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**PEOPLE'S PEACEMAKING PERSPECTIVES** MARCH 2012

# South Sudan

## **CHALLENGES OF INTER-COMMUNAL VIOLENCE AND MILITIA MOBILISATION**

are a recurrent problem in South Sudan and are miring the early optimism about the new country's prospects. Escalating problems between Juba and Khartoum have added to a growing sense of uncertainty, and stand to take away crucial revenues from South Sudan at a time when development and security priorities cannot go under-resourced. The fact that Jonglei State yet again witnessed hundreds of deaths over the past few months, as well as the abduction of women and children and the theft of thousands of cattle, raises troubling questions for the Government of South Sudan (GoSS); as it does for international actors who have supported and continue to support the prevention of violence in conflict-affected states. And beyond Jonglei, many communities have yet to transition from a state of conflict and continue to suffer insecurity and poverty.

This policy brief pools research findings from three states experiencing serious insecurity – Jonglei, Warrap and Unity – to unpack from local perspectives the issues underlying violence in the affected areas. The research provides the European Union (EU) and its partners with the opinions, concerns and recommendations of a cross-section of citizens in each state; perspectives which can inform their support. Beneath the destructive cycles of raiding and looting, deep grievances about politics, governance, severe poverty and hunger are festering. Scant progress in guaranteeing security and removing weapons from society add further dimensions to crises for which there are no quick fixes. The challenges are putting enormous pressure on the newly elected GoSS, and could tip the country into more severe instability, if they remain continuously unaddressed.

The EU has long been a significant humanitarian actor in South Sudan. It must now deepen its engagement beyond humanitarian needs to focus on South Sudan's development, governance and peacebuilding challenges, working together with all actors to support more sensitive crisis responses as part of a clearer long-term peacebuilding vision.

## **KEY OUTCOMES**

- **Cattle raiding is the most visible form of conflict in Jonglei, Warrap and Unity, where vicious cycles of violence have deep roots in local culture and identity.** Sensitive, co-ordinated efforts are urgently needed to prevent further violence and address underlying cultural, political and economic causes.
- **Inter-communal violence is also fuelled by grievances about governance and feelings of marginalisation among local people.** The politics of South Sudan's violence needs to be better understood so that progress can be assiduously encouraged, divisions better anticipated and peaceably resolved.
- **Widespread poverty and underdevelopment are holding back progress on factors causing insecurity.** Development efforts must directly support attempts to make progress on political and security problems in affected areas.
- **Localised conflict and insecurity will not be overcome by prioritising forceful methods.** Longer-term approaches to the achievement of human security must be prioritised and instituted.

## **The People's Peacemaking Perspectives project**

The People's Peacemaking Perspectives project is a joint initiative implemented by Conciliation Resources and Saferworld and financed under the European Commission's Instrument for Stability. The project provides European Union institutions with analysis and recommendations based on the opinions and experiences of local people in a range of countries and regions affected by fragility and violent conflict.

**"The state government is trying to maintain peace and stability but people have to produce food for themselves, because hunger is the second war after liberation."**

Interviewee, Jonglei State

# Findings and Recommendations

## 1.

**Cattle raiding is the most visible form of conflict in Jonglei, Warrap and Unity, where vicious cycles of violence have deep roots in local culture and identity.** Sensitive, co-ordinated efforts are urgently needed to prevent further violence and address underlying cultural, political and economic causes.

**"Cattle raiding is a disease for Jonglei State."**

*Interviewee, Jonglei State*

There are heightened levels of insecurity amongst agro-pastoralist communities and close linkages between cattle raiding and inter-communal and ethnic violence. A key part of this conflict dynamic comes from competition for access to water and grazing land as well as wealth accumulation. Ethnic communities come into conflict when they migrate into rival groups' territories in search of water, grazing land or cattle.

**"You can see, there is no water. Even our animals lack water to drink."**

*Participant, group discussion, Unity State*

These are persistent problems in Jonglei (between the Lou Nuer, Dinka, Murle and Jikany Nuer) and in the cross-boundary areas between Warrap, Lakes and Unity.

