

Preliminary research on dynamics of how people live and manage their lives in post-
conflict situations:
-A case study of Western Equatoria, South Sudan-

Year: 2013

Place of fieldwork: The Republic of South Sudan

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• **Research background:**

The number of armed conflicts has been increasing, particularly especially after the Cold War. Causes of most such civil wars, which have recently been occurring in developing countries, are attributed to ethnic/religious conflicts, poverty, underdevelopment, bad governance, or the legacy of colonialism. However, it's necessary to understand the historical background of conflict zones and to carefully analyze the social, economic, and political dynamic, concerning some influence of the international community, which may intervene positively or negatively in local contexts. Most peace-building or state-building projects launched so far have Western origins, and these paradigms are not always suitable for the non-Western world. Then it's argued that grass roots or bottom up cooperation between regional organizations and local communities have the potential to resolve post- conflict issues. South Sudan, which gained independence from Sudan in July 2011, is one of the fields where such trials and errors have been extended, and this research focuses on the influences of wars in this area.

• **Research purpose and aim:**

It is important for me to be familiar with the local language, to conduct fieldwork without interpretation, as much as possible. Another purpose of this preparatory research lies in overviewing the present situation in Western Equatoria, in South Sudan.

Sudan's conflicts (including present South Sudan), several civil wars (1955-1972, 1983-2005), and genocide in Darfur have all received international attentions. The western area was temporarily under the power of the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M), especially during the second civil war, but seems to have a different history from eastern parts of South Sudan. It was in the latter, where the fiercest fighting developed causing many people to move to within inside and outside the region. There are few references or records on the South Western region, except for Azande, for example. Therefore, it will be interesting to know how people inhabit this area, and how intra- or inter- relationships of several groups now function.

• **Results and achievement by through fieldwork:**

With assistance from JASSO's (Japan Student Services Organization) Explorer program, I was able to stay

in South Sudan from December 2, 2013, to February 15, 2014. , However, the local situation worsened and I was not able to accomplish my initial goal. I would like to explain this briefly below:

I participated in a forum titled, “Peace building and ‘African Potentials’: Harmonizing Approaches from Above and Below in South Sudan and Beyond” from December 6 to 8, in Juba. There, I was exposed to listen to analyses and reports on conflict resolution, and peace-building projects undertaken by the staff of international organizations, UN professionals, and researchers who have been engaged in (South) Sudan.

After the forum, I left Juba for Western Equatoria. It took about six hours to drive to Mundri, located roughly 180 km from Juba. The Moru is the main ethnic group there. I first stayed in Mundri, visited the local market, and bought a Moru-English dictionary, some linguistic texts, and ethnographic texts on the Moru. I also received a report from a local NGO, which conducts activities like reconciliation, healing, and education in post conflict societies.

Lui, which is approximately some 30 km from Mundri, is the next place I visited. There are many Christians in this area; missionaries contributed to Lui’s development. One day, the Lui church reverend and NGO staff told me about “the big tree.” According to them, many inhabitants were traded as slaves by Arabic merchants under this tree, in ancient times. The reverend also allowed me to access several historical records about the region, and I made an appointment to revisit these later. In order to receive research permission from the University of Juba, I returned to Juba. Late evening on December 15, the shooting and fighting began, and I thus had to return go back to Japan.

• **Implications for and influences directions on future research:**

I learned a great deal though my research in Western Equatoria. However, it was greatly disappointing to leave without conducting enough fieldwork on some families in local villages. Violence spread across mainly the eastern states, and some area, where people from Ethiopia, Kenya, or Uganda run small businesses, is also damaged. Even though the ceasefire held in Addis Ababa apparently ended this crisis, no one can predict what will happen next. It may not be possible to revisit South Sudan until the emergency called off. But I would like to conduct field research with refugees in neighboring countries, and I resume my research in Western Equatoria when the time comes.



Fig.1 The Nile and Juba-bridge



Fig.2 Mosque in Juba



Fig.3 Lunch at a restaurant in Mundri