

Conflict Sensitivity Analysis: Considerations for the Humanitarian Response in Mangalla

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The extensive flooding in South Sudan in 2020 has led to significant displacement across the country. Over the past few months, there has been a large influx of primarily flood-affected Dinka into the Mangalla area, in the northern part of Juba County, Central Equatoria. While many of these Internally Displaced People (IDPs) were displaced by flooding in Jonglei state, others are arriving from the Shirikat neighbourhood in Juba. The arrival of large numbers of people into the Mangalla area, and the accompanying humanitarian response, has the potential to exacerbate existing tensions between the Bari and Mundari residents of Mangalla over control of land and other commercially significant resources in the area. In addition, there are also fears amongst Mangalla residents that some recent arrivals are not fleeing floods, but rather seeking commercial opportunities in the area. As a result, it is important that donors and humanitarian actors understand the underlying conflict dynamics and drivers in Mangalla, and that the response is planned and implemented using a conflict sensitive lens.

Introduction

South Sudan is currently grappling with a second consecutive year of higher than normal flooding.¹ The crisis has affected 37 of South Sudan's 79 counties and displaced an estimated eight hundred thousand people.² Among the places to which flood victims have fled is a small town called Mangalla, located 75 kilometers north of Juba along the Nile River. By the end of September, it was estimated that between 16,000 and 30,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) had fled to Mangalla from Jonglei and Shirikat (Juba County), with hundreds more arriving by barge each day.³ The Government of South Sudan reportedly helped IDPs who were temporarily sheltering in a neighborhood called Shirikat outside Juba to travel to Mangalla. Nonetheless, most of the IDPs had been displaced from Jonglei by the recent flooding. The influx of IDPs to Mangalla has placed pressure on host

communities who themselves are struggling with the humanitarian consequences of the flooding, intercommunal conflict and economic hardship.

The situation in Mangalla has also captured the attention of political leaders. After the President declared a state of emergency in Jonglei and Pibor in August 2020, a high-level delegation that included the Vice-President in charge of the Gender and Youth Cluster and the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management conducted field visits to affected areas. On 23 September, the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs issued a statement officially designating Mangalla as an IDP settlement. The Minister's statement caught many humanitarian organizations by surprise as government institutions rarely make such designations.⁴ The move also generated some suspicion among host communities in Mangalla who questioned the government's motives in

¹ Anecdotal reports suggest that the last time Jonglei experienced flooding at this scale was in the 1960s. However, it is difficult to discern the extent to which the high levels of flooding this year reflect cyclical rainfall patterns in the Nile Basin versus a more extreme weather event. An unpublished report by a team of South Sudanese researchers working with the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs suggests that Ugandan authorities recently released an overflow volume of Nile water through their dam at Jinja which may be contributing to the situation. See *Analysis on Humanitarian Situation in South Sudan due to Conflict, Flood and Chronic Food Insecurity*, unpublished report (Sep. 2020) (on file with author); see also Halima Abdallah, *Uganda drains excess dam water into the Nile*, The East African (9 Mar. 2020), available at <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/uganda-drains-excess-dam-water-into-the-nile-1438230>.

² United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), *South Sudan: Flooding Snapshot* (5 Oct. 2020), available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-flooding-snapshot-05-october-2020>.

³ *Id.* IOM interviews with 356 recent arrivals suggest that the IDPs are mostly from Twic East (73%), Bor South (19%) and Duk Counties (7%). An Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) mission to Mangalla in September found that 1,196 individuals from Bari and Mundari communities on nearby islands were also displaced and were being absorbed into host communities in Mangalla. See ICCG, *Inter-Cluster Coordination Mission to Mangalla*, unpublished report (23 Sep. 2020) (on file with author).

