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James Kunhiak Muorwel
Jan Pospisil
Veronica Igale Monoja
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Authors: James Kunhiak Muorwel, Jan Pospisil, and Veronica Igale Monoja

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Executive Summary

The climate crisis has intensified the migration of Dinka Bor herders from Jonglei State to the Equatoria region. Commencing in July 2020, catastrophic floods compelled herders to move with their cattle to higher ground. While some returned to Bor after the receding floods, others faced pressure from national and state governments to leave the Equatoria region. However, a faction of herders remains in Western Equatoria, particularly around Mundri, contributing to heightened tensions with host communities.

Conflict between migrating herders and local farmers has resulted in clashes, causing human casualties, looting of property, and raiding of livestock. These conflicts emerged as livestock destroyed crops and encroached upon the hunting grounds of host communities.

Despite efforts by civil society organizations and government entities to facilitate local dialogues between pastoralists and farmers, progress has been limited. Resource constraints hinder larger peace dialogues organized by civil society, and there is a perceived lack of interest in dialogue among the conflicting communities. Additionally, the government's limited political will to address the conflict peacefully has impeded effective resolution.

While the national government has made some targeted efforts to mitigate climate-induced displacement and its impact on herders and farmers, comprehensive climate action policies are lacking. The absence of such policies has compelled citizens to devise their own coping mechanisms, often leading to conflicts among them.

Introduction

Climate change is exerting severe impacts on South Sudan, a nation already grappling with minimal adaptation strategies and constrained resources for addressing emergencies. Since gaining independence in 2011, the country has been plagued by civil and subnational conflicts. The Greater Upper Nile region, significantly affected by climate-related issues, faces exacerbated challenges due to concurrent conflicts. The consequences of climate change, particularly severe flooding, have worsened existing conflicts by intensifying competition for scarce resources like grazing lands. For instance, pastoralists displaced by floods in Jonglei State have migrated to the Equatoria region, triggering tensions with local farmers. Livestock movements have resulted in the destruction of livelihoods, escalating into violent clashes and further displacement of people. The intertwined nature of climate-induced challenges and conflicts demands urgent attention to prevent escalation.

This report aims to elucidate the phenomenon of climate-induced protracted displacement of herders and their livestock in South Sudan. It will delve into conflict risks arising from the irregular and sudden migration of herders in response to natural disasters. Additionally, the report will explore efforts, both informal and formal, made by local and national actors to prevent, manage, and resolve such conflicts.

South Sudan is one of the countries in the Horn of Africa region most susceptible to adverse impacts of the climate crisis (International Rescue Committee 2023). This vulnerability is likely to worsen in years to come (MoF 2021). The climate crisis is impacting different communities in different ways (IPCC 2022). Farmers are getting low yields because of drought. Pastoralists are seeing grazing lands for their animals dwindling. People have been displaced by huge and protracted floods. For example, Jonglei State, which is the most affected in the country, had 174,000 internally displaced persons in 2021 alone as a result of floods (Eberle and Boswell 2022). The situation has worsened in the subsequent years. Inhabitants of this country are gazing into a bleak future as changes in climatic patterns and related effects are unearthing a host of other problems threatening the already fragile peace.

South Sudan has been entrenched in conflicts of diverse nature, spanning civil wars involving the government and various rebel groups, as well as localized disputes that contribute to the country's overall instability. Persistent

issues such as cattle raids and revenge killings, fueled by governance shortcomings and competition for scarce resources like land and water, have become widespread. Regions such as Lakes, Warrap, Unity, and Jonglei States have witnessed rampant cattle raids, while land disputes among the Padang Dinka, Nuer, and Shilluk in Upper Nile State have resulted in loss of lives. Some of these conflicts have been ignited or exacerbated by climate shocks that have become more frequent over the past years. According to the World Bank dashboard on South Sudan (showing records from the year 1901 to date), South Sudan has seen increasing temperatures and reducing rainfalls (World Bank 2021). The changes in climatic patterns have resulted in climate-induced extreme weather events such as floods and prolonged droughts.

South Sudan's vulnerability extends beyond its borders, as changing regional rainfall patterns, exemplified by the Nile floodings in 2020 and 2021, impact the country. These floods, triggered by elevated water levels in Lake Victoria, forced Ugandan authorities to open the Nile dams. The ensuing water flow reached the plains of Greater Upper Nile, causing historical floods. The prospect of continued high water levels in Lake Victoria suggests that severe flooding in South Sudan may persist even with moderate rainfall in the broader Lake Victoria region.

In response to sudden and prolonged flooding and occasional droughts affecting livelihoods and pastures, Dinka Bor herders from Jonglei State have relocated their livestock to the Equatoria region. This migration pattern has been followed by Mundari herders and, at times, Murle communities. The movement has led to tensions in the Equatoria region, with complaints from local communities about livestock damaging crops, encroachment on farmlands, invasion of hunting grounds, and destruction of beehives. Resulting grievances have escalated at times into deadly hostilities between herders and farmers.¹ The tensions between farmers and herders, along with the various factors driving the migration of the latter into the former's homelands, have persisted without substantial resolution. As of mid-2023, most of the herders have departed Central Equatoria, relocating to Mundri and Yambio in Western Equatoria, and to a lesser extent, returning to Greater Bor. While the relations between the

1 Key informant interview, youth representative, Mangalla, Central Equatoria State.

predominantly Dinka herders and the host communities have generally improved in Central Equatoria, tensions with the Moro community remain notably high.

