



FROM COLLAPSE TO EVIDENCE

RE-FOUNDING JOURNALISM AS DEVELOPMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

TIMEOFTHEWORLD.COM

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This was the central discovery of the founding period: disciplined solutions journalism does not merely tell uplifting stories; it generates development grade evidence in real time, at low cost, and with proximity no external assessment can match.

The implication reframed the entire enterprise. Journalism's enduring civic function in a fragile state is not to compete as a commercial content industry but to serve as a distributed civic intelligence system: documenting how people solve problems when formal institutions falter, and translating those responses into usable knowledge for learning, accountability, and programme design.

By the end of 2022 the organisation remained small no large newsroom, no long term institutional funding, no big staff. Yet the fellowship had achieved something far more valuable: it produced an archive of stories that empirically proved the hypothesis. Journalism, properly practised, already supplies the grounded evidence that the entire development ecosystem claims to seek.

That evidence based insight that the collapse of traditional journalism revealed, rather than erased, its deepest public value, is the intellectual foundation on which TimeoftheWorld.com now stands.

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The years 2021-2022 constituted the diagnostic founding phase of TimeoftheWorld.com. Enabled by an inaugural Solutions Journalism Network fellowship, the organization set out to understand why journalism in South Sudan had collapsed and whether any public function still remained viable after that collapse.

The inquiry was grounded in fieldwork, not theory. Visiting empty newsrooms, tracing vanished revenue streams, and reporting directly from communities revealed a multidimensional failure: economic (advertising and print models destroyed by inflation and digital disruption), professional (experienced journalists migrating to better paid sectors), political (shrinking space for critical reporting), and, most decisively, epistemic. Journalism had lost its ability to produce verified, contextual meaning that citizens could trust. In its place, people turned to rumor, kinship networks, memory, and private messaging groups to make sense of daily uncertainty.

A pattern emerged from the grant supported reporting itself. Whenever journalists rigorously documented community responses to crisis: how a village rebuilt a flooded road, how farmers escorted harvests through insecure areas, how mothers organized informal healing circles, how youth mounted night patrols, the resulting stories contained precisely the evidence that development and humanitarian agencies repeatedly fail to capture: behavioral data, proven adaptations, limitations encountered, and transferable insights.



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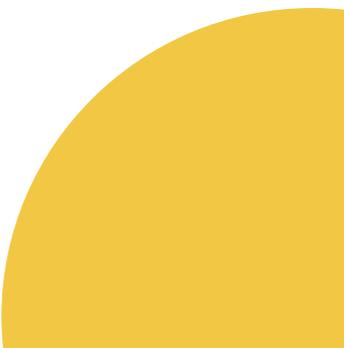
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





CHAPTER 1 ORIGINS: A YEAR OF DIAGNOSIS

The years 2021-2022 constituted the diagnostic founding phase of TimeoftheWorld.com. Enabled by an inaugural Solutions Journalism Network fellowship, the organization set out to understand why journalism in South Sudan had collapsed and whether any public function still remained viable after that collapse. The inquiry was grounded in fieldwork, not theory. Visiting empty newsrooms, tracing vanished revenue streams, and reporting directly from communities revealed a multidimensional failure: economic (advertising and print models destroyed by inflation and digital disruption), professional (experienced journalists migrating to better paid sectors), political (shrinking space for critical reporting), and, most decisively, epistemic. Journalism had lost its ability to produce verified, contextual meaning that citizens could trust. In its place, people turned to rumor, kinship networks, memory, and private messaging groups to make sense of daily uncertainty. A pattern emerged from the grant supported reporting itself. Whenever journalists rigorously documented community responses to crisis: how a village rebuilt a flooded road, how farmers escorted harvests through insecure areas, how mothers organized informal healing circles, how youth mounted night patrols, the resulting stories contained precisely the evidence that development and humanitarian agencies repeatedly fail to capture: behavioral data, proven adaptations, limitations encountered, and transferable insights.

