

SOUTH SUDAN CONFLICT: HUMANITARIAN AND ECONOMIC EFFECTS

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Abstract: This paper explores the topic “The South Sudan Conflict: Humanitarian and Economic Effects”. South Sudan is a young country that gained independence in 2011 and conflict started in the capital Juba in 2013. The once prosperous nation has been faced by various humanitarian and economic crisis that has impacted the country regionally and globally. The paper seeks to discuss the Humanitarian and economic costs of the South Sudan conflict and offer recommendations on how to solve the problem at hand.

Keywords: South Sudan Conflict, Humanitarian, Economic Effects, economic costs.

1. INTRODUCTION

South Sudan is a landlocked East-African country of approximately 640,000 km², formed in 2011 after a successful referendum that saw it separate from the former unitary state of Sudan (South Sudan Bureau of Statistics, 2012). South Sudan is bordered by Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Central African Republic. The country is divided into 10 states, with Juba as the capital city. The main ethnic communities in South Sudan are the Dinka (35.8%) and the Nuer (15.6%) (Verjee, 2011). Before the independence of South Sudan, civil wars (1955-2005) erupted as interreligious conflict between the Muslim North and Christian South. Other factors included need for political autonomy by the South, and the need to control their resources especially oil that was discovered in the 1970s (South Sudan Bureau of Statistics, 2012). The first civil war (1955-72) in the unitary Sudan was between government of Khartoum and separatist movement in the South referred to as the Anya-Nya. This was followed by a second civil war (1983-2005) between the Khartoum government and the separatist movement in the South that had transformed itself into the Sudanese People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) led by the late John Garang, which led to a Comprehensive Peace Agreement on January 9, 2005, and Independence on January 9, 2011 with an overwhelming referendum leading to the formation of the Republic of South Sudan on July 9, 2011 (UCDP, 2014; Ighobor 2013).

The joy of a new nation was short-lived, as violent clashes erupted in Juba on 15th December 2013 between SPLA soldiers from rival and ethnic groups within the military ranks (Weber, 2014). Consequently, President Salva Kiir accused the former Vice President Riek Machar of leading the rebellion, incitement, and attempted coup. This violence quickly spread over to other regions including Central Equatoria, Longlei, Unity, and Upper Nile States, with heavy fighting between governments' allied forces and separatist rebellion. According to International Crisis Group (2014), the fighting in South Sudan adopted an inter-ethnic conflict between Dinka, allied to President Salva Kiir, and Nuer, allied to Riek Machar who formed Sudanese People's Liberation Army/Movement-in Opposition (SPLA/M-IO). Other conflict factions include the South Sudan Democratic Movement (SSDM); South Sudan Defence Army (SSDA) and other small ethnic groups' conflict. According to Zambakari (2013), the underlying causes for South Sudan ethnic conflict includes persistent lack of services, competition over resources, poor leadership, and cattle rustling. This paper will explore the various humanitarian and economic costs of the South Sudan Conflict and draw conclusions and recommendations for conflict mitigation and elimination.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Securitization Theory:

Securitization was developed by the Copenhagen School of Barry Buzan, Ole Wøever, Jaap de Wilde and others, so called because most writings emerged at the Conflict and Peace Research Institute (COPRI) in Copenhagen in the 1990s. The concept of 'securitization' is hinged on the idea of 'security' as survival. It delineates a process of identifying a specific class of threats (military and beyond) as 'existential threats' to a referent object (state or other units); their sociological construction into acceptable definitions of threats to the 'relevant audience' (people), accompanied by 'emergency responses', beyond and above 'the normal bounds of politics', utilizing every resource at the disposal of the referent object (Buzan et.al 1998; pp. 20- 21). This definition establishes the theoretical understanding of securitization as a self-referential practice, which is justified by the very existence of a perceived, inter-subjective understanding of existential threat, and it also renders clear that the armed, military action of the state (beyond political negotiations) to tackle internal ethnic conflicts for protecting national sovereignty and security is an act of securitization.

