



ISSN 0882-4894

VOLUME 36 NUMBER 1-2 2016

# The Applied Anthropologist

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Vol. 36  
No. 1-2  
2016

## POINT-TO-POINT JULIE A. REYES

*Humanitarian assistance is reaching more people than ever, but what people really need is peace.*  
(World Food Programme)

With this issue of TAA devoted to the crisis in South Sudan, the recent political events in the United States resulting in travel bans, and the threat of mass deportation targeting those most vulnerable seem significant. At a time when South Sudan is unravelling, the United Nations News Centre is warning that an estimated “100,000 people are facing starvation, and an additional one million are on the brink of a famine. The total number of food insecure people is expected to rise to 5.5 million at the height of the lean season in July [2017] if nothing is done to curb the severity and spread of the food crisis. A formal declaration of famine means that people have already started dying of hunger.”

The following articles remind us of the role applied anthropologists and their colleagues play in understanding how larger social structures become embodied in individual experience, or as Paul Farmer states, “violence against individuals is usually embedded in entrenched structural violence.” Many applied anthropologists focus on the social forces that create an environment for structural violence resulting in extreme suffering, including poverty, hunger, torture, rape and even genocide. Farmer beckons us to practice “pragmatic solidarity – *the rapid deployment of our tools and resources to improve the health and well-being of those who suffer this violence.*” The following articles contribute to a growing body of critical anthropology on structural violence in a way that draws the reader to bear witness through solidarity and compassion. By focusing on the structures producing and reproducing pain, suffering, hunger, violence and death among the victims, we are provided a glimpse into understanding the unimaginable. The articles illuminate how the intersection of applied anthropology and international journalism practice pragmatic solidarity by unravelling the social, cultural and political forces that are creating an

environment where thousands of people are on the brink of famine, experiencing violence and escalating human atrocities wavering on genocide.

Practicing pragmatic solidarity is not easy and requires comprehensive work on the ground, in the field working alongside South Sudanese activists. The sheer complexity of the social processes involved in the current crisis requires careful examination grounded in a perspective that seeks to understand, from every direction, the role social structures play in the violence experienced in everyday life for people in South Sudan. Pragmatic solidarity neither promises quick and easy answers, nor is it a panacea to all social problems that exist in any one area. It is a way to reflect realities that are difficult to understand or provide reliable information that is not easily accessed, to refute “alternative facts.” Critical reporting and careful analyses are needed, now more than ever. Applied anthropologists, international journalists, and their colleagues practicing pragmatic solidarity can contribute to influence solutions, especially when the United States, upon issuing its most recent travel bans and stance against admitting refugees appears unlikely to press for actions to build a stronger coalition to address the humanitarian atrocities in South Sudan.

Finally, The Applied Anthropologist would like to thank the following dedicated reviewers for assisting us through the peer review of articles for this issue: Robert Uttaro, Ph.D.; Edith King, Ph.D.; Stacy Stephens, M.A.

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Vol. 36  
No. 1-2  
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## THE CRISIS IN SOUTH SUDAN: AN INTRODUCTION TO FOUR COMMENTARIES

PETER VAN ARSDALE AND TAMARA BANKS

The crisis in South Sudan seemingly worsens by the day. At the time of this writing, in late 2016, news broadcasts of impending – perhaps actual – genocide have reached audiences worldwide. Leaders of the Enough Project (noted below), who have monitored the situation in Sudan and South Sudan for years, state that the country is largely non-functional. Because we believe that applied anthropologists and international journalists have much to offer by joining forces in reporting on such crises, we are doing that here. (The first author is an applied anthropologist and educator, the second author an international journalist and media specialist.) The information we present in this introduction comes from our own on-site observations in South Sudan, as well as from well-known media and activist sources. The four accompanying commentaries rely on a variety of scholarly and related resources, as well as on-site observations in the case of Amum Okiech and Stranske/Delaney/Appell.

As witnessed elsewhere in Africa, most notably Nigeria, having an abundance of oil by no means assures prosperity for the masses. The first author saw glimmers of what was to become an abundant resource in then-Sudan in 1979, as Chevron opened its first successful oil field. Further exploration over the next 35 years led to remarkable discoveries throughout the region, as the second author recently observed. After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2005, many of Sudan's citizens – in both the north and south – believed that these potential riches, if well managed, could lead to improved economic conditions, and that the impending emergence of South Sudan as the world's newest nation would be financially secured. Despite signs from President Omar al-Bashir that his Khartoum-based regime would not make the transition easy, many residents believed that ethnic and religious tensions would ease; they hoped, as one educator told the first author in December, 2010, that a new South Sudan would allow Sudanese citizens, not merely Dinka or Nuer, to emerge and flourish.

With a brutal civil war underway since 2013, a complex web of factors is conspiring against the South Sudanese. From a broad economic perspective, the country's extraordinarily heavy reliance on oil has proven disastrous. The swath of wells in the south, running to Abyei at the Sudan – South Sudan border, tap rich sub-surface reservoirs, but lack of reliable maintenance systems, too few trained indigenous personnel, and reliance upon the north for piped oil transmission to Red Sea ports have led to vulnerabilities. Foreign production specialists, including Chinese, are finding it difficult to operate efficiently. Intense fighting exacerbates the problem. Some oil fields have been sabotaged and others left to the whims of

bureaucrats who have turned to kleptocracy. It is a stretch for any nation to transform crude oil, at the front end, into human service-productive revenues at the back end. For South Sudan, this stretch has become a chasm. The necessary administrative and fiscal structure is not in place; corruption has weakened essential institutions.

The problems of kleptocracy have become severe. As documented by representatives of The Sentry (Prendergast 2016), an initiative of the Enough Project, senior administrators and military leaders have been siphoning off revenues for their personal benefit. Several have purchased expensive homes elsewhere in East Africa. Several have opened bank accounts which contain funds dramatically disproportionate to their stated government salaries. We would stress that this is not stealing from the rich (i.e., oil producers) to benefit the poor (i.e., Sudanese citizens), but rather, stealing from the poor to benefit the nouveau riche (i.e., an emergent government elite).

A hoped-for "cultural homogenization," where national citizenship trumps ethnic stridence, is becoming a divisive "multi-ethnic morass," with ethnic favoritism and bias supplanting dreams of pan-national egalitarianism. The conflict is multi-dimensional, and we are particularly concerned about the role that child soldiers are playing in Jonglei State.

It is difficult to get accurate numbers on just how many child soldiers are now involved in South Sudan's internal conflict. But Human Rights Watch (Wheeler 2015) estimates that thousands of children as young as 13 years old have been, and continue to be, recruited by commanders on both sides of the conflict. Frightened and scarred physically, emotionally and mentally the youngsters carry AK-47s, as the second author has observed, transporting some from the capital, Juba, to the bush in Jonglei State (Turse 2016). Armed forces in what is now South Sudan – as well as in the north – began using child soldiers long before independence in 2011, but the recruitment has picked up pace. There are multiple reports that South Sudan's government recruited such soldiers for the latest phase of the conflict, gaining momentum since the fall of 2016 (see, e.g., UNHCR 2016). In many cases, armed groups in South Sudan intimidate the children to join by threatening not just family members but also threatening to steal their cattle, a key source of wealth and status.

As one of our key government informants has learned, South Sudanese are having difficulty transforming well-intended parliamentary policies into useful on-the-ground actions. Nowhere was this more apparent than in 2014, when (as reported by *The Economist* 2016) a "mad plan" was proposed to force companies and other organizations to fire their

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foreign workers within a month. Indigenous workers presumably then would quickly take over these posts, in turn bolstering local incomes and enhancing local communities. The government had to backtrack when companies and NGOs complained that they simply could not function without Kenyan and other well-trained immigrants. South Sudan does not have nearly enough qualified personnel. (It does have seven universities and colleges, most notably John Garang University and the University of Juba.)

The violence must be dissected. A theoretical orientation that encompasses notions of structural violence is helpful, because the conflict (as emphasized by journalist Aryn Baker, 2016: 22) "has been characterized by scorched earth tactics, ferocious massacres, systematic gang rapes, recruiting of child soldiers and even forced cannibalism. Both sides have been accused of war crimes." Structural violence analysis allows understandings of insidious institutions, disempowering politicians, marginalizing sub-populations, and fracturing ethnic relations (Van Arsdale and Smith, 2010). Such analysis indicates that weak institutions can more easily be corrupted and resources hijacked. Ethnic tensions that would normally be minimized and overridden can more easily bubble to the surface. Individual leaders' idiosyncracies and predilections can more easily take hold. Legal and judicial actions that might effectively ameliorate political disputes can more readily be swept aside, to be replaced by arbitrary and repressive measures enacted on a leader's whim.

What's to be done? Following The Sentry's analysis, grievance and greed – linked to extreme corruption – are powering the violence. Money laundering is wide spread. This organization's representatives believe that if you stop the cash, you stop the conflict. An "effective approach requires going after the ill-gotten assets of warlords and their foreign facilitators, including businesses and arms dealers.... The links between conflict and corruption [must be] confronted" (Clooney and Prendergast 2016: 75). No wonder several other analysts are suggesting, at the extreme, that the country be placed in a kind of trusteeship.

Following the work of U.S. congressional leaders, armed with evidence from a number of humanitarian organizations, the recent passage of the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act can lead to specific improvements. (As part of the National Defense Authorization Act, it was signed into law by President Obama on December 23, 2016.) One provision gives the President standing authority to impose sanctions on non-U.S. citizens (including government officials) guilty of corruption or gross human rights violations. Issues of illicit gain and complicity in such gain are being targeted.

Following our own journalistic/anthropological approach, journalists and media representatives – such as the second author – must continue to pursue robust, on-site coverage. It can be dangerous, but the international exposure of atrocities and political failures, as well as coverage of what is working with organizations such as Project Education South Sudan, remains critical. This type of coverage must be complemented by prag-

matic anthropological analyses of South Sudan institutions, NGOs, and IGOs, such as by the first author.

