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Original Article

The Impacts of Inter-Ethnic Conflict on the Community Development Process in Greater Jonglei State, South Sudan

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Abstract *- This study examines the impacts of inter-ethnic conflict on the community development process in Greater Jonglei State, South Sudan. The target population included 443 individuals from diverse backgrounds within the state. A sample size of 210 respondents was determined using Taro Yamane's (1969) formula. Data were gathered from both primary and secondary sources. A mixed-methods approach was employed for data analysis, utilizing qualitative and quantitative techniques. Descriptive statistics were generated using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel. Findi ngs revealed that 93.8% of respondents agreed that inter-ethnic conflict has led to civilian deaths, mass displacement, destruction of properties, interruption of human activities, looting, and the collapse of government institutions. In addition to the results of inter-ethnic conflict, 97.2% of respondents (n=205) identified the most severe consequences of inter-ethnic conflict as the destruction of property. The Cost of inter-ethnic conflict majority of respondents (95.7%, n=202) agreed and identified the costs of inter-ethnic conflict as including damage to social services, increased food insecurity, malnutrition, and a heightened burden of disease and also, 94.8% of respondents (n=200) believed that the continuation of inter-ethnic conflict would intensify human suffering. These conditions have led to the collapse of most human activities and the development process in the state. The study recommends that both state and non-state actors in South Sudan develop and implement stronger policies aimed at the disarmament of civilians and youth, while continuing to promote peacebuilding, dialogue, and reconciliation among the communities of Jonglei State.*

Keyword *- Inter-ethnic, Conflict, Community, Development, Jonglei State.*

1. Introduction

Inter-ethnic conflict refers to clashes between two or more contending ethnic groups. While the root causes of such conflicts may be political, social, economic, or religious, individuals involved often fight explicitly to secure their ethnic group's position within society [1]. Inter-ethnic conflicts in Africa, including Kenya, South Sudan, Chad, Rwanda, Congo, Nigeria, and the Central African Republic, have escalated due to European colonialists' division of the continent, which ignored historical territories and drew borders based on European national conflicts, leading to increased violence. Inter-ethnic conflicts have a significant and detrimental impact on economic growth since they lower investment, raise government spending, and increase the likelihood of civil war [2]. According to [3], [4], civil war can have a significant negative impact on a nation's economic and community development prosperity because it can result in the loss of human capital, the destruction of infrastructure, and a decline in trade, investment, and daily market activity. Additionally, Civil wars result in immediate death tolls, depletion of healthcare resources, property damage, and economic interference. They create overcrowding, limit access to food and clean water, and turn refugees into cross-border disease carriers. Crime and homicide rates may increase during wartime and persist afterwards, affecting societies used to violence[5]. According to [6], the conflict is primarily driven by cattle rustling involving tribal militias from both ethnic groups. Contributing factors include long-standing illiteracy, extreme poverty, and the widespread availability of small arms and light weapons, which have intensified insecurity across the two states and the greater Jongeli state. The ongoing inter-ethnic conflict in Greater Jonglei State has had devastating effects on the country, resulting in tens of thousands of civilian deaths, widespread destruction of community property, and the displacement of approximately four million people, 1.9 million of whom are internally displaced, with another two million having fled to neighboring countries. These conditions have led to the

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collapse of most human activities [7]. Jonglei has been the site of some of the worst violence in South Sudan, both during and after the civil war [1]. The Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) is working to resolve the long-standing conflict between the Murle and Lou Nuer communities in Jonglei State, South Sudan.

The conflict stems from issues such as cattle raiding, child abduction, the spread of firearms, and the collapse of traditional governance. Both communities also feel politically and economically marginalized, particularly by the Bor Dinka [8]. Through peace dialogues and reconciliation initiatives, the SCC aims to address these root causes and promote lasting peace. [9]. Cycles of cattle raiding—accompanied by increasing violence against individuals, communities, and their assets—persist amid extreme poverty and inadequate infrastructure [10]. The state also hosts one of the last remaining rebel groups that openly challenge the government [11]. South Sudanese leaders and international actors, such as the United Nations, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and donors, have long engaged in discussions on post-conflict recovery and reconciliation in Jonglei and other states. However, genuine recovery and reconciliation require a shared vision and commitment from the warring groups—something that has yet to emerge [11]and[12].

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), South Sudan faces major political and socio-economic challenges, which continue to be exacerbated by inter-communal tensions, insurgencies by rebel groups, and localized conflicts over land and natural resources. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [7]. [6] found that the Dinka–Murle conflict severely harmed child rights, livelihoods, and community well-being, with children facing abductions, violence, and displacement. The conflict was fueled by revenge attacks, cattle raiding, and weak governance. He recommends strengthening child protection, promoting peacebuilding, and improving institutions to address the root causes. The objective of this study is to assess the impacts of inter-ethnic conflicts on the community development process in Greater Jonglei State, South Sudan.