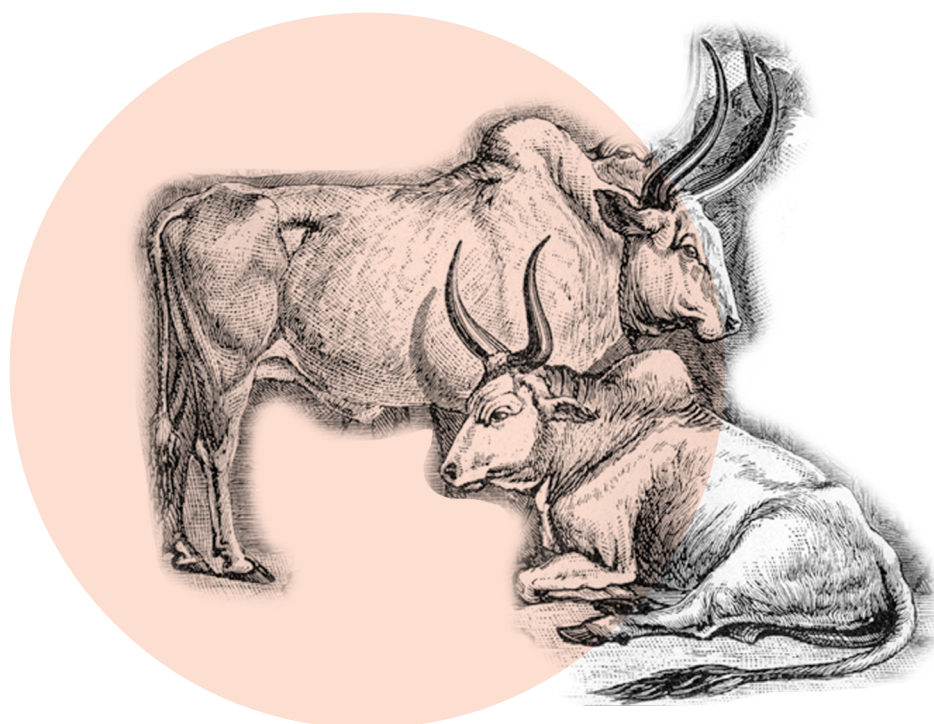
Attempts to resolve the conflicts, which have claimed lives, destroyed crops and properties and displaced people, between the farmers and pastoralists have been minimal and largely unsuccessful given their limited scope, lack of political will from the government, and lack of appetite for dialogue between the herders and farmers because of their deep mistrust for each other. Policies to reduce the impact of climate change including climate-induced displacement leave a lot to be desired and need considerable time and resources. Measures of mid- to long-term mitigating and resilience building have started in some areas, yet are far from being sufficient.

In this report, we offer an appreciation of the phenomenon of climate-induced protracted displacement of herders and their livestock, how climate change interrelates with other factors that result in cattle migration, shortcomings in the prevention and management of associated conflict risks and policy needs arising from the same.

Data collection for this report was conducted mainly in Juba. In addition to literature review (mainly grey literature) and reports on dialogues between the pastoral and farming

communities, the researchers conducted 17 key informant interviews and 1 focus group discussion with government officials (state and national level); church, community and youth leaders from Central Equatoria State; members from civil society organizations working on peacebuilding issues; UN expert and programme managers working on climate security; researchers on South Sudan specializing on peace and conflict issues; and Dinka Bor cattle herders.² The majority of the interviews were conducted face-to-face.

Although the interviews went largely as planned, one key informant interviewee decided to let her views not be used in the report given the sensitivity of the subject under study. On the other hand, we felt that the participants who held government positions were cagey in their responses possibly because of the nature of their roles and the sensitivity of the topic under discussion. Most of them did not want to be seen as favouring the narrative of either the farmers or the pastoralists. They nonetheless portrayed neutrality and empathy for both the herders and communities in the Equatoria region. It is also important to note that the South Sudanese co-authors also come from Bahr el Ghazal and Equatoria respectively. It is assumed that their collaboration on this paper would ensure checks on each one's possible bias in presenting the competing views of the communities affected by the climate-induced displacement and conflicts caused by this migration.



² An intended key informant interview later turned into a focus group discussion as the herders gathered and demanded that they speak to the interviewer in the same place while they were together.

Climate-induced migration of herders and their livestock

Although climate-induced displacement is not new (Myers 1993, Myers 2002, Alison & Bassett 2015), the frequency and the extent to which people have been affected has been on the rise recently. And with it comes the uprooting of people from their natural habitats. However, the United Nations' International Organization for Migration (IOM 2008) grapples with how to term the situation where people have been forced out of their original habitats by climate shocks. IOM disagrees with many of the terms flouted around such as 'climate refugees', 'climate migrants', 'environmental refugees', among others. They go on to quote the phrase used during its 2007 sitting (IOM 2007) as the best definition, thus:

“This working definition encompasses people who are displaced by natural disasters as well as those who choose to move because of deteriorating conditions. It also acknowledges that environmentally induced movement or displacement can be internal as well as international.”

