People involved with “Solidarity with South Sudan” know that Solidarity has achieved incredible results in South Sudan. Nevertheless, after ten years, it was important for Solidarity to get an objective view of the results from the outside. For this reason, an external evaluation was commissioned, the results of which are presented in greater detail below.

A country torn by 40 years of war

In order to understand the kind of difficult conditions in which Solidarity does its work, one must look back at the history of the country. From 1955 to 2005, South Sudan had only 11 years of peace, and when Solidarity began its work in 2008, the country was torn apart and traumatised.

Even independence from Sudan in mid-2011 did not bring the hoped-for peace, because just two years later the power struggles between the government and the opposition led to another civil war. Between 2013 and 2018, over 380,000 people were killed, and the fighting also created one of the largest refugee crises in Africa. Around four million people were displaced within the country or to neighbouring countries. It triggered a desperate economic crisis, leaving millions of South Sudanese to depend on humanitarian aid. About 57% of the population continue to suffer from severe food insecurity. South Sudan has been further traumatized by many atrocities such as looting, rape, murder, forced recruitment of children as soldiers and abduction and sexual exploitation of girls.

The current peace deal in September 2018 is fragile, as President Salva Kiir and rebel leader (former Vice-President) Riek Machar continue to wrest control of power and resources. With sporadic outbreaks of fighting between armed groups in different parts of the country, the security situation remains tense.

How Solidarity became what it is today

Upon the invitation of the Sudan Catholic Bishops’ Conference in 2006, a delegation of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG/women religious) and the Union of Superiors General (USG/men religious) observed the desperate needs in South Sudan. In response, Solidarity with South Sudan was founded in 2008, representing a special and new paradigm of religious life: over 200 congregations from all over the world collaborating and jointly coming together. Only through such an inter-congregational approach Solidarity had the capacity to set up and run two institutes for education and health training, a farm with an outreach programme as well as support many pastoral agents with countrywide reach.
Results from an evaluation perspective

The external evaluation carried out in 2019 examined the achievements of Solidarity in terms of effectiveness, impact and sustainability over the previous 10 years. It commenced with a consultation with the Board Members, Project Principals and Supporters of Solidarity. At the project locations, workshops and feedback sessions were held with project teams and participants to identify the most important changes. Project participants were asked to reflect on changes at personal and community level.

The team of two external evaluators interviewed more than 350 participants and consulted over 50 external and 70 internal stakeholders. Key questions asked included the extent to which the projects had achieved stated objectives, the difference made to the lives of participants and communities, and how likely were the results to endure in the longer term.

The greatest achievement of Solidarity lies in their being a symbol of their name to inspire people in South Sudan. Solidarity has increased the agency of individuals to acquire vocational skills and to contribute to food security, education, healthcare and spiritual nourishment of communities. Between 2008 and 2018 Solidarity’s collective impact is seen in the formation of 475 primary school teachers, 190 nurses and midwives, more than 1000 farmers, and over 1500 pastoral agents as well as community members.

The impact of Solidarity’s training is also clearly visible at the level of individuals. Over the course of their training, students learnt not only to become good teachers, nurses or midwives but also learnt life skills that could support them in their professional, personal and family life. The students acknowledged having learnt a lot from Solidarity Community members such as being committed, patient, cooperative, and punctual. And for many of the students, it was the first time they had a feeling of security, not having to worry what they would eat the next day and what would happen next.

Learning how to teach and care

At the Solidarity Teacher Training College (STTC) in Yambio, 227 teachers have received pre-service training, and another 248 teachers got in-service training at various locations around the country (till Dec 2018). It is a remarkable success that 70% of the graduates are employed and almost all of them continue to work in the education sector. Many of them have returned to serve in their home communities. However, after graduation there are many challenges that the new teachers have to face. In particular, for those whose salaries are not paid by an NGO or church, it is impossible to rely on a government salary only, as it is so low.

Solidarity has been able to track the information of 76% of its graduates, despite the difficult circumstances in the country. Without exception, graduates and current students have said that the course means a lot to them, because they see the difference between their working as untrained...
earlier and now. They have acquired professional skills that support their teaching to become more effective.

Samson Bruzii, a 15-year-old student from Tombura Primary School in Yambio, says: “When the teachers from STTC come to teach us, I am so happy because I know that I will get a good chance to learn a lot of things. They are always in class and on time. They really know how to teach well. They teach in a way that I can easily understand and I can remember what I have been taught.”

The other training institute of Solidarity is the Catholic Health Training Institute (CHTI) in Wau. Over the past 8 years, 134 individuals have been trained as nurses and 56 as midwives. CHTI is the first institute in the country to follow the registered nursing curriculum. Of all the nurses and midwives qualified throughout South Sudan during that period, 22% were trained by CHTI.

The students have learnt all the skills required to take care of patients. They are also among the top scorers in the national certifying examinations. It is a big credit to Solidarity that 85% of the CHTI graduates have found employment in the health sector. As such, graduates contribute to providing high quality health services in different and often remote parts of the country where there are few or no qualified healthcare professionals.