Following the work of advocacy organizations such as South Sudan Reborn, activists and humanitarians must continue to speak out. From a U.S. perspective, this is done best as South Sudanese in the diaspora and Americans work hand-in-hand. In 2010, the first author spoke with Roger Winter, one of the authors of the Comprehensive Peace Accord; he was cautiously optimistic about what was to transpire. While he is undoubtedly discouraged today, he and other civilian experts like him – including savvy diplomats – should be brought back into the process as advisors. We should engage expeditionary diplomacy.

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Vol. 36  
No. 1-2  
2016

THE CIVIL WARS IN SOUTH SUDAN: AN HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL COMMENTARY

PA'GAN AMUM OKIECH

## ABSTRACT

South Sudan gained its independence on July 9th, 2011. The world's newest nation was born out of conflict. By the time Sudan gained its independence from Britain in January, 1956, it was already mired in a brutal civil war waged by a south Sudanese insurgency. The causes of the Sudanese civil war(s) which pitted the northern Sudanese elites/governments against the people of southern Sudan, and led to the later separation of South Sudan, are rooted in conflicts of identities. The Sudanese ruling elites adopted a narrow and limited vision for the nation state they were determined to build. This was reflected in policies of exclusion and marginalization of south Sudanese by the north Sudanese elites who inherited the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium State in Sudan (Deng 1995). They defined their mission as that of building an Arab Islamic nation-state. This was viciously pursued against the glaring contradictory backdrop which was and still is a "country with extraordinary ethnic and cultural diversity and 'a microcosm of Africa' " (Akolawin 1973). This commentary concludes with specific suggestions to ameliorate the crisis.

## The Historical Context

South Sudanese are neither Arabs nor Muslims. Most are ethnic Africans, and mostly Christians and followers of African traditional beliefs. Hence, they were automatically excluded and marginalized from the original Sudanese process of state and nation-building. When they demanded their rights to be included as equal citizens, they were denied and violently suppressed. This resulted in two long, devastating civil wars. These wars were brutal and led to the killing and uprooting of millions of South Sudanese over several decades. The Sudanese state miserably failed to rise to the challenge of harnessing the Sudanese diversity as a source of strength to build a multicultural non-racist and non-sexist society (Aldehaib 2010).

In addition to exclusion and violent suppression, South Sudanese were subjected to forced assimilation in the form of Arabization and Islamization. Most northern Sudanese elites and political parties were from the school of thought purporting that Arabism and Islam were to be the only bases of building the Sudanese nation state to the exclusion of other elements of the Sudanese cultural mosaic (El-Affendi 1990).

The struggle of the people of South Sudan was, therefore, primarily aimed at self-determination as the goal. They employed strategies and political platforms expressed in different demands and goals which would lead to one of two outcomes. The first was to force their inclusion as equal stakeholders in Sudan. This was to be achieved by dictating to the northern elites the redefinition of the Sudanese nation-state project, to make it inclusive of all Sudanese, based on acceptance and respect of their diversity. If this objective was not to be achieved, the second goal was for southerners to break away from the Islamic Arabized Sudan model and form their own independent state.

The first war started in 1955 and ended with the Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972 (*Addis Ababa Agreement on the Problem of South Sudan* | *UN Peacemaker* 1972). It was

waged by a southern Sudanese insurgent army called the Anyanya Movement. The agreement granted South Sudan regional autonomy. Although the Anyanya Movement fought for separation and total independence from Sudan, the Addis Ababa Agreement was a compromise made by both parties. It granted the southerners an autonomous self-rule within a united Sudan. This arrangement lasted for a decade but was abrogated by the government of Sudan. The result was the immediate outbreak of the second war which started in earnest in 1983.

A movement and an army were established under the name: Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/SPLA). It was led by Dr. John Garang de Mabior as the Chairman and Commander-in-Chief. The SPLM under Garang put forward the New Sudan Vision to fundamentally transform Sudan. Garang proposed that the solution of the problem of Sudan did not end with mere separation of the South but in effecting a paradigm shift in the center of power in Khartoum. With this vision, Garang united the struggle of the people of the South with the struggle of the people of other marginalized areas of the North, as well as with the democratic forces in the center of power (El-Affendi 1990). The most compelling attribute of Garang was his ability to unite various southern Sudanese ethnic groups and tribes around a common goal. "By 1994 a new 'nation within a nation' called New Sudan was declared within the war zone of the South; this new administrative structure introduced a democratic apparatus into the Southern Sudan and while the North/South war continues, intra- Southern Sudan strife virulent since the 1970s has begun to decline" (Beswick 1998). Harkening back to 1990, to reflect, with this struggle "the conditions for the establishment of a modern state [in South Sudan] may have been created, and the task of state builders made that much easier, albeit at a monstrously high cost in human terms" (El-Affendi 1990).



After arduous negotiations, which were mediated by regional and international partners, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of Sudan (GoS) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) was signed in Naivasha, Kenya, on January 9th, 2005. The CPA recognized the right of self-determination for the people of South Sudan, to be exercised in a referendum vote after a six-year interim period (Government of Sudan and Sudan's People Liberation Movement/Army 2005).

Yet barely six months after the signing of the CPA, South Sudan was facing a tragedy of historic proportions. John Garang died in a helicopter crash on his return from Kampala on July 30th, 2005. Garang was a unifying, charismatic, and larger-than-life character who drew admiration from leaders across the globe. He had earned his doctorate at Iowa State University and was well known in American circles. His sudden death dealt a blow to the Sudanese in general and South Sudanese in particular. The only potential beneficiary of his death was the Sudanese state under Omar al-Bashir, who could have easily exploited the vacuum. The SPLM, on the other hand, accurately surveyed its strategically weak position and decided to immediately replace him. The SPLM nominated Garang's deputy, Salva Kiir Mayardit, to be the new Chairman and thus leader of the movement.

## A New Nation

Despite the obstruction and machinations of the National Congress Party of Sudan, on January 9th, 2011, the southern Sudanese people exercised their right in a referendum and voted overwhelmingly (98.9%) to secede from Sudan. On July 9th, 2011, South Sudan was declared an independent state. South Sudanese, others in the region, and indeed the entire world seemed jubilant and hopeful. The vision of "One Nation, One People" was going to be pursued and hopefully achieved within this new independent polity. Yet, to the chagrin of South Sudanese and their friends and allies, the new leader of the SPLM, General Kiir, exhibited a uniquely tribal and sectarian outlook with an accompanying myopic governing philosophy. Regional, tribalist, and sectarian policies came to be vigorously pursued by Kiir and his tribal/sectarian inner circle. The unity of all tribes of South Sudan, suggested by the CPA, was at risk and "as a result, a divisive and polluted environment at independence has rekindled the South - South divisions, rivalries and animosities which led to weaken the high spirit of oneness, leading to cast doubts on the assumed unity and solidarity of the people of South Sudan, making a number of scholars and observers to speculate that the unity and oneness of South Sudanese shown in the overwhelming vote to secede will unravel dangerous internal divisions with the loss of the North as the common enemy" (Laudati 2011). This early, post-independence statement proved to be a spot-on prediction.

Sustainable peace and progress in building a free and prosperous South Sudan were not only predicated on having an independent state for South Sudanese to call their own but was

"also a matter of addressing the causes of the fracture lines in Southern Sudan. Overlooking these intra-South Sudan divisions and its ongoing latent conflicts, promises to undermine the current [post-CPA] peace process. It also threatens to usurp the South's sovereignty and disrupt its socio-economic recovery" (Laudati 2011). To astute analysts, fracture lines and divisive strategies clearly were apparent as early as 2011.

## Renewed Struggles

President Kiir abandoned the use of the party organs to solve policy differences and the power struggle, and instead decided to rely heavily on a council of his elder tribesmen called the Jieng Council of Elders (JCE). He tribalized the political struggle within the SPLM by recruiting a private army from his own tribe, the Dinka, also known as Jieng. These militia came to be known as Mathiang Anyor and Dutku Beny, and were recruited from Northern Bahr El Ghazal and Warab states in 2012. On December 15th, 2013, Kiir launched the war against his opponents in the SPLM leadership. South Sudan was plunged into a devastating civil war barely two years after independence. The war was an attempt to stifle dissent within the party, and to change the direction of both party and country away from building a democratically inclusive nation state, into a dictatorial, tribally dominated state. Kiir deliberately decided to turn the political dispute and power struggle within the SPLM into an inter-tribal war, initially between the Dinka and the Nuer, the tribe of Dr. Riek Machar, his then Vice President-cum-opponent. He decided to disarm the Nuer soldiers and began ethnically targeted killings against Nuer civilians in Juba, the nation's capital, by his militia (AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan 2014). In turn, Riek Machar did the same, by exploiting Nuer anger and rage in reaction to the massacre of "his (Nuer) citizens." Riek Machar therefore had launched a massive Nuer-based rebellion (Waal et al. 2014).

In sum, the idealized trans-ethnic leadership of the new nation never materialized. The abandonment of the inclusive vision by the top leadership of the SPLM led to an ominous internal power struggle, causing a rapid disintegration of both the SPLM, the ruling party in South Sudan, and the SPLA, the supposedly-aligned national army. The SPLM splintered into three factions (IG, IO, and FD) and the SPLA broke up into several warring tribal factions and militias (King 2014).

Regional representatives and the international community intervened, mediating an agreement among the South Sudanese warring parties. In August 2015, the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) was signed. President Kiir was initially resistant to signing it, citing certain technical and political reservations (Government of Sudan and Sudan's People Liberation Movement/Army 2005). In my opinion, Kiir and his cohorts were – and still are – resistant to all forms of political settlement. Kiir and his chief of general staff were – and still are – adamant in pursuing a military solution whereby their opponents will be either annihilated or subjugated. How-





ever, the regional representatives and other international partners pressured him and he signed the agreement in Juba.

