
Seminar report

China and South Sudan: New perspectives on development and conflict prevention

Juba, 30 May 2012

In Juba on the morning of 30 May 2012, Saferworld hosted a roundtable discussion on Chinese engagement in South Sudan. Focusing on issues related to development and conflict prevention, the roundtable was opened by H.E. Vice President Riak Machar and chaired by the Deputy Minister of Finance and Economic Planning, Mr Marial Awou. Approximately thirty other participants - drawn from Government ministries, the military, embassies, NGOs and universities - joined the event and engaged in active discussion (see below for participant list).

In his opening remarks, the Vice President spoke about South Sudan's changing relationship with China, highlighting some of the opportunities, challenges and expectations that lay in the relationship's future. The Deputy-Finance Minister then outlined the differences and similarities between Western and Chinese engagement in South Sudan and called for civil society to play a more active role.

Following opening remarks, three experts delivered presentations. Mr Larry Attree, a Conflict Advisor at Saferworld, presented the findings of Saferworld's latest report on China's role in conflict-affected states, with a special focus on the rising power's evolving engagement in South Sudan and Sudan. His presentation was followed by reflections on China's principles, policies and actual practices in Africa by Dr Yuhua Xiao of the Institute of African Studies (IAS), Zhejiang Normal University. Providing a perspective from South Sudan, Dr Alfred Lokuji of the University of Juba shared his views on the differences between Western and Chinese responses to conflict.

Mr Rurik Marsden of the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DfID) and Mr Julius Woli of the Generation Agency for Development and Transformation (GADET Pentagon) CBO then gave their thoughts and responses to the presentations.

Both the presentations and open discussion highlighted several issues:

- There are many different actors involved in Chinese policy and engagement in South Sudan, including a variety of government agencies, state-owned banks and corporations, and private companies. It should not be assumed that the central Chinese Government (Beijing) has full control over them.
- China's engagement in both Sudan and South Sudan has been evolving. Contradictions and challenges have arisen for China's non-interference policy, military role and economic cooperation. On the whole, Beijing has adopted pragmatic responses to the realities of a complex situation.
- South Sudanese perceptions of China today are still tainted by its role in past conflict. However, due to China's support for the South Sudan referendum and through high-level political exchanges, relations have improved. There is recognition that China has national interests just as any other actor, including the Government of South Sudan (GoSS). In this way, foundations exist for a stronger partnership to be built.
- China is still a developing country and cannot afford large aid programmes. Instead, China sees win-win economic cooperation as the best path toward mutual economic development.
- That China seeks natural resources from African countries is unexceptional: this is also the case for the United States and European countries. However, China's "Go Global" strategy also has implications for other economic sectors, which may possibly start to support the growth of manufacturing in Africa, as well as further development of the infrastructure sector.
- Many in South Sudan believe China can play a significant role in economic development, especially through large loans and the fast

delivery of infrastructure projects. At the moment a large deal is in the process of being agreed and feasibility studies are being carried out in several areas (e.g. roads, grids, hydropower). It is understood that while this is not aid from China, it does represent a long-term investment in South Sudan's development and so ties China to the new country's future. However, it is also clear that investments in South Sudan's economy cannot be made while conflict is on-going.