2. Statement of the Problem

The Republic of South Sudan is a multi-ethnic sovereign entity consisting of 10 states and a culturally diverse population. While this ethnic diversity speaks to the country's rich national heritage, it has also always been a source of internal ethnic discord in South Sudan. Since South Sudan gained independence on 9 July 2011, the country has witnessed localized inter-ethnic conflicts, most notably arising from disputes rooted in grazing land, cattle raiding, land grabbing, and lack of justice in terms of provision of development programmes and access to natural resources, predominantly in Jonglei State. Despite multiple, concerted and ongoing national and local efforts to address the security challenges arising from ethnic tribal disagreements, this phenomenon still persists and renders the overall situation rather fragile. This article seeks to examine the impact of ethnic conflicts on peace efforts in South Sudan [1]. Violence in Jonglei is often described as 'ethnic' or 'tribal', painting a picture of impenetrable, intractable conflict in the minds of many outsiders [13].

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Study Area

Jonglei State, located in the southeastern part of South Sudan, is the country's largest and most populous state, with a population of approximately 1.3 million spread across 11 counties. It shares borders with Ethiopia to the east, Kenya to the South, and several South Sudanese states, including Unity, Upper Nile, Eastern Equatoria, Central Equatoria, and Lakes. The state is ethnically diverse, inhabited by six major Nilotic groups: the Nuer, Dinka, Anyuak, Murle, Kachipo, and Jieh. The majority (about 91%) of the population resides in rural areas, and the local economy is primarily based on agriculture, agropastoralism, and pastoralism, which together account for over 80% of domestic employment. Despite its size and population, Jonglei remains one of the most underdeveloped regions in the world, suffering from chronic poverty, poor infrastructure, and high levels of food insecurity [14]. Nearly half the population lives below the poverty line, and around 39% face food insecurity, with 30% experiencing severe food shortages. Seasonal inaccessibility due to poor road networks, especially during the rainy season, compounds security and development challenges[14]. These conditions are the result of decades of civil war and neglect by central authorities.

3.2. Target Population

The target population for this study consists of 443 individuals from diverse backgrounds across the Greater Jonglei State, including the Greater Pibor Area, Greater Akobo Area, and Greater Bor Area, which together form the case study region. The study includes participants from various societal sectors such as government officials, community leaders, family representatives, church leaders, members of private organizations, business owners, and local citizens. These participants represent the wide ethnic diversity of Greater Jonglei State, which comprises an estimated 64 tribes of South Sudan. The selection of respondents aims to ensure a comprehensive understanding of inter-ethnic conflict and its impact on community development from multiple perspectives.

3.3. Sampling Designs and Sample Size

This study employs an explanatory survey research design, which is appropriate for providing both quantitative and qualitative descriptions of the subject matter. A total sample size of 210 respondents was determined using the [15] formula for sample size calculation. Participants were selected using a simple random sampling technique, with respondents grouped to ensure broad representation across key categories

and to facilitate accessibility. Data for the study were collected from both primary and secondary sources, enabling a comprehensive analysis of the research objectives.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis in this study incorporated both qualitative and quantitative methods. Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) alongside Microsoft Excel to organize, analyze, interpret, and present the data effectively.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The result is shown in Table 1. A total of 211 respondents participated in the study. The majority were male 169(80.1%), while females accounted for 42(19.9%). represents the gender dynamics prevalent in South Sudanese culture, where males are frequently more prominent in official positions of authority and local decision-making processes [16]; [17]. In terms of age distribution, most respondents were aged between 25 and 34 years (39.8%), followed by those aged 35–44 years (33.6%). Respondents under 25 years comprised 17.5%, while 8.1% were aged 55–64 years. Only 0.9% were aged 65 years and above.

Research in line with [18], individuals within the working-age population are particularly affected by conflict, and their perspectives highlight the severe disruptions it causes to family stability and livelihood opportunities. Regarding marital status, a significant proportion of respondents were married, 148(70.1%), followed by singles at 55(26.1%). Divorced and separated individuals made up 2.4% and 1.4%, respectively. In terms of educational attainment, 44.1% had completed secondary education, while 27.5% had attained a university degree. Other qualifications included technical school (10.9%), primary education (10.4%), master's degree (5.2%), and PhD (1.9%). Occupationally, 35.1% of respondents were government employees, followed by students (26.1%), self-employed individuals (15.2%), unemployed (14.7%), and NGO workers (9.0%). These findings are in agreement with [19] assessment in Jonglei, which found a similarly high proportion of married respondents (54%) and dominance of secondary level education (50%) in conflict-affected areas. Occupationally, the prominence of government employees (35%) and NGO workers (9%) reflects the heavy involvement of formal institutions in conflict mitigation and recovery efforts, as emphasized by [8].