The Sudanese Liberation Movement (SPLM/A) saw the South Sudan achieve its independence and hence became the only political party (De Waal, 2014). It remains a direct actor in the South Sudanese Conflict and together with other security institutions are a social and political network that reaches right through all aspects of state, government and society. The formal security institutions consume a great deal of the national budget for example 41 per cent of the proposed national budget in 2014/15. It is clearly undesirable that the security institutions should have such an influential hold over South Sudanese society and government. However, most people want SPLA to deal with threats to security in their local area, which normally stems from outside their immediate community. The securitization of institutions in South Sudan is a problem and an opportunity. (Brown J.A, 2014, P.10)

2.2 Realist Theory:

The proponent of the realist approach is Hans Morgenthau. Political realism explains conflict as an inherent attribute of man. The realist theory describes conflict as a product of the innate selfish nature of man, who continues to pursue his own best interests even if the ox of others is gored. This selfish nature of man leads to "competitive processes" between actors who seek to have all or most of available scarce resources (Folarin F.S P. 9). This theory describes the South Sudan conflict in analyzing the attitudes, interests and positions of the direct actors in the conflict, President Salvar Kiir and Dr. Riek Machar. Both have held hardline positions as shown by their failure to implement the peace agreements that have been the outcome of various mediation processes. This shows that each side pursues its own interests in the ethnically polarized country leading to a protracted conflict.

2.3 Marxism Theory:

The proponent of this theory is Karl Marx. The theory explains that the society is divided into unequal classes: the one is strong, rich and noble and bears the tag of bourgeoisie, who controls the instrumentality of state; while the other is deprived, socially deflated, financially infantile and is called the proletariat. There is a constant struggle between the two, but he that has the financial muscle controls both the state and the poor, and that is the structure of society. Thus, the Marxist stand is that the state is itself a product of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms (Lenin, 1917). The state is therefore structured to be in a perpetual state of conflict. The rich controls the state as well as means of production. The rich thus grows wealthier at the expense of the poor, who lives at his mercy and is implicitly embittered by the development. The central argument of Marxism is thus that capitalism is at the heart of the state, and that same capitalism is exploitative and oppressive and has been responsible for the polarization of the society (and state) into two incompatible classes (Folarin F. S P.8).

The South Sudan conflict has been exacerbated by perceived socio-economic marginalization by the two warring factions (Zambakari, 2013). Mostly, the major cause of the conflict between both factions is based on lack of inclusive government that serves the socio-economic needs of all the South Sudanese people. Machar persuasion is that President Kiir has used the presidency to discriminate the Neur's from socio-economic resources, and thus, the Neur have no choice but to fight for their rights. Equally, on numerous occasions, Machar has accused President Kiir of corruption, tribalism and nepotism in governance.

3. HUMANITARIAN EFFECTS

3.1 Violations of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Abuses:

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Human Rights Watch, and UNMISS, amongst other organizations, have reported human rights violations, which suggest that the situation may amount to systematic and widespread intentional crimes against civilians. In December 2013 at the start of the civil war, UNMISS recorded the deliberate killing of Nuer civilians, as well as unarmed or captured Nuer soldiers between 15 and 20 December 2013 by SPLA soldiers and other security forces. (Hansohm and Yihdego, 2016).

In the same period, between two hundred and four hundred Nuer men were alleged to have been killed after being detained at the Joint Operations Centre in eastern Juba. In another Juba neighborhood, a further 200 Nuer men were detained for questioning, with only eight returning; according to the OHCHR, witnesses heard shots, suggesting that the remaining Nuer were killed. Many Nuer sought refuge in UN compounds, where they remain to this day for safety reasons. (Hansohm and Yihdego, 2016). This clearly shows civilian targeted by all armed forces, often with an ethnic intent. There continue to be reports of sexual violence, including rape and gang rape, committed by all parties to the conflict. (UNOCHA, 2016).