**"Conflict about cattle is a big problem and is usually over girls and revenge for theft and killing. Competition over water and grazing land is also one of the causes of the persistent problems in the area."**

*Participant, group discussion, Warrap State*

Violent cattle raiding is a product of political, social and economic factors in which gender, and ethnic identities and social hierarchies also play an important part. The payment of bride price in cattle is an obstacle to some men who aspire to get married. Some young men turn to cattle raiding to get enough cattle to pay for a bride. In other cases, the bride elopes (by choice or coercion). Family feuds over bride price can lead to violence as this is a key source of income and status for families. Girl elopement – raised as a serious concern in Warrap – and abduction of women and children – a recurrent problem in Jonglei – are particularly abhorrent

features of raiding practices that lock communities into cycles of revenge.

The importance of seeking revenge to appease victims, as an expression of community pride and as a form of redress, contributes to the creation of intractable cycles of violence between communities and ethnic groups. Engrained social and cultural norms ensure that raiding occupies a central position in social hierarchies, reinforcing both masculine and feminine identities that encourage violence as a legitimate expression of social aspiration.

These engrained norms, and the manner in which they have been tainted and distorted by years of war (such as inflated bride prices) coupled with easy civilian access to small arms and light weapons (SALW), must be considered alongside efforts to address development, governance and security deficits. The customary checks and balances that in the past were built into raiding practices – and minimised human casualties – have been almost completely destroyed by the sheer capability and indiscriminate nature of automatic gunfire.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Encourage and support the GoSS with advice and strategic support from the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) to ensure sustained police and military patrols and presence in areas where cattle raiding and inter-communal violence frequently occur and at county, state and international boundaries.
- Insist that any civilian disarmament efforts are voluntary and appropriately coupled with improved security provision, peace and reconciliation processes and development progress. In addition, simultaneous disarmament of rival groups and commitment to provide for their security and development in the long term will be key to success.
- As part of a wider conflict prevention and peacebuilding strategy, increased attention and support should be given to negotiating and monitoring adherence to local-level resource sharing and migration route agreements. Primary dispute resolution and mediation mechanisms can negotiate ways for communities to meet their basic needs in peaceful co-existence in an environment of resource scarcity, provided they are followed up in a sustained and supportive fashion by the GOSS and its partners at all levels. To be successful, these tasks must be undertaken by customary institutions, proven civil society groups and formal justice and security sector actors, in a co-ordinated fashion.
- Action is needed to recover abducted children, bring those responsible to justice, and tackle the cultural acceptance of abduction among the groups involved.
- The way gender identities are encouraged within pastoralist culture, and are linked to and enacted in violent behaviours, needs to be better understood. Local women believe investing in and encouraging education of girls is the first step towards changing the position of women in society.
- Intensify support for local initiatives to develop alternative livelihood programmes and create opportunities for people in agro-pastoral communities to supplement their income and food sources, as part of a wider conflict prevention and peacebuilding strategy.

## 2.

**Inter-communal violence is also fuelled by grievances about governance and feelings of marginalisation among local people.** The politics of South Sudan's violence needs to be better understood so that progress can be assiduously encouraged, divisions better anticipated and peaceably resolved.

**"If there is not democracy in South Sudan, there will be war."**

*Interviewee, Unity State*

Marginalisation and perceptions of marginalisation run deep in Warrap, Jonglei and Unity, and are fuelling conflict in each context in different ways. Feelings of marginalisation are perhaps inevitable given the lack of state presence – in terms of security and other service delivery – in many areas, and the lingering persistence of underlying (south/south) grievances that have their roots in the war years. However, in all areas, research participants expressed the desire for the GoSS to deliver security and development. At the same time, participants spoke of a lack of faith in governance processes, particularly in elections, the transitional constitution-making process and in terms of transparency and accountability generally.

In Warrap, communities feel geographically isolated and politically and economically excluded. Insecurity in those areas is generally under-reported, and there is a perception of little response and interest from national and international actors.

In Jonglei, insecurity related to armed groups, cattle raiding and civilian possession of SALW are tied to contestations over political power at state and national level – which have in the past been both complex and bloody. The state's ethnic communities bear strong grievances about their share in – or exclusion from – political power. They assert that there has been political complicity in inter-ethnic clashes, and that past security and development interventions have unfairly discriminated along ethnic lines.

**"Some officials instigate land issues between communities, creating problems."**

*Participant, group discussion, Warrap State*

In Unity, perceptions of marginalisation of forces integrating into the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) contributed to the formation of a new rebel militia group in April 2011. Particularly in Unity State there is an additional sense of frustration that oil revenue is not sufficiently translated into service delivery and development dividends.

