our right, without tribally discriminations. SPLA and

NCP should think positively and work together to keep popular consultation's rights with equal divide for the representatives in the assembly.

Njn5, who lost family members in the war

Bring community of north and south together to share the information that can bring good life. It will be helpful to bring people of north to understand our situation or point of view and also put pressure on the both Government.

A woman who lost her hand and witnessed 15 women massacred in a cave

Mobilize societies, associations, organizations and CSOs to play the national role toward the civilians (increase awareness, fix the human rights, etc)

Tima man, 37

Make workshop to increase the awareness of Nuba Mountain people about CPA and their responsibilities.

Otoro man, 39

Communities have to accept each other and give the right to all the population live in the region, treat them with equity and without discriminations.

Tima woman, 36

Lasting peace will not come until the GOS deals with the bigger problem of lack of human rights for people of South Kordofan.

Kaolib man, 44 years

The role of northern Sudanese civil society in this would be important. Few – if any – international bodies would have the local legitimacy to convey these messages effectively to a northern Sudanese audience. Political space for such discussion will remain very constricted for years to come and, in many cases, northern CSOs may have more chance to exploit the limited opportunities than would internationals. And the issues that will need to be raised (racism, exploitation, social injustice, religious intolerance) are so sensitive that it needs a level of socio-cultural understanding that many external agencies lack.

**Lesson 33** The level of forgiveness among Nuba civilians and their readiness to look to the future rather than to the past is remarkable; it represents an enormous opportunity for protecting peace. Unification and reconciliation are seen as fundamental protection measures for the future in terms of preventing a return to conflict and insecurity. However, the need to actively promote people-to-people dialogue and mutual understanding, both among the different communities of South Kordofan and between them and the wider public of northern Sudan, is seen as essential. Albeit working through local civil society, international agencies could usefully support processes leading to such dialogue.

The research reveals the level of importance attached by local communities to the CPA as a means of preventing future insecurity and of protecting the opportunities for peace. The interviews show that people attach as much importance as to how the CPA is being implemented, monitored and handled by different stakeholders as they do to its actual content. It thus serves not only as a tool for protection today but as a barometer measuring the commitment to peace tomorrow. Considerable disappointment was expressed at the perceived failure of UNMIS to stand up to power-holders who are seen as infringing the

agreements, plans and spirit of the CPA. The issue here was not so much surprise that the politicians were, at times, ignoring the CPA but that the international body set up to enforce the CPA was not responding more actively to such violations. Similar concerns are expressed in Pax Christi's recent CPA Alert.<sup>32</sup>

**Lesson 34** This research reveals a deep and pervading lack of grassroots confidence in UNMIS's ability or willingness to uphold the CPA. This is doing nothing to strengthen the existing (social and cultural) opportunities for peace building since it weakens people's belief in political process. Peacekeeping forces such as UNMIS have to find ways to improve their relationships with the civilian population and demonstrate their readiness to challenge political power-holders who are undermining agreed peace-building processes.

Several respondents pointed out that the psychological impacts of the war have not been dealt with at all. Apart from the mental anguish that many may still be experiencing (but which only few respondents raised), they warned that some orphaned youths who lost their family members in the war would still be seeking vengeance. They warned that those who had failed to find employment and had no family structure to provide social and economic support, were ready to go back to war. This problem appears common across conflict lines – both among Misseriya youth and Nuba. It is also very apparent that there remains almost no constructive dialogue between these two groups of young men.

**Lesson 35** Since the signing of the CPA in 2005, much more could have been done with international assistance to respond to the various needs of the youth on both sides of the conflict. Skills training, employment opportunities and promotion of constructive interactions between the youth of different ethnic groups could contribute significantly to opportunities for longer term peace.

### 4.3 Preparedness for future protection needs

Despite the lack of confidence in the current peace process, only a very small minority admitted to considering any sort of preparatory measures in case of renewed conflict. The overall sense was that despite civilians' misgivings, the idea of returning to war was so abhorrent that most just did not want to think about it. Others pointed out that returnees since the CPA who had no experience of the conditions in the Mountains during the war were ill-equipped to make any preparations for possible self-protection.

There is also a strong sense among the Nuba communities that internationals will take responsibility for protecting civilians if conflict does return. Even though disappointed with what the UN and INGOs have achieved to date, there remains an underlying belief that if hostilities were to resume these organisations would provide protection for civilians.

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<sup>32</sup> The Nuba Mountains – central to Sudan's stability, Julie Flint; IKV Pax Christi's CPA Alert (January 2011)

Despite their lack of confidence in UNMIS, many people feel that it would intervene in a worst case scenario.

We don't want another war. If war comes back again, we will just die.	Otoro farmer
There is no preparation, if war is coming we will die.	Tira woman, 41
We are not preparing anything for that. It is too bad to think about war returning. We can not face that terrible experience again. Our advice to the internationals: bring army to protect civilians [from physical attack] and help people and communities to maintain their livelihoods and live [through their own efforts].	Moro man, 44
Now we are trying to rebuild our lives in peace. We don't have time to think about war.	Moro man, 39
If people return to war, I will not fight as I know I am fighting my brother - I will not shoot a gun on my brother this time.	Tima man, 40 years

The reports of Khartoum supplying new arms to the PDF and other militias among Misseriya youth are too widespread to ignore. They may be exaggerated but it is most unlikely that they are completely fabricated. Is this an example of civilians taking responsibility to protect themselves in the case of renewed conflict? Although this research has been unable to interview active PDF or militia groups directly, discussions with Misseriya and Hawazma groups suggests not. The strong impression from the interviews is that the militarization is not an autonomous, spontaneous process; rather it is dependent on direct intervention by certain groupings of the political elite in Khartoum. It is also linked to the increasing frustration among Misseriya youth with their continuing marginalisation and lack of economic opportunities. A recent Small Arms Survey report quotes Misseriya elders observing that youth enlisting with militias they are moved by "anger" rather than by any vision or ideology, and that they could be deterred from taking up arms if their perception of marginalization was addressed<sup>33</sup>.

