



# THE SUDD INSTITUTE

RESEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL, JUST AND PROSPEROUS SOUTH SUDAN

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## Weekly Review

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### Ngok -Twic Border Conflict: A Manifestation of Botched Socioeconomic Development in South Sudan

*The Sudd Institute*

In response to recent fighting along the border of the Abyei Special Administrative Area and Twic County, this Weekly Review calls for prompt preventive action by the leadership of South Sudan at the local, state, and national levels. It aims at raising and attempting to briefly answer several questions: What happened? Why did it happen? What should be done? And who should do it? While this analytical and prescriptive note focuses on the Ngok-Twic crisis, it tries to allude to an overarching need to address deep-rooted inter-communal tensions and conflicts to promote peace, security, and stability throughout the country. The Government of South Sudan should return to its roots and pursue the SPLM policy of peace through development, taking towns to the people in the countryside, using oil revenue to fuel agriculture as an engine of growth and building an extensive network of roads to improve trade.

On February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022, militant youth alleged to have been from Twic County attacked the Aneet market, apparently a contested area between the Abyei Special Administrative Area and Twic County, opening fire and killing innocent civilians. Accounts of the details of the sequence of actions that led up to the attack vary, but the outcome was an exchange of fire in which innocent people died on both sides. Unfortunately, the crisis escalated into repeated attacks and shootouts with increasing numbers of casualties. The background to this attack appears to be land claims. While this murder of civilians is a criminal offense, it takes place in the broader context of some politicians stoking communal conflicts through land claims—evident by violence-inciting press statements. The immediate triggers, however, relate to the administration of the area, controversy over the plans of the Abyei Special Administration to survey the town of Aneet and the overall management of the market and its revenues. The conflicts, therefore, pit the administrators, the politicians, and affiliated militant youth against each other, rather than the respective communities and their traditional leaders.

The murder of civilians is a criminal offense requiring justice through the due process of the law. Successful application of the law to hold accountable those found guilty of armed assault and murder will help ease the tensions and stop the violence from spreading. The

SSDF quickly responded by deploying to the area and deserves recognition for limiting the loss of lives and destruction of property that would result from more attacks. With the central Government's support, traditional leaders, local authorities, and other peace actors should also intervene to ensure that the incident does not mushroom into a large-scale conflict. Consultations with the leaders at these three interrelated local, state, and national levels should be urgently undertaken to discuss and address the root causes of the crisis.

Even with a well-orchestrated response that brings the criminals to justice, addresses animosities, and allows reason to prevail in respecting administrative borders, we should recognize the management and distribution of scarce resources associated with the Aneet market amidst poverty as a significant underlying condition that leads to such devastating clashes.

Simple phrases sum up why the events of last week happened. Poverty makes man angry, and the idle minds are dangerous minds. We have neglected the youth who make up the majority of our population. As long as these youth cannot feed, educate, and heal themselves and their families, and as long as they cannot develop their skills and pursue their passions, their frustration will keep South Sudan unstable. If our leaders do not create the conditions for greater prosperity in the rural areas by investing the country's wealth in the people, our youth will gravitate towards criminal activities and remain vulnerable for conscription into politically motivated violence.

While the President rightly observed at the SPLM Leadership Retreat in Lobonok Village that the third and final phase of the liberation struggle is eradicating poverty, the fact that we see no movement in this direction is worrying. After ten years of independence and the abundance of resources within South Sudan under our sovereign control, we must ask ourselves why we remain mired in such festering rural poverty. We cannot blame this condition on external factors, such as withdrawn development assistance and sanctions. Our failure to address the widespread poverty deprives us the moral grounds to question external, punitive interventions. Our detractors will continue to point to the egregious acts of inter-communal violence as evidence of neglecting our people and, therefore, justify their threats of punitive action against us. While strengthening the security sector is the first line of defense against attacks such as the February 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> assaults in Aneet, the sustainable solution to stabilizing South Sudan is socio-economic development.

The GOSS agricultural line ministries produced a thorough 25-year plan, divided into three phases, five investment spaces, and 110 projects with detailed budgets and activities called the Comprehensive Agriculture Master Plan (CAMP). The ministries devoted significant effort to getting donors to support this plan. However, the donors invariably declined to invest, saying they first wanted to see the Government of South Sudan take the lead. By investing resources in the CAMP, the Government will more fully assume the responsibility of sovereignty. Making these resources available and investing them in agriculture requires setting priorities and managing revenues according to those priorities. Thus, increased efforts to strengthen the current public financial management committee (PFMC) are in order.

The fighting over borders in South Sudan that is now commonplace is significantly rooted in poverty. Just as a wound heals from its edges, the Government of South Sudan can start the inclusive agricultural development activities framed by the CAMP along strategic borders in areas threatened by inter-communal conflicts. For example, in Abyei, these activities could focus on developing production and peace markets along the historic trade routes and migration corridors where communities have interacted peacefully throughout much of our history. It is also essential that neighboring communities be accorded equal opportunities for services and development. In crises lie opportunities that should be identified and constructively built upon. We should respond to the current Ngok-Twic crisis not only to take immediate preventive action, but also to relate it to the wider inter-communal conflicts throughout the country and whose root causes are connected to lack of services to our rural masses and employment opportunities for our restless youth. This is not only the right thing to do, but also a crucial means of ensuring peace, security, and stability for our country.

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### **About Sudd Institute**

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