

## The Sudd Institute in 2019: Looking Ahead

In 2019, as in years past, the Sudd Institute was steadfast in observing, conducting research and analyzing South Sudan's public policy environment, especially how the country's political leadership has behaved with regards to war, violence, peace, security, reconciliation and the economy. Through the work of its members, individually or collectively, the Institute has engaged in policy dialogue with the government, the opposition, civic groups in the country, the international community, especially rights groups and the international and national nongovernmental organizations. In 2019, our research and publications provided a public platform, especially on the roles of each of the entities listed above with regards to understanding the dynamics of violent conflict, at communal or national levels.

There have been serious challenges in doing public policy analysis in a restricted political and civic space, where access to information is limited and criticism of public officials is punishable. Our goal has been to contribute toward imbuing public officials with a culture of constructive criticism, research and analysis and continuous generation of reliable data, which are processed into an information to support policy decisions.

The Sudd Institute has also engaged with the public, with a view to getting the country to agree on policy priorities, what challenges are more important, what low-hanging fruits can be harvested and used as a way to assure everyone that all will be fine despite the current countrywide state of despair. The following is a non-exhaustive list of issues we have engaged the political leaders, policy makers and civil society on this past year.

South Sudanese leaders and policy makers were faced with the ongoing challenge of conflict and violence and the pressure to restore peace and stability. This has been the most pressing challenge of 2019. The government has had the daunting task of trying to run a country with an ailing economy and increasing poverty. The government also lacks the trust of the citizenry, partly because of the popular conviction that government officials, especially the high-powered among them, only care about enriching themselves. This has earned South Sudan the ignominious rating of being among the most corrupt countries in the world. While South Sudanese have grumbled about this dire situation, they have not been able to claim any civic space necessary for them to protest against government's failings, especially on rights abuses, on security and failure to live up to its most fundamental responsibilities to provide basic services, to ensure safety and to protect the citizens against poverty. As an institution that focuses on measuring the pulse of the country, we know that it is partly this lack of civic space and political freedoms that has made armed rebellion the most common form of protest. Any other form, labor strikes, popular demonstrations on specific issues such as commodity prices, protest against any specific action such as arrest and indefinite detention of critics and activists without trial, all were forbidden in 2019, as was the case since the liberation war days, when the now ruling SPLM used violence as a method to govern as a philosophy, which it has now continued even after South Sudan became

a country. Many of the partners we work with, in civil society, youth groups, women's coalitions and professional associations, all say that democracy and open society values will never take hold in South Sudan until there is respect for and strict enforcement of the rule of law.

Millions of South Sudanese have remained refugees and internally displaced, a major challenge for the future, as they will all have to be repatriated and resettled in their locales when/if peace returns. To do all this while the country is broke and reliant on the increasingly uncertain oil revenues is a tall order. Even more so because that finite resource, oil, is being used to fraudulently enrich a few while the rest rot in poverty and violence.

The September 2018 peace deal, the Revitalized Agreement on Conflict Resolution in South Sudan, has been an emotional roller coaster in terms of its implementation, especially for those most affected by war and violence. It had called for establishment of a Transitional Government of National Unity, unification of the armed groups, repatriation of refugees and IDPs and reparation for the regions of the country most impacted by war.

The effort to establish this government and to facilitate the return of opposition figures like Riek Machar Teny back to the country has been most particularly hindered by the issues of division of the country into 32 states, which the opposition views as unconstitutional, and by issues of security arrangements. Dates for this government formation have shifted under the weight of these problems that the agreement has stipulated must be addressed prior to formation. Most South Sudanese now seem to hang their hopes for the return of peace on this transitional government, so the more it is postponed the less hope of peace.

As citizens attempt to push for change across the country, and because of the restrictions on constitutional right to protest, they have looked to international actors to put pressure on South Sudanese leaders and government. This has complicated the situation, as external pressures have caused the government to become more defensive and defiant, rather than dialogue, unwilling to respond to citizen cries, on account that their voices are only raised at the behest and in service of foreign entities. It stifled the potential for dialogue. Ideas such as putting the country under a trusteeship or increasing foreign troops to provide protection, which have been debated for the past few years, have all remained a source of government aversion to public criticism, and have been very divisive issues in the country.

Both the government and the armed opposition have pursued peace concurrently with a war, and the result is that the country's preoccupation with the quest for peace while committing to a military victory has amounted to a postponement of everything else that the country needed done in order to ensure public welfare. For example, investment in infrastructure, power generation, road construction, food security, quality educational institutions and healthcare facilities, has been totally negligible because the only milk cow, the oil revenue, has been milked for one thing and one thing only over the past six years, and that is to fight the war, a war whose

only goal is to keep the current SPLM caliber of leaders, above whom sits Salva Kiir Mayardit, not just in office, but in control of everything in the country. Is there any mystery as to why the country continues to bleed? Ask the Sudd Institute research staff whose only job has been to talk to South Sudanese about what's going on in their lives.

The country has also been plagued by mismanagement of oil revenues, grand corruption and how these things link to widespread violence throughout the country. Some foreign researchers have indicated that there is a nexus between corruption and pursuit of war, something that has captivated the attention of donor countries, but which has been based on very scanty evidence. This has been the basis for imposition of sanctions on some targeted individuals and companies in South Sudan, emphasizing economic issues hoping to solve that, which is essentially a political problem. I have personally tried to show that sanctions, targeted or not, is a wrong approach to the problems of governance in South Sudan.

In various other publications (i.e., Awolich on R-ARCSS implementation, Tiitmamer on oil proceeds to the communities and states, Jok on citizenry's cry for peace, and Mayai on security investment and security outcomes), the Sudd Institute has been at the forefront of efforts to show why the government has been failing in its responsibilities, why it has not fought graft in earnest, what drives insecurity in the country, what importance has the climate people struggled with, alternative sources of energy, pollution in oil producing states.

The Sudd Institute produced tens of publications, including weekly reviews, policy briefs and program reports and the institute staff and fellows traveled to many countries to give presentations and have increasingly become a source for global media, development agencies and diplomatic missions in the country. The Institute has also aimed and endeavored to improve its capacity for training young researchers/graduates, hosting graduate students from around the world as fellows and collaborating researchers, indeed a resource we have enjoyed and have appreciated very much in recent years.

In 2020 the Sudd Institute will continue to support decision-makers and challenge them to do better. We will continue to offer the international community with independent and credible field-based analysis and policy options, while providing a neutral platform for debate and discussion.

For nearly a decade now, the Sudd Institute has provided a platform for debate and discussion on the new state, increasingly amplifying South Sudanese voices and perspectives on domestic and international issues. On behalf of all my colleagues at the Institute, I take this opportunity to look back and reflect on our short history, but also to announce that I have stepped down from the position of Executive Director, with an able colleague, Abraham Awolich, taking over as Managing Director, a new designation in the Institute's Board recently passed. I will remain on the Institute team as a senior policy analyst and as this transition is happening at the beginning

of a new decade. I also want to wish everyone a very happy new year and decade. Most especially, I wish Abraham and his team a productive, peaceful and prosperous 2020 and beyond.

For a full review of Sudd Institute's work in 2019 please visit [www.suddinstitute.org](http://www.suddinstitute.org)

The Sudd Institute is grateful to our supporters and partners, without whom the Institute's current achievements would not have been possible. If you wish to support this work, please contact us on [info@suddinstitute.org](mailto:info@suddinstitute.org)

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jok Madut Jok', is centered on a light blue rectangular background.

Jok Madut Jok  
Executive Director The  
Sudd Institute