After the agreement was signed, by spring 2016 the government had stalled and begun employing delay tactics, so that the agreement would remain "a document on paper," never to be implemented. After a lot of push and pull, Riek Machar arrived in Juba and was sworn in (again) as the Vice President. With the implementation of the agreement clearly in jeopardy, tensions again started to rise among the previously warring parties. True to their intentions, Kiir and his tribal circle were still on course to destroy the agreement from within (Pinaud 2016). By July, 2016, the agreement had, for all practical purposes, collapsed. Fighting broke out in the Presidential Palace while both leaders were in a meeting inside. Within days, Riek Machar's headquarters were reduced to rubble, and he was running for his life in the Equatorial region. He was pursued by the Kiir government for forty days, until he eventually entered the Democratic Republic of the Congo where he was rescued by the United Nations Mission.

## The Role of Anthropologists

The civil war which has quickly engulfed South Sudan and caused a national existential crisis has become a subject of study by various scholars seeking to understand its root causes. South Sudanese, in their disillusionment and despair, are themselves asking questions while trying to understand the nature and causes of this devastating war. The international media came to categorize it as an ethnic civil war or a civil war with ethnic overtones. It became clear to certain scholars that the causes of this crisis are rooted in the historical legacies of the long civil war that seemed to have been ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in January, 2005. According to John Akec (2014), "not only history, but anthropology matters also in understanding the root causes and parameters of ethnic conflict." Even mediators and foreign governments interested in helping South Sudanese to end the conflict started to seek the advice of anthropologists. This is what Sharon Hutchinson and Naomi Pendle reported in *Anthropology News*: "...when violence erupted in South Sudan in December 2013, the UN and the Obama administration reached out to regional experts, including anthropologists, to gain a better understanding of the crisis" (Reuss 2015). Noted anthropologist Gunner Sørbø (2014): "...while there has never been a complete divide along ethnic lines, the power struggle between leaders from Dinka and Nuer ethnicities has also involved a component of ethnicity when mobilizing a support base, or as the unintended consequence or a by-product of such a power struggle."

## Conclusions and Solutions

This war started as a political dispute and a power struggle within the SPLM. The SPLM leadership had abandoned the state- and nation-building project based on the original vision of John Garang. President Kiir reduced himself from the status of a true national leader and first president of the new nation, into a tribal chieftain turning the conflict into an ethnic war. He,

in a cynical way, revived the traditional animosities between the Dinka and the Nuer, as the two largest nationalities-cum-ethnicities in South Sudan. Riek Machar unfortunately exploited and reciprocated in counter-tribalist fashion. As a result of this myopic tribal and sectarian insurgency and counter-insurgency, the civil war in South Sudan continues developing strong tribal overtones which cannot be ignored.

The government in Juba destroyed the chance for peace when it reluctantly signed the peace agreement and then proceeded to obstruct its implementation, ending with the fighting discussed above. The government has expanded the war, antagonizing literally all the rest of the tribes such as the Shilluk, the Murle, the Fertit, the Azande and the Kakwua. Hate speech and ethnically targeted killings and rapes are on the rise. South Sudan is in danger of descending into genocide and all-out ethnic war. Adama Dieng, the United Nations Secretary General's Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide, reported with dismay that there is a strong risk of violence escalating along ethnic lines into genocide (United Nations News Service Section 2016). Areas of the country which were previously peaceful are no longer safe (Lynch 2016). Neighboring countries and the international community also must bear some responsibility for the latest developments. When Kiir pursued Riek Machar in an attempt to eliminate him, no one in the region or elsewhere in the world condemned that or intervened. Instead, the United States Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan clearly stated that the U.S. was in favor of the exclusion of Riek Machar (Reuters 2016). The message to other oppressed people is that the only solution to this kind of predicament is to bear arms and use military force against a government. As a direct result, there is an increase in the number of armed groups, with new ones popping up every few weeks in South Sudan (Reuters 2016). On the other hand, Kiir is emboldened to continue oppressing his people, violently suppressing dissent and dishonoring agreements. He can clearly see that he is not paying any price for this glaring obstruction of peace. Instead, he continues to consolidate power.

## My colleagues and I believe that solutions lie in the following steps:

1. Implementation of UN Security Council resolutions 2304 and 2206 (United Nations 2016), (United Nations 2015).
2. The United Nations, together with the African Union, takes the initiative to organize an inclusive roundtable conference. All stakeholders must take South Sudan back to the drawing board to agree on a new transition, as well as a new social and political contract to serve as a framework for building a peaceful, free, and prosperous nation (Wel 2016).
3. The proposed South Sudan Hybrid Court must be established as soon as possible per ARCSS (Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission 2015). Accountability must be at the center of hoped-for departures from the perpetual impunity exhibited by the warring factions. Accountability will also

bring about human rights-related retributive justice to the many victims and survivors of this war.

4. An effort to harmonize the world's stance on the issue of South Sudan is important.
5. Dissolution of the current sectarian kleptocratic government is necessary. The wrangling and the dysfunctionality of the current system cannot be solved through copy-and-paste but rather through a total reboot and restart (Johnson 2016).
6. South Sudan should be put under a neo-trusteeship system of governance. In conjunction, a government of South Sudanese technocrats should be installed and supervised by the UN/AU Trustee. Beside supervising the technocrats, the Trustee should be the custodian of the oil revenues in a secured escrow account. The government must build the necessary infrastructure to build a functioning state. It must also work to create an environment conducive for a free and fair election at the end of the Trusteeship (South Sudan Reborn 2016).

This war brought forth a culture of terror never known to South Sudanese. The government militia raped women, broke into shops, looted homes, and ransacked with an impunity of shocking proportions. The once-disciplined SPLA has been turned into a tribalist, barbaric killing machine. It uses tactics similar and at times worse than those used by the oppressors in Khartoum.

The ultimate solution to the conflict in South Sudan lies with building an inclusive nation. South Sudan must return to the vision of Dr. John Garang: A vision of a harmonious multi-cultural and multiethnic society based on South Sudanese commonalities. Celebrating the diversity and uniqueness of all 64 tribes of South Sudan is the only bridge to a free, peaceful, and prosperous nation.

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### ABSTRACT

The cycle of violence and revenge in South Sudan continues. A predatory conflict is underway. Following its independence in 2011, the world's newest country was full of hope and optimism for a more peaceful future. Instead, recent targeted violence against civilians by all parties to the conflict has turned this optimism into distrust, displacement, and profound suffering. Although the political and humanitarian situation has been tense since December 2013, the volatile environment in South Sudan deteriorated further in mid-2016. This commentary emphasizes the events of July, 2016, and the long-term effects – including psychosocial and PTSD – that these events have had on innocent civilians caught in the crossfire. Poor mental health is proving to be destabilizing.

### The Increasing Humanitarian Crisis

The social fabric holding South Sudan together is being torn apart. Many civilians have experienced violence and fled, either within the country or beyond. Psychosocial issues are among those being encountered. While the rate of PTSD continues to grow, the ability of those in South Sudan to cope is diminished both by the increasing distrust among the local communities and by the lack of urgently needed professional psychosocial support throughout the country. While political and military elites vie for power seemingly without regard to those civilians they are meant to protect, the social and psychological impacts of this half-century of violence on civilians will likely be felt for decades to come.

Tensions had been building for weeks (UN Security Council, 2016) when clashes between President Salva Kiir's Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) government and supporters of Vice President Riek Machar's Sudan People's Liberation Movement-In-Opposition (SPLM-IO) brought three days of death and destruction to South Sudan's capital in July, 2016. Individual but related incidents of violence occurred in the capital in the ten days prior to the events discussed in detail below, including the shooting of a Norwegian embassy car and the shooting at a hotel in town. When SPLA soldiers attempted to arrest members of Machar's guard at a checkpoint, they resisted with force. Tension was reportedly so palpable that many UNMISS and humanitarian officials were told to go home at lunchtime on July 8<sup>th</sup> out of concern for their safety. Violence reached a crescendo on July 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> near two separate UN facilities in the capital (Spink and Wells, 2016). The United Nations' recent "Executive Summary of the Independent Special Investigation into the violence which occurred in Juba in 2016 and UNMISS response" confirmed that during this chaotic period, both SPLA and the SPLM-IO forces fired indiscriminately, committed violence against UN facilities and the Protection of Civilians (POC) sites alongside the UN camps, and deliberately attacked civilians (Executive Summary, Juba, 2016). Several similar attacks had

occurred earlier at other POC sites (Executive Summary, Malakal, 2016).

Although a nation's government is primarily charged with protecting its own civilians, the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) instead engaged in predatory behavior meant to terrorize the local population. The SPLA deliberately targeted civilian populations in their operations. It used tanks and artillery in known civilian areas, even bombing some of those neighborhoods from helicopter gunships (Amnesty International, 2016b). Forces loyal to the GoSS also attacked Terrain camp (Executive Summary, Juba, 2016), where they terrorized and raped humanitarians sheltering there and killed a local journalist reportedly because his tribal scarring showed he was Nuer. The SPLA restricted the movement of fleeing civilians, using force to stop them from trying to reach safe areas. "SPLA soldiers [also] conducted house-to-house searches during which they carried out extensive looting as well as rapes, abductions, and summary executions, at times targeting civilians on ethnic grounds" (Spink and Wells, 2016).

Not to be outdone, opposition forces loyal to Machar deployed into areas heavily populated by civilians. Although they did not have the same kinds of heavy weapons as those available to the SPLA, they too put civilians at risk by conducting operations in close proximity to them. "It is not clear whether in doing so the fighters intended to shield themselves from attack or impede military operations – which would constitute the war crime of using human shields – but regardless of their intention, the impact of such manoeuvres was to endanger the thousands of civilians sheltering in the sites" (Amnesty International, 2016b).