**Lesson 36** International peacekeeping missions such as UNMIS need to ensure that local communities understand the level of protection that they can realistically expect in the case of renewed armed conflict. At present, communities may give less attention to emergency preparedness and self-protection because they feel that UN peacekeeping forces will provide all necessary protection.

Despite the apparent lack of preparedness for serious insecurity, many interviewees felt that they and their communities could be doing more to be ready for worst-case scenarios. This

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<sup>33</sup> Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment (HSBA) Feb 2011 update. <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org>

research points to a number of simple, life-saving measures (building on experiences already discussed in section 3 above) that could at least be considered and discussed in situations where a return to hostilities remains possible (as is the case, unfortunately, in much of South Kordofan). These will include the pre-positioning of basic survival commodities, but given the sensitivity of disclosing information about mountain hideouts or hidden stores, this is an area where outsiders have to tread carefully (indeed, we expect that there may well be more preparedness in reality than interviews disclosed). Similarly, in a situation where perceptions are so important, the inappropriate promotion of conflict-preparedness strategies could have significant negative impacts on peace-building efforts.

Three key guiding principles emerge from this research that should inform external efforts to support such preparation for self-protection:

- 1) Facilitate communities to reflect on the available first-hand experiences of previous conflicts to identify a set of practical lessons which they can then use to **develop their own, community-based protection plans**. This should include ideas on early warning, prepositioning (of survival items), means of communication, key roles of individuals and additional skills or information needed (e.g. first aid, water treatment, herbal medicines and wild foods etc). The key is that it is their own preparedness plan, informed by their own (or neighbours') experiences and resourced (as far as is possible) by them.
- 2) For most survival items, separate household-owned 'kits' would be more appropriate than attempts at providing one communal, prepositioned resource which comes with its own set of management and social challenges. In most cases, **households can prepare their survival kits themselves** (both for prepositioned stashes or ready stocked run-bags) since they are largely made up of basic household items (e.g. certain foods, soap, salt, matches, clothes, cooking pots, tools) that they have prioritised themselves. What is needed is a trusted animator to introduce the idea in a sensitive way.
- 3) Where additional support is needed to acquire more specialised or communal inputs for self-protection, communities should select their own preferred means of controlling and managing them that will not endanger solidarity and unity by provoking argument, mistrust or resentment. For some specialised items (e.g. simple medicines, or means of communication) the community would need to identify an individual or group of individuals to take responsibility (e.g. a health assistant, trusted leader, blacksmith, traditional healer, midwife, village chief) (Box 2).

**Box 2 Possible inputs that may need support:**

For household 'kits'

- run-bags
- empty sacks for households to store their own food reserves in safe places
- seeds of upland, quick maturing, drought-tolerant crop varieties

- simple, self-treating medicines (e.g. common anti-malarials, ORS, paracetamol)
- compact, high-energy foods

Possible inputs for 'specialists' and prepositioning in safe-places

- regulated medicines (e.g. antibiotics, strong anti-malarials, typhoid treatments)
- early warning devices (whistles, sirens, bells etc)
- bulk water sterilisers (for contaminated wells)
- blacksmith tools
- training in first aid
- training in herbal medicines
- empty barrels for water storage
- wind-up transistor radios
- heat-resistant vaccines for common poultry diseases

- 4) It is local CSOs and civil authorities that are most likely to remain operational and able to reach vulnerable communities if insecurity returns – not INGOs or UN agencies. Investing now in capacity-building of proven CSOs should be a priority for those worried about a return to conflict. Three areas of capacity especially deserve mention: management, accountability, and logistics (i.e. mobility, communications, stores). Helping selected CSOs preposition larger number of survival kits and prioritised stocks (as above) in strategically positioned, “safe” stores should also be supported.

**Lesson 37** Learning from the war years, a few simple preparatory measures could be undertaken that would significantly strengthen local capacity for self-protection. These focus on facilitating vulnerable communities to develop and put in place their own preparedness measures (based on analysing their previous experiences) and building the capacity of local CSOs that are likely to remain operational during insecurity. Some additional support would allow prepositioning of particular survival items beyond the budget of local populations or CSOs. However, such support would have to be provided as part of peace-building measures to reduce risks of promoting a war mentality.

Eroded assets for self-protection

Many Nuba respondents observed that the strong sense of unity, cooperation and self-help that existing during the war has weakened significantly since it ended. They saw this as weakening their capacity to protect themselves (unity was identified as a major asset, see section 3.1). They mentioned two separate factors causing this weakening of unity among Nuba: poor leadership (e.g. MJ2 “breakdown of unity between Nuba is caused by bad or divided leaders”) and human nature (now people are seeking their own employment and money and they have forgotten the poor who don’t get community support like before (MJ1). Initiatives to rebuild unity were seen as a priority for increasing local capacity for self protection. The majority felt that this would not happen without support from NGOs (local or international) or local government.

Similarly, most of those who highlighted the importance of wild foods and medicines, considered that rates of deforestation since 2005 were worrying and had weakened the natural resource base. Many commented that active promotion of protection of forests and natural resources (especially wild foods) was needed (both by local government and NGOs) was needed if communities were to take more responsibility to protect assets. While these are clearly longer term measures for strengthening opportunities for future self-protection capacity, the accelerating rate of forest clearance warrants immediate action.

**Lesson 38** In areas that are likely to remain unstable for many years to come, relevant interventions can be made to maintain or strengthen local capacities for coping with renewed insecurity. Protection of the natural resource base, especially of wild foods and medicinal plants, is one example. A relevant starting point here is awareness-raising among communities and authorities alike of the crucial importance of the indigenous forest resources and of the wider benefits of mending tribal divisions.

