

EU Single Country Strategy Planning: Lessons Learned – South Sudan
Towards Country Level Joint EU Joint Programming

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The EU Single Country Strategy Plan responds to the principles embodied in the November 2011, European Commission communication: *Increasing the impact of EU Development Policy: an Agenda for Change*. The strategy paper responded to the partner country’s national development plan and sector strategies; it focused on enabling greater ownership and alignment for “greater reciprocal engagement” with South Sudan, “including mutual accountability for results [and] dialogue at country level within a coordinated donor framework.”

The EU is not simply another donor at the table; it plays an important coordinating role and promotes more effective use of aid. The development of a single country strategy paper for South Sudan responded to member states interests as well as in promoting common over-arching goals of: sustainable development, democracy, human rights, good governance and security while also creating new livelihood opportunities for South Sudan’s young population.

The first impetus to develop an EU Single Country Strategy for South Sudan came from headquarters; particularly vocal support from Devco and the External Action Service proved essential to kick-starting the process. The fact that the office of Commissioner Piebalgs was monitoring the process, afforded the process the authority and urgency necessary to sustain momentum. Initial discussions started in May 2011, a consultant was recruited and a first mission to Sudan and South Sudan launched in June 2011. By November 2011, the first draft of the strategy had been developed and validated in a stakeholder consultation. The success of the South Sudan process is testament to the fact that with high level political will Single EU Country Strategy Papers can be successfully developed even in challenging environments.

1. Conceptual Understanding

The South Sudan exercise started with extensive consultations on what joint country strategy programming meant for South Sudan. This necessarily included consensus building discussions on:

- How the EC, MS and Government would participate,
- The role of DoL, lead, active and silent donors and their relations to donors outside the EU,
- The value of a joint strategy for South Sudan particularly in light of the transition from humanitarian to development programming,
- How the strategy would complement and support existing processes and,
- To what extent a joint country strategy could both improve the effectiveness of EU and MS aid while reducing transaction costs.

Given that the form of joint strategies and programmes must adjust to the county and donor context, an allotted inception phase (in this case led by HQ based staff) proved essential to setting realistic parameters and targets for the single country strategy paper.

An EU single country strategy is in the form of a *country strategy paper* and responds to the partner country’s national development plan. Headquarters support for a single strategy proved essential to raising the attention of senior decision makers for the EU as a whole. This HQ driven support also demonstrated the value of the approach to the

partner government. The actual drafting of the strategy, however, needed to be locally driven both to ensure relevance and build legitimacy with country level decision makers. In the case of South Sudan, the *EU Comprehensive Approach to Sudan and South Sudan* provided an analytic starting point from which to start an EU coordinated strategy. Commitments to division of labour enabled the identification of priority sectors and lead donor arrangements. In other countries, division of labour arrangements combined with existing joint donor response documents (e.g. a Joint donor statement on partner country national development priorities) should provide a comparable framework from which to start development of a single strategy paper.

Throughout the South Sudan process it proved essential to reaffirm key definitions and ensure continued dialogue on the purpose and goal of developing a single country strategy paper. In this regard, the *single country strategy* was used to refer to a *multi-year joint country strategy document*. Joint programming is promoted in the strategy but joint programming itself typically refers to pooled funds that operate at the sector level. Sector based joint programming was a key goal of the EU Single Country Strategy for South Sudan.

The purpose of the joint country strategy was a coordinated response to South Sudan's national development plan in which the EU and MS prioritise focal sectors, identify common sector and overarching priorities and make indicative sector allocations. In this regard, lead, active and silent donor arrangements promoted division of labour as well as responsibilities for specific sector strategies (components of the single strategy). Sector based division of labour enabled EU donors to be more effective in designing interventions and ensuring dialogue with government counterparts.

An essential lesson learned from the South Sudan process is that to replicate this experience, key definitions, responsibilities and expectations of all participants need to be continually reaffirmed and discussed.

Process	Participants	Role
Start joint analysis and strategy planning process; ensure progress against a <u>set</u> timetable.	Headquarters colleagues	Launch the process, Monitor progress against implementation plan, Lobby key decision makers to ensure the strategy remains a priority, Information sharing and ensuring participation particularly with MS not present in the partner country.
Developing the single country strategy.	EU Delegation (HoD)/Lead Member State Ambassador; Partner Country Donor Coordination Office.	Drafting the paper and providing the technical/secretariat capacity to the process, Convening consultation meetings to build consensus, Liaising with the partner government and soliciting buy in, Ensuring the core analysis and consideration of cross-cutting and over-arching principles
Developing the sector responses.	Identified Sector lead and active donors; Partner Country Line Ministries; Civil Society	Coordinate EU actors in sector programming, Identify common priorities, ' Map participation in the sector, Ensure sector based dialogue with government (line ministries) and stakeholders, Draft the particular sector strategy, advocate for better effectiveness at sector level and develop a plan of action to better respond to common sector priorities.