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristic	Categories	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	169	80.1%
	Female	42	19.9%
	Total	211	100.0
Age	Less than 25 years	37	17.5%
	25-34 years	84	39.8%
	35-44 years	71	33.6%
	55-64 years	17	8.1%
	65 and above years	2	.9%
	Total	211	100.0
Marital Status	Single	55	26.1%
	Married	148	70.1%
	Divorced	5	2.4%
	Separated	3	1.4%
	Total	211	100.0
Please indicate the last grade or year in school that you completed.	Primary	22	10.4%
	Secondary	93	44.1%
	Technical School	23	10.9%
	Degree	58	27.5%
	Master	11	5.2%
	Phd	4	1.9%
	Total	211	100.0
Occupation	Government	74	35.1%
	NGOs	19	9.0%
	Student	55	26.1%
	Self-Employed	32	15.2%
	Unemployed	31	14.7%
	Total	211	100.0

4.2. Impact of Inter-Ethnic Conflict

In response to the question regarding whether the impact of inter-ethnic conflict in Greater Jonglei State constitutes a humanitarian crisis, the majority of respondents (66.2%, n=139) agreed that it does. This finding aligns with [20] and [21] report, which highlights that inter-ethnic violence in Jonglei has led to widespread devastation, resulting in approximately 10,000 deaths and the displacement of over one million people. These figures underscore the scale of the crisis and affirm community perceptions of the conflict as not only a local security concern but a broader humanitarian emergency. In contrast, 71(33.2%) disagreed with the statement, because humanitarian phenomena have an agenda of unity and peace and may result from cattle raiding, socio-cultural behaviors. As shown in Table 2 and Figure 1.

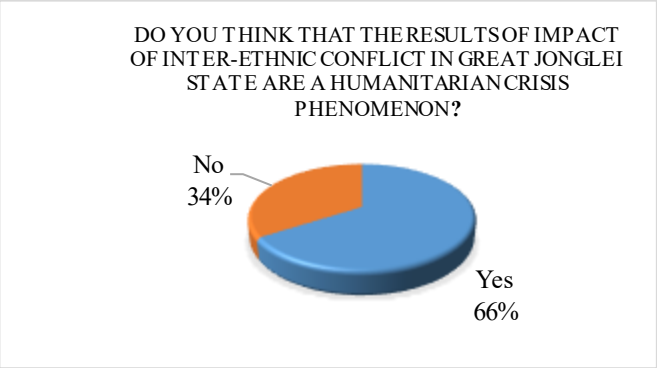

Fig. 1 Impact of inter-ethnic conflict

4.3. Results of Inter-Ethnic Conflict

An overwhelming majority of respondents (93.4%, n=197) reported that inter-ethnic conflict leads to displacement, increased morbidity, loss of life, and the erosion of social cohesion. These findings are consistent with [8]and [22], which emphasizes that one of the most immediate effects of inter-ethnic violence in Greater Jonglei has been large-scale forced displacement. The conflict has been marked by the killing of civilians, rape, widespread looting, and the destruction of both physical infrastructure and vital community assets, severely undermining development and recovery efforts in the region. In addition, 97.2% of respondents (n=205) identified the most severe consequences of inter-ethnic conflict as the destruction of property, reduced productivity, macroeconomic collapse, and disruption of local markets. These findings are supported by the [8],[19], and [22] reports, which highlight that inter-ethnic violence has significantly disrupted agricultural productivity, an essential sector upon which approximately 85% of the South Sudanese population depends for their livelihoods. The conflict has severely impacted the entire agricultural value chain, with over 50% of harvests lost in violence-affected areas due to inaccessibility, destruction of farmland and livestock, lack of agricultural inputs, and damage to infrastructure such as storage and warehousing facilities. These disruptions have not only undermined food security and economic stability but have also led to the displacement of communities, destruction of property, loss of human life, and the breakdown of social cohesion in Greater Jonglei State [23].

Table 2. List of variables related to the results of inter-ethnic conflict

Are the results of inter-ethnic conflict displacement, morbidity, loss of lives and loss of social cohesion among the communities?			Do you think that the worst of inter-ethnic conflict will bring the destruction of properties, productivity, macroeconomic collapse and marketing disruption in the country?		
Variable	Frequency	Percent	Variable	Frequency	Percent
Yes	197	93.4%	Yes	205	97.2%
No	14	6.6%	No	6	2.8%
Total	211	100.0	Total	211	100.0

4.4. Cost of Inter-Ethnic Conflict

A significant majority of respondents (95.7%, n=202) agreed and identified the costs of inter-ethnic conflict as including damage to social services, increased food insecurity, malnutrition, and a heightened burden of disease. These findings are in line with [8], which reports that inter-ethnic conflict in Greater Jonglei has severely disrupted the delivery of essential public services. The deliberate destruction of infrastructure, health facilities, water systems, and equipment has undermined the accessibility and functionality of vital services. As a result, communities have experienced rising levels of malnutrition and exposure to disease, largely driven by worsening food insecurity and inadequate access to healthcare and water/sanitation services. The conflict has also forced population displacement, limited security, and hindered food production, reinforcing the perception among affected communities that conflict leaves no room for development or well-being. Furthermore, 94.8% of respondents (n=200) believed that the continuation of inter-ethnic conflict would intensify human suffering and result in further loss of life across Greater Jonglei State.