Despite the remarkable resilience demonstrated by civilians in the Nuba Mountains, it is clear that without adequate external protection enormous suffering in the face of war is inevitable. Community –self protection is not enough and neither are the potential inputs of the humanitarian agencies willing to intervene. In this sense, our conclusions concur with those of a recent study of protection efforts in occupied Palestine which observes:

“as conflicts and many displacement situations have become protracted, perhaps it is time for the humanitarian community to scale back expectations of what it alone can do to protect people at risk ...and time to redouble efforts at a political level to ensure that those responsible for protecting people actually do so by pressing harder for accountability and political solutions”<sup>34</sup>.

**Lesson 39** A clear lesson from this research is that community-based protection, by itself, is not sufficient to avoid humanitarian disaster. Neither are humanitarian agencies able to offer anything like the physical protection required during a war to save lives and livelihoods. A priority for South Kordofan right now (and other post-conflict situations) should thus be to achieve maximum international political pressure for:

- i) dis-incentivising a return to armed hostilities
- ii) increasing the capacity of UNMIS for civilian protection in the case of renewed insecurity

#### **4.4 Strengthening the potential of a wider national public to protect during conflict**

As discussed above (section 3.2), there is some evidence that a growing aversion among the northern Sudanese public to what was happening in Nuba may have helped prevent hardliners in the GOS from following through with their apparent policy of genocide. Could

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<sup>34</sup> Incorporating protection into Humanitarian Action: approaches and limits; Elizabeth Ferris and Chareen Stark, Oct 2010 (IFI/UNRWA International Conference, Beirut)

this indirect protective role of the public have been harnessed more systematically? In the case of future conflicts, could we learn how to maximise its potential for reducing state-sponsored aggression against civilians? A cautious and uncertain majority of respondents in this research felt that yes, appropriate communication with the northern public during war and even with the attacking forces – if that was possible in practice – would be worth trying. The objectives mentioned as to why this might be relevant were all about appealing to the underlying morality and humanity of the general public and included:

- raising awareness of the real reasons behind the Nuba opposition (to counter the misleading propaganda being spread by the GOS)
- raising awareness of the brutal targeted attacks on innocent civilians, including killing of women and children and elderly, rape of girls, abduction of children, torture and execution of educated civilians (teachers, health workers)
- raising awareness of the targeted attacks on mosques and churches
- requesting the northern population to protest against attacks on innocent civilians
- asking the soldiers (including the many Nuba fighting in GOS and militia forces) why they are attacking and killing innocent civilians
- raising awareness among soldiers as to the human rights of the targeted population, both as Sudanese citizens and within the scope of international human rights.

If war is to return, how might such cross-conflict communication be effected in practice? The pre-distribution of cheap and sturdy camcorders with solar-powered, portable satellite tele-communication systems for sending out footage on the internet (Facebook, Utube etc) would be one option. For threatened communities at risk of displacement and possible blockade, should we be considering training a network of grassroots journalists and facilitating them to acquire and pre-position (possibly in refuges) basic video and communication equipment? Are there local CSOs that could be involved in such projects? Could local and international human-rights and advocacy agencies act as hubs to then pass on the information to as many relevant sites visited by different sections of the northern Sudanese public?

Mobilise people of north by writing message through internet and poems and having meetings with their leaders and make new politics that stops war and brings people together as one.

36 year old Nuba farmer who fought in GOS army during the war

When outsiders write articles or books or make films primarily for international audiences, should these then be redesigned and translated and disseminated through appropriate channels in order to reach a more local audience of the wider national public? Could more be done to involve civil society in general and local human –rights activists in particular in the North? Just as we (in INGOs and UN agencies) tend to design projects that we can implement to try to protect others, so we tend to produce advocacy material and reporting aimed at lobbying similar international audiences. Perhaps a lesson from the horrors of the Nuba civil war is that we should be doing more to stimulate local constituents of the

aggressive forces to take a more active role. Evidence from other sources<sup>35</sup> also suggests that increased understanding among “duty-bearers” of the rights and realities of targeted populations can help reduce levels of human-rights abuse. It is remarkable how even now that so many educated, aware and well informed Northern Sudanese remain ignorant of what really occurred in the Nuba Mountains during the war.

**Lesson 40** Explore all opportunities for stimulating the relevant general public (in this case of North Sudan) to fulfil its potential to curb State policies that are fuelling targeted violence against civilian populations. This would usually focus on raising national awareness of human rights abuses being inflicted by the military and countering some of the more misleading state propaganda that justifies a military response in the first place. Innovative ways of ensuring communication during war and of using available political space to lobby would normally be required; the involvement of local civil society again seems crucial.

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<sup>35</sup> Self-protection in conflict: Community strategies for keeping safe; Oxfam GB in DRC; Katherine Haver 2009

## **5. Opportunities for lesson learning within and between threatened communities**

### **5.1 Post conflict experiential learning within threatened communities**

This research was originally conceived as a means for increasing understanding among relevant international and national organisations of how they might better complement and support community-based protection in times of conflict. However, the process of carrying out this research has revealed significant opportunities for improving reflection and lesson-learning within the threatened communities themselves. The following patterns that emerge from the work in South Kordofan indicate the relevance of initiatives to actively support community-based learning about protection:

- a) there is clearly a wealth of relevant protection experience and knowledge existing within threatened communities
- b) however, this knowledge is fragmented and not spread equally among the affected population during the war; lives could have been saved (and improved) if it had been shared more evenly
- c) many people alluded to the fact that protection assets and knowledge are quickly lost and that many important lessons from the war period are already being forgotten
- d) many people valued the efforts (of this research) to facilitate reflection and lesson learning from the experiences of the war – they did not think that such ‘experiential’ learning would happen spontaneously without proactive facilitation
- e) many of the families who have returned to live in the Nuba Mountains area have no experience of surviving within a war zone: if war was to return they would be among the most vulnerable.

