



THE SUDD INSTITUTE

RESEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL, JUST AND PROSPEROUS SOUTH SUDAN

P. O. Box 34, Juba, South Sudan • Tel: +211 (0)956 305 780
Email: thesudd.institute@gmail.com • www.suddinstitute.org

Weekly Review

May 6, 2013

Managing the Communal Violence in Tonj East County

Augustino Ting Mayai

Communal violence has become inevitable in South Sudan, routinely leading to more lives and property loss compared to interstate confrontations with neighboring rump state, the Republic of Sudan. From Eastern Equatoria to Warrap state, people regularly die in communal disputes, much so among cattle dependent local economies or settings. For some of these settings, cross-sectional and internal violence has a long history. However, in some sections, such cleavages seem to have elevated with the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) and the subsequent defection of South Sudan from Sudanese polity. This changing human security climate in the country could not be more evident, particularly in Tonj East County (Warrap), a place that had historically experienced minute internal discontents but has recently plunged into recurrent episodes of destructive violence. Shifts in the scale and spell of communal disagreements seemingly imply the state's enfeebled capacity to adequately nurture and sustain peace at the grassroots realms. It is also related to the weakness of justice system, as many people who do not receive justice decide to take the law into their own hands (South Sudan Law Society, 2013). These also readily imply the impact of war and the need for coherent healing and reconciliation programming in the country. Moreover, resource-driven disputes could be curbed through basic service-delivery projects, a fundamental development aspect the Juba government seems to have considerably failed to propagate, specifically in favor of the rural citizenry.

This analysis is a review of recurrent communal violence in Tonj East County, with emphasis on Jalwau and Luackoth settings, both sub-sections of Dinka nation. The analysis surveys the nature and consequences of this internal violence, and its challenges towards development and governance in South Sudan. The review also offers some necessary and practical recommendations.

It has been 7 years since the emergence of acrimonious internal relations within Tonj East County, particularly between Luackoth and Jalwau. Interestingly, the Dinka sections are from Anan Atak judicial constituency, which is apparently chaired by an Executive Chief, Gum Mading, from Jalwau. Though the two communities share the same nation, territory, social networks, inter-sectional marriages, and leadership, little have these communal, ascriptive resources helped

restrain the groups from engaging in prolonged detrimental confrontations. In fact, one of the recent skirmishes resulted in a death of the executive chief's son, attracting even more retributions from this section. Nearly a decade since the commencement of considerably souring relations in these two communities and the ensuing disastrous effects on both sides, the proximal motivation has been competition over grazing land. This is consistent with other experiences in the country, particularly in Eastern Equatoria, Lakes, and Jonglei states where combined death statistics associated with communal disputes are in thousands.

Responding to this protracted internal violence, Jalwau and Luackoth's elders, intellectuals, and leaders gathered this past January, drawing solutions that supposedly terminated the standoff. The peace intervention summit, conducted in the county, brought along prominent leaders such as Madam Awut Deng, South Sudan's former Minister of Labor who also doubles as the county's representative in the Juba's parliament, and Wek Mamer Kuol, an incumbent Deputy Minister of the nation's Cabinet Affairs Ministry. Several other Warrap state and county authorities also participated in this peace-building program. More specifically, the Deputy Governor of the state is said to have made several appearances in the area in an attempt to help the two communities observe serenity and good neighborliness.

Despite the importance the communities seemed to have placed upon peacefully settling their communal frustrations through dialogues as evident in the January initiative, little has this ended historical bitterness, which seems to source ongoing retribution events. Two months into the January's communal understanding the conflict unfortunately resumed. In March, members of the chief's family from the Jalwau section are reported to have attacked Luackoth, killing 8 people, many of them children and women, and injuring a few others. Rumor has it that the chief might have endorsed the attack. Executed around 4 AM in mid March, this incident occurred in Baar Ayiec cattle encampment, a seasonal grazing estate often shared by both communities.

As violence continues in Tonj East, evidently as is the case in many other parts of the country, undermining human security there, both development programming and state authority are readily challenged. Disarmament has been quite ineffective nearly across the entire country. Border security with other states and the state's inability to carry out a credible, impartial disarmament exercise explain a continuity of gun violence in the country. Reports from Tonj East, for example, indicate that the SPLA and local authorities are regularly remarketing the previously withdrawn weapons back to the community, properly clouding the merits of the disarmament. At times, arm trade with or return to the civilians is deliberately carried out at the expense of a particular community that was previously disarmed. This is a serious challenge to the state, a clear illustration of systemic corruption and the mishandling of the nation's security. Subjected to economic and sectional interests, disarmament seems to render individual communities more insecure, invoking a comprehensive assessment of the project. Lacking stability, Jalwau and Luackoth are

among a constituency of South Sudanese communities that are constantly subjected to fear and under-development.

But even more hampering in realizing stability in Tonj East is the underlying lack of effective management of violence within the local justice system. Some community judges in Tonj East are reported to not exercise neutrality in communal disputes; instead, they seem to inflame the youth to participate in crude behaviors. This renders the community wild, putting everybody at security risk. The state authorities have equally failed to provide sufficient resources to install inter-community policing and proper protection programs. Likewise, the national justice system remains apathetic in providing a maximum regulatory framework towards managing communal violence in the country. All of this demonstrates the extent to which poor service-delivery surfaces as an explanatory constituent for violence and instability in South Sudan. Further, what is quite ironic is that some places like Tonj East suffer from communal violence due to the absence of government while others, like Jonglei, suffer similar levels of conflict due to poorly planned presence of security forces.

As a practical response, the state and local authorities may curb rampant violence in Tonj East by improving security surveillance and installing border and grazing land patrols. Without sound justice served, bitterness and conflicts are likely to often ensue there, with capital retributions being a consequence. This requires unbiased judicial authorities to try security disputes in the area. The disarmament program should be inclusive, humane, and security focused; its primary aim should be an encompassing human security improvement in the country. Arms collected from the civilians should automatically be registered, indicating their serial numbers and put on a gun registry database, so that any weapons that reappear in the hands of civilians can be easily traced to the officials who were put in charge of the storage facilities. Any official found carrying out arm sales to the civil population should be held accountable. As part of the ongoing national reconciliation and healing initiative, the currently embittered communities like Tonj East may need prioritizing in the program. Community leaders, such as Madam Awut Deng, an experienced peace mobilizer, can guide both the community and reconciliation team in peace advocacy.

Lastly, insecurity partly results from underdevelopment, suggesting that adequate provision of basic services in the area may help inhibit communal violence associated with competition over limited resources. For example, the communities in question continue to have no telephone network that could ease the communication of impending attacks to the authorities. They also do not have a road access that could facilitate immediate police responses. The absence of such infrastructure stifles trading and other development programs that could engage the citizens and help invest in their future so that violence begins to be seen as a liability to peoples' collective interest, rather than an option to solving common problems.

About Sudd Institute

The Sudd Institute is an independent research organization that conducts and facilitates policy relevant research and training to inform public policy and practice, to create opportunities for discussion and debate, and to improve analytical capacity in South Sudan. The Sudd Institute's intention is to significantly improve the quality, impact, and accountability of local, national, and international policy- and decision-making in South Sudan in order to promote a more peaceful, just and prosperous society.

About the Author

Augustino Ting Mayai is the Director of Research at the Sudd Institute. His major research interests include childhood mortality differentials in the Sudan and South Sudan, applied quantitative methodology (econometrics), applied development research, social accountability and public service delivery, and the demography of conflicts and violence.