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POLITICAL SCIENCE ■



CONFLICT
RESEARCH
PROGRAMME

Conflict Research Programme

Researching in Conflict: Interviews from the Bridge Network Archive

The Bridge Network in partnership with Jimmy Awany



About the Authors

The Bridge Network is a group of eight South Sudanese early career researchers based in Nimule, Gogrial, Yambio, Wau, Leer, Mayendit, Abyei, Juba PoC 1, and Malakal. The Bridge Network members are embedded in the communities in which they conduct research. The South Sudanese researchers formed the Bridge Network in November 2017. The team met annually for joint analysis between 2017-2020 in partnership with the Conflict Research Programme.

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About the Conflict Research Programme

The Conflict Research Programme is a four-year research programme hosted by LSE IDEAS, the university's foreign policy think tank. It is funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. Our goal is to understand and analyse the nature of contemporary conflict and to identify international interventions that 'work' in the sense of reducing violence or contributing more broadly to the security of individuals and communities who experience conflict.

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Introduction

The demands and practicalities of researching in conflict contexts are multifaceted and unpredictable. This task is increasingly shouldered by local researchers on the ground and there is much to learn from the ways they perceive and navigate the research environment. Global inequalities and power dynamics generally place southern researchers at the forefront of research projects under relatively higher risks than their colleagues and employers in the Global North. Sometimes they gain comparatively little from the research outputs and until recently their experiences have remained mostly hidden. In general, their contributions have been significantly under-reported.¹

This report focuses on the work of the Bridge Network, whose seven members were responsible for gathering interviews and observations for the Conflict Research Programme (CRP) in South Sudan. We formed the network in November 2017 and have researched from within our own communities in five case study locations: Gogrial, Malakal, Leer, Nimule, and Abyei. Since 2017, we have been researching the logics of governance in South Sudan, a violent and turbulent political arena. Our research has explored not only the transactional politics of the 'political marketplace', but also how authority is changing, as well as civic authority and actions.² The research was implemented under the broad CRP concepts of public authority, civiness, and the Political Marketplace Framework. We have conducted several interviews with a broad mix of South Sudanese, highlighting their stories, experiences, and views. It should be

noted that due to ongoing active conflict, access to certain locations was challenging, such that the themes and volume of data were not collected systematically across the five locations. This publication reflects on our struggles and showcases our achievements. In what follows, we firstly reflect on the research process and secondly present some of our research findings, including a series of original interviews.

The report includes extracts from conversations between members of the Bridge Network and CRP researchers between 2018 and 2020. The discussions were in part aimed at providing the necessary support to the members to ensure their safety, address logistical and ethical challenges, and to document their lessons and experiences for other scholars to learn from.

Our conversations reveal some of the difficulties encountered, but also demonstrate the possibilities and skills of a diverse research team working in a conflict zone. We provide new insights into the demands of research in South Sudan and highlight the specific dilemmas involved in being not only a participant observer, but also a member of the community under 'observation', whose lives and families were personally affected by many of the issues we were documenting during a critical time of war and political uncertainty. The report is structured along common themes that arose from the discussions.

¹ Mwambari, D. (2019). Local Positionality in the Production of Knowledge in Northern Uganda. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1609406919864845>.

² The research was co-designed by Rachel Ibreck, Naomi Pendle, Hannah Logan, and The Bridge Network members. The tax research was designed by Matthew Benson. The team met annually for joint analysis between 2017-2020, including with Flora McCrone, Jimmy Awany, and Matthew Benson in January 2020.

In **Part One** of the report, our reflections on the research process offers the following key insights:

- Research permits and IDs are crucial, and provide a degree of protection to researchers. In some situations, however, permits pose security risks. While it is crucial to have permits, researchers need to equally understand their context and know when and how to use them or refer to their identities when engaging at different levels.
- When engaging with people affected by conflict, it is necessary to be cautious about the kind of questions that researchers ask and how they ask them to avoid affecting the well-being of respondents. Researchers also need to be conscious about the effect of the conflict on themselves and others involved in the research project.
- Community expectations for participating in research projects are usually high in contexts affected by conflict. Such momentum presents good opportunities for research, however, the need to clarify the purpose and outputs of the research from the onset is ethically crucial to managing expectations.
- Research methodologies and theories need to be operationally flexible, relevant to each context, and must empower local researchers to think critically about their own environment. Such an approach could minimise the one-directional nature of research exercises.

Part Two of the report highlights some of the selected interviews from the various sites. We chose interviews that best typified the concerns and customs of our communities, the hardships the local population face, and the impact of the conflicts – past and present – in their areas. They reflect the actual experiences and viewpoints of the interviewees as drawn from interview transcripts. All the interviewees presented personal opinions and not those of their organisations or institutions. As a key part of the ethics of the research, it was made clear to interviewees that their names would not be used in any material, and as such no one is named in this report. The interviews are grouped under the following reoccurring themes:

- The impact of protracted conflict and displacement on families, gender relations, and related local customs: These interviews illustrate the impact of the conflict at the family unit level.
- Education and Civicness: These interviews explore examples of civic behaviour and how education, for example, has created political and social spaces for more civic authority and actions.
- Local governance, violence management, leadership, and authority at community level: These demonstrate the ways in which violence is governed at the local level and the role that public authority figures play within these dynamics.
- Taxation at the community level: These explore the historical legacies of tax practices in South Sudan and whether related ideas about taxes continue to inform peoples' understandings of, and relationship to, the state in South Sudan.

Part One

Researching in conflict contexts: Reflections and insights from the Bridge Network researchers

First steps: Manoeuvring security risks and getting research permits:

“They needed to know who I was and where I came from.”

In conflict contexts, trauma, tension, and violence are usually high, and surveillance by military and security actors is routine. Research activities draw a lot of attention and associated risks. Research permits and introductory letters are often demanded either by governmental authorities, rebels, or even arbitrarily at roadblocks. Gaining ‘permission’ is crucial to avoid clashes with people in positions of authority. The CRP research started at a time when South Sudan was in the flux of a conflict. Trust was very difficult to build, which made getting permission a sensitive matter.

As researchers, we recalled being questioned about our affiliation and purpose of the research. Sometimes we were judged based on our identity or ethnicity and people held back access or information that could have been vital to the research. Involving people from the research locations also increases trust and confidence. The researcher from Leer, for example, explains that:

“When I went to seek permission from the local authorities for the research, they needed to know who I was and where I came from. When they realised that I was part of the community, they were more open to supporting me and provided me with the necessary documentation to conduct the research.”

The permits ‘clear the air’ and provide protection especially in militarised contexts where research activities draw unnecessary attention. They also seem to bolster the researcher’s confidence to reach out to interviewees, and reassures the interviewees to feel safe and trust the researchers.

In some cases, researchers found it necessary to have an ID that associated them with an organisation to look credible. Some also needed permission from multiple levels, including from the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, National Ministry of Higher Education, and state-level authorities. The researcher in Abyei, for example, explains that:

“I went to the governor’s office to seek permission to do this research and I was given a letter. I also consulted the county executive director who gave me another letter as a backup. With these letters, I visited many schools and interviewed people.”

Sometimes, however, the permits posed security risks to the researchers. Researchers expressed that they had to be careful about when and how they used the permits. One of the researchers, for example, explains how he only presented his research permit whenever anyone raised doubts or suspected his activities and discloses its connection with the London School of Economics to avoid trouble. Although this sometimes raises ethical questions, researchers are pushed to be selective with the information they disclose for their safety. One of the researchers in Nimule explains his experience that:

“I was researching cattle migration and went to seek permission from a certain gentleman. He asked me where the research was going towards. When I showed him my research letter, he asked me what the *mzungu* was planning. He said the *mzungu* would collect information and use

it to criticise us. I explained that it wasn't the case, and told him about the books previously produced and that it could be used by university students. This individual refused to talk to me and threatened to arrest me but his deputy intervened and gave permission."

Identity issues are also crucial to consider in conflict contexts. The identity or ethnicity of the researcher might affect the research process. The researchers discussed that it was necessary to involve people from ethnic groups and locations where you are researching so the community feels they have a person they know and can trust. Furthermore, the gender of the researcher is important to consider especially when talking about topics which may be culturally inappropriate for women to openly discuss with male researchers. Identity sensitivity was carefully considered in the selection of the research network. The following quote from the researcher in Malakal exemplifies how perceptions of identities, both local and international, can open doors:

"It was okay for me to manoeuvre around because I am a resident of Malakal, also because I was working for UNMISS. I would visit the PoC often and easily, and get as many interviews as I needed."

Navigating ethical challenges in a conflict and trauma context

“ *Sensitive questions could spark trauma.* ”

Ethical issues can be numerous and difficult to navigate in conflict contexts. When engaging with highly traumatised and depressed populations about their experiences with conflict, for example, it is easy to unconsciously trigger respondents and perhaps affect their well-being. The researcher from Malakal notes from his experience that:

"When you approach a person, especially in places such as Malakal for example, you must know the person directly. If you don't know the person then it is important that you approach the person through a friend who might know them. Even when asking questions, it is important to ask questions the right way and avoid sensitive questions that could spark trauma."

Another researcher based in Abyei noted that his community often suggests that he should involve at least one woman to support him in asking sensitive questions. The consequences of such work on the researchers was also highlighted. As local researchers, they cannot avoid being positioned in the conflict and have their own narratives around the conflict and have been affected by it in different ways. The researcher from Malakal, for example, notes that:

"As a researcher, it is sometimes necessary to self-evaluate and understand how the conflict might have affected your personal life. It is crucial to reflect and prepare before you go into an interview."