⁴ The Central Equatoria State government deployed a committee to Mangalla in July 2020 to investigate fighting that broke out that month between Bari and Mundari groups over the administrative status of Mangalla.

intervening in this manner. The local discontent reflects deeper concerns amongst both the Bari and Mundari that the situation in Mangalla could become a repeat of the situation in Nimule, when in the early 1990s thousands of Dinka Bor displaced by violence in Jonglei sought refuge in Nimule. At the time, the civil war had displaced much of the local Madi population into Uganda, and when the Madi started returning to Nimule after the signing of the CPA they increasingly came into conflict with Dinka IDPs and migrants who were reluctant to return to their homes in Bor. The situation in Nimule has continued to escalate over the years and currently is among the most hotly-contested land issues in the country.

In response to the rapidly evolving situation, the Vice-President reportedly provided some foodstuffs to IDPs and a South Sudanese construction company called Africa Resource Corporation (ARC) constructed a water yard in the area, while aid organizations have begun scaling up humanitarian operations in Mangalla. A partial list of actors currently on the ground is outlined below, although additional agencies have also mobilized:

- Action for Recovery and Transformation (ART) which has engaged in nutrition programming with support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP);
- Health Link South Sudan (HLSS) which has operated a health center in the area, although, as discussed below, their operations were interrupted by conflict between the Bari and Mundari in July 2020;
- According to a report from a protection cluster visit to Mangalla in mid-October, a national organization called Rural Community Empowerment Network is involved in activities that resemble camp coordination and camp management (CCCM);
- CARE is currently planning a response in Mangalla; and
- International Organization for Migration (IOM) and World Food Programme (WFP).

This briefing provides a conflict sensitivity analysis to inform the humanitarian response in Mangalla.

Data was collected through a mixed methods approach including a review of primary and secondary source material and discussions with key informants that have been closely monitoring developments. The analysis complements the work done by Conflict Analysts at IOM and WFP who deployed to the area to assess the situation, including the conflict sensitivity implications of the flood response, in mid-October after humanitarian partners pledged to provide at least three months of assistance in the area. Among the issues that are discussed are how the influx of IDPs could exacerbate underlying tensions over land in Mangalla, concerns that humanitarian assistance could incentivize IDPs to remain in Mangalla even after the flooding has subsided, and the potential for the situation in Mangalla to become intertwined with political and intercommunal conflicts in neighboring areas.

Mangalla's Strategic Importance

Several factors contribute to Mangalla's strategic importance to groups in the area. Mangalla is high ground relative to the surrounding wetlands, making it an important site for settlements, agriculture and grazing, particularly during the rainy season. It is strategically located between Juba and Bor, and the port at Mangalla was among a handful of ports that the President designated as priorities for rehabilitation in 2006.⁵ The fertile land in the area and its easy access to the Nile have also made Mangalla attractive to various agro-industrial investments over the years. In the 1950s and 1970s, successive government administrations made trial attempts to grow sugar and establish an industrial complex in Mangalla. In both instances, the attempts were short-lived, though smaller community-driven agricultural projects can still be found in the area. In 2007, the Government of Southern Sudan entered into discussions with a Ugandan company named the Madhvani Group to establish a sugar plantation in the area, but the company suspended its activities in 2015 due to the underlying dispute over Mangalla's administrative status.⁶ Mangalla also lies alongside Bandingilo National Park and concerns have been expressed about the impact that agricultural investments may

⁵ Sudan Tribune, *TEXT – Salva Kiir statement before South Sudan parliament*, (11 Apr. 2006), available at <https://sudantribune.com/spip.php?article14995>.

⁶ Peter Hakim Justin and Lotje De Vries, *Governing Unclear Lines: Local Boundaries as a (Re)source of Conflict in South Sudan*, 34 *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 38 (2019).

have for the migratory routes of wildlife in the area.⁷

Conflict Drivers in Mangalla

The administrative status of Mangalla is a source of contention between the Bari and Mundari and has been compounded by both politics and the reconfiguration of state and local government administrative units over the years.⁸ The Bari and Mundari have much in common; they are both Bari-speaking peoples and have intermarried extensively. While the Bari predominantly rely on agriculture for their livelihoods and the Mundari on agro-pastoralism, their relationship involves considerable interdependence. Nonetheless, there is a history of both groups contesting control over Mangalla, which, as noted above, is vital not just from a livelihoods perspective, but also for commercial and strategic reasons.

