**Conflict assessment report in Upper Nile.**

1. **Situation overview**

When fighting broke out in Juba on December 2013, the violence had spread throughout the country. Control of Malakal switched between the government and the rebels six times in the first six months of the war. During this time forces associated with Dinka and Shilluk remained loyal to the government while many of the Nuer forces in Malakal revolted due to the killings of Nuer civilians in Juba. Civilians living in Upper Nile state fled to UN compound in Malakal, to other states and crossed the borders to neighbouring countries. The August 2015 peace agreement between the government and the SPLM/A-IO brought hope for the people in the state; however, the president decree of administrative in October 2015 that increased the ten states to 28 created another contention. In the new structure, Malakal was located in Eastern Nile State, surrounded by almost all Dinka Padang land, which the Shiluk believed that it was effectively planned to annex Malakal under Dinka land. Shilluk anger at the proposed division of the state has already led to increased support for Johnson Olonyi, who was aligned with the Government but defected and joined the SPLM-IO in May 2015. Now the SPLM-IO nominated Olonyi to be the governor of the Upper Nile state, but he is not yet appointed by the president. The shiluk and Nuer in the POC are not happy by the delay and it created tension on the relatively peaceful interaction of ethnic groups. The army forces in the area are not yet integrated and also created vacuum in the administration and recently the public prosecutor is found dead by unknown gunman. Generally, Upper Nile state in general and Malakal in particular is still the political hotspot and it needs coordinated effort of the peace actors to support the transition process.

1. **Major Conflict dynamics and Conflict drivers**
2. **POC and Malakal town Conflict Dynamics**

Malakal is a strategic military base and is the administrative capital of Upper Nile state, where 80 percent of South Sudan’s pre-crisis oil production originates. The opposition and the government have fought bitterly for control of Malakal, which stands out as one of the war’s most protracted location. The town is almost destroyed as it changed hands six times between government and opposition forces in the first three months of the crisis. The people from all over the state flee and occupied the UNMISS POC. Soon after the civilians entered, the protection of civilians (POC) in UNMISS Malakal was divided into three areas: one for each major ethnic group: Shilluk, Nuer and Dinka, reportedly at their own request and for their own protection. Though kept apart, conflict broke out occasionally between different communities, most did not involve firearms and were quickly halted by UN peacekeepers. On February 2016 Violence erupted in a PoC and there are strong indications that external military forces were also involved in the fighting. In less than a day 30 people were killed, 120 injured and burned down most of the Shilluk and Nuer sections. All Dinka and Darfuri IDPs departed the POC and moved to Malakal town before and during the fighting and occupied the town. So, **there are continuous conflict and tension between the POC and the town residents and the major conflict drivers are:**

* **Land dispute**: When the Dinka moved out of the POC after the 2016 attack, they occupied Malakal town which the Shiluk in the POC claimed as their land. As per the UNHCR and IOM intention study, the vast majority (97%) of POC residents indicated that their habitual residence prior to displacement was in Malakal town. The Shiluk in POC believed that the delay in the appointment of Johnson Olony as governor for Upper Nile state is associated with the land contention and claim over the town- Malakal. As Olony and his entire militia is from Shiluk, the Dinka living in the town are fearing that he will redistribute the land they occupied to the Shiliks in the POC. The POC youth reported during the focus group discussion that “the Dinka in the town raised the land distribution issues and their fear over Johnson Olony to the president and the president hold the appointment of the governor.” So land in the town of Malakal and some pocket counties is the major conflict driver.
* **There is huge grievance and animosity** among ethnic groups, particularly between Shiluk and Dinka on the impact of the conflict in general and as a result of the 2016 POC attack in particular. On 17/18 February 2016, armed Dinka militia entered UNMISS Malakal PoC and were killed and injured Shiluk and Nuer IDPs. None of the Dinka or Darfuri shelters were destroyed, but all Nuer and Shiluk shelters were burned throughout the PoC. The humanitarians and the government moved the Dinka IDPs out of the POC and they settled in the town. During the focus group discussion with the POC youth (most are from Shiluk), they expressed their grievance over the incident and they didn’t seems recovered from that feeling. For instance, the executives of the youth centre in the POC were asked about their marriage preference and 80% of Shiluk men prefer to marry Nuer girls at the first choice and the rest choose shiluk. Similarly, 60% of the Shiluk girls prefer marrying Nuer man and the rest choose Shiluk. None of the youth choose Dinka at the first chose and majority reasoned that this is due to the scar as a result of the consecutive conflict and the following rhetoric they were listening for years. Relatively speaking, the youths in the town has less grievance and seems willing for positive interaction but they don’t show interest to discuss about the land issue, which is the major agenda for the Shiluk in the POC.
* **Youth unemployment and hopelessness:** there is a huge youth bulge both in the POC and in the town who are highly affected by the continuous conflict and displacement. Almost all didn’t go to school and they didn’t have alternative opportunity to make a living. As per the youth key informants in the POC, majority are now drinking alcohol, involving in theft, GBV and conflict. They are easily mobilized for conflict. The situation of youth created a fertile ground for the political parties to easily engage them in conflict and for ethnicization of the conflict. Most of the youth are loyal to the political faction organized in their ethnic groups, for instance, the Shiluk and the Nuer are living in relative harmony as there is similar accord between the political partiers organized in their ethnics. On the contrary both the Nuer and Shiluk youths have a feeling of resentment over the Dinka youths and vis-à-vis as the reflection of the political parties organized on their respective ethnic groups.
* **Proliferation of weapons on the hands of civilians:** As Upper Nile state is the major contention and consecutive war front between SPLA and the SPLA-IO, weapon is highly abundant in the area. As per the finding of the KII in the town and POC, most of civilians have weapons and there was no attempt for disarmament so far. The DRR office opened and started operating in Malakal but they only working on the integration of the ex-combatants, not on the disarmament. Having weapon on the hands of civilians, coupled with the political and ethnic tension, makes the situation in Upper Nile very fragile and all interviewed participants agreed that the situation is so unpredictable. Conflict in Malakal and the surrounding has huge impact on the national peacebuilding effort as most of the national political actors has strong interest in the area.
* **The lifting of the protection aspect of the UNMISS also created frustration**: UNMISS plans to lift the protection aspect and give the responsibility to the government. The POC are in the process of changing to IDP sites and this created frustration, especially on the POC residents, as there is not formal governor and the communities are still highly divided on ethnic and political lines. The unified force is not yet taking effect (they are still in the cantonment) and are still aligned with their ethnic lines.