Another ethical challenge was dealing with the expectations of respondents. The researchers noted on several occasions that respondents usually expect something in return – something tangible they can immediately benefit from if they participated. One chief, for example, asked what his community would gain.

The researcher from Malakal, for example, notes that he has had to use his own money to invite an interviewee for tea or coffee during an interview. He explains that "although it raises ethical concerns to buy tea for an interviewee – how do you deal with these dynamics? Because culturally, you are expected to do it."

During one of the Bridge Network researcher workshops, participants discussed offering

tea or a snack to focus groups. They agreed that the culture of offering tea depended on cultural expectations. They also agreed to avoid giving money, but ensure that there is refreshment, and something the respondent or participants can carry along to their homes rather than cash handouts.

To manage the expectations, the researchers found it helpful to clarify their position from the onset of the interview and explain that there were no material gains from the research.³ The quotes below highlight some of their experiences:

“When you introduce yourself as a researcher, they already see you as an NGO worker and expect some money after the interview. It is, therefore, crucial to explain your intentions and requests before conducting the interview. As a teacher and public figure in my community, it has been easier to access people without raising expectations and falling into trouble.”

“People usually expect something tangible, something that they can immediately benefit from if they participated. One chief, for example, asked what his community would gain. I had to clarify that there was no materialistic gain and the chief was understanding.”

The researchers also observed that many respondents did not feel comfortable with their interviews being recorded. Many didn't speak honestly while being recorded because they worried their voice would be used as evidence. It was challenging for the researchers to document unrecorded interviews because transcriptions take time to write up and some information can be lost in the process.

Additionally, it was noted that it is important to give people feedback after research has been conducted. Many other researchers

have, for example, previously interviewed people and collected data and never provided feedback. Due to this practice, respondents get fatigued and discouraged from participating in future interviews or research projects. One researcher explains her experience as follows:

“There is a Kenyan in Yambio managing one of the faith-based local organisations. When I visited this guy for an interview, he refused to meet me. The guy refused because some researchers who had previously talked to them for data used the information for their benefit and did not give any feedback. It is important to give people feedback after research has been conducted.”

Community expectations and responses to the research

“*They looked at this research as an avenue to vent and express their views.*”

One researcher noted that his community is grateful that he is involved and proud that their son is being taken to higher places. The community is particularly grateful that their culture and practices are being documented and shared to the rest of the world. He notes that even though the community won't get material gains from the research, they would like that the outcomes be shared with them. Community feedback sessions have always been scheduled for the end of the programme; however such feedback shows a need for them to be more regular throughout programming.

The same researcher said his community viewed the research as an opportunity to voice their concerns and opinions on the conflict and the governance of South Sudan. He says the community hopes that the

³ The researchers had a mandatory consent form that was read out to each participant in their local language in which it was explained that the research was for academic purposes and participating would not lead to financial or material gain.

analysis and findings from the research can lead to improvements in how the country is governed.

Another researcher noted that his community felt represented by the research and that he was like their voice in the research. One of the commissioners who gave him a research permit said they were looking for people like him in the community to gather and document information about their culture. He says the community is happy in a way, but often ask for the outputs and want to understand how they benefit.

Several researchers noted that they've felt conviction to mentor and help some of their respondents because they were moved by their stories. One researcher explains his experience as follows:

"I observed that people are angry and emotional from suffering due to the conflict, yet their voices are not being heard or documented. They looked at this research as an avenue to vent and express their views with the hope that it would contribute to some change. I have found it necessary to encourage such people and comfort them. Sometimes I have voluntarily organised forums to talk to the youth and provided counselling and career advice. I use my personal experience to guide the youth and show them what they can achieve with education."

There is also the assumption that researchers are given a lot of money that they keep for themselves out of selfishness. This makes it difficult to garner trust from an interviewee. The researcher from Malakal says he properly explains his position to interviewee to avoid any suspicions and cultivate trust.

The researcher from Yambio says she is respected and has the support of her community. She thinks it is because of her family and educational background. She is

the only person that holds a master's degree in her family. She says some community members have started calling her professor because of her connection with LSE and it is motivating her to pursue a PhD. As a woman, she is a role model for many girls. Even the local leaders encourage her to guide and mentor her sisters and peers. She says she sometimes doesn't realise the impact she is creating from her actions.

Reflections on the research methodology

The researchers noted that the methodology gave them flexibility and independence to manage their research activities. They say the flexibility enabled them to be creative and flexible in finding people to interview and how to approach them.

One of the researchers from Nimule, for example, noted that the flexibility allowed him to manoeuvre the security context and conduct many interviews whilst maintaining high ethical standards. He says he learnt from the interviews and it strengthened his confidence and skills in networking and researching.

Another researcher noted that the regular workshops provided are a useful space for the researchers to connect with LSE researchers. He noted that during the workshop, they were able to share experiences and learn from each other, which he thought was different from the other research projects he has participated in.

The researcher from Abyei said the research was like a job opportunity for the researchers and it has improved their lives. He further noted that:

"Being part of the bridge network has been helpful because it has improved my relationship with people in my community. I have since been able to visit the

governor's office and interact with many commissioners and chiefs. It is not easy to meet chiefs in my place, but I can now meet them for this research. There is an interview that I conducted with a chief and I was given a comfortable respectable chair which doesn't happen usually."

One of the researchers from Nimule also noted that he has learnt many things from the interviews. He says the research strengthened his confidence and ability to make presentations. His writing and

communication skills have also since improved and he has gained a lot of knowledge and people skills which has exposed him to many people and NGOs that have since been useful to his career growth.

The researcher from Yambio also said the research is positively impacting her life. As a teacher in South Sudan, she has rarely written because there has been little need. Writing for the CRP research however has allowed her to practice and is strengthening her skills as a result.



Part Two

Select interviews from the Bridge Network archive

The following interviews were selected by our bridge network members from across the CRP research sites (see location citations in the following). We chose interviews that best typified the concerns and customs of our communities, the hardships the local population face, and the impact of the conflicts – past and present – in their areas.

Gender and Civicism: The impact of protracted conflict and displacement on families, gender relations, and related local customs

The plight of a single mother of two

Theme: Gender and Civicism

Location: Malakal PoC

Date: 7 February 2019

Role/Title: Tea lady within the PoC in Malakal

Gender: Female

The Interviewee is Shilluk and was born in 1992 in the village of Warjuok, on the west banks of the Nile opposite Malakal town. She entered the Malakal PoC following the first clashes that hit Malakal in 2014. During the clashes, her house was raided by many soldiers. All the women and girls who lived in their house were raped.

Her interview demonstrates the extent of sexual and gender-based violence carried out during the recent conflicts in South Sudan and the impact of this violence on the lives of the survivors, including discrimination and social isolation. The interview also highlights the cultural impact of being displaced by violence and

difficulties providing for dependents when separated from wider family.

I have two children, my first child, I had him nine months after I first entered the PoC in 2014. The second, my lovely daughter, I had her in 2017. Well, I am not married and people judge me sometimes when I tell them this. Giving birth without a husband, I get called names and so forth.

My kids have two different fathers, my firstborn I do not know his father and the second one my daughter's father, he is within this PoC but he has his family. The guy denied responsibility when I told him I was pregnant. Now we are like total strangers. I did not sue him or force myself to him since I would be seeking to embarrass myself. He is a responsible man with a wife and kids against a girl who had no family or brothers.

My first child, my son came to existence under very painful events in my life. During the first outbreak of the conflict in Malakal in 2014, I was at my uncle's place – actually not a direct uncle, just a friend of my father from Nasir of the Nuer tribe. The house was raided and all the women in it were raped since the men in that house were all soldiers but had not been in the house for two days. I was one of those girls. I didn't know anything, after the house was raided, I was brought here in a wheelchair unconscious from that rape. I stopped counting the number of soldiers who raped me when I fainted. When I woke up, I found myself in a hospital and felt like I had died and was on some other planet. So, I have my boy as a result of that. I don't know whether I should be grateful or pained by the fruits of such evil. What can I do, life goes on!

I am going through a very hard life because I have not studied, and I would not want my children to go through the same. I try my best, ask around, and even attend the meetings carried out at schools and

guess who I meet? Known drunkards in the community and old men who studied through the Arabic system of education. Teachers are paid very little – even cleaners from the humanitarian are paid far more than the schoolteachers. I wonder why this is so. I attend their meetings and all I hear from their committee is contribution from the community to help educate our children, why? Aren't we IDPs? We have no money, where is the UN? It is really unfair.

If we talk about my problems ever since I entered the PoC, we will sit here for a really long time. I had never sold tea or worked in the market before, I was just an ordinary girl before the war. I started selling tea five months after I gave birth in 2014 and I have been selling tea since. I would stop selling for a bit but go back to it since I had to take care of my only relative, my grandmother who died in 2016 of an illness. I have been left alone since then.

I have never seen the rest of my family since I entered the PoC, I don't know where they are. My father was a soldier so maybe he is still in the bush or dead, God knows. My mother may have fled somewhere I don't know. You see my life story may just make you sad if you listen to it.