2. Create Space to Participate

Heads of Cooperation/Operations meetings were held every three weeks in Juba South Sudan (see timetable below). Representatives from Khartoum participated via video conference because a number of participants had not yet moved their offices to Juba. The meetings resulted in widely circulated reports on decisions made, feedback and/or incorporation of comments from those not present in Juba and consensus reached.

It proved essential to create space for those that did not have delegated cooperation offices in South Sudan. In this regard, headquarters based colleagues established an ad hoc working group in Brussels; because many participants were better able to attend meetings in Brussels, the ad hoc group proved essential to ensuring feedback and buy in.

3. Maintain Momentum

It proved impossible to get formal approval at each stage of the process because MS are variously decentralised with some still needing headquarter endorsement of decisions made at country level. Furthermore, while there may be policy consensus in headquarters, at country level there were varying degrees of support for the process. In order to make progress, the process resisted calls for formal endorsements and consensus early on. The strategy paper was continuously presented as a *policy document* that is not binding and could be selectively used by MS depending on its added value.

With multiple actors participating in the process in South Sudan, some called for the single country strategy to be expanded to cover all aspects of cooperation. In South Sudan, the approach was to stick to a core definition of what the strategy paper would do to make it achievable and enable it to be approved by multiple institutions. In South Sudan, the focus was on *development cooperation* that contributed to aid effectiveness and joint programming. This meant the strategy paper was a response to the national development strategy and focused only on aspects of cooperation that explicitly involved government and a transfer of ownership as well as potential for joint or pooled funding at sector level. This meant a strong focus on aligning with government sector definitions and line management arrangements at central level.

4. Starting the Conversation

The best time to start development of a single country strategy paper is prior to the partner country drafting its next medium term national development plan. In the case of South Sudan the *Comprehensive Approach to Sudan and South Sudan*, provided the basis for strategic planning in the lead up to the South Sudan Development Plan being released in August 2011. An EU coordinated response to the partner country's national plan is both in the interests of the partner country and donors at country level because it promises tangible aid effectiveness and transaction cost benefits. In the case of South Sudan, the process of designing the joint strategy started in June 2011; the *2011 to 2013 South Sudan Development Plan* was circulated to development partners in August 2011. This timing proved optimal because a number of donors had already collated sector based inputs on the development plan for dialogue with government on future programming. Tangible sector based priorities (e.g. the need for better government absorption rates) provide a strong basis for building a coherent strategic vision because they tend to be more about real sector priorities than donor needs. Additionally, the relatively slow work period over the European Summer (July-September 2011) was valuable in collating the background information and consulting with technical officers (i.e. with senior management largely on leave, the Summer period allowed technical officers more time to contribute to the sector strategies).

The starting point of the single country strategy paper was a joint mission with Brussels based colleagues to Juba in South Sudan. The joint mission resulted in a mission report

that elaborated the key principles for launching the design of the strategy. The key principles included: EU policy to Sudan, commonly identified donor-government priorities and the need to transition from a humanitarian to a development approach. Circulating the mission report, soliciting comments and feedback were essential first steps in building consensus on the way forward. Subsequent meetings resulted in “state of play” documents that progressively built on widely agreed principles until the point that the EU and MS were ready to draw the agreed text out of these reports and put it into a “zero draft” strategy document.

The *progressive iteration* of well-circulated reports is essential to allowing stakeholders to comment while working towards a legitimate, agreed strategy. In the case of South Sudan, between June and August 2011, there were five iterations of the reports that steadily increased the scope of the report to the point that it was transferable into a zero draft.

5. Set a Timetable; Do Not Deviate From It

In the case of South Sudan, a fixed timetable of events and deliverables was established in the May 2011 mission. This timetable was then used to develop a Terms of Reference for the consultant that facilitated the process; the inclusion of a specific timetable put pressure on the consultant to ensure timely delivery of the product. Temptations to delay and delay decisions were real, reoccurring disincentives to progress. It is very difficult to deny high-level officials’ requests to delay a process. However, if delays become accepted and routine, the strategy paper risks being postponed to the point that even those who strongly support its development see the process as no longer relevant.

It is worth noting that in the case of South Sudan, the denial of requests to delay the process was reinforced by Commissioner Piebalgs’ planned mission on November 10th 2011 in which he committed to discussing the strategy with senior partner government counterparts.