1. **Maban Conflict Dynamics**

Maban County is located in Upper Nile State. It borders the Blue Nile State of Sudan to the east, Longochuk County to the south, and Renk County and Melut County to the west. There has been historical conflict between local Maban ethnic groups with the Dinka groups from Melut and Renk counties and Nuer from Longochuk County due to competition over water for people and animals, land and border disputes, tension over taxation rights. Intermarriage and commercial ties, especially with Nuer from Longochuk County, have helped to mitigate the escalation of such conflicts.

Currently the major tension and consecutive conflict in Maban is because of the refugees and host communities in the area. 156,192 refugees are living in the five Maban refugee camps who are fleeing a five-year-old conflict between Sudanese government and the rebels. The refugees are putting enormous pressure on the host community, have ethnic tensions among themselves and created humanitarian challenges. In May 2017, fierce fighting broke out among the tribes in the refugee camps, leaving dozens dead and much of the temporary infrastructure, built by the United Nations, burned and looted. As a result, thousands of families were relocated by the UN, and the camps are now divided along tribal lines. The number of the refugees outnumber the host community, and most are ex-combatants and have weapons. Currently the major conflict drivers in the area are:

* **Feeling of excluded from aid**: The host communities believed that they are not getting any benefit from refugee response in the location and this created huge tension with refugees and aid agencies. The host communities said that “*our living status is not different from the refugees, we are affected by the conflict and hardly meet our basic need, but most of the aid targets the refugees living in the camps*”. This issue is raised by the youth and the government official and it seems that it is a common agenda for the host community.
* **Competition over natural resource**: as the number of refugees are ever increasing, the demand on natural resources, especially land and water, is also rising from time to time. These created Stiff competition with the host communities and became the basic factor for conflict. In December 2016, the outbreak of violence between the host community and refugees resulted in the death of nearly 90 people and destruction of many assets. The humanitarian working in the location built few water points and tries to address other issues, but it didn’t meet the huge demand.
* **Robbery, theft and other dysfunctional activities**: Robbery, theft and alcohol is also mentioned as one of the major factors for conflict between the refugees and host community. This is exacerbated by the low level of law enforcement and poor quality of the judicial systems within Maban County. There is little capacity to effectively investigate crimes in the area, leaving the majority, especially minor crimes such as theft or minor incidents of violence, unsolved and unpunished. These unsolved crimes are often blamed on the other group: the host community blaming the refugees and refugees blaming the host community.

* **Luck of employment opportunity for youths**: like Malakal town, there is high youth population in Maban with no opportunities for economic engagement. The youth and community elders raised complain about the NGOs working in the location as they believe they don’t give job opportunity for local youths. The youth said that most of the national staffs are from elsewhere and only few are from the area. The youth were in conflict with the humanitarians and the tension is still there.
* **Proliferation of weapons in the hands of civilians, especially the refugees**: Arms within the camps and outside have proven to be a problem that contributes to increased insecurity for all communities and stressed relations between host community for refugees. Efforts were made in early 2016 to enforce the removal of weapons from the camps and the refugees and host communities believed this increased the security situation and relationship between the two groups

1. **Conflict dynamics around Cattle Migration route**

According to UNMISS civil affairs, millions and millions of cattle are migrating from Sudan (the Felata) to Upper Nile state through Renk during the dry season. UNMISS and other peace actors are supporting the migration conferences to smoothen the process, but the tension is very high. As per civil affairs report, the migration is the highest (in terms of number of cattle in the move) in country. Despite the migration conferences and agreements, still:

* There is competition over water and other natural resources, and this became a source of conflict in almost all migration seasons. Especially water points are spelled out by civil affairs as one of the major factors.
* The migration taxation system is not well organized, and pastoralists are raising concern on double taxation
* Women and youth are not part of the peacebuilding process while they have huge stake in the conflict drivers
* The pastoralists are well armed and have warrior mentality and these challenges the peaceful resolution of the conflict
* Some pastoralist doesn’t follow the migration route agreed on the pre-migration conference and end up in destroying the host communities land.
* Despite the cattle migration has huge economic benefits (as said by UNMISS Civils affairs and the former peace commission chairperson), this is not well communicated with the public and as a result, the community still have negative attitude about the practice. So, few disagreements may end up on deadly conflict as the community don’t have prior buy in on the practice.

1. **Eastern Nuer Conflict dynamics**

The Eastern Nuer area include Nasir, Longochok, Mawuit and others are one of the main conflicts hotspot in Upper Nile state that Nuer tribes are usually conflicting each other. These locations are entirely occupied by Nuer ethnic groups and there is less tension on the basis of ethnicity. Despite the fact there is continuous clashes which are related to revenge killing and political divisions. dry season, as mentioned by UNMISS civil affairs, is the point where the conflict spike and halt on the rainy season.

1. **Dinka Akoka Vs Shiluk Conflict dynamics**

This is basically a conflict on the control over the east bank of the White Nile, including Paloich, the sole productive oil field in South Sudan and the country’s financial backbone. The oil production is creating a social problem that the inhabitants (especially the Shiluk) are complaining about. The dinka are backed by the militias and repeatedly attack the shiluk inhabitants. The basic conflict drivers are:

* Politically motivated control over the east bank of the White Nile:
* Problems associated with the oil production and the company
* Grievance of Dinka and Shiluk inhabitants because of continuous fighting

1. **Peace actors**

There are several peace actors in Malakal including UNMISS Civil Affairs, Internews Media Network, Council of Churches, Safer World and CSOs including PaCC partners. They are eager to work with UNDP. One of the major gaps is there is no peace actor’s coordination system and there is weak system of collaboration and reinforcing efforts. As there is no active peace commission currently in Malakal, UNMISS civil affairs are waiting for the appointment so as to push the peace actor’s coordination forum. There are also three UNDP projects currently implementing in Upper Nile: Upper Nile University, Local government and Access to Justice and this gives a good opportunity for PaCC for coordinated approach.

In addition, the peace actors, particularly UNMISS, created various community structures that works on peace building and promoting social conflict. For instance, the migration conference is already created, and some conferences were conducted, and resolution drawn. UNMISS also established country commissioner’s forum that helps to coordinate and reinforce peacebuilding and security efforts in the location. Internews are working in disseminating peace building and social cohesion message through radio in Upper Nile that covers majority of the states. They have daily programs and most peace actors use this platform to disseminate peace messages.

1. **Gaps and Way forward: Recommendations**

* Malakal is a very unique context and a major front to determine the stability of the peace agreement and the new transitional government. It is the capital for the SPLM-IO, it has 6 cantonment area and the communities are still divided along their support on political parties and ethnic lines. So, there is enough entry point (in terms of peace building and social cohesion) for UNDP to open base in Malakal.
* Major Focus area recommend:
  + - Majority of the peace actors and humanitarians are implementing projects in the POC and this raise concern from the government and inhabitants of the Malakal town, predominantly from Dinka ethnic group, as they are neglected by the intervention. So, it is good to understand these dynamics for having conflict sensitive planning before commencing major activities.
    - The peace actors (civil affairs, human right section of UNMISS, the government and CoC), advised UNDP to combine the soft peace building and social cohesion activities with infrastructure-oriented peace building and social cohesion intervention (if budget permits). Most of the peace actors, including civil affairs, are working heavily on soft part. Some of the recommendation are:
      * There is a cultural centre in the town that civil affairs recommended renovation,
      * no youth centre in the town (youths in the town are asking for vocational skill training) …
      * water points on the place where these ethnic groups usually interacting, such as around market centres
      * as fishing is the basic activity that bring the POC and Malakal town youths together, supporting the process in also advised
    - The acting DG and the cabinets speculated challenges in the transition: during and on the initial phase of the appointment of the governor, and asking for support on:
      * Supporting the attorney office to conduct awareness raising on the peace agreement to address some of the contentious issue (especially land issue)
      * They also asked for support to strengthen the security (police) in patrolling (we know this is not in the scope of the project, it is just to give the heads up on what is requested)

1. Risks

* There is Very high expectation from the government on UNDP projects
* Dry season is coming and conflict, especially on Nuer east and migration routes are expected to be raise
* The tension during the appointment of the governor will also make the general situation unpredictable