From 2005 to 2015, Central Equatoria State was governed by a Mundari military leader named Clement Wani Konga. During the 22-year war (1983-2005), Konga commanded a Mundari militia that received support from Khartoum and was active in the areas around Juba. During his 10 years as Governor of Central Equatoria, Konga faced numerous problems relating to land, including the dispute between the Bari and Mundari over the administrative status of Mangalla. Konga's main contender in the 2010 elections was a Bari politician and military figure named Alfred Lado Gore. Gore advocated on land issues during the election as the issue resonated strongly with his base in the Bari community. Although Konga managed to win the election, the political contest contributed to the politicization of the dispute over Mangalla.

In addition to the political dynamics, the reconfiguration of state and local government units over the years has also served to fuel the dispute. After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, the newly-created Government of Southern Sudan divided Juba District into Juba and Terekeka Counties, creating an ethnically defined county boundary that passed

through Mangalla.⁹ Then, in October 2015, President Salva Kiir issued a presidential decree dividing South Sudan into 28 states. Central Equatoria State was divided into Jubek, Terekeka and Yei River States, elevating the dispute over Mangalla from a local government issue to a state-level issue. The Jubek administration asked Mundari government officials to leave their offices and serve in Terekeka State and disagreements began to surface over the sharing of state resources. More recently the Central Equatoria Governor, Emmanuel Adil Anthony, banned all land allotments across the state. These administrative changes thus served to raise the stakes for the two communities, driving more exclusionary conceptions of ethnic identity, and reinforcing zero-sum approaches to not only the underlying land dispute, but also the non-sharing of services between the two groups.

Finally, the influx of IDPs, mainly Dinka agro-pastoralists, into Mangalla and the accompanying humanitarian response could not only amplify these historical tensions, but create new tensions, over access to grazing land for cattle. If humanitarian agencies are unaware of these tensions, and are seen to implicitly endorse the claims by either the Mundari or Bari to 'control' the land around Mangalla, or to prioritize assistance for Dinka IDPs, some of whom have come with their cattle, it could further enflame tensions. The example of Nimule where the displacement of Dinka Bor and their cattle in the 1990s led to more permanent settlement and conflict between the 'resident' Madi community and IDPs, should serve as a warning. The current situation in Mangalla could lead to similar tensions and serve as a potential trigger for conflict between the Bari, Mundari and Dinka Bor who bring their livestock. Given the highly fractured political and security context in South Sudan, such conflicts could easily become intertwined with national political interests.

⁷ David Deng, *Understanding Land Deals in Africa: Country Report: South Sudan*, Oakland Institute (2011), p. 11, available at https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/sites/oaklandinstitute.org/files/OI_country_report_south_sudan_1.pdf.

⁸ A letter from a Bari community organization notes that disputes over Mangalla arose in 1994, 1998, 2006, 2008, 2016 and now in 2020. See BCA Press Statement.

⁹ See *Governing Unclear Lines*, p. 36.

Conflict Dynamics in Mangalla

Conflict dynamics in Mangalla revolve mainly around access to land and natural resources. Localized conflict in the area sometimes becomes intertwined with administrative conflicts and political rivalries involving the Bari and Mundari groups in Mangalla and Dinka groups in neighboring states. Typical incidents include the following:

- During the 2010 election season, a dispute over a signpost for a police station that identified Mangalla as part of Juba County resulted in physical confrontations between Bari and Mundari groups in the area and the displacement of several Bari households. Around the same time, conflict with Dinka Bor groups passing through Mangalla and Gemeiza with their cattle displaced approximately 4,000 people.¹⁰
- In May 2016, when the newly-appointed Mangalla County Commissioner attempted to raise a flag for Jubek State at the county headquarters, fighting erupted between his security detail and Mundari youth, resulting in four deaths and displacing 1,200 people.¹¹
- In May 2017, conflict erupted between Mundari and Dinka Bor communities over allegations of goat raiding, resulting in South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF) being deployed to Mangalla town center. An interagency assessment in June 2017 found approximately 17,000 IDPs spread across Terekeka.¹²
- In March 2017, six aid workers were killed along the road to Pibor. A month later, as many as 30 people were killed in an ambush on commercial vehicles in Gemeiza, north of Mangalla.¹³
- Most recently, in July 2020, less than six months after the government and opposition parties agreed to revert to the preexisting 10 states and three administrative areas, clashes again broke out between Bari and Mundari groups in Mangalla. Bari residents were forced to flee further south, where they remain to this

day, and the local health center and police station were closed. At the time of writing, Mangalla is under the administrative control of an SSPDF commander stationed nearby.

Further complicating the situation are rumors that some of the newcomers to Mangalla are not IDPs but are rather migrants that have come from Juba to access economic opportunities associated with the humanitarian response. Some of the speculation can be traced to busloads of Dinka Bor IDPs that were being collected in a neighborhood called Shirikat on the outskirts Juba and taken to Mangalla. According to reports, many of the IDPs were displaced to Juba by the flooding in Bor, though local residents in Mangalla have also reportedly been selling commercial property to Dinka businessmen that have come to the area to capitalize on economic opportunities associated with the humanitarian response. These developments have triggered fears of land grabbing, including a rumor that a South Sudanese company that specializes in road construction has been surveying land in the area.

Finally, over the years, armed groups on all sides of the political divide have sought to capitalize on perceptions of marginalization and a prevalence of small arms among minority groups to enlist them into political conflicts. According to several key informants, armed opposition groups that did not sign on to the September 2018 peace agreement have been conducting outreach among Mundari youth to convince them join the armed rebellion. Subnational conflicts in Jonglei and Pibor present another threat. Dinka Bor IDPs in Mangalla could provide a soft target in the context of conflicts among the Murle, Dinka and Nuer groups in Jonglei.

Humanitarian Context

The flooding has had a devastating impact on communities in Mangalla – both IDP and host communities alike. The IDPs from Jonglei arrived with nothing, having lost most of their belongings in the floods, while the host communities have had

¹⁰ See United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), *Inter-agency Rapid Assessment Report for Conflict Affected Population in Mangalla Payam, Terekeka County, Central Equatoria State, dates of assessment: 28th July and follow up from 12th – 14th August 2010* (unpublished), cited in *Land Belongs to the Community*.

¹¹ See Alice Su, *Splits and Schisms in South Sudan*, *The New Humanitarian* (16 Jun. 2016), available at <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2016/06/16/splits-and-schisms-south-sudan>.

¹² IOM, *Terekeka Rapid Assessment*, Assessment Report (8-12 Jun. 2017), available at <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20170622Terekeka%20Assessment%20Report.pdf>.

¹³ *Id.*

their farms washed away and have little to share with IDPs. Conflict between the Bari and Mundari in July 2020 had already resulted in the closing down of key services, including the health center and the civil administration. Local residents had few resources to share amongst themselves and were ill-prepared to accommodate an influx of tens of thousands of IDPs from Jonglei and Shirikat. Assessments by humanitarian agencies also report open defecation, which could easily lead to the outbreak of water borne diseases.

A protection cluster mission to Mangalla in mid-October found that there is a coordination structure in place that involves community representatives from Mundari, Bari, Dinka and Nuer communities, but poor communication remains a source of concern. For example, early reports reflect concerns about the quality and extent of consultation with Bari and Mundari community leaders regarding the temporary provision of land to accommodate IDPs. Bari and Mundari community leaders are also reporting that IDPs have been settling outside of designated areas and occupying houses, market areas and other public spaces that have been abandoned by host communities. This has led to the perception that some of the IDPs, particularly those coming from Juba, are actually economic migrants who have come to the area to capitalize on business opportunities. Fears of 'resettlement' by Dinka, similar to what had happened in Nimule, is further complicating the matter.