The other problem I often have is with women in the community. Most of them accuse me of having affairs with their men, which is never true. Most recently, I was attacked by a lady because her husband was sitting among the people taking tea in my shop. She started a tantrum, insulting the man in my shop, when the man stood up and left, the lady turned to me and started throwing unfounded accusations. She even said I tied her husband to the shop with *kunjur* (witchcraft). I could not take it easy being insulted by a woman like me. But the men who were around intervened and we were separated, and I went and reported them to the community police for tarnishing my name in public.

I choose not to think about the future of my children. I feel that it is beyond my control and it is beyond my understanding. There are very few options to be considered within this PoC when trying to make sure a child grows up to be an acceptable and able member of society in years to come. It's totally out of my hands now. I do what I can to make sure my babies don't at least die of hunger.

I feel the damage is already done and it won't make any difference, even when a peace agreement has been signed. I was 21 years old when I first entered the PoC, I owned no property, in fact I had no idea of ownership of anything. I just lived with my parents. People pretend and say 'we will go back home and live happily again' when there is nothing to go back to, especially for orphans like me who has kids now without a home to go back to. The only home I know is in the village in Warjuok and I cannot go back to the village there. I basically cannot farm. This war took everything away from me. Peace will make no difference in my life, to be honest.

The life history of a returnee soldier

Theme: Gender and Civicness

Location: Malakal

Date: 20 May 2019

Role/Title: Soldier

Gender: Male

The soldier spent 23 years separated from his family due to successive conflicts and recruitments. His interview demonstrates the extent to which conflict has affected lives, separated families, and how the peace agreement is opening up space for people to return home.

I got married at 17 years but joined the army and was deployed to Yei in Eastern Equatoria, only eight years into my marriage.

I left behind my wife who was three months pregnant at the time, and with two other children.

Five years later when I went back to my village, I did not find my family. There were numerous fights in the community including air strikes from choppers. My family was left vulnerable, and my wife and kids had to flee. It was devastating because I did not know where they were. Khartoum was the first thought, so I settled and tried to gather money and trace them.

In 2011 word came and they were indeed in the North. I spoke to them for the first time then and it was a big sigh of relief for me. I then travelled to Juba in 2012, reported for duty, and I was assigned to the Tiger Division. I was slowly organising for my family to come home, but a year later in 2013, you know what happened, I became a bush man, literally. The first clashes started in the heart of our division. I fled and all this while, I have been hiding in Western Equatoria. I made it to Malakal PoC to meet my family only three days ago (2019).

My children have grown so much now, I cannot believe my eyes. The first one, a female, is now 30 years old; she is married with three children. The other two are males; 26 and 23 years old, and are both married as well.

My wife and kids have decided to make it special for us and share the happiness with other family members, neighbours, and friends. They have invited them all for prayers that we are back together today. Personally, I am overjoyed and thankful to God for keeping my family safe. The lastborn was only three months in the belly when I left but when I came into the PoC for the first time we met on the road as I was lost and trying to ask around for directions on how to find them and he recognised me. I remember not ever taking a picture to leave

behind. We basically broke into tears on the road and made a big emotional show for the passers-by.

During the time we have been apart, I didn't go a night without dreaming about them. I sometimes wake up frightened that someone or something was hurting either the children or their mother. I have almost gone mad.

When our eyes lock with the boys, it's an awkward moment – I sense a mixture of pity and anger in their eyes. My eldest daughter seems the easiest to converse with, she is always smiling and seems to understand everyone and the whole situation. I think it's because she may have vivid tiny memories of from before.

Finally, my wife walks with pride because I am back and she should be proud because she raised competent worthy members of this competitive society of today. All of her kids are hard workers and able to fend for themselves. I couldn't have done it any better. Since I came, we have gathered in one spacious room, we basically talk and laugh all night, this has helped me learn a few things about them and I am impressed.

My wife is the best thing that could have happened to any man. All these years I had imagined she had moved on with another man and probably changed the last names of our children. I would never have blamed her, most young women in her situation have done this but my lady is different that it makes me feel guilty. I feel that I denied her joy.

The peace talks and the revitalised peace deal is part of the struggle, it's not a good deal but it's a way to a better living and better chances of achieving a better life for the South Sudanese people. You see, if I tell you that we enjoyed rebelling, I would be lying to you. Neither is anyone in the

bush fighting to get a position with the government, some of us like myself would retire and turn to private businesses the minute peace and security is guaranteed. Let it go out there that amongst many other vital needs, South Sudanese need education most, to prevent anything like this from ever happening again.

Honouring the dead in Nuer culture

Theme: Gender and Civiness

Location: Leer

Date: 20 May 2019

Role/Title: Payam Administrator

Gender: Male

The interviewee highlighted how honouring the dead in Nuer culture has been practiced for many generations – by grandparents, and those before them. If a male person dies before he is married, the person is honoured by marrying him a wife. This happens for any male child who was born into a family and lived for more than three months. It is significant to the Nuer because it is considered to keep the family of the dead going.

This interview reflects on the motivations behind certain cultural practices and the extent to which people uphold and respect them, and how culture is changing due to the influx of western education and values; the number of people killed, particularly men, in the conflict and; the impact of this has on local understandings of death and its rituals.

Honouring the dead among Nuer has been there from the past generation. It keeps going from age to age. The Nuer find it very important because it keeps the family of the dead going. When a child is born, he/she is considered a human being. If the child unfortunately dies, then this culture comes in.

The brother of the dead is not expected to marry before he marries a wife for his deceased brother. Traditionally, he would be expected to marry for his dead brother first then marry his own wife. If not honoured, there is a fear that the living brothers' children could die or be abnormal. Sometimes the wife of the living brother may stay longer without conceiving. Sometimes the dead brother may come in nightmares telling the family to marry him a wife. These things are common in the community.

So, when it is preserved and a wife is married for the dead, a cow is killed to welcome the wife and to bless the entire process. An invocation is done before the cow is killed and it is conducted by the most senior people in the family from the man's side. During the invocation, the elders remind their son that the wife he has married belongs to the dead brother and that he should take good care of her and not mistreat her and respect her rights as a woman in the family. The man is also expected to name the children from such a marriage after his late brother.

The elders also advise the wife to understand the context under which she is being married. She is advised to respect the man who will be producing children with her. She should also care for the man and treat him as a husband. When this is done, it is believed that the dead is happy wherever they are.

One family around here in Thonyor, for example, gave their son a chance to marry his own wife before he married for his eldest deceased brother. The marriage was done successfully, and the wife gave birth to three children before any problems started occurring. Few years after their third child, all the three children became sick at once and people wondered why. Because there is a traditional spiritual leader living among us, the family was advice to consult him. Then they were taken to the *Luak* of Gatluak

Gatkuoth who pronounced the problem even before it was explained. He told the family that the dead person who was not married for a wife would not only kill the three children but more children if the woman continued to produce. The prophet advised that the children should be released for the deceased and named after him. Following the prophet's advice, the wife became the ghost's wife and the man who married her could only produce and fulfil the other responsibilities as expected from the ritual. The family obeyed and the young man will pull up his socks to get a new wife for himself.

The resources from the marriage come from contributions from many family members including the grandparents, uncles, aunties, sisters, and friends. With all these contributions, it's enough to approach any girl for marriage. Next time if any of these people married, you will do the same to contribute for them. This the social game within the Nuer culture. If you refused to contribute and you are a close relative who is supposed to pay his share, it's a right of the marrying man to open the case against you in the chief court and the case will be ruled against you.

The person that is appointed to marry for the deceased chooses a girl from among his friends. If he is accepted, the girl will go to her parents and inform them about it. The family of the girl will look at the background of the proposer until they find out that this man is raising the family of his deceased brother. Those who understand will not refuse, they will accept if the man and the family background is okay. They will not refuse because the person is not alive. They know that death happens to any family. The parent will ask their daughter to go to that family, provided they meet the conditions of the dowry payment.

Today there are some changes. One is civilisation. With civilisation, people have

gone to school and become independent where they will only think of what the modernisation tells them. They work and marry with their resources and forget that they have deceased people to be considered. Christianity also discourages this belief. Only a few who are not Christians are practicing this culture.

Sometimes the person who is expected to raise his brother's family may end up impregnating a girl. The impregnated girl however cannot be married to the dead brother. He needs a fresh woman. It is believed the dead would not be happy if he is not treated well in this regard. This is the change that has come today because of education and the church. So many families don't practice this because they are exposed to the church. It is traditionally not encouraged because the family cannot grow big. The Nuer people believe in large families. Anything that restricts the extension of the family is not good in this culture.

These cultural norms have changed due to wars or western education. People should go back to these practices when the situation becomes better and when resources are regained. Many have died young in this crisis and if nothing will be done about them the population will be very small. Nowadays females are more than men because men are killed by wars.

The life history of a Tea Lady

Theme: Gender and Civicness

Location: Nimule

Date: 23 May 2018

Role/Title: Tea Lady

Gender: Female

The tea lady is the firstborn of her late father. Her father was a soldier who fought under John Garang during the liberation

struggle. Before finally settling in Nimule, they had moved to many locations including Ethiopia, Torit, and Dumo.

Her interview demonstrates how life has been changing for women in the informal economy in South Sudan. Norms surrounding gender constrain women within these sectors, yet, despite these setbacks, the interviewee has succeeded in having several businesses through which she has independently paid for her children's education.

