

# CSRF Context update: (October 2021-March 2022)

## Introduction

This context update aims to support a conflict-sensitive approach to decision making by aid actors and policy makers in South Sudan through an improved understanding of South Sudan's context, conflict dynamics and how aid actors interact with the context. The analysis by the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF) is based on secondary data from various sources and qualitative data from some key informant interviews. This analysis covers a 3-6 month period (October 2021-March 2022), and it provides a brief overview of national trends, and regional trends from three regions: Upper Nile, e.g., Jonglei & Pibor ; Bar El Ghazel, e.g., Greater Tonj and Abyei; and Equatoria region, e.g., Tambura) looking at violence related issues. Please refer to the [CSRF and WFP Guidance Framework](#) for the terminology used for the analysis of organised violence in South Sudan.

## Country wide trend: An overview

Despite the signing of the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict (R-ARCSS), there are still significant numbers of South Sudanese who are displaced, either internally or as refugees in neighbouring countries. There are a number of complicated and interrelated contributing factors behind their displacement: recurrent sub-national and localised violence, floods and drought, and widespread food insecurity. According to the 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview the population of those in needs of humanitarian assistance has jumped from 8.3 to 8.9 million in South Sudan.<sup>1</sup> This is an alarming increase putting South Sudan's population who are food insecure at even more risk.

Some of the states or areas affected by these factors, which this update will focus on are: Jonglei state and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area, Western Equatoria state, Warrap state and the Abyei Administrative Area.

During the October 2021-March 2022 period, there was an increase in flood-related displacement. Considered as extremely vulnerable to climate crisis, South Sudan is facing its <sup>2</sup>fourth consecutive year of 'once in a lifetime' flooding. An increase in annual temperature and climatic events, such as floods and droughts have not only led to the destruction of crops and livelihoods, but also to the migration of some populations, with their cattle, into agricultural areas, which has resulted in clashes between cattle keepers, as well as between cattle keepers and farmers<sup>3</sup>, and over grazing land.<sup>4</sup>

In Eastern and Central Equatoria states, localised violence between cattle herders and farming communities in Magwi have become worse, and this seems to have resulted in increasing alignment with other communities, other armed groups and political forces.<sup>5</sup> The other flood affected areas include, Lakes, Unity, Warrap, and Upper Nile states.

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<sup>1</sup> The 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview

<sup>2</sup> Norwegian Institute for International Affairs (2022), '[Climate, Peace and Security Factsheet South Sudan](#),' 16 March

<sup>3</sup> Eye Radio (2022) Magwi County: 7 killed and hundreds displaced as rustlers and cattle herds clash in Owinykibul, March

<sup>4</sup> Eye Radio (2022) Over 20 cattle keepers killed in Magi allegedly by NAS, Feb

<sup>5</sup> Ibid



From January-March 2022, there has been an increase in conflict-induced displacement due to localised and sub-national violence, especially in Jonglei, Abyei and Greater Tonj<sup>6</sup>, despite the reduction during the October to December 2021 period. Though the localised violence is driven by the competition over water, grazing, land, access to limited services and unemployment, there are also links to interests and elites at the sub-national level. The tensions between identity groups in Jonglei state and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPA), as well as the Abyei Administrative Area continue to impact on local populations, as well as the operations of aid agencies, as attacks against aid workers and aid convoys limit humanitarian access to affected populations. Other areas affected by displacement linked to conflict include Central, Eastern and Western Equatoria states and, Warrap states.

Cross-state border conflict has also continued to increase between January and March 2022. In February, violence between communities in Tonj East, Warrap state and Lakes state forced aid agencies to relocate. Also, the inter-state violence between Jonglei and Eastern Equatoria and Greater Tonj and Bar El Ghazel has led to clashes between farmers and cattle herds, drawing in some non-state armed actors. Furthermore, cattle raids continue to take place between Greater Tonj and Unity state, and Lakes states. Other areas that are affected by cross-border violence and displacement, including Warrap, Unity, Lakes, Western Bar El Ghazel, Jonglei and Eastern and Central Equatoria States.