Throughout this paper, we shall adopt the IOM's definition, thereby talking both of displaced herders and of those who chose to move given the increasingly difficult surroundings. This will mostly relate to the Dinka Bor herders from Jonglei State who have left Bor and moved to the Equatoria region.

South Sudan has been struggling with extensive and protracted flooding, at some point affecting about 47 per cent of the country. Three quarters of the affected areas are in Jonglei State and Unity State (OCHA 2020). The cause of the flooding is heavy rains far above the average that South Sudan and the region usually receives. What made the situation unusually severe was that Uganda had to open its dam into the White Nile following an unmanageable increase of the water level in Lake Victoria. These dam openings increased the volume of the water that normally flows through the mighty Nile River feeding the Sudd Swamp (Abdallah 2020). Most of Jonglei State straddles the Nile with low-lying flat plains that makes it vulnerable to floods when the Nile overflows. These areas have been severely flooded in recent years forcing their inhabitants with their livelihoods to seek refuge in higher grounds

even beyond their state borders. Among those who have migrated from Jonglei state to other states as a result of the floodings are Dinka Bor pastoralists.

Transhumance has been a practice among the Dinka Bor in the past where they would move with their livestock from place to place at different seasons in search of greener pastures, cleaner water, and in avoidance of pests and diseases. Yet, the flooding-induced displacement starting in 2020 was different. This time the herders, initially, did not plan to migrate. The floods abruptly forced them out from their usual settlements. “The flooding was sudden and protracted ensuring that the pastoralists fled to the higher grounds in Greater Equatoria where there are pastures for their livestock and wouldn't return soon”, observed a United Nations climate expert.³ Such sudden movement is in contrast with the normal practice of moving from place to place, usually within their state boundaries, and back to their places of origin.

Seasonal migration for herders and their animals occurs at regular periods and over predetermined boundaries. During dry season, the Dinka Bor herders would move with their cattle to areas with greener pastures and clean water mostly along the Nile River. During the rains, the Nile floods its banks and becomes almost inhabitable. The pastoralists would then move to the higher grounds with their animals. Around this time, there is clean water and pastures for the animals almost everywhere. In most parts of South Sudan, including Jonglei State, the dry season starts around November and lasts until April with the driest months being between January to March. Then the rainy season is between May till November with the heavy rains falling between June and September each year in normal circumstances. Transhumance is aligned to these two distinct seasons.

“In the months between September to December, we would bring our livestock near our homesteads in Bor to graze”, narrated one herder about the past practice and went on to lament that this had now not been the case.⁴ In this context, the stay of Dinka Bor herders in the Equatoria

3 Key informant interview, UN Climate Expert, Juba.

4 Focus group discussion, herder 2, Shirkat neighborhood, Juba.

region has become semi-permanent, raising suspicion and outright hostility from the farming communities that now had become host communities without ever giving their consent.

The drivers of the recent migration of the Dinka Bor herders to the Equatoria region are as complex as they are contested. Government officials⁵ and the herders⁶ interviewed argued that floods in Greater Jonglei had forced them out from Bor and made them move to safer areas in the Equatoria region with good pastures for their livestock. The host communities in the Equatoria region counter that this migration is owed to more than just floods because of the permanent nature and frequency of the herders' incursions into the farmers' habitats.⁷ Further reasons included the fear of attacks from the Murle, which, arguably, are partly also caused by environmental factors, and armed campaigns by the Nuer White Army.

A researcher with extensive knowledge on Jonglei State's issues agrees with the line of argument of the farmers, and questioned why some Dinka Bor herders that were displaced by floods to Eastern Equatoria returned to Bor while the group of herders in question that have clashed with farmers never went back even when the floods had subsided.⁸ Yet, motivations might be multifaceted and may change over time. Further, they depend on the group of cattle herders. Small herders from Dinka Bor and Mundari

move in the search of livelihood and to avoid violent retaliation campaigns by Murle in Greater Jonglei. Big 'away owners', often entertaining professional cattle keepers that are well supplied with arms and food, might have different motives. Even their mode of moving the cattle in 2020 and 2021 was different and relied on trucks and boats, in a systematic and planned manner. While small owners might not return because of livelihood concerns, the motivation of large-scale 'cattle investors' might indeed be driven by political reasons. Some observers also speculate that some of these big herds remain in the Equatorias to effectively hide raided cattle.⁹

In any case, the current situation is not the transhumance practiced in the past by the Dinka Bor pastoralists because of the sudden nature of relocation, the routes taken and the length of their stay in the Equatoria region. "The pattern of movement has changed and has become more frequent since 2020. In the past, the cattle herders used to stay in the outskirts far from the villages but now they have encroached into the villages", one community representative from Kaj-Keji observes.¹⁰ Another participant goes on to explain that the frequency of movement of the herders and their livestock into the Equatoria region has intensified and their stay appeared to be more permanent than before.¹¹ It is apparent that these elements have given rise to inter-communal tensions and conflicts between the farmers and herders.