My father had very many wives and children which made going to school very hard and my mother had also just given birth at the time. I decided to stop going to school at the time to support my mother. My mother taught us how to work and by then alcohol was the marketable thing. So, we were also able to make and sell alcohol and it is what we used as our source of income until I reached primary five. I would go to the market to make bread and also buy cassava in Bibia on the Uganda side and I would cook and sell it. When my mother was strong enough, I was able to go back to school.

At the end of primary five, I was to be promoted to primary six when the man who married me approached me. That man came and told me that he wanted to marry me and I refused, until when my father said, this man is good my daughter. Since other men wanted to take you by force, I will give you to this man because he is able to take care of your life. Then I started reasoning that my school is not progressing, and I am the firstborn at home, I don't have elder brothers and my uncles were not even giving us any support. Then I told my father, if you have said it, I have accepted this man and I will go with him so that my brothers and sister who have followed me will have access to education which will help them in the future. That was the reason why I accepted that man. It was in 2005 and my marriage was organised in December that year.

There was nothing I got bad from my marriage from 2006 to 2012. We were going well with my husband and my brothers and sisters. Things become worse in 2012 when my husband was taken to fight in Heglig because he was a soldier and his rank was a Major. That was the time my life become worse because my husband was not there, and I needed food and I was staying with my husbands' relatives. When he would receive his salary, he would send it to me so that I could use it for feeding the children. I started helping him by opening my tailoring shop where I was making bedsheets and table covers while I was also making alcohol at the same time.

I did this for some time until I constructed the house which is currently at home as a permanent house. I also built a house which was designed as a shop then I reported to my husband that I have built a shop, but I have nothing to put in, therefore, it will be your work to get me some money so that I can buy items to sell. He accepted and as we were planning to buy some goods for the shop, my father came and asked for the balance of my dowry which was not paid in full by then. So, he took all the money we were having and the shop remained with nothing in it.

In 2012 when my husband came back from the frontline, he found that I had constructed two more houses. He came back sick and passed away in 2013. While I was still mourning my husband, an opportunity for training in catering and tailoring came and I enrolled. Following the training, I was recruited for employment at an Indian supermarket where I worked for three years (2013 – 2015).

I was earning 20 SSP a day when I started working at the supermarket. At the time in 2013, 20 SSP could buy many things and it was able to sustain me and the children. At one point, I saved 15,000 SSP that I used to attempt to start a business. I bought clothes

from Moyo (in Uganda) and sent to resale in Rumbek for a profit. Unfortunately, however, this business collapsed because many of my customers took cloths in debt and did not pay back.

All this time (2013 – 2015), my father was not happy about my work in the supermarket. He called me and told me, my daughter this place is not good for you because it is a restaurant at one side and the other side was a bar where people drink alcohol while inside is a guest house. He told me that this place will spoil you, you cannot managed yourself well. I told him father, you care enough when we were still young but as per now if my husband was alive he was supposed to be the one to help you but not you alone but to support us also, please allow me to go and work so that I can be able to support my children, then he accepted and I continued working from there for another year.

When I felt like having another child, then I had to go to Juba, this brother-in-law who was given to me to take care of me and his brother's properties came from Rumbek and we met in Juba where we stayed until I conceived. When I conceived, I stopped working at the Indian supermarket until I gave birth in 2016.

When I gave birth, my life was not good because no one was supporting me. Even the man whom I had the child with was not supporting me. School fees for my children was sometimes provided by my father. Three months after my delivery, I asked for permission from my mother-in-law to travel to Nimule for work. I had five chairs and was going to partner with my uncle's wife who was based in Nimule to start up a tea business and share the profits equally.

After one month, I observed that my uncle's wife failed to stick to the agreement and was only paying me 20 SSP per day instead. 20 SSP a day in 2016 could not sustain me, and

so I started cooking and selling food within the same premises. The food business started with low sales, but it got busy after a few weeks. Since the food business was more profitable, my uncle's wife also started cooking food to sell and we could no longer work together.

I quit and started working in another restaurant with some friends I had made in Nimule. My friends would pay me 30 SSP a day and sometimes 50 SSP depending on the day's sales. I worked with them for three months before I finally opened my own tea place. My tea business was successful, and I managed to save and bank 90,000 SSP. Because food restaurants are more profitable, I used the 90,000 SSP to start a food restaurant. Unluckily, due to the conflict and a poor location, my food sales were low, and I had to close the restaurant.

I have since gone back to making tea for two years. I am independent and not getting any support from any relatives and been able to pay for all the school fees and basic needs of my children.

Education and Civickness

Interview with a Head Teacher

Theme: Education and Civickness

Location: Nimule

Date: 18 October 2019

Role/Title: Head Teacher

Gender: Male

The teacher has been teaching for over 22 years. His interview explores the meaning of public authority in conflict contexts and demonstrates how the education sector has been affected by the dimensions of the conflict. Albeit with many challenges, teachers are using their influence to provide alternative spaces for negotiation and dispute settlements.

It has not been easy to teach in South Sudan during the conflict period. In Nimule in particular. It was not easy. When the conflict broke, many people went to Uganda for their safety in the refugee camp. Basically, many trained teachers went into exile leaving a big gap in the education sector in Nimule. The number of learners also reduced as many children were taken to the refugee camps. School governing bodies like the PTAs left for the refugee camps. The level of management gap in the school increased because there has been low concentration of supervision by the education authority at *payam*, county, and state level.

I sacrificed myself not to be in the refugee camp so that I could help the learners who have not gone to the camp. I bought some of the reference books to help learning in the school. Even teachers in the neighbouring schools borrow some of the books for lessons.

Before the conflict, the education system was under the control of state authority and the education sector was doing well. During the conflict, education was centralised, which has brought in some of the following challenges: there are serious examination malpractices during external examinations; learners are now not being prepared to compete favourably at the international level; teachers are also staying in fear because of the conflict; payment of salaries delay and the money has lost value, which makes the life of teachers difficult in terms of finance. Due to the conflict, teachers are not sent for upgrading or capacity building either.

I had two scenarios where my life was threatened by the parents of my learners. When I was a head teacher in one of the schools, one of the prefects on duty was patrolling to send learners into the classrooms for lesson, one of the girls started to run due to fear of being late in the school and unfortunately the girl fell and lost two of her teeth.

When the girl's parents got the information, they came to the school with a lot of threats and wanted to forcefully take the prefect to the police. However, I told the parents of the girl that the issue was administrative because the prefect is part of the school administration and did not intend to cause the accident. It is supposed to be the school authority and the parents' representatives to handle the case.

The parents felt I was supporting the prefect and he forcefully took me to the police to explain what happened to his daughter. I went to the police with the father of the prefect, but unfortunately, the parents of the prefect accepted anything the parents of the girl demanded as compensation for the lost teeth. The case was referred to the chief to handle. The chief passed a judgment that the parents of the prefect should pay two cows to compensate the lost teeth.

According to my observation, the situation escalated due to ethnic differences because the girl was from a Dinka community and the prefect was from the Madi community. According to Dinka customs, when a person loses a tooth, the person who causes it should pay a cow. Since there were two teeth lost, that is why they demanded two cows.

The father of the prefect came back to the school for some assistance to get cows, but I advised him that the problem was not to be handled in the court. I also advised the two parents that if we do things like this, next time learners will not accept to be part of the school administration. The parents of the girl accepted my advice and told me that the teeth were to be fixed and his girl should remain in the school. The teeth of the girl were finally fixed and the school gave some money to support the process.

We are working hand in hand with the other authorities at the county level. When an issue arises in the school and the school can

solve it, the other authorities are not involved but other cases, for example when a girl is impregnated, the other authorities like the *payam*, county, or state are involved to see that this girl is helped to remain in school.

In most cases however, the teachers are not getting enough support from the higher education offices. In the near future, nobody would wish to put on the shoes of being a teacher. When you look critically, teachers have low pay and yet have a lot to do to raise the young ones to help the nation in the future.

We reduce tension by encouraging cultures which unite people together like traditional dances where every learner is encouraged to learn from the different tribes. If the Dinka are dancing, all the other tribes join in and vice versa. We encourage football activities where every learner is encouraged to participate, irrespective of tribes.

Interview with a Head Teacher

Theme: Education and Civiness

Location: Nimule

Date: 17 June 2019

Role/Title: Head Teacher

Gender: Male

The headteacher is 42 years old and has been teaching for the last 20 years. In his interview, he explains how conflict has affected the provision of education services in Nimule and the challenges that teachers face in this context.

I became as teacher through an inspiration from my former teachers from Uganda during my stay as a refugee in Uganda. I started teaching in 2000 after I finished my A-Level. I started as a licensed teacher and later joined a teaching college and obtained a diploma in secondary education.

Teaching in Nimule after the 2013 conflict has been particularly difficult. Due to the conflict, people were displaced from all over the county and many settled in Nimule because of its proximity to the Ugandan border. Students, therefore, came from different backgrounds and ethnicities, yet school policies and regulations varied across the country.

Some students who had fled into exile in Uganda were forced to return to Nimule because they failed to equate their grades to Uganda's educational curriculum and system. Many of them returned as individuals and stayed with relatives and friends. Such students usually found it difficult to support themselves to stay in school and sometimes missed lessons to do petty jobs to survive.

Getting the students to study and relate to each other was extremely challenging. The sudden changes forced many school administrators in Nimule to review their policies and systems to be able to survive and accommodate the influx and mix of students.