### Greater Jonglei—Jonglei State and the GPAA

Since October 2021, the relationship between Jonglei state and Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA) has remained tense over a cycle of sub-national violence that has pitted Dinka Bor, Nuer, Anyuak and Jie communities against Murle over cattle raids and child abduction. Although the level of violence has declined since January 2022, there have been some pockets of attacks in January and February.<sup>7</sup> Most notably, an attack that was carried on Bor village of Baidit that claimed 32 people on 25 January.<sup>7</sup> Also, at least 13 people were reportedly killed in cattle raided attack in Duk county of Jonglei state in

<sup>6</sup> WFP (2022) 'WFP South Sudan County Brief,' April 2022

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Mission in South Sudan (2022), 'UN calls for probe into deadly attack in South Sudan,' 25 Jan

March.<sup>8</sup> Although most of these attacks have been blamed on youth, some officials in Juba are allegedly being blamed too.<sup>9</sup> The area has remained calm despite rumours of potential counter-attack by youth from Bor Dink and Nuer.<sup>10</sup> This was partly because of non-response from the affected communities coupled with the calls for restraint by Jonglei community leaders.<sup>11</sup>

Apart from that, there has been attacks on aid agencies operating in the area. In March, trucks carrying WFP relief have been attacked for a third time in a row, causing some deaths and injuries.<sup>12</sup> Also, there has been an erection of a blockade by the Bor Dinka youth along the Pibor-Bor road, preventing aid agencies and travellers from accessing GPAA.<sup>13</sup> This has resulted in the shortage of goods and services in Pibor.<sup>14</sup> Though there has been no reprisal attack linked to the blockade, the continued shortage of goods in GPAA will likely fuel further tensions. This volatile situation raises a number of conflict sensitivity issues:

1. Aid agencies should take necessary precautions against possible escalation in violence. As the dry season draws to a close, the rate of violence increasing is very high. This is because potential raiders are likely to exploit the remaining dry season window to raid more before the onset of the rainy season.
2. Aid agencies should explore the link between localised and sub-national interests and how their operations can interact with these dynamics. Just like most local conflicts in South Sudan, the conflict between Jonglei state and GPAA conflict is blamed on not only youths, but also some local elites. This is because some of them have allegedly acted as the catalysts for conflict through providing moral or material support.
3. Aid agencies should negotiate for humanitarian access to GPAA to enable them to provide equitable services to the needy there. As aid agencies are repeatedly constrained by insecurity and access denial to certain areas, they should continue to coordinate with local authorities and to seek donors' support with national level advocacy to improve access.

## Greater Equatoria—Tambura County

Between October and November 2021 period, the sub-national violence in Tambura that began in June 2021 was at its highest peak. Although the violence calmed down in December 2021, the security situation has remained tense, especially along Tambura-Yambio Road. For example, three traders were reportedly killed in January,<sup>15</sup> and two individuals were reported missing in March.<sup>16</sup> Last year's violence caused massive displacement.<sup>17</sup> Also, as the country heads towards the end of transitional period, the likelihood of political changes and reshuffles remain high. These upcoming changes risk raising more tensions across the country, especially in Tambura where the localised violence is caused by the competition over power. Finally, the recent restoration of Azande Kingdom have been received by a mixed reaction by Azande's neighbours, with some warning of its potential exercise of authority over their subjects or land. A number of conflict sensitivity issues can be drawn from Tambura conflict:

1. Avoid using terms such as 'inter-communal' or 'ethnic' violence when referring to the situation in public statements, reports, or other documents.
2. Ensure humanitarian interventions are inclusive in terms of both geographic coverage and the targeting of beneficiaries.

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<sup>8</sup> Eye Radio (2022), 'At least 13 People killed in cattle raids Duk County,' 8 March

<sup>9</sup> Eye Radio (2022), 'Jonglei State: US urges gov't to take action against official fuelling violence,' Feb

<sup>10</sup> interview with INGO Representative, Juba, 15 March

<sup>11</sup> ibid

<sup>12</sup> ReliefWeb (2022), 'UN World Food Programme strongly condemns third attack on humanitarian convey in four months,' 25 March

<sup>13</sup> Interview with INGO representative, Juba, 15 March 2022

<sup>14</sup> Eye Radio (2022), 'Pibor markets run out of basic food commodities,' March