5 Key informant interview, senior government official from the national Ministry of Forestry, Juba.

6 Focus group discussion, herder 4, Shirkat neighborhood, Juba.

7 Key informant interview, chief, Mangalla, Central Equatoria State.

8 Key informant interview, researcher 2, Juba.

9 Key informant interview, researcher 3, Juba.

10 Key informant interview, youth representative from Kajo-Keji, Central Equatoria State.

11 Key informant interview, chief, Mangalla, Central Equatoria State.

Pastoralists in the Equatorias: An uneasy relationship between local communities and migrant herders

The Equatoria region is predominantly inhabited by farmers and hunters. It is referred to as the 'breadbasket' of South Sudan in terms of the agricultural production. The land is fertile and less affected by climate shocks compared to other regions in the country. Before the second wave of the South Sudanese civil war in 2016, the region was also the most peaceful in South Sudan. But ever since, parts of the region have been strongholds of rebel groups such as the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (SPLM/A IO), the National Salvation Army (NAS), and various self-defence groups called the Arrow Boys. These rebellions and opportunistic politicians have sown the seed of tribal hatred especially among some communities in the region and the Dinka.

On the other hand, Jonglei State, historically, has been one of the most populous in South Sudan, as it was confirmed by the 2010 census. Made up of mostly pastoralists, it is one of the most restive states in the country with reports of cattle raids, human abductions, and revenge killings counting as common occurrences. Jonglei is also one of the most affected states by climate-induced shocks. Since 2020, the state is hugely affected by floods forcing people to move to other states with their livelihoods. Besides the large migration to the Equatorias, some herders migrated also to Lakes State. However, those who fled to Mingkaman¹² in Yirol East County of Lakes State are mostly women and other more vulnerable groups. They did not go with cattle as they had to cross the Nile and would not ferry the herds of cattle on small dinghies. Lakes State is also riven with chronic problems of cattle raids. Hence, the majority of the pastoralists chose to head south to the Equatoria region.

The influx of Dinka Bor cattle herders into the Equatoria region predates the devastating cyclical floods hitting Jonglei state since 2019 and displacing hundreds of thousands from their homes (Miettaux 2022b). Dinka Bor migration, structurally, started in 1991 in the aftermath

of the so-called Nasir split within the SPLM/A. Mostly Nuer-dominated troop contingents in Upper Nile and Jonglei split from the mainstream SPLM/A, which resulted in severe internal fighting. In the aftermath of the split, Nuer community militias systematically attacked Dinka Bor, leading to large-scale displacement, especially to Central and Eastern Equatoria. While this displacement sometimes also happened without cattle, some Dinka communities remained in areas such as Nimule and Torit, attracting further movements by their communities. Cattle migration from Jonglei to the Equatorias has been a common occurrence since then, albeit at a much lower scale.

Against this background, Dinka Bor herders claim that the hostilities against them and their cattle is a recent phenomenon, claiming that in the past their fathers had come to the Equatoria region for pastures and fleeing catastrophes without encountering any problems.¹³ When the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in 2005, many Dinka Bor people came back to their homeland. This pattern of displacement and return was repeated in 2013 after the civil war broke out between the South Sudanese government and what formed as the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (SPLM/A IO). This time, too, Dinka Bor herders moved to the Equatoria region. It is around these times that the tensions and violent confrontations between the pastoralists and the farmers became pronounced based on media reports of the clashes between the cattle herders and the farmers (Elias 2022).

Since 2020, clashes between herders and the farmers in Greater Equatoria region have again increased (Miettaux 2022a). The communities in the Equatoria region allege that the herders and their animals destroyed their crops, tampered with their hunting grounds, and ransacked their beehives. These purported actions by the pastoralists and their animals have stoked tensions resulting in deadly clashes with increasing intensity and rising human and

¹² Mingkaman also hosts internally displaced persons that fled the 2013 crisis after crossing the Nile River on dinghies. When the floods struck, the Dinka Bor also fled there.

¹³ Focus group discussion, herder 1, Shirkat neighborhood, Juba.

animal casualties.¹⁴ The incidents are not confined to single a location but are widespread with the farmers pointing to the same causes. Clashes were reported at different times in Magwi, Aru Junction (along Nimule–Juba highway), Kajo-Keji and Mangalla areas.

The reasons for the difficulties between the herders and the communities in the Equatorias are multifaceted. One often-cited reason is the prolonged nature of the herders' stay (sometimes even going back to 2014) in the farming lands of the communities in the Greater Equatoria and their unwillingness to return. This created suspicion among the farmers about the motive of the herders. The communities in the Equatoria region are weary about a disguised land-grabbing agenda by the Dinka. "The issues are more than climate-induced displacement. It's more of a political ideology to displace people and establish settlement within the region to extend their influence"¹⁵, a member of a youth group in the area asserts. Such allegations repeatedly point towards that despite flooding and its effects have reduced in Bor, herders have not been willing to go back to Jonglei State.¹⁶

With the grazing lands becoming also degraded because the endured presence of large number of livestock, the animals sometimes venture into the farmlands destroying crops and other livelihoods of the farmers. A high-level state official from Central Equatoria claims that the lack of pastures for their livestock makes the herders desperate to invade farmlands.¹⁷ Coupled with reduced farm yields in the context of climate change, the last thing the host communities would want is their little produce destroyed without any kind of compensation from the herders.