It seems therefore that much could be achieved by facilitating a process of experiential learning among the threatened communities themselves. Since community-based protection obviously plays such a crucial part in helping people to survive during war, it is perhaps obvious to start by helping communities strengthen their own potential for self-protection themselves. This may be especially important in situations such as South Kordofan, where the need for “protecting the peace” is so important and where the risks of renewed insecurity remain significant. This paper – written as it is for an English-speaking, (largely) academic audience with no first-hand experience of self-protection – will not fulfil this need. A different approach is needed that focuses on facilitating people to reflect on and learn from their own experiences; that not only helps people identify key lessons from their own, first-hand experiences but also helps them use these lessons to practical effect. It implies not only a change in knowledge, but also in attitude and practice.

Experiential learning is sometimes described as a simple three-stage process that asks people to reflect on 3 questions:

- 1) **what?** (what happened to you, what were your key experiences related to protection in war and peace?)
- 2) **so what?** (what are the key lessons that you learnt from these experiences?)
- 3) **now what?** (what will you do now to actually benefit from these lessons and make sure that you use them in practice to improve something)

Given the political realities of post-conflict situations, proposals to promote local learning for self-protection would need to be sensitively “packaged”. Low-profile, multi-faceted approaches would be more suitable than a high profile, one-off campaign. Similarly those actually facilitating the learning would need to be trusted by the particular communities that they are working with; often requiring different structures and individuals to be involved in different areas. Based on experiences within South Kordofan, a sequential process is proposed (see Box 3 below). Though informed by the Nuba context, the basic principles could be relevant in other complex political emergencies.

**Box 3 A possible approach for facilitating experiential learning around self-protection**

- i. Initially, undertake a process of consultative (largely extractive) research similar to what has been tried so far by L2GP in order to identify key patterns, trends and lessons on protection
- ii. Identify the different stakeholder groups that would each require a different set of foci, approaches, facilitators when attempting to promote experiential learning.
- iii. From this initial research, pull out an initial set of key lessons relevant to each stakeholder group and write them out in the appropriate local language as simply as possible.
- iv. Identify appropriate local actors who could use these as a starting point for facilitating discussions with the stakeholder populations. These actors could be government departments, or traditional community-based leaders, or local NGOs, or faith-based groups, or local service providers (e.g. teachers or health technicians) , or community youth groups, or in some cases well-trusted international agencies with in-depth local experience
- v. Support these actors to facilitate a suitable number of experiential learning sessions with representative groups of their stakeholder populations (women and men, at schools, with youth groups, elderly). These participatory discussions should allow significant refinement of the initial set of key lessons and identify the practical actions and changes in behaviour that could be adopted.
- vi. Ideally this experiential learning process would be replicated throughout the villages and nomadic groups of the threatened populations. This might require training up women and men from the target communities themselves to act as facilitators in order to cover a significant area.
- vii. Other dissemination techniques could also be used to spread key lessons and messages: written pamphlets, programmes on local radio, village drama, puppet shows, TV or short films on DVDs. For now these mass media means might be better suited to disseminating local lessons related to “protecting the peace” and preventing

- conflict rather than coping with protection threats during issues. They could also relate to issues of protecting local assets for resilience: forests, unity etc.
- viii. At the same time, preparations could be made for how practical lessons on protection of livelihoods and safety might be disseminated if widespread or protracted insecurity was to return.
  - ix. Where the learning provokes a genuine desire for action that requires additional support (training, equipment, materials) then a means of providing the appropriate resources for such initiatives would also be needed. This could be a locally managed small grant scheme.

Given the enormous political and security sensitivities around issues of self-protection, great care would have to be taken in how this process was facilitated, especially in the dissemination of any written material. A robust do-no-harm cross check would need to be established before initiating such activities, informed both by the threatened communities themselves and by trusted observers and analysts. In some cases it may be too risky to support any dissemination of lessons except that undertaken by the grass roots.

**Lesson 41** Facilitating experiential learning for conflict-affected communities appears to be a worthwhile initiative for several reasons. Not only can it generate lessons for improving self-protection and external assistance, it can also help develop opportunities for peace building. The set of lessons shared in this paper are aimed at helping external actors strengthen the impact of their protection initiatives. A significantly different set of lessons would be presented if the audience were the threatened communities themselves and the aim was to help them decide directly what they would do to strengthen their self-protection initiatives.

## 5.2 Promoting experiential learning between different communities during conflict

This research has revealed the potential for increasing local resilience by supporting the spread of effective protection methods ideas, skills and practices among the threatened populations of South Kordofan. Meanwhile the wider L2GP programme is generating lessons from the protection experiences of other communities in other conflicts – in Jonglei in South Sudan, Karen State in SE Burma and in Zimbabwe. What is the potential for helping to share lessons between these different communities? What lessons could be shared by the highly experienced community-based protection experts of conflict torn parts of DRC, Dafur, Afghanistan, Kurdistan, Tibet – and so many others?

We need to hear about experiences from elsewhere on other conflicts and how the communities were able to overcome war and provide support to make peace process a living reality.

Tima man, 40 years

Using academic researchers to carry out studies and publish their findings is one way to try to capture and share lessons from different community protection experiences in different

countries. But such researchers have no first-hand experience of self-protection in conflict themselves, they tend to ask the questions (and hear the answers) that fit their academic framework and their writings cannot be used directly by communities attempting to protect themselves elsewhere.