Instead of actively trying to protect the South Sudanese, predatory state and non-state actors in South Sudan are deliberately targeting innocent civilians based on their ethnicity and perceived political or tribal affiliations. Even before this recent violence in Juba, human rights violations were committed systematically, in most cases with extreme brutality (African Union, 2014), and as part of their military tactics.

Now reports confirm that “all parties to the conflict have perpetrated gross violations and abuses of international human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law, including attacks against civilians, rape and sexual violence, arbitrary arrest and detention, abduction and attacks on journalists, as well as United Nations personnel and peacekeeping facilities” (UNHCHR, 2016). In the weeks following this surge of violence, the incidents of sexual violence increased (Executive Summary, Juba, 2016). In search of food and firewood for their families, women and girls were often raped by forces aligned with the GoSS when they left the protected confines of the POC sites (Executive Summary, Juba, 2016; Spink and Wells, 2016). Nuer women were raped in order to hurt and subjugate them, punish their husbands, and humiliate their wider ethnic group (Amnesty International, 2016b). With the human rights situation in South Sudan rapidly deteriorating, there appears to be an increasing general disregard for human life that has left a legacy of fear and distrust among the people of the country. Violence against civilians and gross human rights violations by all parties to the conflict continue in a culture of impunity, and civilians are the ones who suffer the most.

While the SPLA and the SPLM-IO have deliberately targeted civilians as a tactic of war, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) failed to protect civilians in the July, 2016, violence. Following the violence in 2013, the UN Security Council authorized an increase in the size of the UNMISS force. It also updated the mandate to focus on protecting civilians, monitoring and investigating human rights abuses, facilitating aid delivery, and supporting the cessation-of-hostilities deal. Even with the changes in mandate and force projection, peacekeepers have been unable to effectively do their job in part because the GoSS has restricted their movement and ability to protect civilians in direct violation of the Status of Forces Agreement. Nonetheless, peacekeepers did not have the political will, motivation, or means to protect civilians in July, 2016.

Peacekeepers' engagement intensified on July 10, when an RPG wounded six Chinese peacekeepers outside a POC site known as POC1. Although they were evacuated to the closest UN medical facility in Juba for treatment, they were unable to get to the Level 1 medical facility 15 km away where they could have received needed blood transfusions and proper medical care. Instead, insecure conditions and an inability to get a military escort from the SPLM to accompany them to the medical facility for 16 hours led to two of the peacekeepers dying. Other Chinese peacekeepers shaken by the lack of medical care left POC1 largely unguarded. Without perimeter security, approximately 5000 civilians jumped over barbed wire fences to retreat further into the core UN House base. Ethiopian peacekeepers at two other POC sites (POC3 and Tongping near the Juba International Airport) largely withdrew from their perimeter security posts but still worked to evacuate casualties and engage when civilians were being targeted. Rwandan peacekeepers at the Tongping site eventually created an opening in the perimeter fencing to usher fleeing civilians into the site for protection when access to the site through the gate was closed

off due to gunfire. Outside the POC sites, peacekeepers were unable or unwilling to protect civilians. When SPLA soldiers who attacked the Terrain compound sexually assaulted aid workers and killed a local journalist, a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) was ordered to intervene. No peacekeeping contingent accepted the request, and no QRF left the UN House gate (Spink and Wells, 2016).

While the United Nations recognizes that protecting POC sites, some of which house upwards of 20,000 people, is beyond the capability of the UNMISS peacekeeping mission, it also understands that those sites will be a part of the mission for years to come. “The Special Investigation found that the lack of preparedness, ineffective command and control and a risk-averse or ‘inward-looking’ posture resulted in a loss of trust and confidence – particularly by the local population and humanitarian agencies – in the will and skill of UNMISS military, police to be proactive and show a determined posture to protect civilians under threat, including from sexual violence and human rights violations” (Executive Summary, Juba, 2016). Peacekeepers had limited mobility due to constant Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) violations committed by the GoSS, restricting their free movement throughout the country. Nonetheless, “with inadequate contingency planning and a lack of understanding of the ROE [Rules of Engagement], the general consensus is that the UNMISS peacekeepers did not do enough to protect civilians” (Spink and Wells, 2016). While these POC sites have created unrealistic expectations of the UNMISS peacekeepers among the civilian population, they nonetheless remain among the best protected areas in South Sudan.

The violence has uprooted millions of people, only magnifying the humanitarian needs of the country. According to OCHA's Humanitarian Bulletin (October 20, 2016), 1.6 million were internally displaced and 1.0 million were refugees in neighboring countries. More than 50% of those displaced were children. As of September 29, 2016, the total number of civilians seeking shelter and protection in six POC sites located on UNMISS bases was 202,019 (UNMISS “Protection of Civilians” [POC] Sites, 2016). The constant uprooting and displacement of so many of the South Sudanese means they cannot farm their own land (Al Jazeera, 2016) or feed their own cattle, therefore contributing greatly to the fact that more than 4.8 million people were food insecure in July (OCHA, 2016). Since the July fighting, many have been unable to meet their most basic needs. The annual inflation rate surged to almost 730% in August, 2016, with food costs rising almost 850% (Blanchard, 2016). Aid stocks were looted in the July fighting including 4,500 metric tons of food taken from the World Food Programme's main warehouse in Juba, which would have fed 220,000 people for a month (Blanchard, 2016). Ongoing security issues mean that many humanitarian agencies are unwilling to pre-position supplies throughout the country, necessary for the period when many areas of the country become inaccessible during the rainy season. “The humanitarian response in South Sudan, one of the most expensive in the world, has been constrained by funding shortfalls, access challenges, bureaucratic restrictions by the govern-



ment, threats against U.N. and other aid agency personnel, and ongoing hostilities” (Blanchard, 2016).

## Psychological Distress

While the humanitarian situation is extremely serious, there is also an urgent need to address the psychological suffering of the civilian population. According to research conducted by the South Sudan Law Society even before this latest surge in violence, 63% of the respondents had a close family member who had been killed and 41% had personally witnessed a friend or family member being killed (Deng, et al., 2015). There have been reports of people being burned alive in hospitals and places of worship, captured people being forced to eat human flesh or drink human blood, rape and gang rape of women of all ages, and mass burials (African Union, 2014). Violence against civilians and witnessing such acts of violence has severe and serious consequences to an individual’s mental and physical well-being.

Forty-one percent of those surveyed by the South Sudan Law Society showed symptoms consistent with a PTSD diagnosis, a rate similar to that for PTSD among the civilian population following the genocides in Rwanda and Cambodia (Deng, et al., 2015). Internally displaced South Sudanese also report specific symptoms consistent with PTSD including headaches, stomachaches, back pain, nightmares, an inability to sleep, a lack of interest in food, irritability, difficulty maintaining personal relationships, and thoughts of suicide. A large majority of those interviewed expressed a desire to receive professional psychosocial support services to treat their psychological distress. Unfortunately, many of those interviewed said they already had been interviewed (sometimes more than once) about what they had seen or experienced but had not received any medical attention. While some friends and relatives have reportedly been a source of comfort for those suffering from PTSD-like symptoms, the continued conflict and its mass displacement have weakened these community-led support networks (Amnesty International, 2016a).

Despite the clear need for professional psychosocial support services throughout the country to help the population cope, mental health and psychosocial support services in South Sudan are extremely limited. Juba Teaching Hospital is the only facility in the country that provides psychiatric care, but the hospital has just 12 beds for this purpose. There are only two practicing psychiatrists in the country, but neither sees patients full-time. Psychosocial support for those who have suffered from the loss of a close friend or family member, or who have witnessed violence firsthand, has also not been a priority for humanitarian groups operating in the country; these organizations are more focused on feeding and sheltering the civilian population until the political situation settles. Because of a lack of understanding of mental health issues by the local population and an inability to appropriately treat them even if they were able to, most people with mental health conditions are housed in prisons whether or not they have committed a crime. In these terrible conditions,

those with mental health issues are often literally left in chains; some have died from diarrhea and dehydration. Poor mental health in South Sudan has been and will continue to be a major destabilizing force at all levels of society (Amnesty International, 2016a). As more and more people experience brutal violence in South Sudan, the need for access to psychosocial support services will continue to increase. In a country where at least two generations of families have known nothing but violence and conflict, many people have never experienced peace.

## Ethnic Challenges, Political Tensions, and the Near Future

What was once a political struggle has now divided the country along ethnic lines. Brutal violence of the magnitude the South Sudanese are experiencing also tears apart the social fabric that tenuously holds together a society which recently aspired to be civil and strong. Whereas a healthy society can rely on friends and neighbors for financial or emotional support in times of need, a society which has suffered so greatly has a tendency to turn inward. Over time and through many painful experiences, tribal affiliation becomes less a source of pride and joy and more a source of protection. Peaceful relationships between communities once solidified through cattle trading and dowries (as confirmed through primary research conducted by the author in 2011) no longer exist. Effective methods of communication among clans have been disrupted. Without a reason for non-violent and diplomatic communication, community cohesion shatters. “Nearly 40 percent of respondents said that people from other ethnic groups cannot be trusted.... The three ethnic groups that are most commonly associated with the conflict – the Dinka, Nuer and Shilluk – are also the most likely to express a negative change in their view of other ethnic groups as a result of the conflict” (Deng, et al., 2015). When the fighting eventually stops, it will require many dedicated years of community engagement and mediation to repair the extensive harm done to the very fabric of South Sudanese society (Deng, et al., 2015).

