

## **SOUTH SUDAN'S INTERNAL VIOLENCE, ITS IMPACT ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION**

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### **Abstract**

Two years after it seceded from Sudan in 2011, the Republic of South Sudan was forced into ethnic violence by the internal division within the ruling party, the Sudan People Liberation Movement (SPLM), in which the vice president, Dr Machar and the entire cabinet were dismissed by President Salva Kiir in 2013. This triggered fighting in Juba which quickly spilled over to Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile states which are home to ethnic Nuer communities. Within a week, the fighting developed into full scale retaliatory tribal revenge between the Dinka and Nuer tribes, after a number of Nuer's soldiers and civilians were reportedly killed in Juba. After Machar's narrow escape in Juba he mobilised his fellow Nuer youth, known as the 'White Army,' in an attempt to overthrow Kiir's government in Juba, but, was overpowered by alliance forces of the Ugandan and South Sudanese governments. After nineteen months of deadly fighting and a rocky peace negotiation in Ethiopia the government and the rebels were pressured to sign an agreement in August, 2015 to form a government of national unity to end the violence.

The violence has affected millions of civilians, with many forced to seek safety in Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Sudan. Thousands of people have died, many killed in targeted revenge attacks between the Dinka and Nuer tribes. Displaced persons include local farmers, fisheries and cattle keepers, which consequently causes severe food shortages and catastrophic outbreaks of disease. Due to widespread violence long-term development projects and local economic activities have been disrupted, as many areas become inaccessible due to insecurity. Moreover, the government diverted oil revenues to finance the war, which caused severe underfunding in the healthcare and education sectors. Inflation on the other hand has reached record high, goods and services imported from neighbouring countries have also been affected. Overall, the violence has reduced South Sudan's GDP (by 15%) in the last two years (Frontier Economic, 2015).

The violence has also had a huge political impact on the role of a multiparty system and freedom of expression in South Sudan. The government slides towards authoritarianism, with

an increase in disappearances of opposition politicians and the killing of journalists by unknown operatives during the conflict. Last, but not least, diplomatic relations between South Sudan and the international community have also been affected, as many countries threaten South Sudan with sanctions and accuse them of massive human rights violations.

## Introduction

South Sudan is the world youngest country with an area of 619,745 km<sup>2</sup> similar to the U.S state of Texas and a population of about 11.8 million people. It is located in East Africa on the border of Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, DR Congo and the Central Africa Republic (Gale, 2011). South Sudan became a Republic in 2011, following a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed between South Sudan and Sudan in 2005, which gave the South a semi-autonomous government and the right to hold a referendum to decide whether to remain as part of Sudan or separate as a sovereign country. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of July 2011 the Republic of South Sudan voted overwhelmingly to separate from Sudan and became the world youngest country (the 193<sup>rd</sup> country) after decades of civil war. The long awaited separation was welcomed by South Sudanese around the world and the international community in the hope it would end the long suffering and devastating civil war (Casey, 2012).

The separation brought enormous opportunities for South Sudan to embark on development efforts to address the devastating effects of the civil war and integrate into regional and global politics and economies. However, building a new country from scratch was very challenging for the South Sudanese and their partners. Just two years after secession from Sudan the world's youngest country was forced into ethnic violence, on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013, causing massive human displacement, economic disruption, ethnic tension and setbacks to democratic transformations. While the new country was focusing on rebuilding its crippled infrastructure and post-war economic development, ethnic violence continued to create insecurity.

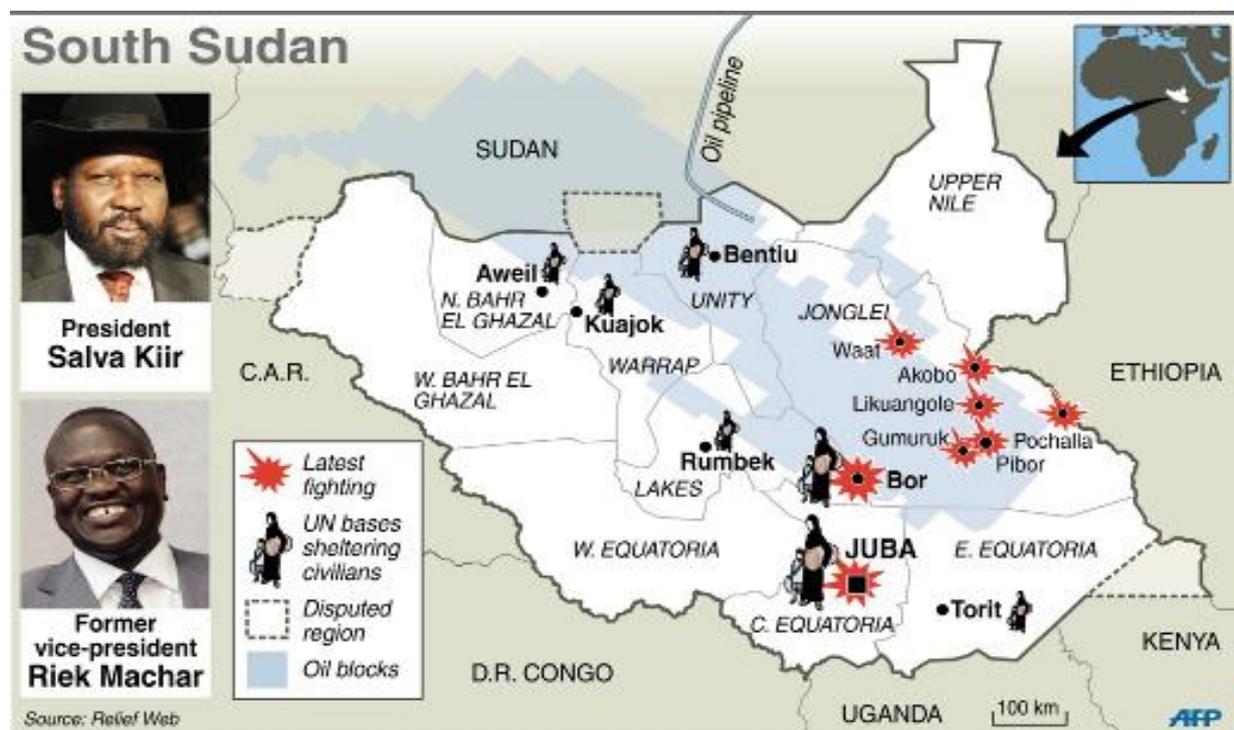
After two years of fierce fighting and a lengthy peace negotiation in Ethiopia, mediated by East African countries with the support of the international community, the two leaders agreed on the final peace agreement in August 2015, to unite the party and end the fighting, with a compromised agreement of power sharing. However, the violence has affected people in many ways. To understand the extent and impact of the two years of conflict on the South