**"We hear money was given to one person but he ate the money."**

*Participant, group discussion, Unity State*

**"Bribery is a problem."**

*Participant, group discussion, Warrap State*

In all three states, dissatisfaction with political processes and state governments has created an environment of uncertainty that has made it relatively easy to mobilise people to violence. Unaddressed political grievances provide a standing invitation for either southern elites or external actors to play on South Sudan's internal divisions – an opportunity which many in these states believe Sudan is already manipulating.

Lack of faith in the government and lack of trust in neighbours have complicated efforts at disarmament and enhance the potential for disputes to easily escalate into violent confrontation. The lack of a widely accepted vision of the new Southern Sudanese national identity means that people rely on their ethnic identity as a primary reference point. Participants in the research believe that this lack of social cohesion is sometimes exploited by unscrupulous politicians.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support, at the political level, effective public consultation processes on important national strategies and frameworks like the constitution and the review and implementation of the South Sudan Development Plan. This should be used by federal and state governments to better understand and respond to perceptions and needs of communities before they escalate into violence and rebellion.
- The EU and international actors should deepen their understanding and monitoring of conflict dynamics at state and county levels, and support greater efforts for dialogue between conflicting clans and social groups, and their leaders, before divisions lead to violence.
- Invest in a greater role for civil society to promote civic education and improve access to information for the public, as a means to strengthen local institutions and build the capacity of civil society to participate constructively in decision making and accountability processes.
- Support programming to strengthen anti-corruption and transparency mechanisms as well as improved budgeting and monitoring activities involving the state legislatures.
- Noting the problems surrounding integration of militias, engage with GoSS, SPLA and other disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) stakeholders on how to mitigate the potential for future integration and demobilisation processes to fuel further tensions and violence between SPLA and former and current militias.
- Continue to support political processes to end hostilities and resolve grievances in the border areas of Abyei, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, demarcate the North–South border and curb any actions that fuel internal instability across the North–South border.

## 3.

**Widespread poverty and underdevelopment are holding back progress on factors causing insecurity.** Development efforts must directly support attempts to make progress on political and security problems in affected areas.

Insecurity is fuelled by underdevelopment. Thus changing the dynamics of insecurity to reduce armed violence is reliant upon changing political and socio-economic factors.

**"The state government is trying to maintain peace and stability but people have to produce food for themselves because hunger is the second war after liberation."**

*Interviewee, Jonglei State*

In consultations in Jonglei, Warrap and Unity participants highlighted the lack of roads and limited communications infrastructure as the primary challenge to improving security. These were identified as prerequisites for government presence and response, as well as to enable communities to increase trade and other forms of co-operation. Similarly, across all the states, access to water emerged as a clear peacebuilding priority to reduce the potential for conflict and to improve living conditions.

Communities' lists of development issues that lead directly to inter-communal and ethnic violence are long; they also include food insecurity, lack of education, unemployment and lack of access to healthcare.

**"We need help because our children are suffering from hunger. We need roads to be opened and conflicts to be resolved to remove the unknown gunmen and to make us participate in agriculture to have surplus food. We need a supply of safe drinking water. At the moment we are using stagnant water sources."**

*Participant, women's group discussion, Unity State*

Social ills associated with lack of opportunities such as alcohol abuse, theft, youth violence and banditry are also becoming increasingly visible, especially in towns.

Youth frustration emerged as a central component of conflict dynamics. There is a high youth population throughout South Sudan (more than 51 percent of the population is under the age of 18) faced with massive developmental challenges. The combination of high youth population with lack of opportunities for escaping poverty creates high levels of frustration. High bride price and food insecurity also reinforce the centrality of cattle to people's survival and prosperity. Consultation with communities highlighted their anxiety over how deep the culture of dependency on humanitarian assistance has become.

**"The locality is one of the most devastated by wars and war related problems. As a result the entire population still depends on humanitarian food for survival."**