School policies were, for example, adopted to treat every student equally and not segregate based on ethnicity or language. School policies also do not allow students to mobilise and segregate based on ethnicity. Due to some cultural practices, however, girls are often segregated and denied access to education. As a result, male students usually outnumber female students.

Since the December 2013 conflict, there is a high rate of devaluation and yet there is no increment of salaries. This has affected my social life. There's no motivation and salaries are usually delayed. The school is since being run using money contributed by the parents.

Trained teachers are very few and many of them need capacity building to increase their

skills. The number of learners handled by a single teacher is quite large, for example, a class could have about 150 to 200 students. This has affected learning and makes it difficult for teachers to manage and support their students.

Due to the conflict, there have been high rates of school dropouts. Many students lost their parents or guardians while others just couldn't afford to pay for school requirements. Some students have since come to ask for scholarships because they cannot afford to pay for the school requirements. Some students come to my office asking for scholarship because they cannot pay their school fees. Some students say their parents lost jobs in the government which has affected their social life. There is a high rate of school dropouts due to the difficulties caused by the conflicts.

There are some materials which are at the moment being provided by the parents like chalk, duplicating papers, and finances. Majorly, the school depends on the parents. There was some funds being given by the Girls Education South Sudan (GESS) program annually based on the number of the students but the school benefited once in 2015 before the 2016 crisis. Since then, the school has not received any fund from the GESS program.

The challenge with GESS programs is that when the school submits a budget proposal, GESS does not provide the funds as budgeted, and this affects the school's plans. Usually, GESS designs forms to be filled by the school that includes details and numbers of teachers and students. The forms are submitted to the state government, but it is not clear how or if the forms get to the national ministry of education.

The most vulnerable group in the school are the orphans. They have the desire to stay in school but lack financial support.

Another vulnerable group are the girls who are expected to do most of the domestic work in their homes. This affects their ability to stay in school and concentrate on their education. Since the war started, there have been no direct opportunities for the students to study in higher institutions once they finish their senior four exams. Despite all the challenges, the school does campaigns and outreach to sensitise people about the benefits of education. They engage and mobilise the parents through meetings and discuss ways to support the school so that learning continues.

The life history of a teacher in Abyei

Theme: Education and Civiness

Location: Abyei

Date: 28 February 2019

Role/Title: Teacher

Gender: Male

The interview demonstrates the lived realities of teachers in South Sudan and the harsh conditions that teachers encounter serving their communities.

I joined a missionary school in 1999 and studied there up to primary eight. After primary eight, I volunteered to teach in Bullic Primary School. I taught in Bullic Primary School up to 2005 and finally joined Ayak Akat Secondary in Warrap to continue my education.

I first got to Abyei in 2008 through a friend's connection. I moved to Abyei in search of better living standards. In Abyei, I was enrolled to attend a teacher's methodology training course for one month. During this time, I networked with fellow teachers and one of them recommended me to Miyom Primary School. In this school, no interviews were conducted. I was expected to teach voluntarily as they gauged my performance to give me a teaching contract.

A major incident happened in Miyom Primary School in 2012 that pushed me to seek a transfer to another school. On the closing day of one of the school terms, some students who had been expelled for indiscipline started a fight with me. The fight intensified involving other teachers and students and the police were involved. I was arrested and detained in a police cell for a night that day.

Following that incident, I opted to be transferred to Madding Jok Thiang Primary School where I taught for a year. After that, I moved to Akech Nhial Primary School where I also taught for a year. I am now teaching at Comboni Primary School. I joined Comboni in hope for better pay but it has not been the case. I am still being paid in SSP.

Teaching conditions in private schools are better than in public schools. Salaries in private schools are paid on time, whereas salaries in government schools take up to three months. While I was teaching in a public school, I couldn't afford clothing, meat, and other necessary items for my family. As a teacher in Comboni, I can now buy certain things and look after my family. It is also possible to get a loan because lenders trust that they will be paid back.

Private schools are also stricter and better at enforcing discipline among teachers and students compared to public schools. Another challenge with public schools is that they get overly congested, yet with very few teachers, and this affects performance. Most trained teachers seek alternative employment with NGOs leaving mainly unskilled teachers to run the government schools. Some teachers continue to teach because of the food rations they gain. Some teach to serve their communities and the country or simply to avoid being idle.

The head teachers sometimes benefit because they report a higher number of students than they actually have so that the

food ratios are increased. The head teachers sometimes distribute the surplus food ratios to the teachers to motivate them.

There is no accountability in public schools. Whenever strict measures are introduced, teachers don't show up because there is nothing that motivates them. Teachers also normally show up late because they use their morning hours engaging in other money-making ventures like agriculture to sustain their families.

In Comboni, they have lesson plans and teaching timetables to follow. The number of teachers is also enough to deliver all the planned lessons. In case a teacher is absent, the school has other teachers on standby to cover. Teachers who misbehave are immediately dismissed.

Private schools have also been better at handling conflict and issues between teachers and students. In 2018 for example, I was supervising an exam and caught a boy cheating and decided not to accept the boy's answer sheet. I then reported the case to the headmaster who backed my decision. Following the school regulations, they forwarded the case to the priest to make the final say. The priest held my decision and decided that the student would not be awarded marks for the particular exam and be discontinued in the next term. At the beginning of the new term however, the student apologised to the teachers and was allowed back to the school.

I would like to appeal to the government and NGOs, including WFP, to continue supporting private schools with food ratios. I am appealing because my school was recently informed that it would no longer receive the food rations from WFP. Students in private schools also go through the same harsh conditions as the other students and stopping the food ratios would be devastating for them.

Interview with the Director for Education, Rumamer County

Theme: Education and Civicness

Location of Interview: Abyei

Role/Title: Director for Education, Rumamer County

Gender: Male

The interviewee holds a diploma in theology from Aweil. He started his career in 2007, volunteering to teach English in Marol Primary School in Abyei. His interview demonstrates the key challenges that education actors face in their efforts to provide alternative spaces for civic actions.

As the Director for Education, I oversee the operations of 17 public and private primary schools and two secondary schools in Abyei. All the schools, except for Agok ECS, were built by the community with local materials. The government was only approached to provide teachers and scholastic materials.

Many homes and schools constructed in Abyei town before 2013 were burnt down during conflicts and many people were displaced to Rumamer county leading to congestion in the classrooms. Most schools don't have enough classroom structures, many students are taught in open spaces and under trees. This affects learning and makes it challenging to manage students. A class, for example, has an average of 150 students, while a school with no structures could have up to about 1,000 students.

Due to the conflict, many children were orphaned and have to survive on their own. As a result, many drop out of school due to hunger or lack of school fees and other scholastic materials. Although WFP provides food in the schools, many students won't have food to eat when they go back home and have resorted to hanging around markets with the hope of finding something to eat.

Girls particularly face a higher risk of dropping out of school once they get to the age of 15. At 15 years, they require good clothes, soap, and sanitary pads to keep them in school. When they lack these items, they get discouraged and find a man to get married to.

Teachers' salaries are very low and teachers don't have alternative sources of income. Teachers are paid a monthly salary of 1,000 SSP which is about the value of a day's meal in Abyei. Many teachers lose moral and find employment in other sectors. I encourage the teachers to do it for the greater good of educating the future generation with the hope that it will contribute to the development of South Sudan in the long run.

Abyei does not have a teacher training institute. Teachers are recruited from secondary education finalists who are interviewed and assessed for teaching skills. Once candidates have been selected, they undergo a brief training, for usually about a week before they are assigned. The training is conducted by more senior and experienced teachers.

The Catholic missionaries train a very limited number of teachers. Recently, they only trained 40 teachers, 20 of whom were taken up by a private school. The other 20 were distributed to government schools but I doubt that they are still in the teaching practice as many of them get frustrated and usually find alternative employment with NGOs.

Education is free, however, parents are expected to provide school uniforms, books, and pens to their children. Parents also sometimes contribute towards feeding the children while they are in school. Currently, however, WFP has been providing food to all the schools and also provides money to pay for grinding mills to process the food and for firewood.

According to the South Sudan education policy, Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) provide administrative oversight to the schools. PTAs support the construction of school structures and sometimes contribute towards paying teachers to keep them motivated. When a PTA constructs a new school, they usually approach the county local government through their office to provide teachers to their school.

The ministry has a code of conduct for teachers with well-defined penalties. Once a teacher breaks any of the codes, they are penalised accordingly. Usually, when a teacher impregnates a student, for example, the teacher is discontinued from service. If a student impregnates a fellow student, they are both expelled, and the girl is asked to take two to three years out of school to look after the baby. According to traditional law in Abyei, however, the boy would be asked to pay three cows as compensation for impregnating the girl, after which he would be set free. Students found to have committed other offences are also penalised.

Public Authority: Violence management, leadership, and authority at the community level

A discussion about leadership

Theme: Public Authority

Location: Nimule

Date: 28 February 2019

Role/Title: Dinka community chief and Court B judge

Gender: Male

The interviewee is a Dinka community chief and a Court B judge in Nimule. He has served in leadership positions throughout his adult life including with the SPLA since 1983. His interview demonstrates local

perceptions about leadership and how violence is governed at the local level in South Sudan. It shows the role that chiefs play and their influence over the use of violence in their communities.