Sudanese people this paper assess the root causes of the violence and its impact on democratic transformation, social cohesion and the economic development of South Sudan.

## Root Causes of the South Sudan Violence

The root causes of South Sudan's recent violence are very controversial. The government claimed it was an attempted failed coup by the former vice president, the rebels disputed this saying the fighting was intentionally design by the government to force out critics in the government and the security services. Since fighting erupted, many narratives and reports have been generated to explain the causes of the violence. The Africa Policy Institute (2014) provided two related narratives. First, it argues that "South Sudan is in the throes of an ethnic struggle which is not different from what took place in Rwanda in 1994 or Kenya in 2008" (p. 1). The Institute claims that South Sudan's internal conflict implicated the two dominant tribes in the country, the Dinka and Nuer, who dominated the army and civil government. The second narrative stated that the conflict was caused by the "political-military context" (p. 2) which began as a political disagreement within the ruling party and later lead to confrontation at the army headquarters in Juba between the Dinka and Nuer soldiers, eventually developing into ethnic fighting.

**Figure 1: South Sudan Map and areas affected by Internal Violence**



Source: *Atlantabalkstar* (2013, December 22nd) *South Sudan Conflict: A Test for the African Union*

According to the two narratives from the African Policy Institute (2014) disagreement within the party started after the SPLM's main organ, the National Liberation Council, failed to convene. This was due to some members of the party, including Machar, party Secretary General Pagum and Rebecca Garang, among others, failing to show up to the party meeting. Security assurances were issued by President Kiir promising to disarm all soldiers in presidential units, but African Policy Institute (2014) claimed that Dinka soldiers were then 're-armed' by the commander in charge, who was alleged to be Dinka, which triggered Nuer soldiers in the unit to re-arm themselves in fear of persecution. Shots were exchanged in the unit on December 15<sup>th</sup> 2013 in Juba and within a matter of days it escalated into tribal conflict as news spread across the country that many Nuer civilians had been killed in Juba (African Policy Institute, 2014). After Machar escaped in Juba and appointed himself as head of the rebels, the government quickly accused him of an attempted coup. A claim he rejected and instead accused President Kiir of carrying out a 'purge' of his opponents (African Policy Institute, 2014).

Andrew Natsios (2015), a former United States special envoy to Sudan, provided three different narratives of the root causes of South Sudanese internal violence. Natsios blamed the South Sudanese government for failing to lift the new country out of the devastation and poverty of the previous civil war. He argues that a country like South Sudan which is blessed with oil and other natural resources should have recovered 'quickly enough' to avoid any further conflict of this nature. However, due to a lack of proper development plans oil earnings were wasted on paying government workers who were corrupt and unproductive, instead of investing in economic development to reduce high poverty and promote development. Natsios also questioned president Kiir's ability and capacity to manage a new and fragile country full of enormous challenges. Natsios suggested that president Kiir was weak and lacked administrative capacity, like his predecessor John Garang, and because of this his weakness inspired Machar, who considered himself as someone who has knowledge and vision, to build the new and fragile state. According to Natsios, "Machar is a bright, but corrupt, ruthless, and power hungry rival after Kiir's job ...both Kiir and Machar were motivated by greed, power, and tribal loyalties; they failed to consider the common good and public interest, seeking instead to enrich their narrow cliques."

Natsios also suggested that Sudan's government played a role in inciting internal violence in South Sudan. He argued that Kiir's government was dominated by those who came from Khartoum after the separation, many having been a part of the Bashir government. These people are outsiders to the SPLM mainstream and want to run the South with Sudan's ideologies. This argument cited a number of ministers and other high ranking officials in the Kiir government who were part of Sudan's government and also close relatives of the President, from his homeland of greater Bar el Ghazel region.

On the other hand, Jok (2014, p.17) argues that "conflict within South Sudan has taken three forms: the liberation wars in which the south fought the north in the old Sudan; ethnic feuds over resources, especially among cattle herding communities; and rivalries between political leaders". Jok also claimed that the "history of ethnic relations" during the struggle had played some role in the violence, especially the 1991 tribal fighting between John Garang, a former leader and founder of the SPLM who was from Dinka, and Machar from the Nuer tribe in which thousands of civilians were killed. The memory of this wound remains for many South Sudanese people. The majority think that what happened in Juba was a repeat of 1991 and Machar's habit of destabilising the government by force. Jok also believed that the exclusion of some minority ethnic communities from the government has exacerbated the violence.