In summary, political tensions in the country are worsening. I believe that there has been a downward spiral of mistrust, corruption, abuse of power, and violence against civilians. In July, 2015, National Security Advisor Susan Rice said that the GoSS “has abdicated its responsibilities, failed to protect its citizens, and squandered its legitimacy” (White House, 2015). Just one year later, both the SPLA and the SPLM-IO continue to commit deliberate violence against their nation’s own civilians in the name of greed and their desire for power. I further believe that the events of July, 2016, reconfirmed that the people of South Sudan can no longer trust their own government to protect them as it currently functions. Nor can they trust the opposition to protect them. While UNMISS showed that it is unable to protect civilians when needed the most, it nonetheless remains the highest functioning and best-intentioned armed actor operating in South Sudan. However, with a lack of funding, equipment, training, and robust Rules of Engagement (ROE) that is so often the case in peacekeeping contexts, I believe that civilians quickly



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lose hope in their blue helmet protectors. With inevitable major changes to its operating functions and structure, perhaps UNMISS in the near future will be able to do more to bring peace and stability back to the deserving civilians of South Sudan.

While encouraging civilians to return to their normal lives in their communities by increasing security throughout South Sudan remains a top priority, the international community must also prioritize supporting appropriate mechanisms to help civilians cope with the incredible horrors so many have witnessed. When the fighting in South Sudan finally comes to an end, the decades of reconciliation and rebuilding will have only begun.

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Vol. 36  
No. 1-2  
2016

## CORROSIVE CRISIS: AN ANALYSIS OF SECTORAL ISSUES IN SOUTH SUDAN

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### ABSTRACT

This commentary emphasizes critical sectoral issues that have accompanied the recent crisis in South Sudan. These can be assessed not only sectorally, but also in combination to determine the impacts on the inability to sustain livelihoods. The ongoing violence is corrosive as both quantitative and qualitative indicators clearly show. I conclude with an assessment of the humanitarian situation and recommend ways in which U.S. diplomatic involvement and action by a revamped South Sudanese government can prove beneficial.

### Introduction to the Crisis:

Since Sudan's independence from Britain in 1956, the country has been plagued by violence and civil conflict between factions in the South and North, beginning in 1962 with the first civil war, and again in 1983 until the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 (Brosché 2009). With the creation in 2011 of the world's newest nation, South Sudan, after a peaceful hiatus severe conflict has again ensued. This commentary emphasizes critical issues that have accompanied the recent crisis from a sectoral-analytic perspective. Health, food, personal and infrastructure security are among the most important; when assessed not only sectorally, but also in combination, the impacts on the inability to sustain livelihoods can clearly be seen. The ongoing violence is corrosive as both quantitative and qualitative indicators indicate. As I stress later, U.S. diplomatic involvement and action by a revamped South Sudanese government can ultimately make a difference.

From the beginning (i.e., pre-2011) divisions in the peace-building process were fluid, thus cooperation and trust building never had a permanence, which are necessary for long term institutional building. Factions of the North and the South, some of which came to be known and consolidated within the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), often splintered off and then reconnected (Brosché 2009). Prior to South Sudan's formal emergence, various sides frequently committed massive human rights violations and purposefully divided people along ethnic lines during the conflicts, but especially in the 1990s and early 2000s (Brosché 2009). The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 allowed the South Sudanese to exercise their desire for self-determination and later establish the new nation via referendum. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement also set up a path for institution-building and creation of an effective state in South Sudan by the SPLM/A (Wolpe, et al. 2011). South Sudan was required to create its institutions from scratch, yet lacked the technical skills and organizational capacity to fill government positions beyond the ministerial level (Wolpe, et

al. 2011). I believe that this was an oversight by UNMISS and the United States government, both of whom were aiding in the peacemaking process. That, coupled with lack of political will to carry out the CPA and inability to create effective oversight of oil resource development, has created a terrible situation where the government of South Sudan is not held accountable for the needs of its citizens.

After the formal creation of South Sudan, violence and disagreement between President Salva Kiir and his government forces, and Vice President Riek Machar and troops loyal to him, have created instability and ensured lack of government capacity in providing for the South Sudanese (*The Economist* 2016). Dinka tribesmen make up most of the president's army while Nuer tribesmen make up most of the opposition forces, creating ethnic undertones to the current conflict which the President and Vice President have exploited (*The Economist* 2016). Between December, 2013, and November, 2014, between 50,000 and 100,000 were estimated to have died, many of these deaths purposeful and considered murder (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2016b). Despite a resolution-of-conflict agreement in August, 2015, the violence continued, and between April and August, 2015, an estimated 1,080 additional people were killed (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2016b). During 2016 thousands more have died. Institutions functioned only for a brief time, a situation which ensured that the population would not socially and economically benefit, and that severely jeopardized various protection mechanisms in conjunction with incipient health, water/sanitation/hygiene (WASH), food and shelter programs. Outside humanitarians and erstwhile Sudanese are struggling to provide these things in the absence of a functioning government.

### Key Impacts

With violence and instability almost constant since 2011, the impacts on South Sudanese life include decreased abilities to sustain livelihoods, to provide the basic necessities (i.e., provision rights) of food, water, shelter, and sanitation, to pro-



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mote healthcare, and to enable personal security. Displacement and disruption have become the norm.

Early on, the amount of aid provided to the South Sudanese government without conditionality's created a context where the President and Vice President could fund their armies instead of building responsive democratic institutions. Both sides became indiscriminate in their attacks and continued to target not only civilians but humanitarian actors as well. In July, 2016, there were 123 reported cases of people killed by government or allied militias while fleeing or hiding (Amnesty International 2016). At the time of this writing, there are 1.6 million internally displaced persons in South Sudan and 103,500 who have fled to Uganda (Nyakairu and Moyo 2016). Following earlier atrocities, armed groups have continued to abduct children and force them into military service, with 8,919 cases reported open (children separated or missing) as of September, 2016 (Mdoe and Ibrahim Asindua 2016a). Earlier, within an eight-month period, it was estimated that 1,430 civilians were raped and 1,630 were abducted (UN Population Fund 2016), and this does not take into account the number of cases that go unreported due to the huge stigma associated with rape in South Sudan. This has placed tremendous stress on humanitarian actors to ensure safety for South Sudanese both inside Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites and outside.

The threat of violence, destruction and looting of homes has pushed civilians into displacement. There are few avenues by which people can access pathways to sustainable livelihoods. The United Nations reports that food inflation recently reached 850%, 3.9 million are food insecure, and 3.6 million are food stressed (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2016b). This, combined with disruption of livelihoods, has created a situation where South Sudanese families are either not getting the nutrition they need to survive or are highly dependent on humanitarian aid organizations to provide sustenance. Nearly two-thirds of the 55 counties in South Sudan have a global acute malnutrition rate that is approximately 15%, and two counties have a rate that is greater than 30% (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2016b). Increased food insecurity also leads to increased risk of personal violence and gender-based violence (GBV) because women have to travel outside the PoC sites for food and firewood (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2016c).

Looting and destruction of health infrastructure and resources, combined with displacement, over-crowding, and a massive influx of people into PoC sites, have created a breeding ground for diseases to spread, this linked in turn to inadequate water and sanitation. By estimate, there is only one doctor for every 65,574 people and one midwife for every 39,088 women (World Health Organization 2016a) because the government does not have the capacity or the political will to prioritize the employment of healthcare workers for the benefit of its citizens (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2016b). As of late 2016, 78% of the health facilities in South Sudan were damaged (Fundira and Okara Wanyama 2016) and there were no standard pharmaceutical warehouses across the country for the repositioning of supplies to combat various

diseases (Fundira and Okara Wanyama 2016). The lack of medical personnel and supplies severely has limited South Sudanese access to healthcare during this conflict period, and these will be most needed when the inevitable outbreak of an infectious disease like cholera recurs.

Additionally, citizens are probably less likely to seek out medical help since this would potentially put them at risk for violence. The concentration of people in and around the PoC sites has also created several adverse health risks. The disruption of everyday life has hampered access to adequate water supply and sanitation, which has left only 34% of people with access to improved sanitation, only 27% enabled to dispose of their excreta, only 14% equipped for good hygiene, and only 13% of females enabled for good menstrual hygiene management, according to UNICEF (UN Children's Fund, WASH Cluster 2016). The lack of access to adequate sanitation, in turn, has led to a recent cholera outbreak affecting eight counties. There is an acute watery diarrhea incidence of 84 per 100,000 cases and an acute bloody diarrhea incidence of 8 per 100,000 cases (World Health Organization 2016b). Malaria and acute respiratory infection are the top two causes of non-violent morbidity among South Sudanese. All communicable diseases are exacerbated by at-risk people being in closer contact with one another, in camps and ever more-crowded towns.

## Responses

The protracted violence in South Sudan has created a situation where citizens have few normal pathways to access basic necessities and services. Because of the increase in violence (both gender- and non-gender based) against citizens, thousands have been forced to leave their homes. For these and other reasons, the externally-funded humanitarian system has been called upon to fill the gaps left by the South Sudanese government. So far some responses have succeeded, but most have fallen short.

Responses from the humanitarian system have attempted to take coordinated actions in the provision of WASH, health, shelter, food assistance, and sexual and reproductive health services. The overall level of violence negates success. To help the large numbers of women and girls dealing with sexual and gender-based violence, UNFPA is working to upgrade the capacity of its healthcare workers by training them in case management of rape, related psychological first aid, and in creating spaces for psycho-social services for children (Fundira and Okara Wanyama 2016). UNFPA is also distributing health kits and ambulances to conflict sites, as well as providing GBV prevention/awareness training, female life skills training, and regular safety audits (Fundira and Okara Wanyama 2016).

To address the lack of secure access to food and shelter, the Shelter and NFI (non-food items) cluster – a coordinated grouping of service providers – and affiliates have distributed shelter materials (including tents), kitchen sets, mosquito nets, blankets, and bed mats to people, mostly situated in the PoC sites, but also to those in surrounding areas (Gonzalez Palau 2016).