*Participant, women's group discussion, Warrap State*

A culture of entrepreneurship and access to livelihoods that offer an alternative to poverty and pastoralist violence are urgently needed in South Sudan. To achieve a more diverse economy in which youth have alternative livelihood options, people identified a number of priorities: infrastructure to enable service delivery and economic development; education and skills to access opportunities; and access to markets to enable trade (including in livestock). Security, access to credit and removal of illegal checkpoints and irregular taxes are also critical if the private sector is to grow.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Whilst immediate humanitarian needs must continue to be met, the development of a private sector is vital for future economic growth and stability. Employment opportunities should be a focus area for EU and Member State programming in South Sudan.
- Engage in more targeted youth programmes including through livelihoods and job creation programmes as part of violence reduction interventions.
- International partners should link infrastructure projects to efforts to reduce and mitigate violence, by being sensitive to local conflicts and emphasising opportunities for job creation and local economic development.
- Further invest in the provision of water points, especially in conflict prone areas and amongst agro-pastoralist communities. There should be an increased focus on supporting local government administration to provide basic services including water.
- Support local initiatives to improve internal trade between states and counties to stimulate local markets and improve economic integration. This will require improved road networks as well as the cessation of illegal check points and irregular punitive customs taxes.
- Priority should be given to supporting programming that enables an intensification of primary, secondary and adult education, vocational training, apprenticeships, micro-financing and business advice/mentoring.

Dinka Rek tribeswoman in  
Tonj East county, Warrap State.  
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## 4.

### Localised conflict and insecurity will not be overcome by prioritising forceful methods.

Longer-term approaches to the achievement of human security must be prioritised and instituted.

Significant threats to national security are a pressing concern in the new state of South Sudan. For communities living in the northern border states of the South, the situation is further aggravated by the conflicts in Abyei and in neighbouring South Kordofan and Blue Nile and several security incidents across the borders in recent months have further fuelled tensions. Refugees from Sudan have already placed additional burdens on food supplies. In this context renewed clashes involving rebel militia groups throughout 2011, particularly in Unity and Jonglei, have made a challenging situation worse. Militia attacks, and the responses to them, have had a devastating impact on local people, with homes burnt, assets destroyed and people abducted and killed on a large scale.

For a new government claiming its sovereignty and trying to ensure a successful transition to independence, it is a huge challenge to know which threats to tackle first, and how best to do so. The GoSS needs to find the most favourable balance between addressing political grievances, meeting basic needs, extending service delivery, providing security to communities and reacting to military threats within and from outside the state.

**"Let the police protect local people, not shoot them with guns."**

*Participant, group discussion, Unity State*

The public wants the police and military to be present to tackle security problems, but at the same time raise serious concerns about their capacity and conduct. In the nascent South Sudan Police Service (SPSS), issues raised by the public include lack of sufficient training, equipment and personnel, as well as the old age and sometimes drunkenness of officers. These need to be addressed more urgently.

Participants in group discussions also pointed out the absence of secure prisons – making the clear point that the solution to insecurity lies not only in greater police capacity but in building up all elements of the criminal justice system.

**"Recruitment and training of more police is a must if we the nation is to progress."**

*Participant, group discussion, Warrap State*

SPSS capacity is growing but will remain weak for a long time. However, the SPLA maintain large internal deployments throughout South Sudan. Faced with serious security threats, it would be pragmatic to enhance the capacity of the military to fulfill non-military functions in order to meet the gap in security provision. At present, as the defence transformation process is at a very early stage, there remain serious deficits in conduct and professionalism. Irregular pay of soldiers and lack of sufficient logistical support brings soldiers into direct confrontation with communities.

**"Some soldiers who are not paid cause problems by stealing cattle."**

*Participant, group discussion, Warrap State*

In a country where the scars of insecurity are tangible in underdevelopment and residual grievances, the cost of using force will always be high. As has been seen during past forced disarmament operations, there is a risk that long-term peace and security will suffer if force is too readily used to attain short-term stability.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Due to the central role of the military in internal security, the EU and international partners should invest in civil-military relations programming to encourage more participation and consultation on the defence transformation process and more inclusive processes to define the roles and expectations of security service providers.
- Increasing the capacity of the SPSS is a long-term agenda that requires greater relationships to be forged between police and communities. The EU and Member States should continue to support community policing initiatives and efforts to extend the presence and professionalism of the police.
- There is a need for increased focus on accountability and civilian oversight of the police and military. The EU and Member States should encourage the development of internal and external monitoring mechanisms that citizens can access to hold security personnel to account for abuses.
- There remain significant gaps in the legal framework and in the training of police on criminal law and procedures. Additionally, more efforts are required to increase public awareness of rights and legal procedures.
- Continue to support the border demarcation process being undertaken under the auspices of the African Union. This process should seek also to reach agreement on border crossing points to enable seasonal migration and increased trade.