Ethnic violence has also contributed to this conflict. South Sudan is a heterogeneous society composed of 64 tribes who live in social groups with the Dinka and Nuer as the two dominant ethnic groups. For many decades inter-tribal violence in South Sudan has been a major source of insecurity and conflict, scholars stating that inter-communal violence in South Sudan is practiced to defend territories, acquire wealth and maintain tribal identities (Loyuong, 2014). Others argue that it is part of social life and cultural heritage (Schomerus & Allen, 2010). Inter-communal violence among tribes who mainly keep cattle, such as Dinka and Nuer, are commonly caused by cattle raiding, fighting over grazing land and competition over water points, while among tribes who practice farming such as Zande and Bari, inter-communal violence has been known to be caused by territorial disputes (Schomerus & Allen, 2010; Loyuong, 2014). Conflict can also result from small disagreements between members of the same family, villages, clans or tribes on the larger scale.

A recent study in South Sudan by Schomerus and Allen (2010) shows that in the Greater Equatoria Region there has been a long territorial dispute between Acholi and Bari

communities. There is also a long history of conflict within the Budi County of Lopit and violence and disputes between members of the Toposa and Turkana. In the Upper Nile region there is ongoing tension between the Dinka Apadang and the Shilluk and also intra-communal violence exists within the various Nuer communities. In Greater Bahr el-Ghazal intra-tribal violence is ongoing in Maple and also in other places of Warrap and Lakes State. There is also a never ending conflict between Dinka Malual and Rizeigat.

However, after South Sudan gained independence much of the inter-tribal violence has become a struggle to gain position in the government (Loyuong, 2014). One example is the Murle ethnic movement led by David Yau Yau in 2012. Murle is one of the smallest nomadic and pastoralist tribes in South Sudan, it has a long history of cattle raiding and abducting children from neighbouring communities as part of their social and economic lifestyle (Laudati, 2011). After losing the election in Pibor area in Jonglei State, Yau Yau turned to his Murle tribal men and used deep-rooted tribal conflict between the Murle, Dinka and Nuer as a political opportunity to mobilise members of his ethnic group Murle (Human Security Baseline Assessment (HSBA), 2013).

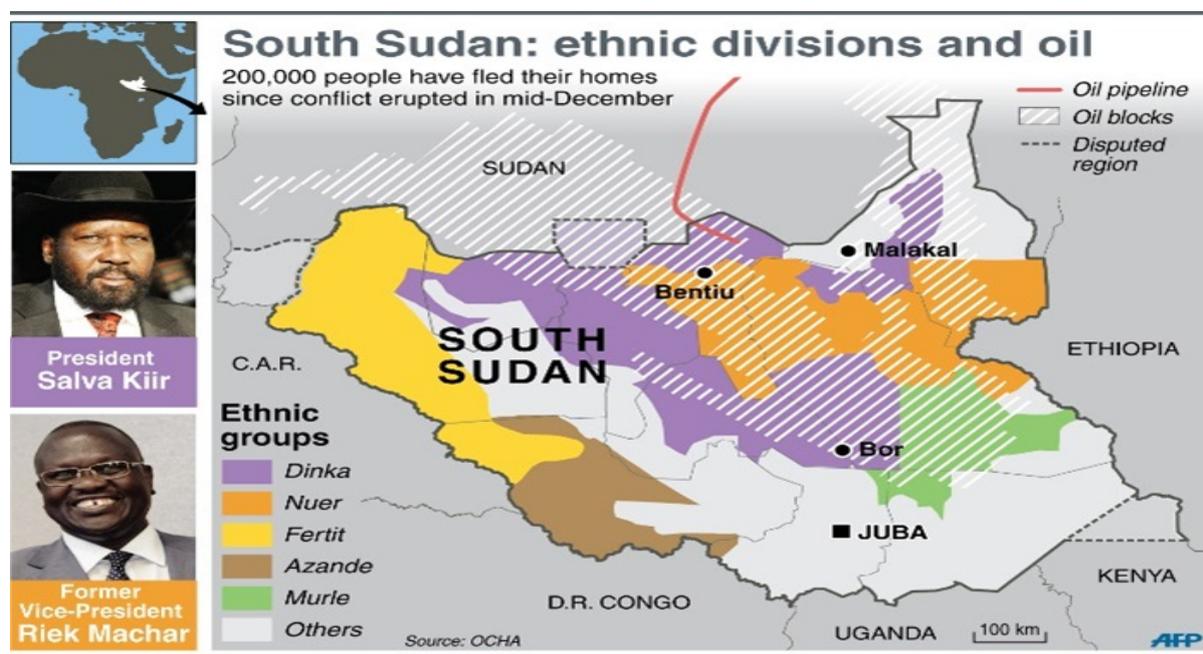
Dinka, Nuer and Murle are not the only tribes implicated by the recent conflict, the violence has also motivated other minority tribes in the country to rise up against the government. One of these tribes is the Shilluk tribe of the Upper Nile State led by former government allied militia general Johnson Olony who lead the 'Aguerek forces' against the Kiir government. Analysts believe that his rebellion was motivated by the long territorial conflict between the Dinka Apadang and the Shilluk in which he claimed that the government backed the Dinka Apadang to eliminate the Shilluk minority (The New Nation, 2015).

There were also other conflicts in Equatoria by a community defence group formerly known as the 'Arrow Boys,' initially started as a community defence against the Ugandan Lord Resistance Army (Cakaj, 2009). This group later became a resistance against the migration of refugees who came with cattle from other states within South Sudan to their territories. However, recently this group changed their claim after politicians involved, and also motivated by the current rebellion of Machar, promised a more inclusive government, which seemed to resonate with minority tribes that felt left out of the Kiir government. There have been several attempts in the past by ethnic communities in the Equatoria region demanding the independence of the Greater Equatoria region from South Sudan, this conflict by the

Arrow Boys is a continuation of that demand. Although these movements have some political motivation, the root causes seem to have historical origin which represents the shift from ethnic conflict to political struggle in the government.