Another way would be to support relevant representatives of one conflict-threatened population to visit and directly share their skills and ideas with other communities facing similar challenges elsewhere. These are the real community-based protection experts who could serve as consultants to build capacities of people trying to survive the horrors of war. Humanitarian agencies were unable to protect Nuba women from being raped by soldiers during the last war – but perhaps some of these women have some knowledge, attitude or practice that would be valued by women similarly threatened elsewhere in Sudan or in Congo, Uganda, Chad, Yemen or Pakistan.

This could be piloted as a piece of action-research that provides as much opportunity as possible for spontaneity and creativity. The cross visits could be almost completely community driven, with international agencies acting as initiators of the idea and providers of logistics support, translation services and the expenses incurred by the grassroots consultants selected to travel. Facilitating INGOs here would initially need to ‘let go’ and allow the whole process to evolve organically without trying to achieve any predefined goals. By monitoring the process, INGOs or national CSOs could then learn how to contribute most effectively.

In terms of cost effectiveness, it should compete favourably with most other protection interventions. If intensive, first-hand, practical experience of prolonged self-protection is deemed a useful qualification for a technical advisor on the subject, these consultants would probably be among the least expensive on the planet.

**Lesson 42** Agencies could usefully start piloting different approaches for facilitating lesson-learning visits between conflict-affected communities with the aim of strengthening local capacities for protection. Such pilots could be readily evaluated by the participating communities and relatively quickly a body of practical guiding principles could be established for designing and facilitating such people-to-people initiatives.

## 6. Conclusions... and a few recommendations

Analysis of the Nuba conflict reveals (as many other case studies have done) the fundamental role of threatened communities in protecting themselves from violence. It also highlights that however remarkable such self-protection, there will be death and suffering on a terrible scale will occur if state-sponsored violence against civilians is not prevented by other actors (, whether through physical or political means). These two distinct approaches to protection are essential, complementary and need to be carried out simultaneously: strengthening local capacity to maximise opportunities for self-protection while generating the international political willingness (as well as national public interest) to prevent or stop targeted attacks on civilians. In the case of the Nuba conflict, it took more than 10 years for international agencies to really start making any meaningful progress on these two fronts – and the delays in doing so resulted in terrible levels of death and suffering.

The 42 lessons generated by this study are specific to the Nuba Mountains. Some of them may be of interest or use to organisations (local and international) working in South Kordofan, but how relevant are they to conflict situations elsewhere? Every conflict is different and care must be taken not to extrapolate generic lessons too widely. That said, we have attempted to draw out a set of recommendations generated by this study that might help agencies when considering protection interventions. These are set out as a checklist of questions that donors and implementing agencies might usefully ask themselves when looking at options for protection interventions. In line with our discussions above, two sets of recommendations are presented: one (Box 4) for mainstream aid agencies (whether national or international) and one (Box 5) specifically for local civil society organisations and self-help groups. These checklists do not aim to be exhaustive; they merely reflect the lessons generated by this particular study. For more extensive and detailed lists of self-protection, the reader is directed to a recent study undertaken by the Cuny Centre.<sup>36</sup>

### Box 4 Checklist for agencies (local and international) considering interventions aimed at protection

1. Does the proposed intervention arise from a sufficiently insightful understanding of local realities at a household and community level to allow it to:
  - a) build on or complement the **existing self-protection assets and actions** of threatened communities, including strengthening the capacity of local leadership at community level?
  - b) alleviate any **negative side-effects** (and fill gaps) of existing self-protection measures, whether related to safety, livelihoods or rights?
  - c) respond holistically to the different and changing needs (between location and over time) of threatened communities **living either side of the conflict –line?**

<sup>36</sup> How Civilians Survive Violence: a preliminary inventory; Casey Barrs, the Cuny Centre; 2010

- d) recognise the importance of the **psychological needs** of people attempt to survive long-term insecurity and displacement? (including self-esteem, knowledge of rights, belongingness and enjoyment)
  - e) build on the key **protection role played by women?**
2. Does the agency have sufficient understanding and capacity at local and national level to allow it to:
- a) provide relevant **capacity-building support to local CSOs** and NGOs that are attempting to respond to civilian needs?
  - b) justify possible **engagement (or not) with local armed forces and governing bodies** to strengthen their positive contribution to civilian protection while minimizing any threats they pose
  - c) facilitate **people-to-people communication and dialogue** between the communities being attacked and those who are carrying out the attacks?
  - d) raise the **awareness of the wider national public** of what is being done to innocent civilians in their own country (such that they might take their own initiatives to influence the authorities responsible)?
  - e) work with **peacekeeping forces** (especially those of UN) to strengthen their understanding of local realities and increase their efficacy?
  - f) Support **community-based peace-building initiatives post conflict** as a means of preventing a slide back into conflict?
3. Does the agency have sufficient understanding and capacity at international level to allow it to:
- a) contribute to efforts aimed at **raising sufficient international political willingness** to stop or prevent State sponsored violence against citizens?
  - b) advocate for **changes in UN peacekeeping interventions**: how they are designed, managed and implemented ?
  - c) provide relevant **capacity-building support to local CSOs and NGOs** that are attempting to respond to civilian needs?
  - d) **support threatened communities to learn from the self-protection experiences** of those from other conflicts?

**Box 5 Checklist for CSOs from within threatened communities attempting to strengthen protection**

1. Keep records of human rights abuses that can be used to raise national and international awareness.
2. Bring in journalists and lobby groups to witness and document human rights abuses as a first step towards attracting international protection support as well as mobilizing local support in the wider national public (so make sure that they run their stories in local languages through local networks in addition to international media channels and languages).
3. Encourage communities to develop their own early warning systems to give time for escape from attacks.