I was born in 1948 and I joined school in 1955 until I finished primary four and we went back to the cattle camp. I remained in the cattle camp for long time until I got married to my first wife in 1972. I married my second wife in 1996. I stopped schooling because of our Dinka tradition. I was expected to stay in the cattle camp because our family was rich and I was the only male child in the family. I personally was rich and did not see any need for school.

I was put as a leader in 1983, I have been working with the SPLA all along from 1983 up to now in 2018 I am still in leadership. I was first elected as chief in 1983. In 1989 when I relocated to Itang, I was again elected, and also in Mugali I was elected. All these times, I have been elected not because of my father's and my grandfather's leadership but due to my own doing. Other tribes and communities have also previously elected me. In 1999 for example, the Lakara tribe in Lafon county had often referred to me as their leader way before they officially elected me.

I have also been working with people and handling different cases as a judge including marriage disputes, pregnancy cases, inter-communal fights, injuries, etc. I give justice to people by giving someone his or her right, if he or she has a case and he or she has a right then I make sure their right is respected. I don't take sides; I just deal with the law and I let the law be the one to judge.

If a person from another community commits a crime within a Dinka Bor community, Dinka Bor by-laws would have to be applied. Cases that involve people from different ethnicities are usually assessed by the recipient court and referred to either

the statutory court or to the particular community court that is considered fit to try the case. If a case is presided over by the wrong chief or community, the plaintiff or a community has a right to complain and the ruling could be reversed.

Murder cases go direct to the judiciary under the statutory court. Murder is not our case, we cannot handle it, it is not in our bylaws, but sometimes we can be appointed by the judge of the statutory court to handle some murder cases. I was one time selected to go and participate in two murder cases. One involved a Nuer man who was killed by another person and the court ruled that compensation be provided. The other case involves two Dinka men, and it was also ruled that compensation be provided.

The way we provide protection as leaders, is like when there is hunger, or any other problem like displacement, a leader of that community should make sure that he offers protection to his people so that they may not scattered. I should make sure that I gather my people in one place so that it will be very easy for me to monitor, if there is a case of hunger and I have something I can immediately give, if it is not there, then I can call for the community so that we can find ways of survival and this is the reason why I was put as a leader, to provide protection, and it is so important to us, this is what make us leaders.

When there was war in 1991, for example, it was us leaders who were giving ideas to people to relocate near the UN camps for protection. As leaders, we realised that it was not safe for people to be moving with cattle and that they would be safer in groups and that the UN would provide protection to our people. As a result, some of our people moved and have since settled in Lobone, Mugali, and Nimule.

When NGOs come to support our community, we tell them our issues and

needs, and we agree on ways to cooperate and work together. As leaders, we can only advise and give directives on what the NGOs should do but we try not to meddle in NGOs business.

Due to the conflict and related movements, cultures and traditions are changing. People are adapting practices and behaviours that are not part of our cultures. Dress codes have for example changed as people become more modern. These changes sometimes affect young children and threaten our cultural practices and systems.

Leadership is a gift from God and leaders are in their positions for a reason. As leaders, it is important to be exemplary, protect people, and show people that they need to help one another. Leaders also need to tell the truth to their people without necessarily taking sides. Even in situations of fear, leaders need to be able to stand for the truth and represent the law in truth and fairness.

Fighting in Suongor Refugee Camp in Sudan

Theme: Public Authority

Location: Leer

Date: 7 June 2018

Role/Title: Soldier

Gender: Male

In June 2018, a violent conflict erupted between Eastern and Western Nuer communities living in Suongor refugee camp in Sudan. The fight lasted four days and seven people were killed before it could be stopped. This interview illustrates the role that non-state public authorities play in mediating and managing such conflicts and the deep challenges actors face in such processes, particularly where they have no prior experience as mediators.

In May 2017, there was a fight that happened in the camp. The Nuer community

fought and divided themselves into two, Eastern and Western Nuer. The cause was a disagreement between the youths. Most of the time the problem is about girls, but this was caused by a radio.

On that day, a general meeting was called in the camp to update people about the peace process of South Sudan. The meeting was being held at a venue close to a mobile phone charging shop. While the meeting was going on, a disabled young man with crutches emerged from nowhere and appeared in the phone charging shop and hit a radio with his crutches for no reason. The owner of the phone charging shop did not take it lightly. He started fighting the disabled guy and beat him to death. The owner of the shop was a Westerner, and the disabled guy was an Easterner. Immediately following this incident, the families and relatives of the two parties intervened and also started fighting each other. It was not possible to stop the fight on the first day as no one was able to intervene at the time. On the second day, another person was killed.

In the camp, there are leaders who are selected to solve the community issues, but this was beyond their capacity. They were being victimised as part of the conflict because of who they were and not recognised as leaders but as members of their ethnic communities. The leaders also lacked experience in handling such issues. Most of them were chosen as leaders in the camp because there were no other experienced leaders to choose from. All they did was mobilise a team of elders to advise the youth to stop fighting, however, this did not yield any results. Some of the leaders instead took sides and were encouraging the fight. An experienced chief would have handled the situation better because they understand the values of Nuer culture and the need to relate with each other.

The Sudanese police that should have intervened also just watched. The fight

continued into its fourth day and another five people were killed. The team that finally stopped the fight was led by a Major General who was residing in the camp at the time. He mobilised a community dialogue and set up a team of six people to mediate the process. The dialogue involved the community leaders, youth leaders, and UN representatives, and was approved by the Sudanese Authority that was overseeing the camp. The dialogue started with a process to vet the mediation team. All the six people passed as neutral and were given the mandate to facilitate the process.

It was difficult to determine the root cause of the fight because the disabled young man who knocked the radio was dead and the kiosk owner was also killed in the fight. Some of the youth who were more directly involved had also been arrested by Sudanese police and could not be consulted. It was then established that anger pushed the other community members to get involved and it was not necessary to separate camps for each of the communities.

The dialogue resolved to suspend all the leaders that were found to be partisan to the conflict. Since it was difficult to determine who had killed the other persons, it was resolved to forgive and use Nuer customs to cement the relation. All four communities in the camp; Bentiu Nuer, Pangak Nuer, Lou Nuer, and Jikany/Nasir Nuer (including those that were not necessarily involved) were asked to contribute 400 SSP to purchase a goat. The goat was sacrificed as a cultural ritual to reunite the communities. An invitation was sent to the Sudanese Authorities to come and witness the occasion. During the ritual, a prayer was made to God to ask for forgiveness, and to those who were killed to forgive their communities.

An agreement was written and signed to document the resolutions. Some of

the points in the agreement included that: schools would reopen; water points would reopen and be accessed equally by everyone; women leaders would be appointed to oversee water points and resolve any disputes; and that people should return to their original blocks of residence before the fight started and live in peace and harmony with each other. Since then, and following the agreement, the camp has not experienced any other conflict.

Taxation: Perceptions of types of taxation, authorities involved, and accountability at the community level

Interview with a field officer for a humanitarian NGO

Theme: Taxation

Location: Yambio

Role/Title: Field Officer with an International NGO

Gender: Male

The field officer has been paying personal income tax for the last 15 years. His interview describes experiences and frustrations with the tax system in Yambio.

When I hear the word tax, I just think of development, which I am not so sure happens here or not. I studied in Uganda and I have moved to other African countries. The experience I gained from them regarding taxes is different from what is happening here in my country.

I can remember very well, when I was young, I used to hear the word "*kufuta*" from my parents. That was during the Sudan's government, it was a united Sudan before the struggle for liberation that lead to

separation of the north and South Sudan into two different countries. Since the independence of South Sudan, and before this period, I have never heard the word *kufuta* again. There are however many other payments that different community members make to the government. For instance, the motorcyclists and vehicle owners pay "*ruksha*" and many other names that I can't remember them all. And for us, the NGOs employees, we pay personal income tax every month when we receive our salaries and I think traders are also taxed as payment for licenses (*ruksha*).

I pay taxes to the government and I have been doing that for quite a number of years. And at some point, I got confused. I am not the only one who has this confusion, there are many others, this is because the system is so confusing you can't understand how it works. Up to now some of my friends who work with the government pay taxes but they don't know how much money they have been taxed. At least for us, the NGOs workers, we may know.

It is quite confusing for us because the collection authority does not have a fixed amount of money that they charge, at times they charge 10 percent, 14 percent, and 15 percent, but they don't tell us about all this, making us confused with how they collect our money.

We pay taxes to the government to the hands of taxation officers who come to our office to collect the bank slip, because we are made to pay at the bank. But now they have changed the policy of us paying in the bank to paying directly to their hands in the office, we see different faces who come to collect taxes from us. As NGO employees, we pay taxes every month when we receive our monthly salaries.

Our community leaders do not ask us to make any payment, but sometimes they ask us to give what is called in Arabic "*tabruwat*"

– meaning contributions. We make contribution only when there are funerals, or when there is a community gathering. This is voluntarily done, and you pay if you have, and if you don't feel like contributing, it is up to you. And remember, people are watching you, because one day you will be in a situation that may require support from others.

We pay taxes in cash money. I don't know for other groups that pay, I am not so sure some might be paying other things apart from money. But generally, in my community, people pay tax in the form of money as government doesn't like material payments, which is problematic. So, I would encourage this payment to be optional. Those of high and middle class should pay in cash and the lower class it can be optional, they can pay materials that they can afford.