Despite different narratives on what caused the recent conflict in South Sudan, this violence has horrific consequences. A report issued by Genocide Watch and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNIMSS) painted a gruesome picture of the killing of civilians. The report stated that a number of civilians, including patients, locals and foreigners, who include women, children and businessmen were gathered from various places, including hospitals, Mosques, Churches, and the UN compound, by the rebels. They were then separated and shot based on their ethnicities (Genocide Watch, 2014). These rebels also gave orders to soldiers on state media to rape and kill any non-Nuer women in the area (Africa Policy Institute, 2014). This is clear evidence that what started as politics has lost its meaning and has become a war of tribe, hatred and ethnic identity.

**Figure 2: South Sudan Ethnic Divisions and Oil Locations**



Source: Eyewitness News (2015) *South Sudan: Ethnic Divisions and Oil*

The diagram above shows how the conflict has divided the entire country on the basis of ethnicity. The states colored orange mostly controlled by the rebels are also states predominately inhabited by Nuer, while states colored pink are dominated by the Dinka and

controlled by the Kiir government. Other states or tribes either side with the Kiir government or have some individuals who have joined the rebels. The fact that Machar, the rebel leader, controlled Nuer's territories and Kiir controlled Dinka territories reinforces the argument that pre-existing territorial identity between the Nuer and the Dinka plays a big role in this conflict. Bentiu and Malakal towns have become the battle background, ownership has changed hands many times during the fighting between the government and the rebels due to the presence of oil in those areas, which is seen by both sides as the main source of income. Historically, Malakal and Bentiu belong to Nuer communities and therefore oil resources in these areas are associated with local resident's sense of belonging and heritage, which they defend with aggression. In a 'Victim of Discourse,' Laudati (2012, p.19) argued ethnic identity in South Sudan is embedded in natural resources and most ethnic violence revolves around 'claims' over these resources. Laudati's argument explains the reason why a large number of youth from these areas have risen up and joined the rebel White Army in the last two years, signifying a sense of identity with the oil, land and towns that are control by the rebel movement of Machar.

## Political Impact of the Internal Conflict

### a. Democracy in South Sudan

Southern Sudan was always governed as part of Sudan since independence in 1956 from the British; it has always been the will of Southerners to have their own government (Rothfuss & Yakubu, 2013). Even though the South was sometimes governed separately by the British during the colonial era, the South had never had political freedom to run their own affairs until the CPA in full first usage and then separation in 2011. However, following the implementation of the CPA, the political systems in South Sudan have been plagued by serious political challenges in terms of democratic governance, peace-building, human rights, and the fulfilment of the state's core functions such as security, justice, service delivery, and resource mobilisation, facilitating economic development and maintaining relationship with its citizens (Attree, 2012:6). Radon and Logan (2014) argued that good governance largely depends on political stability. In this case, the Government of South Sudan was expected to demonstrate its full commitment to embrace effective governance but there were doubts and scepticism from different actors about whether South Sudan could ever be stable given the existent tribal conflicts.

After gaining independence South Sudan adopted a multiparty democratic, decentralised and participatory governance structure to promote the process of inclusiveness and political accommodation for the purpose of shaping a shared national identity, in order to better address the challenges of state building (Kimenyi, 2012; Radon & Logan, 2014). This system of governance was well stipulated in Chapter III of the National Transitional Constitution Act 2011, which stated that “South Sudan shall have a decentralised system of government,” where all levels of government such as national, state and local government “exercise authority” within their jurisdiction mandates (Government of South Sudan, 2011, p. 22).

However, there have been debates in the last four years on the nature of the political environment in South Sudan. Key political actors exercise immeasurable power, misuse of state resources and institutionalised corruption. Unclear government structures and the lack of delegation of power have undermined state peace-building and stability in recent years. The roles of many institutions within the South Sudan government have been questioned, and their political operations have been under enormous pressure to realise good governance. This notion aimed at shaping political governance that could lead national development to a pace of reform in governance (Hutton, 2014). As a result, the country fell into the traps of political torturing, disintegrating into a central authoritarian one-party state, nurturing divisive tribal and ethnic inclinations, and has created fears and concerns not only amongst political oppositions but also within the ranks of the SPLM party, civil society groups and the international community (Radon & Logan, 2014).

Lokosnag (2010, p.120) claimed that the “Government of South Sudan is a political accident.... All leadership, ministerial and other constitutional positions have been done by appointment and not due to a well-informed, constitutionally-rooted democratic process”. With this notion, the current autocratic leadership style in Juba created significant political stalemate, which many observers believed to have directly contributed to bad governance and the current conflict. Prior to the conflict, the president of the Republic of South Sudan, Salva Kiir Mayadit repeatedly used his constitutional powers to remove democratically elected state governors and replaced them with his loyalists. These moves prompted the vice president, Dr Machar, to go public, criticising and advising Kiir to reverse his decisions and to reinstate dismissed governors.

“I urge you to live to your constitutional obligation to diligently and honestly discharge your duties and responsibilities in a consultative manner to foster the development and welfare of

the people of South Sudan, promote the unity of the people of South Sudan and consolidate the democratic decentralized system of government and preserve the integrity and dignity of the people of South Sudan” (Sudan Tribune, 2013).

Furthermore, Machar blamed President Kiir that, “your action of relieving an elected governor is seen as politically motivated and more importantly it is a violation of our constitution. ...to avoid authoritarianism and dictatorship, it is better to change” (Sudan Tribune, 2013). As president Kiir continue to downplay the differences between him and his vice, the situation started to get out of hand in the country which led to the sacking of the entire cabinet, a move claimed by Machar as purging opposition elements within the ruling party (Sudan Tribune, 2013). With these remarks many analysts were sceptical about the legitimacy of the Presidential decision, although the president is permitted by the provision of Article 101(r) of the Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan to “remove a state Governor and/or dissolve a state legislative assembly in the event of a crisis in the state that threatens national security and territorial integrity” (Government of South Sudan, 2011, p. 41).