This perception reflects the growing vulnerability experienced by communities, particularly in areas where conflict has been prolonged and social structures weakened. According to [23], such vulnerability has been further exacerbated by social marginalization and widespread exposure to abuse, exploitation, and sexual and gender-based violence. The ongoing instability deepens the humanitarian crisis and undermines efforts to restore safety, dignity, and resilience among affected populations. Findings are also in line with [24].

Table 3. List of variables related to the cost of inter-ethnic conflict

Do you think that the costs of inter-ethnic conflict are damage to social services, food insecurity, malnutrition and diseases in the country?			Will the continuation of inter-ethnic conflict in Greater Jonglei State increase the suffering and loss of lives for the people of the state?		
Variable	Frequency	Percent	Variable	Frequency	Percent
Yes	202	95.7%	Yes	200	94.8%
No	9	4.3%	No	11	5.2%
Total	211	100.0	Total	211	100.0

4.5. Relationship between Inter-Ethnic Conflicts and the Community Development Process

Table 4 illustrates the correlation, R = 0.586, which shows that there is a strong positive correlation between the two variables. While the value of R square, which is goodness of fit, is 0.070, this value shows a 7.0 percentage change in the community development process, which is affected by conflicts in greater Jonglei state, and explains the impact of inter-ethnic conflicts. Which 93.0 percentage is captured by the error term? This concludes that the model has a poor fit.

Table 4. Mode summary for regression

Model Summary[b]					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.586[a]	.070	.066	.162	1.954
a. Predictors: (Constant), impact of inter-ethnic conflicts on the community development process in Jonglei State.					
b. Dependent Variable: Community development processes are affected by inter-ethnic conflicts in Jonglei state.					

The result confirms that the overall regression model is significant for the data and this was captured by ANOVA (F-statistic value is 15.798 and it is associated probability value of 0.000), (F=15.798, p<0.000) that was found to be significant at 5% level.

Table 5. Shows the ANOVA table

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.416	1	.416	15.798	.000[b]
	Residual	5.498	209	.026		
	Total	5.914	210			
a. Dependent Variable: Community development processes are affected by inter-ethnic conflicts in Jonglei state.						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Impact of inter-ethnic conflicts on the community development process in Jonglei State.						

Table 6. Coefficient

Coefficients[a]										
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	1.406	0.080		17.512	0.000	1.248	1.564		
	IIECJS	-.077	0.019	0-.265	-3.975	0.000	-.115	-.039	1.000	1.000
a. Dependent Variable: Community development processes are affected by inter-ethnic conflicts in Jonglei State.										

Whereas IIECJS: Impact of inter-ethnic Conflicts on the Community Development Process in Jonglei State.

Table 6 illustrate the regression coefficient on the impact of inter-ethnic conflict, coefficient value which was found to be – 0.077, shows that impact increase in loss of people life, disruption of human properties, rise the absent of development process, collapse of state system which are impact of inter-ethnic conflicts, these were decrease the community development processes which are economic development, political development, cultural development process is given a – 3.975 with an associated p-value of 0.000. Since that value is less than 0.05 at the level of significance, the research concludes that inter-ethnic conflict has a negative and significant impact on community development processes in the greater Jonglei State.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that inter-ethnic conflict in Greater Jonglei State has had devastating consequences, particularly on the community development process. The conflict has led to widespread destruction of public infrastructure, social services, and both state and private institutions, effectively halting most human development activities in the region. Jonglei has witnessed some of the most intense violence in South Sudan, both during and after the civil war, which has further undermined peace and stability. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from both state and non-state actors, who must take full responsibility for restoring the rule of law, promoting accountability, and supporting recovery at the community level.

Recommendations

In light of these findings, several key recommendations are proposed: the government should develop and enforce stronger policies aimed at preventing inter-ethnic violence while also promoting peacebuilding, dialogue, and reconciliation among communities. National authorities must also implement effective disarmament strategies targeting armed youth and civilian populations to reduce insecurity. Additionally, non-state actors, particularly humanitarian organizations, are encouraged to continue supporting vulnerable populations through targeted assistance and recovery programs. These efforts are essential for restoring stability and promoting sustainable development in Greater Jonglei State.

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