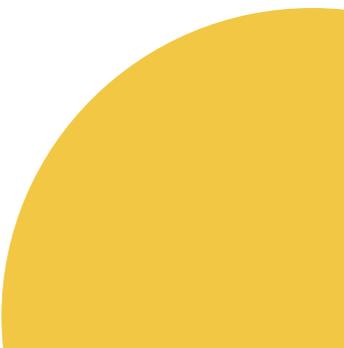




CHAPTER 1 ORIGINS: A YEAR OF DIAGNOSIS

2021 2022 was not the year TimeoftheWorld.com launched with fanfare, hired staff, or published headlines. It was the year we looked at the corpse of South Sudanese journalism and asked, calmly and repeatedly, why it had died and what, if anything, could take its place. Trust was gone. Funding had migrated to climate projects and humanitarian dashboards. The very notion of “news” had been outrun by the open web’s instantaneous, unverifiable pulse. Audiences no longer believed what they read; advertisers no longer needed newsrooms to reach them; journalists could no longer live on what little remained.

Most post mortem reports would have stopped there: journalism collapsed because it ran out of money and oxygen. We refused that conclusion. Instead, the founding year became an extended interrogation: What is journalism actually for in a country where formal institutions barely function, where knowledge itself is distorted, and where citizens have learned to survive on rumour, memory, and private WhatsApp groups? The question was not rhetorical. It was diagnostic.





HOW THE COLLAPSE OF JOURNALISM BECAME A NATIONAL DIAGNOSTIC EXERCISE

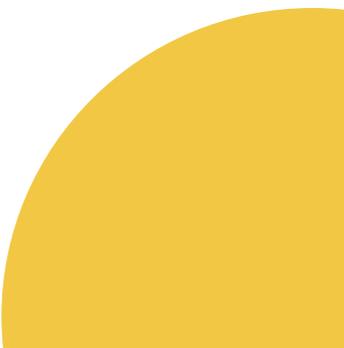
Across twelve months of listening, reading closed newspapers, visiting empty newsrooms, and watching communities make sense of crisis without us, a pattern revealed itself. The collapse was not only economic; it was epistemic. Journalism had lost its monopoly not just on information, but on verified meaning. It could still report an event; it could no longer explain what the event meant or why it mattered.

That realization became the intellectual seed of TimeoftheWorld.com. We began to imagine journalism less as a content factory and more as a civic intelligence system, one that documents how communities actually respond to crisis, generates evidence from the ground, distils practical lessons, and interprets public life with rigour and proximity rather than distance and deadline.

This report is the record of that shift. It is not a celebration of outputs; it is the story of a founding question:

Can journalism be re founded as a knowledge producing institution in a state that has almost no functioning knowledge institutions left?

Every experiment, training session, and hard conversation in the year that followed was shaped by the attempt to answer it.



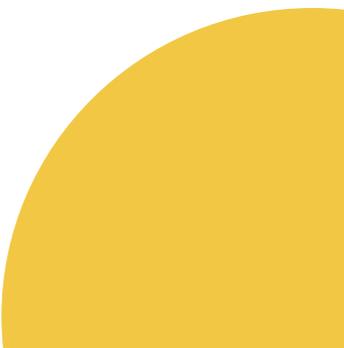


CHAPTER 2 THE DEATH OF THE OLD MODEL

By the time TimeoftheWorld.com began, South Sudan's journalism ecosystem was not wounded, it was extinct. What vanished was not just a few radio stations or newspapers; it was an entire apparatus that once translated lived reality into shared public understanding. The autopsy revealed five concurrent ruptures. First, the money disappeared. Hyperinflation, insecurity, and digital platforms killed the advertising model overnight. Printing a newspaper became financially absurd; distributing it, physically impossible. Businesses moved their budgets to Facebook boosts and WhatsApp blasts. Journalism did not die because citizens stopped needing information; it died because no one figured out how to pay for it.

Second, the audience changed how it listened. Years of war, atrocity propaganda, and institutional betrayal had trained people to trust private networks more than public broadcasts. A verified story that took three days to publish lost every time against a rumour that travelled in three minutes. The slow, laborious habits of verification were simply out of step with the survival tempo of daily life.

Third, the profession hollowed itself out. Experienced journalists migrated to NGO press offices and government spokespersonship, jobs that paid rent and did not require bodyguards. Those who stayed were paid late or not at all, asked to produce more with less, and slowly lost the muscle memory of investigative depth. A generation entered the craft already shaped by survival rather than ambition.





WHY JOURNALISM IN SOUTH SUDAN WAS NOT DYING IT WAS ALREADY EXTINCT

Fourth, the political space shrank. Censorship, accreditation games, midnight phone calls, and selective advertising taught newsrooms which topics were expensive to touch. Caution became an editorial policy; self preservation, a professional skill. The press did not lack courage so much as oxygen.