4. Encourage use of “run bags” and hidden caches of emergency survival items.
5. Look for local examples of effective self-protection and help to disseminate them, especially knowledge on wild foods and herbal medicines.
6. Seek out local crop varieties that perform better under displaced conditions and attempt to bulk up and distribute the seed (and similarly with adapted livestock types)..
7. Seek ways for increasing both the value attached locally to the protection role of women and their opportunities to participate in communal decision-making.
8. Recognise the importance of promoting unity and self-help and take any opportunities for strengthening solidarity.
9. Recognise the importance of entertainment and promote social events accordingly – music, dance, sport, drama, film etc.
10. Design interventions for capacity building of local leadership (from community level upwards) specifically for promoting self-protection in all its forms.
11. Seek out skilled individuals in displaced communities who can be supported to provide basic services whether as teachers, human and animal health technicians, or agricultural extension.
12. Seek opportunities to raise awareness of local authorities and armed forces of the benefits of improving respect for, communication with and accountability to civilian population (i.e. promotes greater solidarity, self-help, resilience, collaboration).
13. When dealing with international agencies, demand assistance to develop your own capacities to provide protection rather than relying only on them to implement their own projects directly.

As for so many studies exploring options for intervening in humanitarian crises, the broad conclusions are familiar. For agencies to add value, they must understand local realities sufficiently to allow them to respond to felt needs, build on local coping mechanisms, support opportunities for self-help, strengthen local capacities, act holistically, and ensure that they do as little harm as possible.

Given the complexities of conflict situations and the potential for doing considerable harm (both by intervening inappropriately and by not intervening at all), this understanding – from the grassroots up – is particularly important. It takes time and effort to develop it and, though not inherently costly, it does require an explicit and an organisational commitment. One-off studies such as this one, using qualitative research and mix of local and outsider expertise, are useful but they are definitely not enough. A longer term approach to learning is required, which allows an organisational memory to be built on by repeated action and reflection.

And here perhaps is the biggest challenge: for agencies to improve their capacity to protect it is not enough just to develop an understanding of local realities: they must then be able to act on it. This may sound obvious but it is extraordinary how many of the INGOs and UN agencies encountered during this research demonstrate an alarming disconnect between knowledge and action. In so many cases, the organisational need for strict compliance with internal procedures and bureaucracy is prioritized over the programming need for

adaptability, creativity and an approach based on local, iterative lesson learning. Even when individuals within agencies had significant insights, experience and understanding too often they were unable to utilize such qualities, either because of the administrative constraints they were working under or because of the centralist nature of their organisations' policies and strategies.

A side effect of this L2GP research was the generation of over 10 small proposals with local CSOs looking at innovative ways to help protect and strengthen the fragile peace that currently prevails in South Kordofan. These proposals ranged from promoting dialogue between conflicting communities, supporting local musicians to sing for peace, investing in voter education, providing cross-conflict public services, provision of vocational training and enterprise development for unemployed youth, improving communication and coordination between local CSOs. They emerged directly from the process of facilitated reflection and creative thinking promoted by the research and they reflect the opportunities that a real commitment to learning can generate.

However, to turn any of these into action has proved very difficult despite the existence of schemes set up to offer small grants for such small-scale projects and the pledging of support. The internal administrative and management systems of these agencies do not make it easy for them to support opportunistic and creative initiatives that arise from innovation and learning among local CSOs and communities. Since (as this research has shown) it is precisely this sort of action that is needed to strengthen protection, such constraints represent a real problem. Without a change in how aid agencies attempt to balance their bureaucratic need for centralised control with the grassroots need for flexibility and spontaneity, action arising from accumulated local learning will remain limited. For the relevant agencies to start demonstrating improvements in the efficacy of their protection interventions, it seems they need to change their management procedures, organisational cultures and self-understanding.

Which brings us to a final, cross-cutting recommendation. Investment in the capacity of leaders to help them better support their communities (or managers, staff, teams or members) to undertake (or promote) holistic and equitable self-protection appears a priority. Village communities which have active, creative and knowledgeable leaders will be better able to protect their physical and psychological needs. Senior local leaders (whether military or civilian, 'Governmental' or 'rebel') who can prioritise and promote the necessary skills and values needed for effective civilian protection will have even greater impact. Agencies (whether local, national or international) with leaders who have a better understanding of self protection, and the need for simultaneous political lobbying, will be better able to intervene usefully. A useful start for any such capacity development for leaders will be to expose them to the multi-faceted opportunities for and pre-requisites of holistic self-protection.

## Annex 1 Question checklists used during research

The following checklist of questions was used as an initial guide for semi-structured interviews. It was not expected that all 15 questions be asked in one interview, nor to ask them in a given order but, if the interviewee was willing, they might be tackled one way or another over 2 or 3 visits. Interviewers were encouraged to ask the first two questions and then to proceed according to the interest of the respondent and depending on the key issues that arose from the “story” described in question one. The story itself might be carried on through out the entire interview and generate answers to other questions without even having to ask them. Similarly, it might generate a new line of investigation not covered at all by any of the suggested questions below.

### Reflecting on the past

1. What happened to you during the time of the conflict in South Kordofan? Where were you when the troubles started? **Tell us your story, from the beginning....** (record main points to provide the core context of the interview and take notes of key issues that arise from the story that you can pick up on later, including main problems faced, coping mechanisms and assistance....)
2. You already mentioned some of the problems you faced and how you tried to cope with them. Can you tell me in **more detail about your coping mechanisms and how you protected yourselves** (pick from the list below according to what is relevant to each person you are interviewing based on their story above):
  - a) How you tried to protect yourselves from violence (e.g. from attack or ambush or beating or rape)
  - b) How you tried to protect your property and belongings from being taken or destroyed
  - c) How you tried to ensure that the family had enough food to eat (from agriculture and wild foods)
  - d) How you tried to ensure that the family had enough water to drink
  - e) How you tried to keep healthy and treat diseases when someone got sick
  - f) How you tried to ensure that the children got some education
  - g) How you tried to make sure that you had basic needs like clothes, shoes, soap, salt, tools etc

➤ When discussing these coping mechanisms find out which were effective and which were not. Some even had negative implications (e.g. getting raped in order to get water, getting sick or dying from eating poisonous wild foods or medicines...) – try to find out about these. Remember, this question about coping mechanisms and self-protection is key question, take time and go deeply .

