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WELTHUNGERHILFE IN: South Sudan

Overview

On 9th July 2011 South Sudan formally separated from North Sudan and became a new state. The United Nations accepted the youngest country in the world as its 193rd member on 14th July. However, disputes over borders and the distribution of oil income define the relationship between the two states. Within South Sudan, an ongoing power struggle between president Salva Kiir, part of the Dinka ethnic group, and his vice-president Riek Machar from the Nuer ethnic group escalated in December 2013. This conflict developed into a brutal civil war between the two ethnic groups, displacing millions of people from their homeland.

Background

When Sudan was still an undivided nation, hundreds of thousands of people fled from the southern regions of the country due to the ongoing civil war that lasted from 1983 to 2005. With the end of the fighting, South Sudan became an 'autonomous region'. In a referendum in January 2011, the South Sudanese affirmed their desire to establish an independent state. The Sudanese government recognised this and on 9th July 2011, the formal separation took place. With the foundation of the state of South Sudan many civil war refugees returned home. The first thing to do was to begin the reconstruction. Both the returnees and the resident population were dependent on humanitarian assistance. Due to the oil fields in South Sudan, the chances for development in the young nation were good. However, it was precisely

these oil fields that led to constant disputes between Sudan and South Sudan. As a consequence, the extraction of oil is currently greatly reduced.

At the same time, power struggles were ignited between the different ethnic groups in South Sudan. After president Salva Kiir from the Dinka ethnic group dismissed his vice-president Riek Machar from the Nuer ethnic group in July 2013, rivalries intensified. In December 2013 the situation escalated with violent outbreaks in the capital Juba, which sometimes also involved foreigners. Recently, in July 2016, posted employees from aid organisations were attacked in the capital. United Nations peacekeeping troops were accused of inaction. Overall, the security situation is very uncertain.

Humanitarian situation

The United Nations has declared the highest level of emergency for South Sudan. 90 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line. To date, the fighting in South Sudan has displaced approximately 1.15 million people into neighbouring countries, for example to Uganda, and around 1.87 million are displaced within their own country. The United Nations is working on the basis that this number will continue to rise. According to the UN, in December 2016 around 3.7 million people were dependent on food aid, which corresponds to 50 per cent of the entire South Sudanese population. For 2017, the World Food Programme expects this to increase to approximately 4.6 million people in need. The emergency situation caused by the civil war has been further worsened as a result of bad harvests. The ongoing fighting often means subsequent seeding cannot take place.

The immense hunger crisis will intensify due to flooding during the rainy season.

[Source: UNOCHA: South Sudan Humanitarian Bulletin 31 August 2016/WFP Situation Report #154, 3.12.2016]

The Welthungerhilfe approach

Welthungerhilfe has been working intermittently in Sudan since the 1990s. After the signing of the independence agreement the organisation had begun to supply returnees and the resident population in the state of Northern Bahr el-Ghazal with vital items and to support them in the building of accommodation. Today, the regional focus of Welthungerhilfe is on two parts of the country: Unity State, and Northern Bahr el-Ghazal. The coordination of the activities takes place out of the head office in Juba. Usually, there are around 20 posted and 100 local employees working for Welthungerhilfe in South Sudan. For security reasons, however, the team has been reduced to a minimum.

Fighting is leading to renewed displacement of people. As a result, emergency assistance is at the forefront of Welthungerhilfe's work in Greater Upper Nile (Unity State). While in other project locations the focus is on hygiene and sanitation measures or food aid and food security.

For all relief work Welthungerhilfe follows the 'Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development' (LRRD) approach. This means that while emergency assistance activities are taking place, the foundations for reconstruction and further development in the project regions are already being laid. With this in mind, Welthungerhilfe is constantly maintaining contacts with partners, local authorities and other relevant institutions, as far as the conflict situation allows and develops these on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, Welthungerhilfe closely coordinates with its European partners from the network Alliance2015, so that food security projects can be developed with combined resources.

Development work and prospects

In 2014, a donor conference took place in Oslo, Norway. There, the international community promised support to South Sudan to the amount of 600 million US dollars (approximately 438 million euro). The share from the Federal Government amounts to 6 million euro. For all United Nations and aid organisation activities, the United Nations had determined an aid requirement of 1.81 billion US dollars for 2015 alone.

South Sudan is facing big challenges. It must bring about reconciliation between the rival ethnic groups in the country and establish a reliable and stable peace. It is vital to address the legacies of the civil war period before the independence of South Sudan, such as reconstruction and reintegration work. This adds to the current crisis situation. There has been a UN peace mission in South Sudan since 2011.

Before the escalation of violence in 2013, South Sudan was in a relatively good starting position. Successful harvests were forecast for the country, in which around 90 per cent of people live from agriculture. However, the ongoing conflict destroyed these prospects. Only when security is ensured for both the population and aid workers can aid organisations make a meaningful contribution to the development of the country. [Sources: UNMISS and UNOCHA]

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