## Culture, gender and conflict in Jonglei State

### "Girls can even be booked for marriage while still in the womb."

*Murle woman*

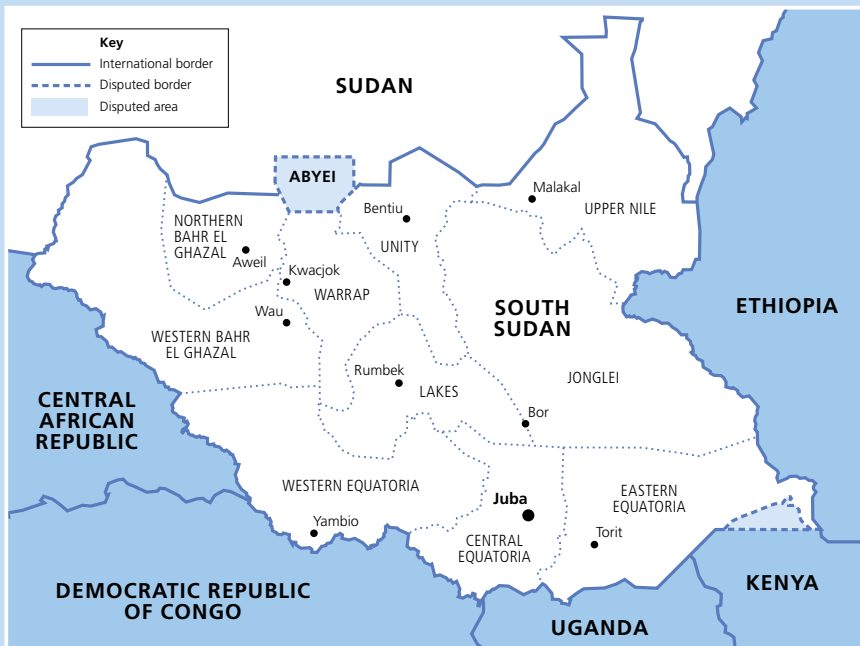
Women and children have been abducted in the recent cattle raids in Pibor county of Jonglei. The word 'booking' is used among Murle communities here, to refer to the practice under which older men 'book' young girls as future wives. This system is also found among Nuer, Dinka and Anyuak communities. As a result of such practices girls are unlikely to go to, let alone finish,

school – where their enrolment will end when their intended husband decides to marry. Under local culture, the Murle receive cattle when their daughters are given in marriage, and a man takes as many wives as his cows will afford. Since women available for marriage are in short supply, their abduction has become a driver of conflict.

According to a young Murle woman, "The old way of doing things must change. We recently formed the Pibor Women Association and are fighting to end

practices which we believe are inhumane." Another member explained: "In our tribe of Murle, children are booked when they are still in the womb. When a woman is pregnant, a person will say when this child is born a baby girl she will be my wife... At this time we don't want this issue of booking girl children in the womb.

The association will help to reduce such practice of child abduction, robbery from bandits, killing of innocent people on the roads and cattle raiding, which are the state's main problems."



This map is intended for illustrative purposes only. Saferworld and Conciliation Resources take no position on whether this representation is legally or politically valid.

## Methodology

Research for this briefing was conducted in three states in South Sudan experiencing serious insecurity – Jonglei, Warrap and Unity – in order to elicit the views of citizens on the factors that continue to frustrate stabilisation efforts and delay longer-term development.

In each state, research teams visited two counties and conducted an extensive series of group discussions and interviews. In Warrap and Jonglei, two rounds of research were conducted six months apart in order to observe changes in the security and peacebuilding dynamics both before and after independence.

Research teams included local civil groups Tears for Hope in Warrap State and the Jonglei State Students' for Peace Network, as well as researchers from Juba University and Saferworld. Preliminary briefing reports were produced and consultations on the initial findings were conducted at state level and with national and international stakeholders in Juba. This final policy brief reflects the themes and priorities cited across the three states.

## References and Acknowledgements

The findings in this Policy Brief were drawn from detailed research which took place in South Sudan, particularly in Jonglei, Unity and Warrap States. The research was conducted by Saferworld under the People's Peacemaking Perspectives project, which produced a number of briefing reports. For full details of the project and the publications, please visit: [www.saferworld.org.uk/PPP](http://www.saferworld.org.uk/PPP)

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The cover picture shows a cattle keeper guarding his cattle with an AK-47. Cattle-raiding between the states of Jonglei, Warrap, Unity and Lakes is a continuous threat to security for local communities and a major threat to life and livelihoods. © PETE MULLER