To confront moderate and severe acute malnutrition among children, the World Food Programme has successfully admitted a large number into outpatient therapeutic programs with a cure rate of greater than 85% (UN Children's Fund 2015). UNICEF has also supported outpatient therapeutic programs; as of late 2016 20 were operational and 25 more were ready to be set up (Mdoe and Ibrahim Asindua 2016b). In order to detect and ultimately prevent disease outbreaks, in place of more comprehensive health facilities the World Health Organization has set up 58 EWARN sentinel sites, has supported the training of Ministry of Health workers on Integrated Disease Surveillance Response, and has facilitated the shipment of biological samples to national and international labs for confirmation (Magda Armah, Ebrahim, and Ilunga Kasongo 2016).

To help fill the gap left by the lack of adequate health facilities, the World Health Organization has developed pre-packed inpatient therapeutic feeding kits, conducted a gap analysis for scaling up blood transfusion services, provided body bags for corpse management, disseminated health education services to promote/improve the use of immunization services, and trained Rapid Response Teams to deal with the spread of infectious diseases (Magda Armah, Ebrahim, and Ilunga Kasongo 2016). To reactively combat the spread of various communicable diseases, UNICEF has supported treatment of malaria, carried out measles vaccinations, and distributed aquatabs, purification tabs, bars of soaps, and oral rehydration tabs (Mdoe and Ibrahim Asindua 2016b). The IOM (International Organization for Migration) has trained peer counselors in HIV awareness training (Kriitmaa 2016) and UNICEF has been able to enroll some pregnant women and infants in ARV treatment (Mdoe and Ibrahim Asindua 2016b).

To help address the lack of adequate water and sanitation, UNICEF has been working to repair dysfunctional boreholes at crucial sites and has donated solid waste compactors (Mdoe and Ibrahim Asindua 2016b). Additionally, the WASH cluster and its partners have constructed bathing facilities and household latrines, and distributed menstrual hygiene management kits, other hygiene kits, and soap bars (UN Children's Fund, WASH Cluster 2016).

### Remaining Gaps and an Increasing Population in Crisis

Despite these cluster-coordinated efforts in providing certain basic necessities to the South Sudanese population, the humanitarian system is still very limited in what it has been able to accomplish. As of late 2016, while the South Sudan appeals were 63% funded, there was still a requested US\$170.6 million remaining in requests (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2016a). As previously noted, humanitarian aid organizations have had some success in addressing basic needs of the population, for those citizens located in the PoC sites. However, the internally displaced population continues to increase, and more of these persons are moving into or near Protection of Civilian sites. Consequently, the numbers of those requiring provision of basic services and protection are increasing significantly, putting a further strain on supply chains that

already are stretched thin. There is an additional need for shelter in several of the PoC sites, and while the shelter cluster is attempting to track movement in and out of the camps through biometric registration, this process has not been operationalized throughout South Sudan (Jones and Kamberaj 2016). The lack of space in PoC sites remains a problem and causes overcrowding (Lobor et al. 2016). Overcrowding along with constant movement in and out of the sites (Gonzalez Palau 2016) leads to decreased ability to provide protection, increased risk of personal and gender-based violence, and decreased access to adequate sanitation and space for quality sanitation activity. Additionally, there are latrines that are still not gender-specific despite on-site follow up by members of the WASH cluster (UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2016).

The violence and insecurity have had a severe impact on health facility infrastructure and related facilities. The humanitarian system is still struggling to fill the gap left by the absence of public health workers. Malaria and acute respiratory infections, as previously noted, are the top causes of non-violent morbidity in South Sudan. Outbreaks of cholera and measles have recently occurred. These health issues are associated with multiple risk factors including lack of quality water and sanitation, as well as inadequate health services, gaps that humanitarian aid organizations have yet to fill. There have been efforts to treat these communicable diseases, but overall coordination among organizations is lacking. The Early Warning and Response Network (EWARN) and Infectious Disease Reporting System (IDRS) have been implemented and organizations have had success in detecting outbreaks; the causes of these diseases still need to be addressed *in situ*.

Food security and lack of access to sustainable livelihoods – especially for those who are internally displaced – also represent gaps that have yet to be fully addressed by humanitarian aid organizations. As the situation in South Sudan evolves into a longer protracted crisis, food prices continue to rise and lack of food security continues to drive displacement (Gonzalez Palau 2016). Long-term solutions to food provision need to be prioritized.

### Summary Assessments and Recommendations

The primary factor constraining the implementation of humanitarian action and the distribution of aid is the prevalence of insecurity and violence as a result of continuing conflict between government and opposition forces. The indiscriminate use of violence against civilians, humanitarian aid workers, and humanitarian resources has made implementing health, WASH, NFI, protection, and food projects very difficult. These difficulties are compounded by the hold-up of resources at checkpoints and the looting/destruction of infrastructure that could be used to facilitate the provision of care.

I believe that the South Sudanese government has little interest in the well-being of its people but is instead focused on consolidating power. Effective state institutions require consensus among all parties. Yet, in a highly contested civil war where both sides believe they can win, consensus and agreement are



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far from achievable goals. The lack of effective political institutions, despite negotiations surrounding the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, continue to plague not only the state-building of South Sudan but also further compromise the essential role that the humanitarian system must play in the survival of the South Sudanese people. While the crisis responses are currently underfunded and therefore hampering the effectiveness of humanitarian organizations, there is only so much these organizations can do in any event. Even if these organizations were able to coordinate efforts in health, WASH, infrastructure development, and sustainable livelihood creation, there is always the chance that the government could become more violent towards humanitarian actors, in turn further putting the population at risk. It should be noted that the inability to effectively coordinate humanitarian efforts in the face of increasing violence and civil war is not something new. In the case of Rwanda and most recently Syria, constraints in humanitarian action inadvertently contributed to genocide and the condemnation of millions of lives.

So what is next and how can South Sudan move forward in a positive manner? As history has demonstrated, when the United States chooses to involve itself, American government officials often can be diplomatically effective. The creation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, in the first place, demonstrated the value of a U.S. role. The thrust should be toward the establishment of effective institutions that have the essential technical and administrative expertise and that are accountable to the basic socio-economic needs of the South Sudanese people. Aided by diplomats, this will require better bridging of the divide that currently exists between humanitarian organizations and development organizations. It is essential to create an integrated space where these organizations can share knowledge and local understandings to help create effective institutions with a revamped South Sudanese government. At the extreme, the ability to overcome the desire for power exhibited by both parties in South Sudan can be achieved by long-term humanitarian intervention, not just by the United States, but a coalition of states which will no longer be shamed by human suffering that they have allowed to continue.

What can citizens of the United States contribute? Inspiring this kind of action requires advocacy at the most local of levels. Drawing attention to the human suffering and informing other members of the general public of the names of various government officials they can contact to make their anger and outrage heard, can make a difference. Activists can assist in drawing up legislative "action points" so that U.S. government officials have relevant information they can easily call upon. An ironic outcome of the recent change in the U.S. domestic political landscape is that many American citizens are more actively exercising their democratic rights to protest and more boldly making their voices heard. The suffering of the South Sudanese people will not fall on deaf ears; we just need to make it audible.

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Vol. 36  
No. 1-2  
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## PROJECT EDUCATION SOUTH SUDAN: CHALLENGES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN FEMALE EDUCATION IN SOUTH SUDAN

RAY STRANSKE, MELODY DELANEY, AND ANDREW APPELL

### ABSTRACT

Since 2005, Project Education Sudan (Project Education South Sudan since independence in 2011) has lived a philosophy embracing empowerment. As a non-profit organization, results have been achieved in some of the most undeveloped areas of this new nation. Centering around Bor, a town which serves as the capital of the state of Jonglei, on-site work has been complemented by key U.S.-based action and activism. Primarily focused on improving access to education for girls, PESS has evolved over the years from funding mainly “hardware” solutions such as schools and wells, to a focus on “software” solutions providing educational support for girls to attend private schools. The work has not been smooth; resources have been stretched thin; navigation of the conflictive environment has proven very difficult. Creative indigenous co-leadership has been a bright spot.

### Introduction: Project Education South Sudan (PESS) and the Need for Education-Related Human Development

On July 9, 2011, with significant backing from the United States, South Sudan became independent of northern Sudan and began to seek its future as the newest country – and newest democracy – in the world. This happy moment followed decades of civil war with the former dominant north that had killed over two million people, mostly civilian black African southerners, and displaced at least four million more southerners.

Aided by the African Development Bank Group, the Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GRSS) created a nation-specific interim development plan which aimed to not only address the fragilities and vulnerabilities of a new nation-state, attempting to escape from brutal conflict and civil war, but to make nation-, state-, and peace- building the focal points of development. Citizens wanted to create a realm in which “justice for all” is not just an abstract concept but a realized truth.

Overall, as will be illustrated, we believe that this plan was a good one. It was comprehensive and thoughtful, emphasizing the necessity of addressing major problems that are key to achieving development, which were summarized as: “Realizing Freedom, Equality, Justice, Peace, and Prosperity for All.” As the plan’s authors put it, this plan was “rooted in a careful analysis of three key aspects of the South Sudan context – conflict, poverty, and the macro-economy” (GRSS, 2011: 12).

Unfortunately, this multifaceted development plan was never given the chance to run its course. As of late 2016, South Sudan faces an uncertain future as a functional democracy, with educational issues being paramount. Per the World Bank (2017), literacy in South Sudan is the lowest in the world: 73% of the population is illiterate and illiteracy stands at a staggering 84% for women. The aspirations of the South Su-

dan people have been made even more difficult due to the internal conflicts that broke out among its leaders in late 2013, causing widespread civilian suffering and loss of educational and economic infrastructure.