6. South Sudan Events Timetable:

June 26-28, 2011	Discussions with provisional sector coordinators to agree what priorities should be presented in the sector annexes. Meet with MS to coordinate next steps to joint programming in line with MS plans.
Monday, July 3 rd 2011	Agree core Juba Heads of Cooperation group to monitor and ensure regular dialogue throughout the process, Agree inputs expected from provisional sector coordinators.
Monday, August 1 st 2011	Agree Aid Effectiveness targets –modalities for doing business, propose ToR for Political Economy study, present initial joint programme document structure.
Monday, August 29 th 2011	Agree draft core joint document incorporating sector inputs.
Monday, September 19 th 2011	Agree oversight/monitoring and roles of GOSS MoFED aid management unit.
Monday, October 24 th 2011	Validation workshop on Joint CSP, Report back on PE study, Risk Management: political risk, corruption, security, effectiveness of capacity development (for both GOSS and donors).
Monday, November 28 th 2011	Agree institutional home, memory/learning and monitoring mechanisms.

7. Get the Terminology Right

An on-going and repeated challenge in developing the Joint Country Strategy for South Sudan was confusion over terminology. In particular, the *joint country strategy* is the equivalent of a joint country strategy paper. It is important to distinguish pooled, sector wide or joint projects from the *joint strategy*. As such it is promoted to distinguish a joint strategy from *pooled funding* at the sector level.

Another common confusion is the role of lead, active and silent donors. Definitions are attached at the end of the document but it is important to repeatedly emphasise two aspects:

1. Lead donors have obligations to deliver results and work in the interest of the sector and specifically put the sector interests above the agency interests of the particular lead and,
2. Silent donors are only silent in so far as lead donors effectively represent, report back to and are accountable to silent donors.

8. Sector Definitions

Pooled funding and/or sector based programming is more desirable when it both improves coordination and dialogue with government. Sector working groups, then, need to be organised along the same thematic lines as government sector definitions (as advised in the EU Code of Conduct). This, then, allows a coordinated donor group to request government to designate a key counterpart to dialogue with at the sector level. Sector working groups aligned with government sector definitions find it easier to address commitments to improving ownership, harmonisation and alignment. Furthermore, clear alignment with government sector definitions as well as responsible line ministries allow donors to better identify the responsible government officials with which important policy and coordination dialogue happens. In the case of South Sudan, sectors that were aligned in this way found it much easier to elaborate coordinated sector responses. For example in health and education, the lead EU donors had clear interlocutors and relative ease in agreeing consensus priorities. However, when it came to the sector *Rule of Law and Security* challenges in building consensus with multiple donors and a large number of government interlocutors proved a major head wind to developing a sector based strategy.

It became apparent that recognising government sector definitions conveyed a strong message to government to participate. Using government sector definitions communicates that donors take responsibility for making their programmes relevant to government (not the other way around).

9. Over-Arching Principles

There was considerable concern by some member states that over-arching principles such as the need for a conflict sensitive approach, gender equality, human rights and a focus on good governance might be relegated to a secondary role in the strategy. Much of this concern is intertwined with the fact that some MS will meet resistance in approving a strategy at headquarters that does not properly emphasise these principles. After much trial and error it was agreed that the strategy would introduce these over-arching principles at the beginning of the document and as a precondition to programming at the sector level. This meant that these over-arching principles became a common foundation to the sector strategies. Clearly and demonstrably emphasising the strategy's commitment to these principles proved to be something of a pre-condition for participation by some MS.

10. Monitoring Implementation of the Strategy

While it is important to keep transaction costs low, independent monitoring of the joint strategy was seen as a good tool to create dialogue amongst donors on what works and what priorities should be reconsidered. After extensive discussions it was agreed that monitoring of this kind should both contribute to the Ministry of Finance's capacity to monitor donor commitments and to enable dialogue on mutual accountability.

It is important to conduct monitoring on a regular basis and in South Sudan this was designated as an annual exercise starting end 2012. To ensure that such monitoring enjoys national ownership, it was proposed to build monitoring into the existing national reporting cycles and/or reviews of donor coordination/aid effectiveness mechanisms. This also contributes to the 2011 Busan commitments to greater monitoring of aid effectiveness at the country level. In this regard, the EU & MS will investigate in early 2012 who are the appropriate government counterparts and the required logistical arrangements for monitoring the strategy.

11. Role of Partner Government Donor Coordination Counterparts

In South Sudan donors complained that there is insufficient government leadership on aid effectiveness and division of labour. This is a common challenge in many countries but it should not be seen as an obstacle to joint programming. In fact, the Single EU Country Strategy Paper for South Sudan can be read as a coordinated response to building government capacity to lead and coordinate its donors.

A common problem recognised was that even though donor resources constitute large portions of government revenue, it is often very difficult for line ministries to justify financing staff or equipment in donor coordination over that of other priority sectors (like health and education). For this reason many of the sector leads agreed as a priority to support government secretariat capacity to coordinate and monitor its donors and associated line ministries. This secretariat capacity would support the establishment of viable government led sector working groups. This was seen as particularly important because donors often address particular ministries on issues that cross-cut multiple ministries and lines of authority. A strong secretariat tasked with coordination at the sector level can dilute tensions created by over-lapping mandates.