#### **b. SPLM and Dinka Hegemony in South Sudan**

The recent violence has provided a clear understanding of the nature of the SPLM party and the Dinka domination within the party and South Sudan in general. When the civil war first broke out in 1983, all the tribes in the South were united under one political party, the SPLM party and its military wing the SPLA. However, due to Dinka dominating the South at 40 %, Nuer with 20% and the remaining tribes at 40% of South Sudan’s population, the movement was controlled by Dinka from start to finish. Consequently the movement experienced many splits and rebellions from minority tribes including the Nuer’s (Ottaway and El-Sadany, 2012). For instance, the 1991 split of Dr Machar from the SPLM came amid claims that Garang (who is Dinka) had controlled the movement. As Ottaway and El-Sadany argue, although Dinka and Nuer have both played crucial roles in the SPLM and the liberation of the South, Dinka see themselves as the custodians of the SPLM party and the true liberators of the South, while “the Nuer were more closely associated with the earlier separatist movement, the Anya-Nya” (2012, p. 12). This argument is consistent with the recent violence and the breakaway of Machar and the Nuer in general from the government, and the Dinka domination within the SPLM party which seems to be preventing other minorities from the party’s top leadership. The recent disagreement within the SPLM between Kiir and Machar is

a continuation of the power struggle between the Dinka and Nuer tribes which also occurred in 1991 between Garang and Machar.

### **c. The Nature and Role of a Multiparty System in South Sudan**

Since 2011 a total number of 23 political parties have been registered in South Sudan (Sudan Tribute, 2011), however, the role of opposition or a multi-party system in democracy has not yet materialised since separation. Instead, it has always been the tribal domination of the Dinka and Nuer that has been the epicentre of the powers in government, military and in the ruling party, the SPLM. One key reason why a multiparty system in South Sudan is ineffective is that many of these parties were formed as armed rebellions against the government and the SPLM party, this has not earned the trust of the general public and the Dinka in particular, who are the majority in the country (Ottaway & El-Sadany, 2012).

For example, the South Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SSLM/A) formed by Peter Gadet in 1999 opposed the government. Also the South Sudan Democratic Movement/Army (SSDM/A) formed by George Athor in 2010 stirred up much ethnic violence, especially in Jonglei state. The National Democratic Front also emerged in 2011 against the government. Also the South Sudan People's Liberation Movement formed in 2011 to oppose the separation of South Sudan from Sudan (Ottaway & El-Sadany, 2012).

In addition, these parties are also "tribally based," as argued by Ottaway and El-Sadany (2012, p.20). Because of their tribal association, in which many are from the smallest tribes, they cannot challenge the SPLM which is dominated by the Dinka. For example, when the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-Democratic Change led by Dr Lam Akol, the former SPLM member who defected during the civil war from the Shilluk tribe, challenged Kiir in the 2010 presidential race he managed to secure only 2 seats in the South Sudan Parliament while the SPLM under Kiir obtained 160 seats. The SPLM won by a large margin because of trust, therefore any party other than SPLM was not trusted. This perception has always affected those parties who want to challenge or breakaway from the SPLM. Hence, because of the history of violence and armed opposition against the government, opposition parties are unable to persuade the people of South Sudan that they are viable political parties who can run the country without inciting ethnic violence.

This historical perspective has also played a role in the recent conflict within the SPLM. Dr Machar and other SPLM members who are discontent with where the country is heading are concerned that if they break away from the SPLM party they will be perceived as rebels and not true SPLM liberators, which would put them in the same uncomfortable position as other opposition parties. Although Machar's army is completely dominated by his fellow Nuer, he still maintains the name SPLM as reflected in the names SPLM-In Opposition and SPLM-Former Detainees. This evidence alone implies that SPLM trust and allegiance is crucial in South Sudan's political environment. In 2011, about 18 political parties in South Sudan attempted to merge into one party so that they could challenge the SPLM and gain more support from the public (Sudan Tribune, 2011). This move failed because most of these parties are from the minority tribes in South Sudan and though they merged they were still not able to challenge the SPLM because the SPLM is dominated by the Dinka tribe.

## Social Impact of the South Sudan Internal Conflict

### a. Possible Genocide

There is substantial evidence to suggest genocide has been committed in South Sudan. The African Policy Institute (2014) stated that the conflict in South Sudan is far more complicated than the Rwandan conflict and possible genocide might have been committed. Although many reports, including the United Nations' Mission in South Sudan, have claimed genocide, obtaining proof has been very difficult and has caused differences between the African Union and the rest of the world, including the United Nations. The fact that the African Union first refused to release the findings on human rights abuses committed in the conflict, by claiming it may jeopardise the peace talks in Addis Ababa, implied that a possible crime committed against humanity was being hidden. According to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, who conducted their own separate investigation into the abuses in Unity State, claims that, about 170 'women and girls were raped', beaten and some were set on fire in their houses by the government army (Human Rights Watch, 2013 & 2015). A report obtained from the Sudan Tribune (2015) stated that;

"Families have endured horrendous atrocities - including killing, abduction, and the recruitment of children into armed groups. Women and girls have been beaten, raped and set on fire. Entire communities have lost their homes and their livelihoods. Many people are starving, living in swamps or in bushes, hiding in fear of their lives."