3.2 Displacement (IDPs and Refugees):

The conflict has left one in four people uprooted. According to UNOCHA Report, (2017), more than three million people have been forced to flee their homes since the conflict began in December 2013, including nearly 1.9 million people who have been internally displaced (with 50 per cent estimated to be children) and more than 1.2 million who have fled as refugees to neighboring countries, bringing the total number of South Sudanese refugees in the region to more than 1.3 million.

3.3 Famine and Food Insecurity:

These years of brutal civil war has also contributed to below average harvest that continues to send food prices skyrocketing. The result has been a food crisis that continues to spread throughout the country. According to an early warning report, there are new areas of South Sudan reaching emergency levels of food crisis, which is just one level above famine. These are areas where people have been recently displaced because of outbreaks of the conflict that drove them off their land leaving them with no access to food and their agricultural livelihoods. For example in Jonglei State, there have been 200,000 people recently displaced. (Care, 2017).

At the height of the lean season in July 2016, some 4.8 million people more than one in every three people in South Sudan were estimated to be severely food insecure. The UN declared famine in two counties of South Sudan in February 2017, where 100 000 people were experiencing famine and another one million are on the brink of starvation in humanitarian emergency. 4.9 million People were estimated to continue experiencing severe food insecurity until April and about 47% of the population (5.5 million people) were expected to be severely food insecure in July, at the peak of the lean season. The combination of conflict, economic crisis and lack of adequate levels of agricultural production have eroded vulnerable households' ability to cope. More than one million children under age 5 are estimated to be acutely malnourished, including more than 273,600 who are severely malnourished. (UNOCHA, 2016). After the UN declared famine, the EU stepped up its help: EU humanitarian aid reaches €82 million in 2017, out which about 30% goes to life-saving food assistance.

3.4 Health:

South Sudan has some of the worst health and nutrition indicators in the world. Access to quality healthcare is a challenge due to low government expenditure, underdevelopment, lack of skilled health personnel and the inaccessibility of many areas. Routine immunization is very weak and measles outbreaks have been confirmed in 12 counties since January 2016. Following an announcement of further funding in February 2017, the European Commission has to date, made more than €423 million available to respond to the worsening humanitarian crisis in South Sudan since fighting erupted in December 2013. The European Commission funds field hospitals as well as health among other things (European Commission Echo Factsheet, 2017, p. 3).

3.5 Water and Sanitation:

Before the conflict, limited access to clean water and sanitation services was already a major cause of illness and deaths. With people uprooted from their homes, living either in the bush or in overcrowded camps, providing safe water has become an even bigger challenge.

By supporting emergency preparedness and response activities, the European Commission Ensures that drinking water and sanitation facilities are available in order to reduce water borne diseases such as cholera (European Commission Echo Factsheet, 2017, p.3).

3.6 Education in Emergencies:

More than 1.17 million children aged 3 to 18 years old have lost access to education due to conflict and displacement since December 2013. About 31 per cent of schools open have suffered at least one or more attacks by armed actors. This has overwhelmingly been the case in Greater Upper Nile, specifically in urban areas (UNOCHA, 2017). Under the EU Education in Emergencies initiative, the European Commission has provided €4.2 million to six relief agencies in their efforts to provide education and protection for children aged five to 17. Particular attention is given to those who have been deprived of education due to conflict and displacement (European Commission Echo Factsheet, 2017. P.3).

3.7 Obstruction to Humanitarian Aid:

In 2015, South Sudan overtook Afghanistan as the country with the highest number of violent attacks against aid workers. Amid a brutal three-year conflict, aid workers have been both caught in the crossfire and directly targeted by state, criminal and militant groups. Notwithstanding the devastating impact the conflict has had on civilians in South Sudan, violence against aid workers has the dual effect of harming victims and their families, as well as the wider response effort. A total of 74 aid workers have been killed since independence, and 108 seriously injured. Over three-quarters of victims (78%) were national staff, nearly half of whom were killed. Although, international NGOs have suffered the highest number of casualties, in contrast to other highly insecure contexts UN agency staff have also suffered a significant number, reflecting the frontline responder work that the UN is engaged in. Shootings and assault (violent sexual assault) remain the most prevalent types of major violence (Humanitarian Practice Network, 2017 P. 28-29).