Another factor for the uneasy relationship between the host communities and the Dinka Bor herders relates to narratives about national politics and the civil wars which have taken tribal undertones. The local communities in the Equatoria region look at the herders as agents of the government disguised as pastoral communities.¹⁸ The herders also look at the farmers who oppose their stay in the Equatoria region as members or sympathizers of the rebel groups opposed to the Dinka-led government. One herder lamented about the fraught relations with the farmers: "They treat us like we

are part of the government, but we have nothing to do with those people (politicians)."¹⁹ Suspicions and accusations have worsened the relationship between the herders and farmers. In turn, such narratives and tensions have been exploited by ruling elites in Juba and those opposed to them to the detriment of the herders and local people who want to safeguard their primary sources of livelihoods now threatened by the climate crisis.

The unpredictability and non-negotiated nature of the migration time and routes used by herders and their livestock has been another source of tensions. As the floods struck, the herders abruptly relocated from their places of origin and surprised the farmers who claim that they would expect advance notice when the herders wanted to come to their homelands.²⁰ The farmers also allege that the herders would now come with their livestock without having been guided on areas to settle in. Instead, they would move in random locations and destroying crops in the process.²¹

The link between climate change and conflict has been fiercely debated. Some analyses dismiss a causal relationship (Nicolas et al. 2023, Tiitmamer et al. 2018), while other studies argue for a mutual reinforcement between climate change and conflicts (IFAD 2009, FAO and IOM 2023, Tiitmamer et al. 2023). These different viewpoints are the result of the context in which these studies were conducted. The extent to which climate change can exacerbate conflict risks can be explained by the existing conflict dynamics and political climate in each region. Where tensions between communities exist, competition for resources as a result of the climate impact may trigger violent conflict. Where there are no such tensions, conflicts are far less likely.

In the case of the Dinka Bor cattle movement, the former is the case. The herders that went to Eastern Equatoria State faced hostilities from the local communities. The State Government sided with the communities in the region and ordered the herders to leave, especially after some farmers were killed by the cattle keepers (Sudans Post 2022b). These calls were echoed by the Jonglei authorities and leaders at the national level who hail from there. The decision for the return of the Dinka Bor pastoralists to Jonglei was also related to raids carried out against them by the Murle and the Toposa tribes. While violent clashes between Dinka Bor and Murle have been a long-standing issue, the conflict

14 Key informant interview, youth representative, Kajo-Keji County, Central Equatoria State.

15 Key informant interview, a youth member working for a civil society, Central Equatoria State, Juba.

16 Key informant interview, researcher 2, Juba.

17 Key informant interview, state official, Central Equatoria State, Juba.

18 Key informant interview, youth representative, Juba

19 Focus group discussion, herder 4, Shirkat neighborhood, Juba

20 Key informant interview, youth representative from Mangalla, Central Equatoria State

21 Key informant interview, youth representative, Kajo-Keji, Central Equatoria State

with the Toposa was caused by them taking the advantage of the priced assets' (livestock) proximity. The Toposa could not have been able to conduct deadly raids against the Dinka Bor herders if they had not fled to Eastern Equatoria State.

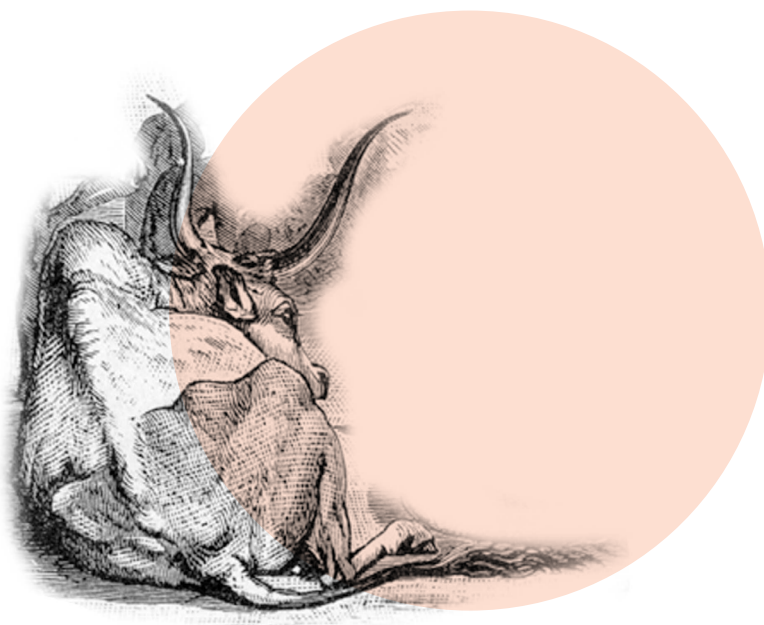
The herders moved as far as Kajo-Keji at the Ugandan border.²² Well-armed with light weapons, they clashed with farmers in the area who opposed their stay among them. The incidents escalated in an incident dubbed as the 'Kajo-Keji massacre', in which 27 people were killed in a retaliation attack (Adidi and Iceta 2023). Two weeks prior to the incident, the cattle of the herders were attacked in the cattle camp killing several cows. Following this attack, the pastoralists mobilized and staged the revenge attack in Likamerok village, killing 21 farmers while six herders also died.