This recent finding by the United Nations is consistent with other agencies working in South Sudan reporting human rights abuses committed by both sides. Regardless of whether genocide was committed or not, the conflict has affected many families, especially in areas inhabited by the Nuer and the Dinka where the war has been concentrated. According to a report issued by the Sudan Tribune, the Nuer community claimed that over 17,000 Nuer civilians have died across the country including those who were targeted in Juba. A figure disputed by the government and other reports who estimated that only 5,000 people were killed in the capital city Juba before the conflict spiraled out of control and the remaining were killed after they joined the rebel White Army (Sudan Tribune, 2014 & Markell, 2014). Several reports including the New York Times, the International Crisis Group (ICG) and Relief Web (Kulishi, 2014 & Markell, 2014) have estimated that the total death toll of the conflict could range from 10,000 to 50,000 people. These reports also argue that the reason for variation in the total deaths is because neither side can provide accurate numbers of people who have been killed for political reasons and fear of sanctions from the international community. They estimated the number of deaths is expected to be more than 50,000 as of 2015 (Kulishi, 2014 & Markell, 2014).

#### **b. Humanitarian Crisis**

Although the recent conflict has been going for just 18 months, which is much shorter than the Sudan civil war which lasted for three decades, the level of damage and the number of people affected is almost half of the entire South Sudan population. Major relief agencies working in South Sudan including Mercy Corps (2015) have estimated nearly 4 million civilians have been affected by this conflict, with more than 2 million people reported displaced and some stranded in bushes or villages with nowhere to go, cut off by fighting in remote areas or have sheltered inside UN camps.

According to Frontiers Economic (2015), more than 194,000 refugees from South Sudan have fled to Ethiopia, 44,000 have fled to refugee camps inside Kenya and 125,000 more to Uganda. There have been reports of many people seeking safety in the forest surviving on 'wild plants like grass, roots and water lilies' (Mercy Corps, 2015). The conflict could be considered to be one of the worst humanitarian disasters ever recorded in South Sudan since the end of Sudan's civil war in 2005.

**Figure 3: Women collecting water lilies in the swamp in South Sudan**



Source: USAID (2014) <https://blog.usaid.gov/2014/07/responding-to-dire-needs-in-south-sudan-three-years-after-independence/>

The security agreement which ended the decades of civil war in Sudan in 2005 gave the United Nations (UN) a mandate in accordance to Chapter VII of the UN resolution 1996 (2011), 2132 (2013) and 2155 (2014) to deploy UN troops to protect civilians across South Sudan (United Nation Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), 2014 & United Nations, 2014). It is estimated that around 12,500 UN troops are currently based in South Sudan, protecting civilians by assisting with humanitarian delivery and monitoring ‘human rights’ abuses (United Nation Mission in South Sudan, 2014). It is believed that about 91,541(10 percent) displaced people in South Sudan are being sheltered in UN camps across the country (Gladstone, 2015 & United Nation Mission in South Sudan, 2014).

The conflict has affected South Sudan’s relationship with the United Nations as many UN troops have lost their lives trying to protect civilians. During the course of the violence about 27 United Nations security personnel have been killed (Sudan Tribune, 2015). In 2014 the two UN camps in Bentiu, Unity state and Bor in Jonglei State were stormed by angry youths, killing about 353 and leaving 250 innocent civilians injured. Both attacks were ethnically motivated (United Nations, 2015).

## The Impact of Conflict on Economic Growth and Development

One of the main concerns regarding the recent conflict in South Sudan is the economic impact. With this new country still in its early stages of recovery from the devastations of 30 year of civil war, the economic development that was established following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 has been severely damaged. Before the current conflict the economy was struggling to recover from declining Per Capita GDP, a shortage of foreign reserves, high inflation and widening gaps between official and informal exchange rates. With exactly four years since independence and currently facing a conflict that lasted for nearly two years, South Sudan's economy is on the verge of collapsing.

A report by Frontier Economic estimated that South Sudan's GDP decreased by 15 % in 2014, while 2015 will see negative growth as the economy feels the full effect of the war with a decline in the country's oil production and a fall in global oil prices. This is coupled with the disruption of local farming as the majority of people have left their villages and are fully reliant on humanitarian aid. Consequently foreign companies such as banks, airlines, transport companies and traders from neighbouring countries that were operating in the affected towns were looted and have lost a substantial amount of investments. The conflict has also damaged the already poor roads, making it difficult to deliver aid to the most affected areas. This combination of costs of this destruction is what has caused the decrease in the GDP (Frontier Economic, 2015).

### **a. Destruction of farmland**

The impact of the current conflict on agriculture has greatly affected the world's youngest nation, particularly in the region of the Upper Nile where the war has caused millions to flee their farmland for a safer life. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) report, the conflict has displaced nearly 2 million people including 1.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), with over 552,000 people being forced to take refuge in other countries including Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda (FAO and World Food Programme, 2015). Moreover, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs also estimated that 4.6 million will faced food insecurity in 2015 and an additional US\$1.81 billion will be required to support the starving population due to a lack of food in the country over the course of 2015 (OCHA, 2015).

The destruction of arable land as a result of civil war has completely annihilated agricultural integrity for this country in the past. Given the speed and spread of the conflict, the impact and damage on agriculture does not just affect farmers but the entire economy of the country. In South Sudan agricultural development plays an important role in supporting the livelihoods of the local population, therefore it is very important to consider the costs of continuing this devastating war to the economy. According to Mercy Corps (2015) the impact of conflict has already destroyed struggling subsistence agriculture where almost “90% of South Sudanese households depend on crop farming, livestock, fishing or fishery for their livelihoods,” now finding it even harder to produce food in this region, a situation described as “man-made crisis” (Oxfam International, 2015). As a result the States of Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile, where villages have been ruined and many inhabitants have been forced to flee, farmers can no longer produce food to feed themselves, and they have been forced to flee their land and become homeless (Mercy Corps, 2015 & World Food Programme, 2015).