Yes, there is always tension with the tax collectors because those who are sent to collect taxes are not paid. So, what they collect is what they help themselves with. When they come, what I need to know from them is the procedures, and our good or bad relationship is based on their approach to this matter. Good approach results in good relationship, and if the approach is not friendly, you can guess what will be the result. It depends on the approach used by the tax collectors. Another thing is that we are able to relate very well if they account to us about the collection, but if not, there is no way that we can relate well.

The difficulty I face with taxation is when they introduce penalties. When you miss a day or some months, that is a lot of money. In this case they take a lot of money from you. If you have a shop, it is closed with effect from that day. If it is an office, and you do not have a strong manager who can defend you, the office can also be closed.

The difference with the tax system during the liberation struggle is that many people

are employed nowadays, as opposed to during the liberation struggle, so now with the monthly salaries they get, they are able to pay personal income tax. Those days, the government was in the bush, and you know when the government is in the bush, they don't have much authority over certain things, so they used to force people to work in their government with no pay at all. At some points, the SPLA/M were told that their salaries are in the hands of the civilians, and of course they used to take by force or borrow motorbikes from owners to take them to certain destinations. There was no system in place to help collection of taxes. With all the confusion during the struggle, SPLA/M greatly received support from the different communities that were under their control.

According to my own observation, the money they collect from us is used to ensure our security. Some years back the security situation of our community was terrible, but now we live in peace. This does not mean that they can't provide good security in absence of collecting payment. And sometimes I really don't see a lot of what is being done with our money. For instance, here in Yambio main market, they collect some money from those who sell in the open market on a daily basis, and around that place bunches of garbage that have stayed there for months. The money collected from them should be used to keep things clean; to me it doesn't cost a lot to keep that place clean. This is just one example. If I begin to tell you about all the groups that pay fees or taxes and analysed whether they benefit from that money or not, you will hear stories.

The right people, who are well trained and who know how to interact with the taxpayers, should be employed, because at times those who collect are rude and do not sympathise with people. Of course, we can't blame them very much because the government takes many months to pay

salaries, so when the salaries delay, they become rude, arrogant, and mistreat those whom they collect taxes from. The fault comes from the government, and that is why they have become corrupt, because how can you go and collect money on an empty stomach? Which is a very big problem with our government.

Interview with a male tax collector

Theme: Taxation

Location: Yambio

Role/Title: Tax Collector

Gender: Male

This interviewee started his job as a tax collector for the Yambio County Land Authority (YCLA) in 2013. Before the formation of the YCLA, collections were conducted by the land council. The YCLA only started collecting taxes after independence. In the interview, he explains how the tax system functions and the challenges they face as tax collectors.

I do both collection and payment of taxes. But I only pay taxes through my salaries, but I cannot even tell you how much money the government cuts from my salaries. I only know that some percentage of my salary is being cut as tax.

I started this job of collecting payments for the county authority in 2013, that means I have done this job for the period of seven years and this is the eighth year, and I am still doing it, and this may continue for some years to come, unless I get promoted to a different position.

The frequency of tax collection depends on a number of factors or situations. In some situations, we collect on daily, weekly, monthly, or even on yearly bases. Our collection at the county authority is based on flexibility. We also collect tax from the few individuals from whom we lease the land.

Sometimes we lease the land for a number of years like ten, or even thirty years, and we ask them to pay accordingly.

The decision on what amount of payment should be collected is actually passed by the council of ministers in their sitting together with the county office or county authority. I think the plan is initiated, discussed, and agreed upon at a certain level. So, as tax collectors our work is just to implement the decision. This plan is written and is given to us, and so, that is what we follow. Some people assume that we just collect payments anyhow, which is not the case, we are very organised in such a way that the amount we collect for each quantity of goods or cargo is placed against each quantity. So can you see how organised we are?

After the collection of tax from the taxpayers, I report it to one of the desks in the county. So, after this, the county authority will pick it from there and report it to the revenue authority. The way I do the reporting to the county authority is different from how the county authorities do their reporting to the revenue authority. Because with my reporting, I carry cash with me and the receipts and submit, but for the county at their level, I am not so sure of how they do it, but I guess the taxes collected from almost all of us who collect taxes are deposited in the account and only the receipts are taken to the office of the revenue authority for reporting purpose. I think that is how it works at their level.

We always do the enforcement through sensitisation on the importance of paying taxes. So, when they are sensitised, some can understand how it works and for those who do not have ears, they will never understand this, and these are the same people who are always stubborn when we ask them to make payments to the government. Sometimes tax is paid through the free will of the community members

who feel that they are supposed to do so for their own benefit and for the benefit of the community and the nation at large.

We do not work in isolation of the headmen and the community chiefs. So, with regards to the question of how we enforce payment of taxes according to the county land authority, we always use the community chiefs and the headmen when we want to enforce tax payment.

We do not expect any form of payment other than cash from our targeted taxpayers for many reasons. The first reason is that paying money is convenient. Secondly, payments accepted in other forms may make the life of tax collector difficult when it comes to reporting. Another reason is that in case payment is made in materials, this may require the tax collectors to look for market so that the materials can be sold which again is an extra cost for us because we cannot get extra pay for this extra work.

As county land authority, we have established a very good relationship with the state revenue authority. It is only with those who pay us taxes that we sometimes do not relate well for a well-known reason that surrounds money issues. When we demand for payment, even if we make it clear to the taxpayers, still there is a bit of resistance, some of them still feel they do not have the responsibility of paying taxes to the government.

The most difficult situation we deal with here is lack of motivation to do this job. Like what I told you, after collecting payments from the target group and submitting them to the office, we are given some allowance at the end of the month. If I tell you the amount of money we are given, you will even wonder how we survive with that small amount of money. But we are managing the situation by the grace of God.

During the struggle for South Sudanese

liberation, SPLA/M used to make some collections. I do not know whether I should call it tax or not, but what I can say is that they used to collect mostly foodstuff. Because the SPLA/M did not pay the army, the foodstuff collection was meant for consumption by the army on the frontline and in the barracks in general. I do not know whether the collection was referred to as taxes, because the collection of foodstuffs was monthly or after some months.

These collections actually targeted each and every household. The headmen and the chiefs used to make announcements followed by collection of the foodstuff. I remember very well during this period, some lazy households used to escape the activity and hide themselves in the far bushes or forests until the activity of collection was over. During the liberation movement, there were a lot of malpractices by the SPLA/M forces, which forced some South Sudanese to flee the country.

I do not think that the taxes I have collected have helped me establish myself as someone with authority. We collect little money, and that same little money is calculated, and we are given some percentages as our monthly allowance. Even the allowance we are given is not big, that is the reason as to why I am saying that I really do not know how it has helped me. It helps me to take care of my family with feeding only, I have not experienced any personal development yet, we just survive by the grace of God.

I do not see many changes experienced by my family and the community members. I do not deny the fact that we have some infrastructure in place like a hospital, some schools in the community, although some of the schools do not function well, but the structures are in place to help our children learn. It is only the health facilities that I am confused about. It is only the main hospital, according to what I hear, that was

constructed by the government. As for the rest of the facilities, I think it is not only the government who constructed it, but it is the joint work of both the government and other partners on the ground.

To my own understanding, people should pay taxes. Only that it seems as if not everybody in this state or even the entire country has the responsibility of paying tax to the government and yet everybody receives the social services provided by the government. You see only the few people who are involved in business or those who buy, sell, or lease some pieces of land are those whom the government asks to pay. You can imagine if all the heads of households were to be paying tax, there would be no blame at all because our government would be rich with enough resources and provide services to the citizens across the country, leave alone one state like ours.

Interview with a Community Chief

Theme: Taxation

Location: Gogrial East

Date: February 2020

Role/Title: Community Chief

Gender: Male

The local authority in Gogrial recently introduced what they consider a social service tax, or a household tax. Every household was made to pay this tax regardless of whether they are headed by a male or female person. Previously, only male adults paid taxes. Due to the conflict, however, many male adults were recruited and deployed in the military. Some were killed in conflicts, significantly reducing the number of males. This situation pushed the local government to introduce the household tax and make everyone eligible regardless of if gender. As a tax collector and taxpayer, the chief provides deep insights into the local organisation of

taxes in his community and explains the challenges with the social service tax.

I do pay taxes which is currently called social services tax or household tax. Previously it was only male adults that were being taxed, but now it is changed to the household tax and this has a lot of challenges which I have raised in several meetings. Some households have no fathers because they were either killed in the conflict of 2013 or 2016, or killed in the cattle raid or by disease or natural death and it is the woman struggling with the children. In some cases, male adults are either in prisons of the main towns or doing some cheap labour kind of work or in the military at very far places.

Because many people have now left to town searching for schools and others in the military, while others are idle in towns, this has made the number of potential tax payers very low at the village level, which forced the government to think of what to do and that is how household tax came about.

The main challenge is that there are very many people who cannot afford paying the household tax, rather they need government upkeep which is also a problem. Another concern that we as chiefs are raising is the fact that we have never seen a concrete building being built by the government as a good utilisation of the tax collected from us. And we don't know what the money is being used for.

Another challenge is the collection of bulls through *muun*. People come and say we need bulls for certain things, but when we follow up, we find that nothing is being done with those bulls collected from the people. Like last year we were asked to collect bulls and up to now we don't know how these bulls have been used and they never account for it.

Another form of tax is ready food or collection of sorghum because if soldiers

are in your locality and the government is not feeding them, they might take laws into their hands and loot people. So, we always cooperate and give them food through systematic collections.