The government was embarrassed by the incident that happened on the eve of the Pope's visit to the country. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, who was visiting South Sudan alongside Pope Francis, even publicly condemned the incident and called for peaceful coexistence between the South Sudan communities (Anglican News 2023). Hence, clear orders were given to the security forces to remove the pastoralists from the area. While a majority of the herders indeed left Southern Central Equatoria in avoidance of an armed confrontation with the army, they did not return to Jonglei State but wandered off to the

Mundri area in Western Equatoria State. For why they chose they route, one herder offered a glimpse into their thinking: "Going to Bor is used by the opportunists along the way to raid our cattle."²³ It seemed that the orders received by the soldiers were just to force the herders out from Kajo-Keji, but not to escort them to Jonglei State which could leave the small herders that could not rely on powerful support vulnerable to retaliation attacks.

Despite claims from the Bor cattle herders that the relationship with the Moro in Western Equatoria State was generally good, some spoke about already brewing tensions that could explode into a violent confrontation.²⁴ Similar allegations of cattle destroying crops and hunting grounds have been raised by communities in Western Equatoria.²⁵ Attempts to diffuse these tensions by cattle herders offering compensation have been outrightly rejected by the farmers who feel that this arrangement would give the herders entitlement to stay on their land.²⁶

Land grabbing, often with the involvement of political elites, is an endemic issue in South Sudan. Possible contestations about land, thus, always raise suspicion. It is against this background that herders are viewed with distrust, as they could always be a part of the ploy to take away the farmers' land. Therefore, the continued stay of those herders in Western Equatoria should be a cause of concern, as more violent encounters could arise between the herders and the Moro farmers.



22 Key informant interview, researcher 1, Juba.

23 Focus group discussion, herder 3, Shirkat neighborhood, Juba.

24 Key informant interview, researcher 2, Juba.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

Managing conflict risks: actors and mechanisms, policy and practice

The climate crisis and displacement caused by it are an igniting factor for the already fragile security situation in South Sudan in general, and among the communities in the Equatoria region and the Dinka Bor herders from Jonglei State in particular. The deadly disputes between the farmers and Dinka Bor herders who fled the floods in Jonglei have been a headache for the government. If left unattended, these conflicts are at risk of escalating further, complicating the already existing host of problems South Sudan is facing. With millions of internally displaced and many more dependent on humanitarian aid as a result of armed conflict and natural disasters, further eruptions of violence in the Equatoria region that could spill over to the existing military-political tensions between SSPDF, SPLM-IO and NAS need to be prevented.

To date, national and local attempts to find solutions to this endemic problem have only happened at a small scale. With obviously limited willingness to strategically tackle the issue, National and State Government entities have tried to address the problem by issuing a unilateral ultimatum delivered in a presidential decree for the herders to leave or face forceful evictions.²⁷ When these calls were not observed by the herders, the government resorted to using security apparatuses to implement the order. In Kajo-Keji, the national army has driven out the herders in an attempt to not only implement the presidential order but also to improve their relations with the local communities.²⁸ However, these drastic measures, so far, have not yielded desired results with the herders still roaming the Equatoria region and clashing with the farmers in other Equatorian counties.

Caution is needed about the use of security personnel on community conflicts, since it could result into wider conflict between armed cattle keepers and regular forces as it has happened in Tonj North of Warrap State in 2022 (Radio Tamazuj 2022c). The local communities in the Equatoria region also have a low degree of trust towards the army, given their tainted history with the communities in the

region during the civil wars (VOA 2017). The army is also viewed as partisan, especially when it comes to pitting the Dinka against communities from the Equatoria region, and in taking bribes from the cattle herders in order to let them stay.²⁹ Yet, it appears that, after a long delay, the SSPDF in 2023 has been following through in employing force to implement the government ultimatums.

The national government has also conducted visits to the affected communities to reassure the farmers that their pleas are being heard and their security would be taken care of.³⁰ State officials have provided similar assurances to their communities (Radio Tamazuj 2022a). Farmers displaced from their homes as a result of fighting with the herders have been asked by authorities to return to their homes, guaranteeing protection from future attacks. Some farmers indeed returned to their villages in places like Kajo-Keji after the herders had left.³¹ Return in other localities previously or currently occupied by the pastoralists has been sparse. As a deterrence measure, two herders who killed a local chief in Nimule of Eastern Equatoria State were detained and subjected to a due judicial process. One was sentenced to death while the other is to serve a prison term after a judgement by a local civil court (Sudans Post 2022a). However, since the majority of the herders have not yet returned to Jonglei State, there is scepticism among the farmers on whether these are just isolated measures or indeed mark a shift in the government's approach.