12. Checklist in Order of Action (based on South Sudan Process)

	Importance
<u>Basis of Joint Analysis:</u> Partner Country National Development Strategy recently introduced, being reviewed or being redesigned.	Pre-Condition
HQ Support for the Process and Communication to Country Offices as well as Possible First Mission to Launch the Design Phase	Pre-Condition
<u>Division of Labour:</u> Donor Sector Mapping	First Step
<u>Division of Labour:</u> Lead Donor Arrangements in Clear Priority Sectors	First Step
Local Champion – e.g. EU Head of Delegation or MS with Capacity to draft the strategy and do the necessary coordination	First Step
EU Heads of Cooperation Group meeting Monthly	First Step
Clear Timetable for Conclusion of the Strategy	First Step
Validation Workshop with Stakeholders, Government, Civil Society and Implementing Partners to validate approach.	Essential Last Step
<u>Joint Analysis:</u> Consensus on Common Donor Challenges and Priorities	Strategy Goal
<u>Joint Analysis:</u> Common Sector Priorities (Lead Donors to Develop)	Strategy Goal
<u>Division of Labour:</u> Sectors Aligned with Partner Country Sector Definitions	Strategy Goal
<u>Joint Analysis:</u> Monitoring of Mutual Accountability Commitments	Strategy Goal
Partner Government Capacity to Coordinate Donors/Lead Strategy Development	Strategy Goal
Political Analysis	Strategy Goal
Functional Aid Architecture	Strategy Goal
<u>Joint Analysis:</u> Government-Donor Agreement on Common Aid Effectiveness and Public Financial Management Indicators.	Strategy Goal
Good Donor-Government Dialogue	Strategy Goal
<u>Indicative Financial Allocation:</u> Compile single information table on funding by sector	Strategy Goal
New Funding/Uncommitted Funds	Desirable but Not Necessary
<u>Joint Analysis:</u> Political Economy Analysis	Added Value - Should do
Involvement of Other/Like-Minded Donors	Added Value - Should do
<u>Division of Labour:</u> Agreement to Use Pooled Funds	Added Value - Should do

Annex: For Reference Only: What do lead, active and silent roles mean in practice?

Lead:

Lead donors ensure coordination of donors with government in the sector to meet the primary purpose of ensuring a harmonised donor message. The leads are responsible for ensuring wide communication on donor activities to the government and other donors. Lead donors are responsible for establishing sector work plans, holding regular coordination and briefing meetings, ensuring regular policy dialogue with government and acting as sector champions.

To play a lead role, donors will be required to have:

- Technical competence (permanent in-country experts) at the sector level,
- Administrative support for coordinating the sector,
- Clear commitments to advocating aid effectiveness at the sector level,
- Financing of current and foreseeable programming in the sector,
- Capacity to lead for at least two years and ensure continuity beyond potential change of personnel (a longer term lead role is preferred to annual rotation),
- Commitment to represent the group over the particular agency position, to report to the group and to demonstrate institutional commitment to playing a lead role,
- The capacity to mobilise adequate human resources recognising the lead role could take as much as 50% of the particular staff members time,

The lead donor is required to solicit regular feedback from government, actively lobby for government participation in sector working groups and to be committed to dialogue with government. The lead will be selected at the sector group level.

Active:

Active donors support the lead by providing technical inputs, assisting in drafting joint documents and supporting work at the sector level. Active donors should be prepared to devote at least a day a week to sector work and should be willing to step in on a temporary basis should the lead be unable to fulfil his/her tasks. Active donors enable dialogue with government and communicate with the wider donor community and champion aid effectiveness at the sector level. To improve dialogue with government, the number of active donors should ideally be limited to no more than four per sector. Active donors should be committed to at least a two year involvement in the sector.

To be an active donor, donors should have:

- Technical competence (permanent in-country experts) at the sector level,
- Institutional support with staff mandated to work at the sector level,
- Predictable financing and a long-term commitment to the sector,
- Commitment to working in a team,
- Allocated time and capacity to work in the sector,
- Willingness to align with government strategy and advocate for strong government ownership at the sector level.

Silent:

A silent donor participates in sector working meetings, monitors sector progress and contributes to discussions in working groups. The background donor has:

- Demonstrated willingness to delegate responsibility for dialogue and coordination to the lead and active donors,
- A commitment to supporting the role that lead and active donors play in the sector,
- Committed to inform their sector participation in the working group.
- Financial involvement or an interest in programming in the sector.

Silent donors are entitled to regular reporting/feedback from lead and active donors.

Silent as well as active donors are key stake-holders and are responsible for holding lead donors accountable to the group as a whole. As such, silent donors are responsible for ensuring regular review and monitoring of the performance of the sector group.