Roseline Edwards Anthony, a 24-year-old graduate currently working as a midwife at St. Daniel Comboni Hospital in Wau, says: “When I joined CHTI, I did not think that I was strong enough to do the course and I used to worry that I would not do well in the clinical rotations, but there is usually an instructor there to guide you and you can ask for help whenever you need it. I am always worrying about something, but in the end, I do just fine and I feel proud when I see the mothers in the wards after a safe delivery. I surely have made a difference.”

Nourishment for body and soul

Securing livelihoods is the main purpose of the Sustainable Agricultural Project in Rimenze and it has several components. The farm itself is employer to 34 permanent workers and up to 80 casual workers from the surrounding communities. It provides income opportunities, especially for women. Solidarity also runs a nutrition training for women, which has enabled them to improve nutrition practices by making the best use of their farm and household resources.

And then there is the training of men and women on the farm itself, and through the “outreach project component” to acquire better farming skills or introduce new crops and livestock. The resulting higher farm yields are contributing to increased income and to food security of families and the community. Over the many years of civil war, farmers had lost their farming skills and had been unable to take care of their fields due to the insecure conditions. Even now, it is often not safe to cultivate their lands. The farmers also face other challenges: It is difficult to transport the harvest to the market, they lack proper storage facilities and have often no access to seeds.

But through the programme communities are seeing hope and possibility for survival. “We have learnt many new farming skills to enable us to provide food for ourselves without the help of other people,” says John Manga from the Parish Farmers Group in Makpandu. “The main challenge is the insecurity that we are currently facing, but no matter what the challenges will be, we will keep pushing ahead.”

Faith is an important element in people’s lives, and it has suffered from the ongoing civil war situation. Strengthening local church structures and personnel has helped to support people’s faith. Solidarity has
contributed to the training of more than 1000 pastoral agents, with focus on the formation of catechists, support to small Christian communities and clergy, as well as working closely with the diocesan pastoral teams.

A strong focus of the pastoral teams has also been offering workshops to pastoral agents and people around the country in trauma healing. In particular, the latest civil war has taken a major toll on the people. As one priest says: Everyone is traumatized in one way or another.

**Change does not come easily**

Staying on and being with the communities in South Sudan, even during the hard and traumatizing years of the civil war was also a door opener for Solidarity to win the trust of the people. While most NGO expat staff had left the country, and the majority of other training institutes had closed down, this unique organisation of Catholic congregations continued its work and responded to emergencies by helping thousands of people affected by the violence and conflict. The Catholic Health Training Institute was also the first training institute offering registered nursing certification in the history of the country, with a high standard of teaching. CHTI’s graduates are in great demand.

Although direct implementation would have been easier, Solidarity’s mission has been to build the capacity of the people to help themselves. Solidarity community members are very committed, work hard and many of them stay for many years. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit missionaries and to find qualified personnel. The locations are a challenge both physically and mentally. Working in an insecure environment with limited opportunities for relaxation and a heavy workload holds a high risk of burnout. Therefore, one of the recommendations made by the evaluation team is to carefully consider new applicants who wish to work in South Sudan; and to prepare new members through an initial orientation programme. For existing Solidarity community members, it is particularly important to take enough rest and recreation by taking periodic time out and to leave the country at least once a year to recuperate.

In a country where political, social and economic instability have been a feature of life since decades, it is not easy to achieve sustainability of the development effort. Transferring responsibilities to local leadership step by step and increasing financial self-reliance is among Solidarity’s future endeavours. Its success will, however, be closely linked to the development of South Sudan in general.

**The key to success**

Solidarity with South Sudan has contributed to the national resources in many ways, notably by increasing the pool of trained primary school teachers, nurses and midwives. The number of female graduates is still only 22%, but in a country where only about 10-15% of women are in the formal workforce, the Solidarity-trained graduates are proving to be strong role models for girls and women in their communities. “The majority of the teachers are male and not many girls want to become teachers,” says 22-year-old Josephine Kuol, a student at STTC. “When I graduate, I hope to go back home and help reduce the number of girls that are getting pregnant and married early and then end up dropping out of school.” As recommended in the evaluation, Solidarity’s action to attract female students should definitely be continued.

The Solidarity institutes are both unique because of students from all over the country with different ethnic backgrounds are studying and living together. As one graduate remarked: “If South Sudan would have many institutions like CHTI, South Sudan would be a different country – people would eliminate tribalism.” In a country full of conflict and war ethnic lines, students living together peacefully is a sign of hope.

Considering the circumstances under which Solidarity has been operating since a decade, the projects have performed remarkably over the last ten years. In one of the most fragile regions in the world, Solidarity has stepped in to live with the people of South Sudan. A representative of the Diocese of Tombura-Yambio put it in a nutshell: “The highest award we can give Solidarity, was that they never departed, they decided to stay – even changed our lives, showed their commitment and sacrifice – living in action the gospel values – Solidarity is lived by them.”