At the grassroots level, civil society organizations such as RECONCILE International³² and the Whitaker Peace and Development Initiative (WPDI) have initiated peace dialogues between farmers and herders. The security forces and state government officials also attended these dialogues where farmers and herders shared stories about the conflicts between them (WPDI 2023). They also discussed possible pathways to overcome their differences

²⁷ Key informant interview, key state government official, Juba, Central Equatoria State.

²⁸ Key informant interview, researcher on peace and conflict in South Sudan and Horn of Africa, Juba.

²⁹ Key informant interview, aid worker for an international organization working on peacebuilding, Juba.

³⁰ Key informant interview, Member of Parliament for the Revitalized Transitional National Legislative Assembly, Juba.

³¹ Key informant interview, researcher 1, Juba.

³² Resource Centre for Civil Leadership is a church-based civil society organization operating in South Sudan. Supported by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, the CSO conducted a number of peace dialogues. in Lokiliri, Pageri, Torit, Lobonok, and Moli Payams of Eastern and Central Equatoria States.

and how to live peacefully in the future. After the local dialogues, communiqués were developed and signed as reference documents to solve future conflicts that may arise. However, the lack of mechanisms to hold future violators of these communiqués to account gives them little weight. The majority of farmers especially in Southern Central Equatoria is also not in favour of co-existence but wants the herders to leave.

In Western Equatoria, some more tangible arrangements were negotiated with the local communities. “For about six months since we moved to Moro areas (part of Western Equatoria State), we have never had any issues with the farmers there”³³, one Dinka Bor herder stated. When the governor of Western Equatoria heard that the pastoralists had come to his state, so the herders say, he came to meet the leaders of the pastoralists. Two people were appointed to represent the herders and would report to the governor should there be an issue. If livestock would destroy crops of the farmers, they needed to be compensated. The durability of such arrangements, however, is always difficult to predict, especially since raising tensions between the herders and Moro farmers have already been reported.

Overall, the appetite for dialogue between the herders and farmers appears to be low, especially among the communities in the Equatorias. They prefer the Dinka Bor pastoralists to leave without preconditions. This is echoed across the Equatoria region.³⁴ On the other hand, there is a sentiment especially among the small herders that they have done nothing wrong and could offer compensation if indeed the farmers’ livelihoods are proven to have been destroyed.³⁵ This willingness is contested, however, as some host communities claimed that they did reach out to the pastoralists, but were either denied compensation or the compensation modalities agreed upon were violated.³⁶ These mutual allegations demonstrate the limited interest in dialogue.

There are further policy approaches touted by the government to mitigate climate-induced migration of

herders from Jonglei State to the Equatoria region. These approaches include the development of guidelines for migration routes. Yet, such attempts have shown only limited impact. For instance, the guidelines to regulate movement of herders and livestock developed by the National Ministry of Environment failed to pass as a bill in national parliament.³⁷ There are allegations that some powerful political actors, who own some of the herds, are discreetly blocking the enactment of these laws, even against the intention of the Presidency.³⁸ It is not wholly apparent whether the government indeed has made serious efforts to get these policies through the parliament, or if the efforts have been subject to effective sabotage.

At the regional level, South Sudan has shown policy commitment. In 2022, the government signed two International Government Authority on Development’s (IGAD) protocols on transhumance (Radio Tamazuj 2022b). However, these instruments mainly apply to migration of herders with livestock across international borders. At present, there are no national policies specific to the South Sudan context to regulate climate-induced displacement among herders and ways that address grievances ignited by such movements on the communities these pastoralists interact with.

The few policies developed by national institutions to tackle the impact of climate change have never been stipulated well enough to cater for the needs of herders displaced by climate-induced phenomena. For example, the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) for Climate Change identifies agriculture, livestock, and fisheries as priorities for climate change adaptation plan, but it does not offer concrete steps to address concrete problems such as large-scale cattle migration across state boundaries (MoF 2021). This calls into question the desire by the government to intervene in climate-induced displacement among the herding communities and acknowledge the wider impact this displacement has on the general population in the country, especially with regards to peace and security.

33 Focus group discussion, herder 3, Shirkat neighborhood, Juba.

34 Key informant interview, researcher 2, Juba.

35 Focus group discussion, Shirkat neighborhood, Juba.

36 Key informant interview, community leader, Mangalla County, Central Equatoria State, Juba.

37 Key informant interview, high-level government official, Ministry of Environment, Juba.

38 Key informant interview, researcher 1, Juba.

Conclusions

South Sudan is grappling with the impact of the climate crisis. With increasing temperatures and infrequent rain showers, the country is affected in profound ways. It has led to sudden and catastrophic climatic phenomena such as drought and flooding. Most of the Greater Upper Nile region has seen unprecedented flooding in recent years. There is no sign this phenomenon is ending soon as the water levels of Lake Victoria and the Nile River keep swelling and filling the adjacent lowland areas. People living in these areas are likely to be regularly forced to migrate with their livestock.