3. From your opinion, did you see any difference between how **women or men** were able deal with these different problems that were faced during the war? (If they seem interested discuss more about women’s role during the war, ,and any reasons for different ability to cope etc).
4. Of all of the negative impacts that you experienced during the conflict, are there any which are **still affecting you today**? If so what are they and how affecting your life now?
5. Describe your **relationship with the armed forces during that time** that were meant to be protecting you where you were living (i.e. either SPLA or GoS or PDF depending in which area they were staying during the war):
  - was it good? bad?

- Did they actually protect you and your property or not? (or even the opposite!?)
  - Could you communicate easily with them or not?
  - Did they treat the civilians well or were there problems?
  - If they did anything wrong against civilians (e.g. taking food, beating, raping) could you complain and get any justice or not?
6. Did you ever hear about the **Nuba Advisory Council** that was formed to give communities an opportunity to decide about whether to continue the war and to discuss other issues related to civilian's situation? If so, was it helpful or not – what did you think about it?
7. a) During the conflict, the army had their means for communication, but how did communities manage to **communicate and exchange information** with each other during the war, especially over long distances? How important was this communication between communities for protection?
- b) In every village at least some one had a **radio** which people could listen to different programmes from outside (e.g. news, music, sports). Were these radios important for people? Why?

### Key lessons learned

8. Reflecting on your experiences of the CPA:
- a) What do you see as the most important **benefits of the current peace** that you most appreciate and value and want to protect?
  - b) What do you see as the main differences between your lives now and how they were in **the years before the war** started (i.e. in 1970s and early 80s) and do you think things now are better or worse as a result of the war? (make sure you get their reasons behind their opinions).
9. a) Reflecting back on those times, what do you think were your most **important assets (e.g. the qualities of your community and society, your environment, your possessions, your relationships, your skills, etc)** that helped people survive and remain strong enough to cope with all the challenges you faced because of the war? (discuss and probe, using check list if necessary)
- b) Now almost 7 years after the cease–fire are these assets still available? **Are all these strengths and assets still existing?**
- c) Do you have any ideas on how these qualities and assets can be improved, strengthened and **protected for the future?**
10. a) Thinking back to the war, do you think it would have helped you in any way if you had been more **knowledgeable about your own legal rights**, about the law, about the legal responsibilities of the security forces? If so, why – if not why not?
- b) If there was a safe way for you **to communicate with the armed forces** who were threatening your safety, your livelihoods, your rights (i.e. those on the other side), what messages would you like to send them? If it could be possible, do you think that it could make any difference by communicating with them (e.g. by making them question their orders and actions?).
11. **International organisations** did not intervene much during the war, but a few organisations tried to do something. You have already mentioned.....:
- a) Were any of these interventions (or any others you heard of ) effective in helping to protect people's safety, livelihoods or rights – if so, discuss how they helped? or if not, why were they were not useful?
  - b) Did you experience yourself, or hear of, any initiatives that had a negative impact on people's capacity to protect their safety, livelihoods or rights? If so what were they,

are why were they bad? Some interviews already say that handouts now are actually weakening self-reliance...but is there really any evidence for this?

- c) Often, INGOs always try to target to make sure that relief only goes to the poorest. What do you think about this – in practice, is it realistic and sensible? Or is it counter-productive because it promotes disputes and jealousy? Or is it a waste of time, because people will share it out equally anyway as soon as the INGO has gone?

### **Planning for the future and sustainable peace**

12. It seems that **unity is** both a means of people surviving in difficult times and a means of maintaining the peace. Let us discuss what have we learnt from the years of war that can help us strengthen unity:
- Unity is important between whom?** (just between Nuba tribes, or also Nuba-Baggara, Nuba-northern communities, Nuba-Southern communities? What is happening now?
  - You all say that **unity between Nuba tribes** during the war was strong, but that now since the CPA, it has become less. What are the actions your community could be taking to help rebuild unity between Nuba tribes, how would you do this, what help would you need?
  - Do you think that it is possible and good to promote **unity between Nuba and Baggara tribes**? If so, what are the actions your community could be taking to help rebuild unity between Nuba tribes, how would you do this, what help would you need?
  - Do you think that it would help if the **civilian population in the north** could be helped to really understand your situation, your point of view, your problems and your hopes? In practice, how could Nuba communities play a role in promoting improved dialogue and understanding with the northern communities and what help would you need to do this?
13. Thinking about the future:
- Given the current situation and what you are seeing, what do you think is more likely: **continued peace or a return to conflict**? (make sure you get their reasons one way or the other).
  - Are there any aspects of your personal **safety, your livelihoods or your rights that are being threatened now**? If so, describe them and what are you doing about it?
  - Are you or your community making any **preparations** in case there is ever a return to conflict in the future? If so what? And what help would you need to improve such preparations?
14. Insha'allah, by any means, peace will prevail, but **if there was a return to conflict**,
- would you **do anything differently** this time compared to the decisions and actions that you took last time? Explain your reasons.  
...if necessary remind them of their previous coping mechanisms (from questions 1&2) and ask them if they would just repeat them or do something new – and if so, find their reasons)
  - If there was a return to conflict, who do you think is **responsible for ensuring your safety as a civilian**, and protecting you and your livelihoods or rights?
  - If there was a return to conflict, should **international organisations** give priority be given to ensuring safety, or to supporting livelihoods or protecting rights? Why?
15. Final (funny) question to finish the interview:
- During the war, **how did you try to keep your spirits up** and remain positive and have fun? Were there times when people could relax and have entertainment? (e.g. sports, wrestling, parties, video films). Do you think these things were important to help people survive.