- Oil remains a thorny issue. Some believe that the GoSS will not turn the flow of oil back on without guarantees from Khartoum. Beijing has a role to play in securing such guarantees, and its national oil companies could help solve the transit fees dispute. Transparency in the oil sector remains a crucial issue for the GoSS.
- Chinese companies, including in the oil sector, have a role to play in social service delivery. In this way, they can support development and peace while safeguarding their own investments. Chinese commercial actors will need to engage with non-state actors, including local communities and civil society.
- Chinese companies often depend on protection from armed guards and security services. However, they could more effectively secure their workers and investments through seeking acceptance from local communities. This could be achieved through a conflict-sensitive approach.
- Commercial actors from China can also be made to play a more positive role through effective national laws, writing social and employment issues into contracts and making sure that laws and contracts are enforced. In this way, responsibility also lies with the GoSS.
- Despite the fact that the use of Chinese workers is often exaggerated, it should not always be seen as a bad thing: These workers can complete projects much faster. Secondly, they can share and transfer their skills to local workers.
- While China's role in economic development is greatly welcomed, some in South Sudan would rather that Beijing first uses its close political ties with Khartoum in order to help resolve insecurity and on-going disputes between the two countries. There is a strong belief that China has more influence over Khartoum than any other country. Beijing's heightened role in promoting negotiations is a step in the right direction, but many still believe it could do more.
- The policy of non-interference is often misinterpreted. It is based on China's experience of colonialism and current concerns over its own sovereignty. It should not be seen as an amoral policy of indifference to suffering. Instead, it is opposition to unilateral intervention in internal affairs. On matters of regional or international security, China has room to be more proactive.
- At the same time, China must interpret non-interference more flexibly in order to promote peace more effectively. It cannot be used as an excuse for inaction. It should also be noted that no country has a policy of interference, and calling for China to be more flexible should not be seen as calling for China to play a unilateral military role.
- Furthermore, that Chinese officials and companies only interact with state actors is seen as harming China's own interests. Civil society in general could be more engaged and involved on issues of China – South Sudan relations. This would improve ties.
- The West is criticized by some for not being active enough in pressuring Khartoum and more actively intervening to protect civilians, despite the fact that it has done so elsewhere in the Middle East.
- The issue of arms transfers from China remains problematic. Despite common misperceptions, it is understood that China is not Khartoum's largest supplier. However, arms to one side clearly undermine Beijing's stated policy of non-interference. Secondly, too often Chinese small arms proliferate into the wrong hands and fuel conflict. Some believe that the GoSS needs more arms to deter Khartoum's air attacks.
- While there are differences between Western and Chinese approaches, there is a shared commitment to supporting peace and development in South Sudan, presenting a clear rationale for cooperation. Host countries – such as South Sudan – have a role in promoting closer cooperation. Civil society also has a role to play in trilateral cooperation.
- The upcoming Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) presents an opportunity for South Sudan to engage with China on several important issues, including the need for support to counter the illicit proliferation of small arms.

Overall, Saferworld's meeting was welcomed as an opportunity to facilitate discussion and promote cooperation and understanding. The meeting was seen as a foundation on which to build sustained dialogue, in which it was hoped that a wider set of Chinese actors would participate. Saferworld intends to continue facilitating discussion and research on China's role in South Sudan.

Seminar participants

H.E. Riek Machar, Vice President of South Sudan

Mr. Marial Awou, Deputy Minister of Finance and Economic Planning

Ms. Elizabeth James Bol, Deputy Minister of Petroleum and Mining

Maj. Gen. Daniel Deng, Bureau for Community Security and Small Arms Control

Col. Philip Aguer, SPLA Spokesperson

Mr. Peter Gwang Akich, Deputy/Peace and Reconciliation Commission

Mr. Moses Mabiior, Director of Aid and Coordination, Ministry of Finance

Mr. Paul Demetry, Rep. from Ministry of Environment

Dr. Alfred Lokuji, Juba University & Rift Valley Fellow

Dr Yuhua Xiao, Zhejiang Normal University

Mr. Julius Woli, GADET Pentagon

Ambassador Kees van Baar, Netherlands

Mr. Peter Welling, European Union Special Representation to South Sudan

Mr. Rurik Marsden, UK Department for International Development

Mr. David Miliband, Tony Blair Initiative for Africa

Mr. David Brown, Tony Blair Initiative for Africa

Mr. Simon Chuol South Sudan Council of Churches

Ms. Kathelijne Schenkel, Pax Christi

Ms. Bridget Musungu, Open Society Foundation

Ms. Laura Barber, London School of Economics

Mr. Berouk Mesfin, Institute of Security Studies

Mr. Steven Kuo, University of Western Cape

Ms. Hesta Groenewald, Saferworld

Mr. Ed Hughes, Saferworld

Mr. Chuol Gew Nhial, Saferworld

Mr Ranga Gworo, Saferworld

Mr. Larry Attree, Saferworld

Mr. Thomas Wheeler, Saferworld

Ms. Sara Skinner, Saferworld

About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent international NGO. We work directly with local people, as well as governments and international organisations, to prevent violent conflict and encourage co-operative, people-centred approaches to peace and security. We believe that everyone should be able to lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from insecurity and violent conflict.

While we are not a traditional development agency, we seek to understand and influence the relationship between conflict, security and international development.

We work in 17 countries in Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. We have over 80 staff, based in Bangladesh, Kenya, Kosovo, Nepal, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Uganda, as well as in London, Brussels and Vienna. Our funding for 2010-2011 was around £6.8 million – mainly in the form of government grants from Canada, Denmark, the EU, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the UK.

Saferworld – 28 Charles Square, London N1 6HT, UK
 Registered Charity no 1043843
 Company limited by guarantee no 3015948
 Tel: +44 (0)20 7324 4646 | Fax: +44 (0)20 7324 4647
 Email: general@saferworld.org.uk
 Web: www.saferworld.org.uk