<sup>15</sup> KII with INGO representative, 15 March 2022

<sup>16</sup> Eye Radio (2022), 'Two missing along Tambura-Yambio road-official,' March

<sup>17</sup> CSRF (2021), 'Tambura: Violence, Displacement and Response,' December

3. Consider the identity group affiliation of team members or partners when conducting analysis and assessments, traveling to remote sites and providing assistance.
4. Consider the impact that the humanitarian response could have on future reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts
5. Donors should ensure their implementing partners are considering conflict sensitivity issues and are able to make adjustments as needed in their humanitarian response, as well as when re-starting any longer-term programmes that had been suspended.
6. Aid actors should make sure that assistance reaches those who need it, without them having to face additional security challenges to access the assistance.
7. Ensure that the provision of assistance does not incentivise either returns to areas not considered 'safe' by displaced populations, or the influx of 'new' residents to an area in search of assistance.<sup>18</sup>

## Greater Bar El Ghazal—Greater Tonj area and Abyei area

### Greater Tonj Area

For January to March 2022, The Greater Tonj area has witnessed a marked reduction in the level of violence. However, the intra-and-inter-clan clashes have continued to persist. Of recent, some communities have allegedly used lack of services as a motivation for clashes with their rival communities,<sup>19</sup> which seems to suggest the transformation of this localised violence into a subnational one. With regards to border areas, the cattle raiding with Unity and Lakes states have subsided following the deadly clashes that led to the relocation of aid agencies from Mabar in February.<sup>20</sup> However, the encroachment of cattle herders from Tonj into Bar El Ghazal in December has intensified the cross-border conflict with farmers there over water and grazing land despite the signing of the cross-border agreement on 27 January 2022.<sup>21</sup> This localised violence has also led to the involvement of Other Arms Group or those that are not signatory to R-ARCSS. Besides that, the area has also witnessed a rise in intra-and inter-clan violence, with some officials stand accused of inciting the violence. In an effort to assuage the violence, the state government has recently launched a disarmament exercise.<sup>22</sup> As a result, the level of violence has recently declined. However, the recent failure to manage blood compensation, payment in form of cattle for killing a person, risks fuelling further cycle of violence. Some key conflict sensitivity issues in the Great Tonj include the following:

1. Aid agencies should properly understand the context, including the emerging trends in order to avoid unintendedly contributing to more conflicts. This's because the conflict is increasingly become complex as rival Dinka sub-clans, including those who were once arch enemies, are beginning to join forces. Also, the emerging trend around intra-clan conflict over theft of animals is causing further divisions and violence.
2. Aid agencies should try to support building trust between local communities and the government. As the communities are increasingly labelling some gov't officials in the state from rival community as bias, it risks undermining the ability of these officials to effectively intervene to settle conflicts, let alone support aid agencies in their work.
3. Aid agencies should consider equitable provision of services in all areas of their operations to counter the perception by some underserved communities that they are using inaccessibility as an excuse for not operating in their hard-to-reach areas. This's because has been reported

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<sup>18</sup> CSRF (2021), 'Tambura: Violence, Displacement and Response,' December

<sup>19</sup> Interview with two NNGO representatives, Juba, 15 March

<sup>20</sup> Roundtable Discussion on Conflict trends in Bar El Ghazel, 17 March

<sup>21</sup> United Nations Mission in South Sudan (2022), 'Dialogue on Peace and Reconciliation Warrap State's Tonj area concluded with agreement,' 27 January

<sup>22</sup> Eye Radio (2022), 'Governor Aleu announces disarmament, warns citizens over non-compliance,' 22 March

of the use of marginalisation as a key driver of conflict by communities with low NGO presence, with some facilities in some areas being attacked or singled out for future attacks.

4. Aid agencies should be cautious of the safety of their staffs who hail from these communities as they might be target of revenge while in duty. This follows the tendency of some chiefs to downplay the payment of blood compensation over frequent and repeated killings between communities. As the practice itself is based around retributive justice, the failure to uphold it will likely fuel a circle of revenge attacks, including on aid agencies' staff.