Violence against aid workers affects the quality and quantity of assistance. For example, because of a specific targeted attack or due to an increase in generalized insecurity in an area, an aid organization will halt programming or change the mode of delivery, or may withdraw from the area completely. Overall humanitarian field presence in the primary conflict affected areas such as Greater Upper Nile region declined considerably over 2014 and 2015, with a 12% decrease in operational organizations working there and a 36% decrease in humanitarian projects. Only a few organizations with independent funding, robust internal security mechanisms and the ability to deploy mobile response units sustained humanitarian programming in hard-to-reach areas outside the POCs, alongside a small number of national NGOs and church organizations (Humanitarian Practice Network, 2017 p. 30).

3.8 Vulnerable Populations:

Women, children and the elderly are among the most vulnerable groups who require specialist interventions and support. Over 17,000 children are estimated to have been recruited by armed actors in South Sudan. Over 9,000 children were registered as unaccompanied, separated or missing at the time of writing. Anecdotal evidence indicates that child marriage is increasing due to conflict and economic pressures. An estimated one million children are believed to be in psychological distress. (UNOCHA, 2017). As stated above, the EU increased funding as of February 2017, caters for shelter and protection of the most vulnerable populations.

4. ECONOMIC EFFECTS

4.1 Decline in Economic Growth:

South Sudan's economy is heavily reliant on oil (around 60% of GDP), and as such, GDP growth in any year is heavily influenced by oil production. The shutdown of oil production in 2012 is estimated to have reduced GDP by 45% in that year. Disruption in 2014 is reported to have reduced oil production by around a third from 90 million barrels for the year to 60 million Frontier Economics, CECORE and CPDS, 2015, p. 11). Projections by International Monetary Fund (IMF) suggest that real GDP will decline by around 15% in 2014 (IMF, 2014).

4.2 Reduced Revenues:

Export revenues decreased due to declining oil prices and lower oil production. Oil production is expected to decrease to about 120,000 barrel per day this fiscal year down from 165,000 barrels per day in 2014 and a peak of 350,000 barrels per day before independence in 2011 (South Sudan Humanitarian Project, 2016, p.4).

4.3 Inflation:

The decline in oil revenue, has also had a negative impact on macro-budgetary indicators, requiring austere fiscal adjustments. The current account has deteriorated considerably leading to depreciation of the parallel exchange rate and fueling inflation. The South Sudanese Pound (SSP) depreciated on the parallel market from SSP 18.5 per dollar in December 2015 to reach almost SSP 80 per dollar by end September, 2016. South Sudan is now in hyperinflation. The annual inflation increased by 661.3% from July 2015 to July 2016 and by 730% from August 2015 to August 2016. Relative prices of food have increased and food shortages and hunger are the most alarming signal of the country's larger economic collapse. Rising food prices have put many households in both urban and rural areas in a very difficult position, as they are unable to afford the minimum food basket. According to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MOFEP), the Central Bank has no reserves and the limited oil and non-oil revenues are spent on defense and security loans (World Bank 2016).

4.4 Rising Poverty Levels:

Conflict leads to poverty as the country is unable to meet its sustainable development goals. The incidence of poverty in South Sudan has also worsened, from 44.7% in 2011 to 65.9% in 2015, with a corresponding increase in the depth of poverty (World Bank, 2016).

