



**Frontlines:** A long way from home: ten months in southern Sudan

**MSF Volunteer:** Anupam Sthapit

**Mission:** South Sudan

Juba is a small town with big plans. I arrived there in 2010, on



*In Leer with Jung (LogAdmin)*

my first mission with MSF outside my home country of Nepal. I had been working since 2003 in MSF's logistics department, but this was my first mission as an 'expat', or international staff member. When I was offered the chance to work abroad, I was

very excited, and felt confident that I would be able to manage all the logistics work on the basis of my past experience.

After doing the Primary Preparation for Departure (PPD) course in Germany, and passing through Amsterdam for my briefing, I flew straight to Juba. The first few days were exhausting, with lots of briefings and a great deal to learn about how the logistics system works in southern Sudan.

My first briefing started on the way from Juba airport to the office. On the next day I flew to Loki, in Kenya, for another briefing and a visit to southern Sudan's operational office. MSF's office in Loki deals with all the supplies and technical support to the field, and is where the MSF plane is based. The coordination office, on the other hand – which coordinates with other NGOs and government authorities – is based in Juba.

While I did manage to catch up on the major logistics issues, it took me a few days before I could memorise the names of the other staff. At first all the national staff's faces looked similar. At that moment I was feeling completely exhausted and my memory was full.

However, when I got started, the work itself was relatively simple. The most challenging thing was to make sure the work was done properly with local staff according to the MSF system.

Most of the time I was in Juba itself, managing all types of logistics support. My main responsibilities were managing supplies for the base, coordinating flights, dealing with local authorities regarding logistics issues, and supervising about 30 national staff. There were around eight international staff based in Juba, with two 'expat' houses and one office. While it looked like a pretty big space, when other international staff came to Juba – for meetings, briefings, debriefings, or else passing through on leave – it could feel quite crowded.

Juba is very hot and dusty. A lot of reconstruction is going on there, with new restaurants and bars opening all the time. There are lots of nice restaurants with nice food, but it is

expensive. Day-to-day life in southern Sudan is generally very expensive. Most of the time, international staff entertain themselves by organising parties in their compounds, inviting staff from other NGOs and MSF sections. However, the parties do not normally last beyond midnight, as international staff need to be back in their bases by twelve, due to security constraints.



*Inside Juba, South Sudan Airport*

I had noticed that the compounds of all the houses in Juba were fenced with barbed wire. All MSF's buildings and vehicles were equipped with HF & VHF radios. We had to inform the office by VHF radio about our

every movement. All these security procedures made me aware that we were in a very sensitive conflict area. During my first night there, my sleep was interrupted every hour by loud bangs. Thank God it was not a gun firing, just the sound of mangos falling from a tree onto the zinc roof.

At the beginning, I missed my family and the cool weather of Nepal. I was sure that my six months would feel like six years. But, as time passed, it began to feel normal, as I became familiar with my new surroundings and environment. In the end I stayed in Juba for ten months.

During those ten months, I had the opportunity to visit Leer and Malakal to provide logistical support to the MSF projects

there. These visits helped give me a clear picture of how MSF works in remote areas and supports the people in need.

Going far away from my family and home country, and working in a very different environment, was interesting – but also exhausting. However, despite all the difficulties and challenges I had to face in the field, I still feel pleased to have had the experience of working as an international staff member for MSF.

*Anupam Sthapit  
MSF Volunteer*