But the deepest fracture was epistemic. Journalism had lost the ability to interpret. It could count bodies after a clash; it could rarely explain why the clash happened, what it revealed about power, or how communities were quietly adapting around it. In a society that navigated uncertainty through oral memory, ethnic calculus, and informal early warning networks, professional journalism had become a foreign language spoken by fewer and fewer people. By 2021 the old model was beyond resuscitation. More donor training workshops, more press freedom statements, even more money for “independent media” would only have purchased a longer death rattle.

TimeoftheWorld.com therefore began not as a rescue mission for the past, but as a deliberate search for a different future: What civic function could journalism still perform credibly when trust, revenue, talent, safety, and interpretive authority had all collapsed at once?

That question, raw, uncomfortable, and unanswered, defined the founding year. Everything that came after was built on its unsteady ground.





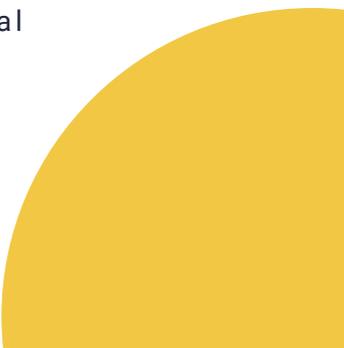
CHAPTER 3 THE BREAKTHROUGH: JOURNALISM AS EVIDENCE

The decisive discovery of 2021 2022 did not come from a workshop, a donor meeting, or a defence of press freedom. It came from watching journalists do one thing unusually well. Whenever a reporter went beyond “what happened” and asked “how are people actually responding?”, something shifted. A story about a flooded school stopped being a catalogue of damage and became a precise record of recovery: who organised the repairs, how parents raised money, which methods restored classes fastest, where the process broke down, and what could be learned for the next flood. A piece on cattle raiding became a study of local peace agreements, who initiated them, what evidence proved they held, what incentives kept them alive, and why some collapsed within weeks.

Without realising it, these journalists were doing the same work that development agencies pay millions to achieve through consultants, baseline studies, outcome harvesting missions, and learning reviews. They were generating evidence from the exact place institutions struggle most to reach: the lived, daily, improvised responses of ordinary people.

That was the click.

Solutions Journalism was not a nicer form of reporting. It was a method of field research disguised as storytelling. Its four part discipline document the response, gather evidence of results, examine limitations, extract transferable insight was identical to the logic of monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) that underpins every serious development programme.





WHEN JOURNALISTS DOCUMENTED RESPONSES, NOT EVENTS, THE ENTIRE MODEL SHIFTED

The implications were immediate and liberating. For decades, journalism in fragile states had defined itself by what it opposed: corruption, censorship, misinformation. It begged for protection or charity. Now a different path appeared. If the core output of rigorous solutions reporting was usable evidence, evidence that humanitarian agencies, government planners, and donors desperately needed but rarely obtained in narrative, timely, human centred form, then journalism no longer had to compete for disappearing advertising dollars or philanthropic crumbs labelled “media support.” It could compete for the far larger, far more stable budgets allocated to knowledge, learning, and adaptive programming.

Roads get funded. Vaccines get funded. Climate adaptation gets funded. What none of these sectors get enough of is grounded, current, community sourced insight into how change actually happens on the ground. Solutions Journalism, practised with discipline, could supply exactly that, without losing its public facing soul.

By the end of the founding year we had not yet built an institution, hired a team, or written a project proposal. But we had answered the question that had haunted us since the beginning: journalism in South Sudan does not need to be saved as an industry. It needs to be recognised for what it can uniquely become, an evidence engine embedded in the architecture of development itself.

That recognition changed everything that followed.





CHAPTER 4 MEDIA DEVELOPMENT AS NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By mid 2022 the question haunting every conversation had changed. It was no longer “How do we protect journalists?” or “How do we keep newsrooms open?” It was “Under what conditions would South Sudan actually need a functioning media sector at scale?”

The answer that took shape during 2021 2022 was stark: only if journalism could prove itself essential to the country’s broader development process.