4.5 Low Levels of Agricultural Productivity:

In 2010 estimates on value addition by agriculture, forestry and fisheries accounted for 36% of non-oil GDP. Much of the rural sector activity focused on low-input low-output subsistence agriculture instead of production for markets. Among the significant reasons for this are: (i) the need for improved agricultural inputs and techniques such as seeds and fertilizers, storage facilities and advisory services, and irrigation development; (ii) the difficulties faced by farmers in accessing markets due to the poor road network, lack of other transport modes and nuisance taxes and charges, including bribes; (iii) the lack of a critical mass of farmer and rural producer associations as a means of entering the market place with the aim of minimizing the cost of inputs, accessing loan finance at affordable rates and influencing farm-gate prices; and (iv) uncertainties pertaining to property rights and access to land. Two and a half decades ago, the country was net exporter of agricultural product to regional markets; due to war-related destruction, poor infrastructure and lack of investment in the agriculture sector, South Sudan is now a net importer of food. It currently imports as much as 50% of its needs, including 40% of its cereals from neighboring countries, particularly Uganda and Kenya. Total food imports are estimated to be in the range of \$200-300 million a year (AFDB, p.131).

4.6 Human Development Challenges:

South Sudan is very young with two-thirds of the population under the age of 30. The 2009 national Baseline Household Survey also reveals that the country faces several human development challenges. Only 27% of the population aged 15 years and above is literate, with significant gender disparities: the literacy rate for males is 40% compared to 16% for females. The infant mortality rate is 105 (per 1,000 live births), maternal mortality rate is 2,054 (per 100,000 live births), and only 17% of children are fully immunized. 55% of the population has access to improved sources of drinking water. Around 38% of the population has to walk for more than 30 minutes one way to collect drinking water, and some 80% of South Sudanese do not have access to any toilet facility (World Bank, 2016).

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

South Sudan is a young nation faced by ethnic conflicts causing severe humanitarian and economic effects that have an impact to the region and the international community at large. Efforts should be made to end the conflict to rebuild the once prosperous country. The following recommendations prioritize the actions that are urgently needed to end the conflict in South Sudan and protect civilians who are affected by the fighting:

a) Establish an international contact group to help secure peace in South Sudan:

This could comprise of Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), African Union (AU), United Nations (UN), Troika (U.S., UK and Norway), and European Union (EU), China and South Africa whose purpose would be to facilitate coordination and discussion to ensure the protection of civilians and a swift end to the conflict (Frontier Economics, CECORE and CPDS, 2015, p.21).

b) Raise the pressure on the parties to the conflict to end the fighting and implement the resolutions of the 28th Extraordinary Summit of the IGAD Heads of State and Government on 7 November 2014 with clear timelines and benchmarks for full compliance with the cessation of hostilities agreement and the August 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS):

Collective action by the IGAD region should be taken against any party responsible for any violation of the cessation of hostilities (Frontier Economics, CECORE and CPDS, 2015, p.21).

c) Avert famine and meet the humanitarian needs of all civilians in need:

South Sudan managed to avert a famine in 2014 because the humanitarian community and international donors stepped in to provide food and other assistance. The best way to avert a famine is to end the conflict and open up full and unhindered humanitarian access to all civilians in need. Only then will some of the two million refugees and internally displaced people have the ability and the confidence to return home, plant their crops, and rebuild their livelihoods (Frontier Economics, CECORE and CPDS, 2015, p.22).

d) Ensure accountability, reconciliation and healing processes take root in South Sudan:

The culture of impunity in South Sudan fuels atrocities and must be tackled if the reoccurring cycles of violence are to end. Neither of the two major parties to the conflict have upheld their responsibility to protect. Armed actors across the country have committed gross violations of international humanitarian and human rights law which may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Those found guilty of such crimes should be held accountable, regardless of their affiliation or position. However holding perpetrators accountable is just part of the answer. Ethnic and other divisions that have arisen or been accentuated by the conflict need to be addressed so there can be a healing process and lasting national reconciliation (Frontier Economics, CECORE and CPDS, 2015, p.21).

e) Bring greater transparency and accountability to the management of oil and mineral resources and all government expenditure to help build the legitimacy of the state:

The IMF's recent report on South Sudan concluded that there is an urgent need for the country to focus on nation building and on key measures to help build stability and the legitimacy of the state. South Sudan in 2014 came in 171 out of 175 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, indicating that the government should "adopt radical anticorruption measures in favor of the people (Frontier Economics, CECORE and CPDS, 2015 p.23).

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