There have been lots of changes since independence. The way it used to be is that the government sends an official communication in the form of a letter from a legitimate authority informing the chief and members of local government about the tax. After, the chief will call the community and other leaders to communicate the news. Once the money is being collected, nobody will just randomly come to you and tell you that he needs money, but rather there is a timeline set by the government and when that timeline finishes, the chief, *gol* leaders, and others involved will take the money to the cashier where it is kept. After the confirmation is done, a receipt is issued, and you are advised to keep the receipt for accountability. Currently, someone just comes from nowhere and goes to the *gol* leader's house and tells them he has been sent by the government and that he needs money. The *gol* leaders have no choice but to give him the money. There is no guarantee that he will not take some money since nothing has been written down. Or how sure are we that he is working with the government – he might be a criminal pretending to be a government official.

Taxes collected from the people should be used in a correct way, like investing the money in development, building things like offices for the county and other developmental projects that are beneficial to the community. Last year, the collection of tax was done twice, individual collection and household tax, and this year we are being taxed with one tax which is household tax. This clearly shows inconsistency and also a lack of appropriate thresholds, as in the constitution.

When I was invited for a meeting in Juba,

I took the initiative to ask my colleagues/ chiefs from Equatoria if they are also being taxed by the government. They clearly told us that there is nothing like that in their places. We, the Dinka, don't truly believe that the country has got its independence. Maybe the Dinka elite, but on our part, we are taking the burden of everything, especially us in Bahr el Ghazal. We are taking the burden of the president being a son from Bahr el Ghazal and we are taking the burden of assumption from other tribes who think that it is Bahr el Ghazal people that are benefiting. In true sense, we are the most marginalised people all over the country.

I gained this authority through the work of my forefathers and through my good work I have been able to obtain respect and legitimacy from my people. However, enforcing what the government requires may just be a contributing factor to my authority. The *gol* leaders can be the right persons to collect the taxes because they are not corrupt. They fear the government. Nowadays, many new chiefs have been formed and when the government asked for a tax from 500 people – which is the minimum number of people that are under that chieftainship – and if a *gol* leader is given that power, they should be able to mobilise the expected taxes.

For a chief, failure to mobilise the expected amount of taxes comes with consequences. They will ask why you are not willing to pay tax and then go further to take what belongs to you as a chief, and nobody will accept to take the burden of all the people. We, however, have no option than to leave those who cannot pay because many of them actually lost their livelihoods while defending the government and now their families are left without anyone to care for them, so I do sympathise with them.

We won't get any feedback from the government even if we asked for

accountability, because we will not find anyone that will take responsibility. In fact, you will be referred until you stop asking and the government never took initiative to come back to the people and tell them that this is the total amount that was collected and here is what has been done with it.

Interview with a veteran teacher who also works for an NGO

Theme: Taxation

Location: Wau

Date: February 2020

Role/Title: Teacher

Gender: Male

The teacher has been paying taxes since he started his profession with the government. As a staff member of an NGO, he still pays personal income tax which is directly deducted from his monthly salary. He says he has no choice but to comply with the government's regulations.

He understands tax as an important aspect of government business and that it binds people and their government. He notes that if the taxes collected are properly used, it could improve welfare and the living conditions of people, and enable technological advancement that can fasten development and make the country strong and successful. If money is not properly used, he notes that citizens will continue to depend on development aid while a few people accumulate wealth.

The interview highlights his perspectives as a regular taxpayer and demonstrates the expectations that citizens have towards the government for the taxes collected.

I have been paying taxes since I got a job with government as a professional teacher. I shifted to the NGOs so that I am able to support my family and I have since still been paying personal income tax. My employer,

who is currently paying my personal income tax directly, pays it to the tax authority and I have no choice but to comply with the directives circulated by the government.

There have been serious tax increases on our income. This has affected our income and the way we live because the little we get is taxed so heavily. We know that these are meant for the development of our country, but the government should give it a second thought.

Tax is a very important aspect of government businesses, but the objective for taxation itself is losing its meaning and understanding. First of all, tax is a binding factor between the people and the government. Money that is collected should be properly used by the government to provide development to its people, then the welfare of the citizens will be improved, and the general living conditions will improve and from there the people will advance and think of issues related to technology and other development-related aspects that can determine a strong and successful country. But with this kind of dealings happening currently, we will continue to depend on aid to eat while a few are getting rich and richer.

The taxes that I give to the community is because sometimes the community may sit together and agree to do certain projects for the benefit of the entire community, and based on each and everyone's capacity, people voluntarily contribute either in cash or in kind to fulfil the project needs. Also, someone in your community might be sick or facing other social problems and people will volunteer to support such people. Such taxes are out of will, while the tax by the government is compulsory and fixed. You pay and get a receipt back for your payment.

During the old days, we only paid 5 SSP until the tax graduated to 1,000 SSP. But it has been affected by the conflict, now we are not paying any tax. But for those who have been

doing some work like myself, it is charged as a percentage of your salary.

The authority to tax depends on the layout of the government – because normally it's the state government that gives directives and orders to the county government and the county government calls all the chiefs and informs them about the need for taxes. Failure to comply is met with consequences from the chiefs and local authorities.

The first step that I know is that once you have paid your money to the chief, your name will be registered in the counter book and so I believe maybe the chief will forward it to the county level. But for my case, the tax that is currently taken by the government is directly paid by my employer to the government.

I believe taxes are important if they are used for the development of the nation. I have moved to several countries and I have seen and witnessed various governments taxing people. Sudan's government has been taxing people heavily, but it must be on the basis that it is used for development. In SPLA controlled areas also, there has been heavy tax on the people. So, this issue of tax isn't new, even in developed countries it is there.

In fact, in the 1990s, the SPLA was asking civilians – how are we going to win against the Arabs? That question led us to divide our contributions to the war into three categories: first, those who went to the frontline directly, second those who were paying taxes, and third those who were getting education to face the Arab intellectually during negotiations and other diplomatic engagements. So, we have been paying anything that we cultivate because there was no money at the time.

To be sincere, taxes have not been properly used because things are now lacking including roads and hospitals. Nothing has actually changed at all and we need the government to step up and change this

situation. We need the government to be responsible enough to help its people.

An interview with a male youth leader Gogrial East

Theme: Taxation

Location: Gogrial East

Date: February 2020

Role/Title: Youth Leader

Gender: Male

As a youth leader, the interviewee is often informed about tax regulations and requirements, and plays an active role in supporting the chiefs in sensitising people about tax. His interview provides historical and current interpretations of taxes in his community.

This tax issue started a long time ago from our great grandfathers. It is not a new thing at all. It started with one pound a long time ago, which actually produced a saying: *Ater Wol has been killed because of just a pound.* The reason why Ater Wol was killed by the government was because he had by then paid his tax to the government and one pound was left with him, this made the government unhappy and they killed him. This also produced a saying: *Apuk's leadership have gone to the abyss.*

A long time ago, after the collection of taxes by the *gol* leader from Apuk, he would put the money in a small bag, called a *lutho*, and carry them from Apuk to Tonj town where the British were based at the time. The same would happen to the *gol* leaders in Abyei. So, when Abyei became far, Deng Majok who was the chief of Abyei during that time, complained of Tonj being very far and was advised by the British government to send his tax to Kordofan instead. Because of this, we are still struggling with the Arabs today about Abyei because they continue to claim despite them knowing the truth that Abyei is a South Sudanese territory.

When we were fighting the Arabs, another tax system was introduced, that is collection of cows and people as contribution for the war. This happened when there were fewer people turning up for the war. This was made compulsory in areas controlled by the SPLA.

Currently, tax collection is contributing both negatively and positively. The positive is that it has helped us to achieve our independence from the enemy but now that we are a free nation, I am telling you that this must be stopped because I am not seeing it contributing to this country. Until the current internal fighting comes to an end and the government that is really willing to provide services comes. From there we will resume the collection because the current one goes to the individual's pockets.

The directives to collect taxes come from the governor taking the up-down approach until the last person who is the *gol* leader who executes the directives from above. In regard to this there are many taxes which includes the collection of cows and kilos of sorghum during the war time. The sorghum was taken to areas near Wau and Gogrial to the soldiers and money was also collected in case a soldier is shot, some people will find a way of going to the towns like Wau to buy medicine. Thank God now this has greatly reduced, there is not much collection of sorghum. Another collection that I am forgetting is people themselves because we were asked if we can sacrifice a son to be a soldier, if he dies it is fine and he survives that will be his

luck. Among them now are some people who are now high-ranking soldiers in the army.

The collection is not consistent, because when we started it was only 5 SSP until it reached 50 and it is still going upwards. Now we are told that we are going to pay 1,000 SSP. The reason for the rise is because of inflations, but the consistent payment is 30 SSP which is collected every January under the directives of the local government.

All attempts to resist taxation have failed miserably because the government enforces it. It is not in any way subject to discussion. Once a decision is made at the high level on the amount to be collected, nobody will be able to change it. At the county level, the argument for taxation is that both state and national governments don't allocate a budget for the government at the county level. What we receive is only some food items from the NGOs and sometimes small salaries for those who work with the government.

The money and resources that have been collected from the people during the liberation struggle were collected for the rightful cause and the ones that are being collected now, we don't know why it is being collected. And concerning what has improved my family or myself, that I don't know because I haven't received any sign or thing of that nature. We are just hopeful that when the conflict is finally resolved, development will be the focus.





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