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- b) Can you tell me a popular joke that you remember from the war years that made people laugh?
- c) And now can you tell me a new joke that is common today that makes people laugh?

## **Annex 2**

### **Summarised account of the people of the Nuba Mountains and the recent conflict**

#### People of the Nuba Mountains

While ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous, the different Nuba tribes have many cultural and livelihood similarities and share a common history. While traditionally they have coexisted peacefully, inter-tribal marriage was rare until recently and interactions were largely limited to markets and certain ceremonial events (of which the Nuba wrestling is one of the best known). The majority of Nuba have been Islamised and Christianised (in roughly equal numbers), so that that now perhaps less than 15% still solely follow traditional spiritual (ancestral) religious beliefs.

The Nuba tribes have been politically, economically and socially marginalised within northern Sudan for centuries. Prior to this most recent conflict, they have repeatedly suffered persecution from armed outsiders, experiencing slave raiding, land grabbing, Mahadist repression and British colonial military control. Constantly outnumbered and out-armed, the dominant strategy has been to flee from their farms on the fertile plains up into the mountains. Although the poor rocky soils limit agricultural production, the physical protection and wild foods available from the rugged uplands has played a crucial role for the survival of many Nuba communities. At the same time, many Nuba tribes have become renowned for their fighting strength and courage – an attribute that ironically fuelled slaving raids and, more recently, forced conscription into armies of successive Sudanese governments.

Some 200 years ago, nomadic pastoralists of Arab origin, mainly the Misseriya (Humr and Zuruq clans) and the Hawazma started to move south into the Nuba Mountains areas seeking grazing and water for their livestock. Despite occasional violent interactions (over land and water – and sporadic livestock raiding), for the most part relationships between these neighbouring Arab and Nuba tribes were not violent, at least when not being manipulated by outside forces. Mutual economic benefit was significant, with pastoralist livestock grazing on crop residues while fertilising fields with manure, exchange of animal products (and salt from brought from the north) with Nuba cereals and vegetables. Peaceful co-existence (even if at times this was an “uneasy” peace) was thus the norm, and marriage between black Nuba and Arab was not uncommon as can be seen today by the broad range of physical features found in the area. It is also relevant that these Arab pastoralist groups themselves have been (and continue to be) marginalised by Khartoum-based governments of Sudan.

The other major ethnic group in South Kordofan are the Falata (of west African origin, mostly Hauza) whose villages can be found throughout South Kordofan. Largely settled farmers and small-traders, the Falata (all of whom are Muslim) interact peacefully with both Arab and Nuba. Small numbers of ‘jalaba’ (urban traders from the political and economic

northern Arab elites) as well as traditional camel herder groups (such as the Shenabla) are also living in the State.

### Conflict in the Nuba Mountains

As described above, for generations the policies of successive Khartoum-based governments has been to marginalise the Nuba people. The effects of such policies (e.g. restricted educational and employment opportunities; loss of traditional farm land to outsider mechanised schemes; social discrimination; lack of political rights; banning of local languages from school curricula) led to increasing frustration, especially amongst educated Nuba in the seventies and eighties. Failure to bring about any changes through political process and alarm at the undemocratic imposition of Islamist Sharia law (in 1983) led to increasingly open opposition by Nuba leaders. In response, the government of Sadiq al Mahadi began arming local Misseriya youth (typically impoverished and marginalised groups themselves) and encouraging them as local “murahalleen” militia to attack Nuba communities and take land and property by force. It was at this time that the emerging leader of Nuba opposition, (the late) Yusef Kuwa Mekki, announced the decision to align with the SPLA/M and embark on a period of armed resistance against Government attacks and policies.

Military escalation was rapid and brutal. Widespread extrajudicial execution, torture and imprisonment of educated Nuba and all suspected of supporting the resistance was widespread. The Misseriya militia were increased, trained, rearmed and established by law as the Popular Defence Force (PDF). Nuba villages were attacked and burnt to the ground, women raped, youth conscripted, community leaders shot outright. The newly formed Nuba SPLA forces attacked a few smaller garrisons of the government and militia groups. Sudanese army forces moved in high numbers in to South Kordofan (with helicopters, fighters planes and bombers and foreign military advisors and combatants), effectively encircling the mountainous areas where the opposition forces were based.

By the early 90's the Government had acquired a fatwa from Muslim clerics to legitimise a jihad against the Nuba people and commenced a campaign that was implicitly genocidal, involving: targeted destruction of Nuba villages by ground and air forces; promotion of rape and insemination of Nuba women by Aran soldiers; planned relocation of half a million Nuba to concentration camps within Kordofan and to other parts of North Sudan and (over a third of which was achieved by 1993) – and mass starvation. The 400,000 or so Nuba who had fled up into to the mountains by the early 90's when their villages were attacked, were effectively besieged by Sudanese army and the PDF. Bore holes and wells in the villages were either destroyed or poisoned. Cut off from outside supplies and any form of services, people thus faced up to 10 years or more with no transport, money or access to health care, schooling and basic needs such as salt, soap, clothes or agricultural inputs.

Meanwhile the Nuba SPLA forces were engaged almost exclusively in defence of the besieged mountain areas, attempting to repel attacks when often hampered by very limited arms and ammunition. Inevitably they were not always successful but, remarkably, they were

never completely over-run. Thus in 2002, when a ceasefire was signed as an initial step towards the comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005 between the Sudan government and the SPLA, there was still a significant force of Nuba SPLA holding their core positions in the mountains where perhaps some 400,000 civilians were still surviving.

To access well research and detailed accounts of Nuba history, linguistics, ethnographic and conflict visit <http://www.occasionalwitness.com/> by an independent authority on the Nuba people, Nanne op 't Ende.