The fighting began close to the Christmas period of 2013, disrupting the most crucial time of harvesting for many small scale farmers in the affected areas. There was considerable property damage, in most conflict affected areas local shops were burnt and looted, hospitals, homes and schools have been destroyed and farming equipment ruined. As a result cultivation in these areas has been impossible, as planting requires manpower, seeds, as well as agricultural equipment during the planting season. As the conflict intensified agricultural organisations, including Mercy Corps, that provides seeds and tools to “help families grow more food where they are living” were forced to abandoned their operations or leave due to the intensity of the conflict in those areas (Mercy Corps, 2015). Consequently, many farmers were unable to go back to their fields “to plant seeds, prepare land or harvest their crops” because they feared being killed upon their return (Mercy Corps, 2015).

The diagram below illustrates two layers of agricultural production. The top layer shows the ‘normal food cycle’ from land preparation to food storage, while the bottom layer explains how the impact of war leads to food shortage. When the country is in peace farmers can plant their seeds and harvest their crops, but during war farmers cannot plant seeds leading to a severe shortage of food.

**Figure 4: The Impact of Conflict on Agriculture Sector**



Source: *Mercy Corps (2015, September 21st) Quick facts: What you need to know about the South Sudan crisis*

### Macroeconomic impact

A key indicator for sustainable government spending is the ratio of government debt held by domestic and external lenders to the ratio of national income, or gross domestic product (GDP). In South Sudan, the ratio of government debt has significantly increased by 23.73 % between 2013 and 2014 (Country Economy, 2015). However there were already grave concerns over the future of the country before the war, that “the country is getting bogged down in taking loans to service the previous loan... by taking this loan, the government risks selling South Sudan’s future to pay for today” (Thon, 2015). Such thoughts allude to the fact that South Sudan’s financial management was deteriorating before the war, adding to concerns that the authenticity of financial status in the country very questionable. By assessing costs associated with high government borrowing, the financing of military operations to fight the country’s opposing factions in the ruling Sudan Peoples’ Liberation Movement (SPLM-IO), has been largely blamed for the debt increase. Through support from the Ugandan military in 2014, providing new recruits and weapons, military spending has increased from US\$982 million in 2013 to US\$1.08 billion in 2014/2015. As a result, the government confirmed spending 60 % of oil revenues on military operations, placing South Sudan as the top military spender in the East African region (Olingo, 2015).

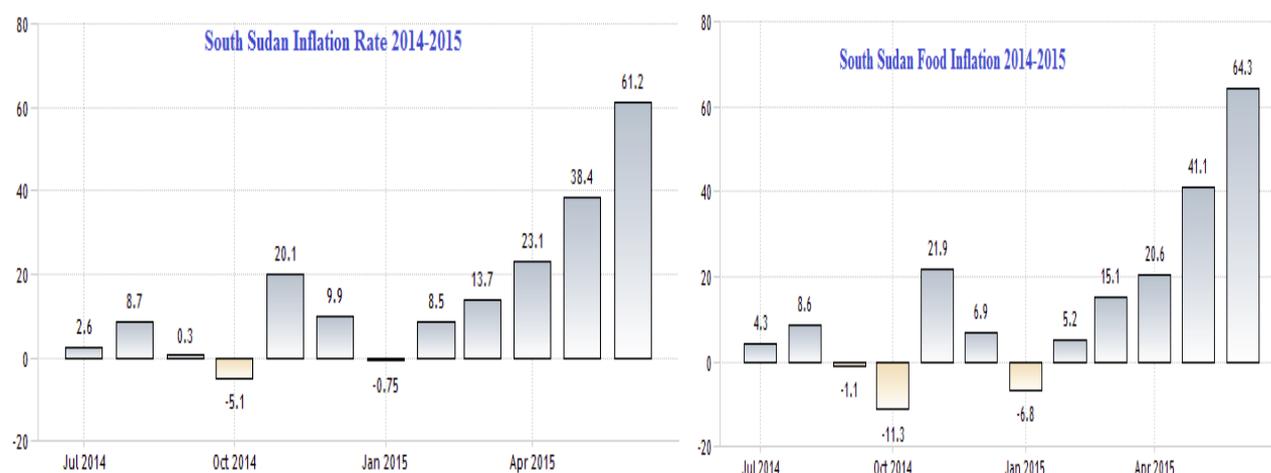
Government expenditure is expected to continue to rise and revenues are also expected to decline as the conflict has disrupted oil production in most regions. Because most of the major oilfields are located in Unity and Upper Nile states where conflict has affected most operations, the production has been hampered significantly in these areas. The projected oil revenue has been largely flawed by wrong assumptions that the prices of oil will keep trading above \$100 per barrel ignoring external factors that would drive down oil prices which “puts more pressure on already low foreign reserves.” Oil revenues make up about 90 % of government revenues, meaning that a reduction in oil production reduces spending in other sectors, such as in health, education and infrastructure (Nkamleu & Mugisha, 2015). Lewis (2015) point out that “prior to the conflict the country was producing around 250,000 barrels per day and production since the conflict began, for the first half of 2015, has been around 160,000.” This data coincides with a significant drop in oil prices in June on the world market to around \$60 to \$65 per barrel (World Oil, 2015).

The enormity of the conflict and its effects on economic development are well documented and appear to have been driven by the cause of the conflict. Growing government spending mainly in military operations and national security increases the level of economic uncertainty in the dynamics of local reserves. As the conflict drags on, the country’s reserve has been severely depleted, due to a significant decrease in production and a sharp decline in global oil prices. This is supported by evidence that “large budget deficits” have been blamed to have weakened South Sudan’s Pound against the US dollar. As the value of the Pound continuously deteriorates foreign investors and currency traders alike “perceive that rising levels of government spending are not sustainable and that the government will need to go to the market to prop up this spending, they sell and buy dollars, pushing down the value of the local currency” (Sudan Tribune, 2015).