Although not officially formed until 2005, Project Education Sudan truly began in 2001—born of an effort to support and mentor over a dozen “Lost Boys” (or refugee children of the Sudanese Genocide) and eventually reunite them with their families. Carol and Rich Rinehart’s efforts were essential. It was a trip to Sudan in May of 2005, after the Comprehensive Peace Accord tenuously calmed the political violence, that gave PES its founding mission. This journey presented a surprising revelation: the citizens of these war-torn areas of what is now South Sudan were not necessarily calling on the government to rebuild their decimated infrastructure or to send help by way of traditional means. Instead, they were demanding education for rural children, to make up for this “lost” generation. If there was going to be infrastructure, make it school construction. And so, starting in Konbeek, Project Education Sudan began a successful school construction initiative aimed at rejuvenating educational infrastructure in the region. With the birth of South Sudan in 2011, the organization changed its name to reflect this progress. Renewed political violence in December of 2013 led to the destruction of much of the existing infrastructure rebuilt since the end of broad-ranging hostilities only eight years earlier. Schools constructed by PESS, however, were still standing.

As this commentary asserts, female education is essential to human development. As the crisis in South Sudan makes clear, both public and private school education must be viewed from a socio-political perspective, because political will is required. As we also assert, a move from infrastructural (“hardware”) approaches to processual (“software”) approaches is required. The concept of social capabilities becomes a key correlate. Democratic, economic, and educational



progress requires empowerment of the South Sudanese themselves. It also requires that the crisis be mediated and that institutional stability be regained.

## A Successful Project in Transition

Since 2005, Project Education Sudan (Project Education South Sudan since independence) has engaged a philosophy of empowerment – at times achieving seemingly impossible results in some of the most undeveloped areas of the country. Since 2011, the work of PESS in South Sudan has been led by Executive Director Daniel Gai. He spends 11 months of each year in Bor, a town which serves as the capital of Jonglei state, 125 miles north of the national capital, Juba. Primarily focused on improving access to education for girls in South Sudan, PESS has evolved over the years from funding mainly “hardware” solutions such as schools, potable water wells, and grinding mills, with the intention of freeing up girls to attend school; to a focus on “software” solutions providing educational support programs and scholarships for girls to attend private schools. Public schools are chronically underfunded and unreliable, and thus cannot provide a consistent, quality education in the same way that private schools can.

PESS’s work is based, in large part, on the following premises: “The causality between education and economic development runs in both directions: with higher income, individuals spend more on education while greater education increases labor productivity and growth prospects” (Shimeles and Verdere-Chouchane 2016: 162). Education is a key determinant for a successful household transition out of poverty. “Girls’ education, is far more likely to result in lower carbon emissions than a shift to renewables, improved agricultural practices, urban public transport, or any other strategy now being contemplated. The International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) in Vienna has done the most extensive modeling of the impact of fertility on population growth. In their scenarios, the impact of education is enormous. Better educated women have far fewer children than women with little education” (Kharas 2016).

Executive Director Gai makes several observations from his experience of the last five years. First, initiatives have demonstrated that investing in girl’s education has a big impact on communities in Jonglei State, especially in and around Bor, where our work has been centered. Data our team collected (at one point aided by students from the University of Denver) indicated that educated girls were having their voices heard and being considered as emerging leaders within their communities of origin. Educated men were now looking to marry educated young women. There are indications, not yet supported by specific survey data, that such young women are raising healthier children and better supporting their children educationally. Gai notes that an educated wife knows how to medicate her young ones without over- or under-dosing them. Educated young women cost more in dowries (read: cows or cash) when it comes to marriage, rarely go through arranged or forced marriage, and can better provide continuous support to both their husbands’

families and their own families of origin.

The early work of what became PESS took account of education’s socio-political and socio-economic context. Traditionally, boys were often given an opportunity for school, but girls were not. Bor, with a population of more than 200,000, has 18 private primary schools and 10 private high schools, but only 10 public primary schools and one public high school (where school is free, but irregular, due to lack of government funding for the teachers).

Gai further observes that girls of high school age were often married off and required to spend the rest of their lives preparing food, carrying water, and caring for their families. By contrast, a girl who graduates from high school has greatly expanded work opportunities including: secretarial work for government offices, teaching, opening a small business like a hair salon, or working at a grocery store. Many such graduates also can enroll in government universities across the country, such as the University of Juba, so that they will be able to expand their opportunities even further. Expanded job opportunities are not the only benefits for girls who receive a high school education. Our observations indicate that these girls also have a great deal more respect in society; they can affect the direction of decision making. A goal of PESS has been to affect the direction of government and the wider society.

As noted earlier, in part due to the evolving crisis PESS has been shifting focus away from infrastructure development (e.g., school building and well-drilling). We believe that we can make more of an impact by the direct funding of girls in private schools. PESS is expanding a program to provide scholarships to girls who cannot afford tuition and school supplies. Many of these students have lost their parents in the fighting or else their parents are jobless due to the dysfunctional economy. Public schools do not run consistent class programs, since (as noted) the government does not have enough funds to pay teachers, and many leave their jobs. Students who receive PESS scholarships attend private schools, and therefore receive a consistent and superior education. PESS is currently providing scholarships and educational support to 50 female students, valued at about \$1,000 each per year; this pays for tuition and fees. PESS has another 90 prospective students on its waiting list, a list that is rapidly growing due to the huge demand for this service.

There are several program enhancements that accompany this shift from infrastructural program initiatives to processual. First, the girls in the program also receive after-school tutoring from one of the teachers at each of the schools that have students in the program. This is a critical program element. Once girls return home for the day, they are expected to help with household chores, and since almost none have electricity or other artificial lighting in their homes, almost no studying is possible in the evening. It goes without saying that internet connectivity is also almost nonexistent for the students, although Gai does have internet access in his office that works intermittently. His computer works when the generator outside his building is running, a service that is also intermittent. Given the desperate financial





situations of the students benefitting from this service, it is safe to assume they do not have the same (intermittent) privilege. Thus, after-school tutoring is key to many girls' academic success.

A second important program element that will begin in 2017 is a monthly Saturday discussion and community-building time for participating students. Successful women in business and government will share their experience and act as role models for the girls. The students will also participate in discussion exercises through an initiative called the Global Awareness Program. The program was developed by She's The First, a New York-based nonprofit organization, and it has structured discussion questions used by girls around the globe who are supported by it. The questions and discussion are geared to expanding students' awareness of world events and the potential for leadership opportunities once they receive a good education. Almost half of the scholarships and program support funds utilized by PESS come from She's the First, which has offered girls scholarships to numerous organizations in developing countries.

Gai notes that the scholarship program seems to be having an unexpected, corollary effect. In schools where PESS is supporting girls, the overall level of girls' enrollment is rapidly increasing. Many families are starting their girls in these schools in the hope that they will be able to apply for scholarship help, which seems to be boosting general enrollment. An example is seen at Langbaar Secondary School, which in 2015 had 47 girls and 470 boys enrolled. In 2016 the number of girls grew to 150, which we can infer was due to girls hoping for scholarship assistance. Another example is seen at Bor College High School. In 2015 there were 36 girls and 380 boys enrolled. In 2016, 133 girls were enrolled in the school.

### Challenges, Despite Good Intentions

The challenges of working in South Sudan are endless: conflict, corruption, travails of the wet season, lack of healthcare, and lack of efficient education. Three general challenges have made development work in South Sudan – including that of PESS – particularly challenging:

- 1) lack of infrastructure
- 2) weak governmental and financial institutions
- 3) difficulties in communications

The South Sudan Development Plan 2011-2013 (SSDP) aimed to minimize conflict and improve security, and in turn, enhance opportunities for human development. The first three years of independence were meant to focus heavily on a) state- and nation-building; b) deepening peace-building; c) preventing conflict; d) improving security; and e) bringing about a process of rapid economic development to reduce poverty. The government accurately labeled these as “mutually reinforcing,” thus placing them at the forefront of the development plan (GRSS, 0.4.2, 2011). It is particularly worth noting what government actors considered vital in achieving a massive reduction of poverty rates: recognition that promoting rural development is analogous to promoting economic development – as well as the underlying potential to further diversify an oil-reliant economy – in saying “rural development is pivotal to improving livelihoods

and food security and for economic and employment opportunities” for a large proportion of rural poor (GRSS, 0.4.2). The government proposed four methods to achieve this general goal:

- 1) Improve transportation infrastructure, mainly roads and highways
- 2) Clarify issues pertaining to land and cattle grazing (as a means of conflict prevention as well as of economic development)
- 3) Improve small-holder farmers' access to inputs, markets, financial services, and extra
- 4) training/education
- 5) Improve key basic services, importantly: healthcare, education, water and sanitation, as well as to address poverty by increasing well-being and labor productivity.

With its strong emphasis on rural development; on transportation infrastructure; and human development via education, healthcare, and improved quality of life, the proposed South Sudan Development Plan had all the makings of an effective and comprehensive development tool. In its efforts to provide for the rural poor and the most vulnerable members of an already-vulnerable society, this strategy attempted to eliminate as many forms of poverty as possible, in macro, meso, and micro ways. Innovative policy initiatives intended to maximize community buy-in and local participation were strengthened by promises of a transparent and accountable government. The government was expected to cultivate a regulatory environment that would encourage small, private enterprise to thrive and, concomitantly, to reduce some of the economy's dependence on oil production.

Unfortunately, while these lofty goals may have been the intention, they clearly have not been the reality. Hostilities and continued ethnic rivalries have resulted in the mass closure of oilfields in South Sudan. Because of their overdependence on oil, the government has been forced to adopt an austerity budget just to keep governmental services and other, basic services operational. The government's failure to achieve these goals has proven to be a major hindrance to the success of development programs. The almost complete absence of both “hard” and “soft” infrastructure; weak financial institutions and institutional practices; and the chaos which has intensified through years of war, have all proven to be deep obstacles to the success of development – including educational – initiatives.