That realisation pulled the centre of gravity away from traditional media support arguments (press freedom, training workshops, equipment grants) and toward a different proposition. Development actors in South Sudan spend hundreds of millions of dollars annually on governance, health, climate adaptation, peacebuilding, and resilience programming. Almost all of that money is justified by promises of evidence based design, adaptive management, and community driven learning. Yet almost all of it struggles to obtain timely, credible, ground level evidence of how communities actually behave, adapt, and solve problems.

Solutions Journalism, when practised rigorously, was already producing precisely that missing evidence. This was not a theoretical observation. It was an empirical one, drawn from watching story after story perform the same function that donor funded learning reviews and outcome harvesting missions attempt, only faster, cheaper, and closer to lived reality.





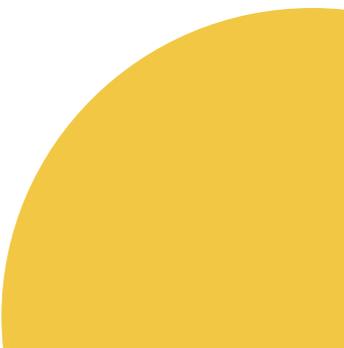
WHY JOURNALISM MUST BECOME STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE, NOT A CHARITY CASE

The conclusion that emerged by the end of the founding year was therefore unavoidable: in a context like South Sudan, media development cannot be treated as a siloed democratic luxury. It has to be understood as strategic infrastructure for national development itself. Strengthening the media sector is not charity for journalists; it is an investment in the country's overall capacity to generate, circulate, and act on usable knowledge.

Gender, climate, youth inclusion, all the themes that surfaced during the year were no longer separate advocacy issues. They became demonstrations of a larger principle: the more diverse the perspectives inside the media system, the richer and more accurate the evidence it can produce for every development sector. Diversity stopped being a moral argument and became a technical requirement for better data.

By the close of 2022 this reframing had become the dominant lens. Saving journalism could no longer mean preserving an industry in isolation. It meant repositioning the entire media ecosystem so that its core output, rigorously documented community responses, was recognised as a public good that development programming actively needs and is willing to pay for.

That was the decisive intellectual shift of the founding year.





CHAPTER 5 THE UNSEEN SYSTEM: HOW SCATTERED STORIES REVEALED A BODY OF EVIDENCE

Throughout 2021 2022 we published stories the way any small outlet does: one by one, often under pressure, always hoping someone would read them. Only toward the end of the year, when we laid them side by side, did their collective weight become clear.

Taken together, the pieces formed something larger than a collection of features. They formed a body of field observation about how communities in South Sudan confront and solve problems when formal systems are absent or late. Five patterns stood out sharply:

1. Solutions precede programmes.

Communities almost never wait for external intervention. Roads are repaired with local rocks, harvests are escorted through dangerous areas, night patrols are organised by youth, healing ceremonies are held for families of the disappeared long before any NGO or government programme arrives.

2. Every community response contains an implicit but sophisticated evidence base.

The methods people choose reveal precise calculations about risk, incentives, timing, and social obligation. These are not random acts of desperation; they are practical theories of change being tested in real time.

3. The evidence most valued by development actors, current, contextual, behavioral, is abundant on the ground but almost never captured systematically.

External assessments arrive months later, if at all. A journalist embedded in the moment can document the exact variables that made a truce hold for 23 days or caused a savings group to collapse after the third cycle.





FIELD OBSERVATIONS REVEALED A SOPHISTICATED, EVIDENCE-BASED LOGIC OF ACTION THAT FORMAL DEVELOPMENT ACTORS CONSISTENTLY MISS.

1. Problems on the ground are never single issue.

Repairing a road is simultaneously an economic intervention, a cohesion building exercise, and a political signal to the state. Protecting a harvest is also a peacebuilding mechanism and a climate adaptation strategy. Siloed programme thinking consistently misses these interconnections; solutions focused reporting naturally reveals them.

2. Rigorous narrative documentation performs the same analytical function as formal monitoring and evaluation but with greater speed, proximity, and public reach.

When a reporter records response evidence of results, limitations, transferable insights, they are executing the core protocol of learning systems that donors fund at high cost through separate contracts.

By the end of 2022 these stories, still modest in number, still published on a small platform, had become something else: an archive of community generated evidence that no consultancy or ministry had managed to assemble.