As of July 2015 the official exchange rate for South Sudan’s Pound traded at 7.20 SSP per US dollar compared to 2008 where the South Sudan Pounds average exchange rate was at 3.80 per US dollar. The inflation rate and food inflation rate were recorded at 61.20 % and 64.30 % respectively in July 2015 (Trading Economics, 2015). The cost of food in South Sudan since the conflict began has increased sharply. The increase in food prices is due to an increase in the official exchange rate as the plummeting South Sudan Pound against the US dollar hit the fragile economy. This created uncertainty about bringing goods into the country among traders from Uganda, Kenya and Sudan, as local consumption heavily relies on

imports, hence goods and services that were coming to South Sudan have decreased drastically as a result. The importance of regional trading to South Sudan was reflected in a report which suggested that “exports from Uganda to South Sudan alone estimated to have increased from \$US 60 million to \$US 635 million between 2005 and 2008” (Frontier Economic, 2015).

**Figure 5: South Sudan Inflation Rate**



Source: *Trading Economic (2015) South Sudan Inflation Rate 2008-2015*

## Conclusion and recommendations

South Sudan emerged from decades of civil war after signing the CPA with Sudan in 2005, which paved the way to successful separation in 2011. The world’s youngest country has been struggling with many unresolved issues from the CPA and the complexities of building a new country, a landlocked country which depends on oil as its main source of revenue. As this new country embarked upon transforming its crippled economy, downsizing the guerilla army and installing democratic governance, it was thrown into ethnic violence in 2013 after two years of attempting to bring democratic reform in the ruling party. Through the Intergovernmental Authority of East Africa and the efforts of the international community a peace agreement was signed in August 2015, after almost 2 years of conflict which has affected over 4 million civilians and displaced almost 1.7 million from their homes, causing the most severe humanitarian crisis recorded since the end of the civil war.

The violence has had a devastating effect on the already weak economy, as many civilians, especially local farmers and business traders, fled for safety to neighboring countries or

sought safety in bushland. Business properties were looted and houses burned, leaving towns like Bortown, Bentiu, Malakal and many others effectively ghost towns. Juba, the main commercial center, was experiencing rapid economic growth, but has now also been affected by insecurity and fear, forcing foreign traders to desert their businesses. This has also affected the importation of goods and services. The economic impact of this violence has equated to the reduction of South Sudan's GDP by 15 % during the two years of violence.

The violence has resulted in the loss of thousands of human lives. It is estimated that over 50 thousand people have lost their lives, many died as a result of ethnic retaliation between the Dinka and the Nuer tribes. In a country that was already in ethnic turmoil, this violence has hardened hatred among the 64 tribes in South Sudan as many ethnic groups joined the rebels or took up arms to fight the government led by President Salva Kiir, which has been branded as a Dinka Government.

The violence has also caused major hindrance to the transformation of the former guerrilla movement, SPLM, to a democratic political party. Building a favorable democratic system in South Sudan has been a formidable challenge, because of a lack of good governance that embraces the process of peace-building among its citizens. The conflict has increased political disparities, giving more political power to the SPLM, the ruling party, and leaving other political parties with insufficient opportunities to provide accountability for better governance. The domination of the SPLM in every political aspect creates political uncertainty. Recent power sharing arrangements stipulated in the peace agreement, signed by the government and the rebels, only addresses power sharing issues within the SPLM party itself leaving other political parties in the country with very limited political involvement.

The internal conflict in South Sudan could be ongoing because of the social structure of the ethnic population, and the history of tribal violence that has been embedded into their culture and way of life. To reduce the level of internal violence among these tribes this paper proposes six recommendations.

**Establish a federal government:** the current system of government in South Sudan has consolidated all powers in the Centre. This has limited state and local government to exercise their duties. Establishing a federal government can distributed powers to lower levels of state and local government and therefore reduce one man rule.

**Adopt genuine democratic system:** the current use of orders and decree by president of relieving elected governors doesn't reflect true democracy. South Sudan needs to adopt a genuine democratic system with limited term of the president to avoid one man or one tribe rule. There is greater need of transparency and accountability in all public institutions and a true democratic process of electing public officials and not by appointment on basis of loyalty and tribal affiliations.

**Restructure the national army:** the great mistake made by the South Sudan government after referendum was failing to create a national army to replace the guerilla SPLA. Instead bloated it with untrained and ethnic militants. There is a need to create an inclusive national army which can be nominated from all the ethnic groups in South Sudan and professionally trained to serve all citizens regardless of tribe.

**Reform and retrain the security sector:** enforcement of laws is very crucial in the establishment of the new state of South Sudan since widespread of small arms on the hands of civilians is a major source of violence in the country. Journalists and opposition politicians have been disappearing on the hands of security agents in recent years.

**Promote rural development:** Building an inclusive and a strong democratic government can promote development in isolated areas which are vulnerable to violence. Many areas in South Sudan are isolated and poverty rate continues to increase in rural communities because development is being concentrated in cities and towns leaving vulnerable population suffering and competing on limited resources in remote areas.

**Reform the judicial system:** The current judicial system in South Sudan is very weak and not properly functioning to address overwhelming crimes in the new country. The practice of customary laws at the local government levels is contracting the criminal laws at the state and national levels. There is also a fear to prosecute high ranking government and military officials that are corrupting the institutions and many ethnic violence and killings are not handled by the courts in a transparent manner as they are always done on tribal line by those in powers.

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