### Challenge 1: Lack of Infrastructure

The SSDP outlines lofty goals for improving infrastructure. However, lack of reliable infrastructure remains as one of the greatest challenges of working in this region, particularly when the goal is to empower vulnerable (often “forgotten”) communities. Joyce Culwell, PESS board member, relayed an anecdote about a recent interaction in which she had to turn down an opportunity to bridge the global divide because of the inaccessibility of the roads:





“At the beginning of the school year, PESS was contacted by a teacher in Minnesota asking if she could have contact with Daniel. I gave her his email address. She said she wanted to help her elementary students become pen pals with Daniel’s students. I explained that it would be very difficult as they don’t have electricity [for lights] at night in order to write and they don’t have internet connections at the schools. Daniel has to go to Juba to use the computer. The rural area where Daniel lives and teaches is like a 4th world country as they have no water or furniture in their homes, no roads, no conveniences at all. [The teacher] wanted to mail the letters and could include extra postage so Daniel could mail their letters back. When I said there is no postal service – no roads – there was silence. After several seconds, she said she finally understood and was sorry it was so hard there, when we only think we have hard times here.”

Poor roads and highways have made travel between school sites difficult as well, which requires the travelers to make some tough choices. PESS board chair Ray Stranske explains the trials of transportation in another anecdote:

“Daniel [recently] arrived in Juba ... to deploy the funds sent to him in the last wire. The banks are not open on the weekend; neither does the plane fly. The trip to Juba now costs 10,000 SSP, equivalent to over US\$300 – for a trip of 120 miles. The increase in cost is causing a drop in passengers and thus a decrease in service. Daniel is becoming discouraged with the air transport and is talking about taking the very bumpy bus or truck trip by road back to Bor when his mission is accomplished in Juba.”

Executive Director Daniel Gai therefore is often faced with a major dilemma regarding getting from point A to point B. Does he pay the inflated cost for a ticket (on a flight which is prone to cancellation) or take the long, bumpy, uncomfortable, and quite dangerous (due to frequent banditry) bus ride? Furthermore, the Juba to Bor road is often completely impassible during the six months of rainy season each year. During periods of heavy rain, commerce simply grinds to a halt due to the slick, rutted, dirt roads.

### *Challenge II: Weak Governmental and Financial Institutions*

The difficulties of doing business in South Sudan are numerous and directly related to the lack of both “hard” and “soft” infrastructure, in concert with weak governmental and financial institutions. The following anecdote clearly illustrates this:

So far this week [Ray Stranske reported recently to the board of PESS], Daniel has been able to pull US\$7,000 from the bank to put into his SSP account that he can access from Bor. He has spent every day this week from 9 am to 3 pm in the bank waiting to see if they will give him any more funds. So, he’s now gotten a third of the funds we sent last month. Kind of crazy when you have to beg the bank for your own money! We explored options such as making Panther Kalei (a PESS colleague who lives in Juba) a signer on his account so he can transfer small amounts of funds at a time. Daniel has already

talked to Panther about getting some of the deliverables from the students in Juba (letters and student updates) so Daniel doesn’t need to make extra trips there to get these. Panther has agreed to do this and Daniel will pay him a small amount for that. (Panther will scan or type up the letters and updates and email them to Daniel in Bor). With all the money Daniel spends for travel to Juba and back and all the hotel nights etc., some of this could go to pay Panther and save Daniel a lot of frustration. After a week in Juba, Daniel had to return home to Bor after drawing out only half of the funds needed for tuition payment for the current term. Further, inflation has skyrocketed, meaning that funds intended to provide tuition assistance or to purchase materials for development initiatives doesn’t go as far, so fewer girls are helped.

This anecdote illustrates many clear barriers to economic engagement, manifest in: the lack of available currency, the opportunity cost in the form of time spent at the bank trying to withdraw whatever currency you can, and crippling inflation (making that currency less productive), among others. This is due to weak governing institutions, as discussed in the following section.

### *Challenge III: Difficulties in Communications*

One of the most challenging parts of working within the South Sudan educational system is that there is virtually no support or communication from government officials regarding the work of groups like PESS. Perhaps that could be considered a benefit, in that there is little interference. However, the fact is that the government seems to have little ability and not much apparent concern to affect the success of primary and secondary education. Gai reports that local officials are aware of what PESS is doing, but they do not attempt to contact him and are largely unresponsive. If it were not for the private schools that are run by groups seeking success for students, the outcomes of the educational system would be discouraging indeed. The government does require that PESS maintain its registration in South Sudan at a cost of about \$600 per year, but there is little interaction with officials beyond that.

There have recently been few NGOs operating in the Bor area, groups that could provide support and mutual cooperation with educational efforts. Most left the Bor area since 2013, considering it too dangerous to maintain aid workers there. (A few began returning in 2016.) Gai’s situation is different. His family is from the Bor area. He fled his village at the age of six to escape the Sudanese civil war in the late 1980s. Living as a refugee in Ethiopia, Kenya, and then the United States for 25 years, he finally decided his place was in his childhood community where he has now married, has two children, and lives in a compound with other family members. The U.S.-based PESS board could not persuade Daniel to leave; his dedication to serve his people causes him to stay and operate PESS’s educational programs.

Thanks in large part to Executive Director Gai’s leadership and dedication, Project Education South Sudan has turned ob-





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stacles into success. When educational infrastructure was lacking, the organization focused on appropriate “hardware” responses such as school construction and well-drilling. Reflecting the change in regional educational needs, PESS has shifted emphasis to “software,” emphasizing tuition scholarships for rural girls. This shift recognizes the importance of equal education to bettering communities and gender relations for future generations.

## Conclusion: Accomplishments, Rare but Rewarding

Children rarely get a second chance at education. Where this opportunity has been lost due to conflict, it is not just a loss to the individual. It is a loss of social capital and the capacity of a society to recover (Smith and Vaux, 2003). South Sudan – this brave new world – cannot afford to lose its greatest asset: the potential of its people. Amartya Sen’s social capabilities approach (1999: 3) frames the mercurial practice of “development” as “a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy.” Thus, development can be conceptualized as a process by which practitioners systematically and routinely dismantle “unfreedoms,” or things which hinder an individual’s ability to make choices in his or her best interest. Democratic, economic, and educational progress requires empowerment of the South Sudanese themselves. Education is an essential tool of human development and “best interest.”

In its first 10 years, PESS helped local communities build four schools in rural villages. All of these closed temporarily in 2013 with the political violence and dislocation that occurred. Most have now reopened, but combined enrollment now stands at about 1,500, down from the 2,000 students before 2013. PESS also drilled seven wells that Gai estimates serve over 5,000 people. These wells provide essential fresh water to the schools and surrounding communities. Other PESS programs helped to support teachers and students and to build desks, since most classrooms were equipped with only crude benches.

During the past several years, as stressed previously, PESS has been making the shift from infrastructure development to supporting student education programs and providing scholarships. The number of girls enrolled in these programs has grown quickly and is now limited only by the funds that the U.S.-based board is able to raise. Since all U.S.-based PESS personnel serve as volunteers, virtually all the funds raised are able to be sent to South Sudan to support the educational programs; there is little overhead. Even though the scholarship program is relatively new, PESS will see eight girls sit for graduation exams (a national program for high school students) in March, 2017. It would be good if most of these students had the means to continue on to college-level programs, but the fact is that most will need to work for a period of time in order to build the savings needed. For some this will be the end of their educational aspirations.

And yet, “it is crucial that the relationship of education to conflict should not only be considered at times of crisis, but also be a routine ingredient of development thinking within the for-

mal education sector” (GSDRC.org 2003). Project Education South Sudan has persisted, through conflict and infrastructural absence – even destruction – to provide consistent educational opportunities for rural girls. From the building of schools and the drilling of wells, to the provision of substantial tuition assistance, young rural women can better their communities and realize their own potential. One student is planning to begin medical school, as she has a U.S. family which plans to support her ongoing education. Another girl from the 2015 graduating class was able to begin a nurse training program at the Juba Medical Teaching Hospital, since she also had a U.S. supporter willing to assist with her continuing education.

At the time of this writing, 50 girls are currently able to attend secondary school because of PESS. A number of graduated girls attend nursing school in Juba on governmental scholarships. Despite the challenges presented to them, graduates can work to better the economy and political stability of the country. Through flexibility, tenacity, and dedication, we believe that PESS has been able to consistently provide education to girls who otherwise may not have had “the chance.”

In conclusion, we would point to a student named Abuk. She recently has been employed by PESS to act as Gai’s assistant. Abuk will be sitting for her graduation exam in March, 2017, and feels confident she will pass. She plans to become a doctor. Abuk says of the support of PESS and She’s The First, “I appreciate you for your continuous support toward my high school education. Your support has overcome the challenges that were in my way to higher education. It has encouraged me to continue my studies to achieve the coming bright future in South Sudan.” We can only hope Abuk’s vision of this coming bright future is soon realized. The successes are slow to come, but students like her and the other 50 who are carrying on, cause Daniel Gai and PESS to believe our work for South Sudan is worth the effort.

*Ray Stranske has had a lifelong interest in and connection to Sudan. He spent his first 14 years in Sudan including the period of Sudan’s independence from British and Egyptian rule in 1956. Ray helped settle Sudanese “Lost Boys” who relocated to Denver in the 1990s, through the non-profit organization he led, Hope Communities. This led to his involvement, with Carol Rinehart, Rich Rinehart, Isaac Khor Bher and others, in the formation of Project Education Sudan (Project Education South Sudan since 2011). Ray has served as its Board Chair for most of the past 12 years. He can be reached at [raystranske@gmail.com](mailto:raystranske@gmail.com).*

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