They proved, in practice, the hypothesis that had guided the entire founding year: in a fragile state, journalism's highest civic function is not to expose what is broken (though it can do that). It is to document, with discipline and clarity, how people are already repairing their world, because that documentation produces the exact knowledge a country needs to make better decisions.

That was the empirical heart of 2021 2022. Everything the organisation understood by the end of its founding year rested on those stories and what they revealed.



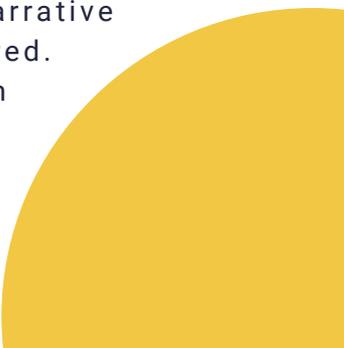


CHAPTER 6 THE EMERGING MODEL: JOURNALISM AS A DEVELOPMENT PARTNER

By the close of 2022 a distinct pattern had emerged from the year's reporting, not from strategy sessions or donor proposals, but from the stories themselves.

A village clearing a flooded road with hand broken stones. Farmers walking armed escorts to reach their sorghum fields. Mothers organising communal healing rituals for families of the disappeared. Youth mounting night patrols to protect cattle. At first glance these were isolated acts of survival. Read together, they were something else: development happening in real time, outside formal programmes, driven by necessity and local knowledge.

What struck us most was how much analytical power these stories carried. Each one documented a response, gathered evidence of what was working (and what was not), named limitations, and surfaced insights that could travel. In other words, every rigorously reported solutions story was performing the same core function that development agencies spend millions trying to achieve through baseline studies, learning reviews, and community scorecards, only faster, cheaper, and in narrative form that people actually trusted and shared. This was no longer a hypothesis. It was an observed fact.





WHY SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM NATURALLY PERFORMS THE WORK OF DEVELOPMENT LEARNING

The alignment was almost unnerving in its clarity. The qualities that make strong solutions journalism, proximity to lived experience, attention to detail, insistence on evidence, willingness to examine failure, were precisely the qualities that development programming claims to want but rarely obtains at scale.

We were not suggesting that journalists should become evaluators, or that stories should replace randomised control trials. We were observing something simpler and more powerful: journalism, when practised with a solutions lens, naturally generates a stream of grounded, current, behavioral evidence that complements and often outperforms traditional development research methods.

By December 2022 this observation had crystallised into the emerging model that now oriented all our thinking: in a fragile context like South Sudan, journalism's most credible and sustainable role is as a development partner, one that documents community driven problem solving and translates it into usable insight for every sector that claims to serve those communities.

That model remained rough, untested, and unfunded. But it was no longer theoretical. It had been built, piece by piece, from the evidence of the year's own reporting.





CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION: THE EMPIRICAL HEART - THE INSIGHT THAT BECAME OUR SPINE

The year 2021 2022 began with a simple intention: to understand why journalism in South Sudan had collapsed and whether anything could replace it. It ended with an answer none of us had anticipated.

The collapse was real economic, professional, epistemic. Yet the reporting we managed to produce in the middle of that collapse revealed something larger: communities were not waiting for institutions to fail or succeed. They were already solving problems, testing strategies, and generating practical knowledge at a scale and speed no formal system could match.

By documenting those responses with rigour, we discovered that journalism was doing far more than telling hopeful stories. It was capturing the country's most under utilised evidence base, the daily, improvised intelligence through which people survive and sometimes thrive in the absence of functioning states.

That discovery reframed everything. Journalism no longer appeared as a dying industry in need of rescue. It appeared as a latent civic intelligence system whose outputs, when structured around response, evidence, limitations, and insight, aligned directly with the stated learning and accountability needs of the entire development ecosystem.





THE COLLAPSE OF JOURNALISM REVEALED SOMETHING MORE VALUABLE THAN JOURNALISM

We ended the year without a business plan, without significant funding, without a large team, and without a fully articulated methodology. What we did possess was clearer and more valuable: an empirical foundation built from the year's stories, and a central insight that had survived every test we could throw at it.

In a fragile state, journalism remains most alive when it stops competing solely for attention and starts contributing rigorous, grounded evidence to the national effort of understanding how people actually solve their problems.

That insight, reached slowly, reluctantly, and entirely through the discipline of reporting, was the true output of the founding year. By the close of 2022 it had become the organization's intellectual spine and its reason to continue.