Since 2020, such movements have resulted in severe frictions between herders and farming communities in the Equatoria region. Migrating livestock has destroyed the farms of the local communities. Seeking reparations for their destroyed crops has often not ended amicably but resulted in fatal confrontations between the two communities. Attempts to find peaceful solutions to the tensions have hardly been successful because of lack of appetite for peaceful co-existence – symptomatic of the prevailing mistrust between local communities in the Equatoria region and the pastoralists who migrated from outside the region, and lack of genuine government effort to find a workable solution for the hostilities between them.

The (in-)action by the national government to address the climate-induced displacement and the resulting tensions

and conflicts between farmers and cattle keepers who compete for the limited resources has complicated the matters. With no laws regulating the movement of cattle, the herders can practically decide on their own on where to migrate. Where the livestock of the herders destroys livelihoods of the inhabitants, the herders are hardly held accountable, leading host communities to resort to violence in an effort to get some sort of justice. In turn, they are met with lethal force from the armed herders, resulting in further escalation. The situation remains tight with the risk to develop into a wider armed conflict.

Actions by civil society actors to engineer some dialogues between feuding communities have achieved only minimal impact because of limited funds and the large geographical area that these conflicts happen in the Equatoria region. This is also caused by the political dimension of the conflict and related prejudices, especially by Equatorians against Dinka and the increasing tensions between Dinka Bor and Bahr el-Ghazal Dinka communities. Resolving these issues in a reconciliatory manner is difficult in situations of heightened tensions, such as when non-negotiated cattle migration movements are ongoing in areas inhabited by farming communities. It is the responsibility of the South Sudanese national government to develop policies to guide the movement of cattle in the farming communities, and then address the issue of climate-induced displacement in the country.

Recommendations

- 1. Conflict-sensitive, “do no harm” programming by aid actors to avoid creating or exacerbating tensions between the local communities and herders.** While peacebuilding, humanitarian, and development partners have become integral to the South Sudan context and are encouraged to increase their support to livestock herders to weather the impact of the climate-induced displacement that puts them in conflict with farmers, this assistance must not alienate the host communities. These interventions should, therefore, include aspects that diffuse tensions that may arise between herders and farmers without setting precedence to accept or support contested migration routes, and proactively target consequences of climate change.
- 2. Regional frameworks for governing migration routes for livestock turning into national policies.** These policies should involve wider consultations with all the stakeholders to ensure acceptance and credibility, focusing on the national and state level. Views from the farming communities and livestock herders should take centre stage because they are the main actors, and the policies will stick if they accept them. Such measures could involve behind-the-scenes talks at the national level, involving some of the political and military figures that own large herds in Jonglei State.
- 3. Development of government strategies to support the livestock herders in climate shock-prone areas.** Starting with the early warning systems that would alert the herders and farmers about any impending adverse climatic phenomenon, it should also ensure that these communities are equipped with the coping mechanisms so that they are not impacted severely. This entails investing in modern early warning systems and adaptation strategies tailored to the South Sudanese context. In the long-run, climate resilience needs to develop into a core intervention area in Jonglei State.
- 4. Supporting local conflict mitigation processes between the Dinka Bor herders and communities in the Equatoria region.** Spearheaded by religious leaders and supported by civil society organizations, extensive consultations primarily among the farmers and herders should be undertaken. In addition, the government, religious leaders, civil society organizations and the international partners need to work collaboratively to find institutionalized avenues to negotiate commonly accepted migration routes that do not harm the farming communities. This requires political will and the commitment of sufficient resources to ensure an inclusive approach satisfactory to all stakeholders.
- 5. Continuation of local peacemaking in Jonglei.** Following up on examples such as the Pieri peace process, conflict mitigation and reduction at the inter-communal level in Greater Jonglei is a necessary precondition to facilitate the return of cattle herders and to reduce conflict-related cattle migration. These peacemaking efforts need to be seen as a continuous process, since the context is highly volatile and prone to rapid changes. As the Dinka Bor, other communities in Greater Jonglei, such as the Murle, are also hit by the changing environmental conditions and in need of respective support.

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About the authors

James Kunhiak Muorwel is a researcher whose work focuses on peace, conflict sensitivity, gender, and youth issues. James has conducted research on resilience programming in South Sudan with Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility. James has also overseen programs on gender, youth, peace, and security sector reform in South Sudan for international organizations.

Veronica Igale Monoja is a freelance consultant with a legal background and over 7 years' experience in the field of gender equality with focus on gender advocacy; policy development and research; protection of women, children and persons living with disability and youth mentorship. She holds a master's degree in international relations and a Bachelor of Laws.

Dr Jan Pospisil is an Associate Professor (Research) at Coventry University's Institute for Peace and Security. His work focuses on post-conflict transition processes and political settlements, donor politics in peacebuilding, the Horn of Africa region, and South Sudanese and Sudanese politics. Jan is a co-investigator in the University of Edinburgh's Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform (PeaceRep) programme, funded by the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

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