### **Abyei Area: Misseriya vs Ngok & Ngok vs Twic**

Since January this year, Abyei area has continued to be a scene of organised violence. A contested oil rich area between Sudan and South Sudan, Abyei witnessed its first attack this year allegedly by Misseriya on Miadol village on 2 January that claimed five lives.<sup>23</sup> In March, a series of fresh attacks resulted in the death of at least 27 people, with 20 more people killed in separate attacks allegedly linked to Messeriya.<sup>24</sup> However, the level of violence appears to have since decreased. Apart from that, the Abyei area was unprecedentedly engulfed in a subnational violence between Ngok Dinka and Twic that began on 10 February.<sup>25</sup>

Although this latest violence came to an end by 9 March, the security situation in Abyei remains tense. The violence between Ngok and Twic has reportedly led to the displacement of about 70,000 people,<sup>26</sup> and to the relocation of over 700 aid workers and families from Agok area,<sup>27</sup> and to the killing of many people, including one NGO staff.<sup>28</sup> It has also led to targeted attacks against the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) conveyances and premises.<sup>29</sup> The cause of this latest conflict between Ngok and Twic is generally attributed to a border dispute,<sup>30</sup> especially, the control and management of Aneet market following a demarcation plan by the Abyei Administrative Area (AAA).<sup>31</sup> Another cause of the conflict relates to widespread poverty and unemployment among youth.<sup>32</sup> The ensuing violence and displacement have prompted the government to deploy South Sudan Defence Forces (SSDF) to intervene in Abyei, and to establish an investigation into the violence. As the tensions between Misseriya and Ngok and between Ngok and Twic remain high, the risk of escalation cannot be ruled out if nothing is done to reconcile these groups.

1. Aid agencies should equitably serve the two rival groups, Ngok or Twic, to avoid being regarded as favouring one over another. With the increasing level of insecurity and access restriction, aid agencies not be tempted to stay where they are. Yet, this move will not go well with those with limited services or NGO presence, fuelling further tensions against their rivals and agencies operating in the area.
2. Aid agencies should critically evaluate housing, land and property (HLP) issues in their areas of operations in the light of the current violence. Driven primarily by land dispute, this violence might fuel further claims over land in the area, which will put land-based aid projects in jeopardy.
3. Aid agencies should create awareness on the humanitarian principles following the recent attacks on aid conveyances and access denial to some areas. As some individuals have begun to

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<sup>23</sup> Steve Paterno and Tong Deng Anei, 'The Current Status of Abyei: History and People's Aspirations,' February

<sup>24</sup> Eye Radio (2022), 'At least 27 people killed in fresh attack in Abyei,' 7 March

<sup>25</sup> Francis Deng/ Sudd Institute (2022), 'My personal Perspective on the Nyok-Twic Conflict in Abyei,' 22 February

<sup>26</sup> UN (2022), 'South Sudan,' February

<sup>27</sup> UNOCHA (2022), 'Abyei Flash Update No 1,' 15 February

<sup>28</sup> UN News (2022), South Sudan: 'Violence Against Aid workers must stop,' 16 February

<sup>29</sup> UNISFA (2022), 'Statement on the increase of violence in southern part of Abyei area, call for a dialogue,' 8 March

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*

<sup>31</sup> Francis Deng/The Sudd Institute (2022), 'My personal Perspective on the Nyok-Twic Conflict in Abyei,' 22 February

<sup>32</sup> The Sudd Institute (2022), 'Nyok-Twic Border Conflict: a Manifestation of Botched Socio-economic Development in South Sudan,' 15 February

attack aid agencies and UNISFA and are attempting to use them to deny access to relief to their rivals, there's a need to draw redlines.

4. Aid agencies should analyse the impact of the lack of a pre-migration conference between Messeriya and Ngok on the current simmering tensions between the two groups. Although Misseriya had organised two pre-migration conferences with Mulual Dinka and Luo of Northern Bar El Ghazel<sup>33</sup> last year, they have not been able to do the same with Ngok for unknown reasons. This might have contributed to the violence between the two groups.
5. Aid agencies operating across the border between Sudan and South Sudan should open communication to ensure coordinated and conflict-sensitive response in the disputed area of Abyei.

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<sup>33</sup> UNDP (2021), 'Promoting sustainable peace and cohesion among Sudan-South Sudan border communities,' February