Given the many intersecting interests in Mangalla, there is a high potential for the humanitarian response to interact in unpredictable ways with the underlying conflicts. For example, community leaders and political elites among the Bari and Mundari may be incentivized to use their interactions with humanitarians, IDPs, and government representatives as an opportunity to reinforce their land claims in Mangalla. This could serve to polarize viewpoints and further politicize the situation. Access to services, including food assistance, shelter and non-food items, water, sanitation and hygiene must be provided in a way that neither reinforces perceptions of Bari or Mundari claims to Mangalla nor incentivizes IDPs to stay in the area any longer than necessary. Over the longer-term, the humanitarian response to the floods could help to inform subsequent resilience or peacebuilding programs that target some of the

underlying conflicts among the three groups. Housing, land and property (HLP) programs, for example, could help to monitor and respond to any land disputes that remain in the area once the flooding has subsided. Close coordination with Bari and Mundari community leaders can help to ensure humanitarian assistance does not become yet another source of competition in the underlying dispute while re-enforcing existing conflict mitigation measures. In addition, messages and assistance to IDPs can re-enforce the short-term nature of the displacement and the expectation that IDPs will return home when the flooding subsides in their home areas, which could help to assuage fears amongst the host community that the displacement could become permanent.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Due to the impacts of climate change and the underdeveloped water infrastructure in South Sudan, the flooding that the country has experienced in recent years may become an increasingly common occurrence. While the immediate humanitarian response is necessarily short-term, it is critical that humanitarian actors are aware of how their activities might impact on the conflict dynamics in the longer-term, and adapt their approach accordingly to mitigate the potential harms and maximize the contributions they make to community resilience and peace. Among the factors that humanitarian organizations should consider for a conflict sensitive humanitarian response in Mangalla are:

- **Ensure that whatever assistance is provided is temporary in nature and avoid treating Mangalla as a special case outside the normal response prioritization mechanisms.** Jonglei is not the only state in South Sudan affected by flooding, nor is Mangalla the only place hosting an influx of IDPs displaced by flooding. Given the widespread impact of flooding around the country, the humanitarian community should ensure that it is basing its response priorities on needs analysis, rather than political or other external pressure.
- **Consider scaling up assistance in IDPs' home areas in Bor South, Duk and Twic East Counties as soon as possible once the flooding has receded, to encourage returns.** There is the potential for the temporary response to the

needs of flood victims to drag on for an extended period of time. This could create or exacerbate tensions between IDPs and host communities. South Sudan has many examples of temporary situations of displacement becoming increasingly permanent, including the example of Nimule cited above.

- **Be conscious of the potential for the situation in Mangalla to exacerbate or become intertwined with political and intercommunal conflicts in neighboring areas.** Humanitarian organizations can guard against these threats by developing written, cross-sectoral humanitarian response plans at an early stage of the intervention that integrate a conflict sensitive approach that recognizes the potential for the response to amplify the conflict threats outlined in this paper.
- **Targeting should take into account the needs of both IDPs and vulnerable host community households, and differentiate between flood victims and people who may have migrated to Mangalla for other reasons.** To account for the complicated dynamics among host communities, IDPs and migrants, humanitarian organizations should use a community-led approach to targeting of beneficiaries and allocation of resources. The provision of resources and services, including shelter, food, water and health/education services should be done in a way that re-enforces the temporary nature of the response for IDPs, while building longer-term access to basic services that are available to all residents in Mangalla. Services should not be allocated for IDPs or Bari or Mundari host communities exclusively.
- **Establish a response-wide complaint and feedback mechanism as soon as possible.** Agency-specific complaint and feedback mechanisms can often overlook how activities by different agencies are impacting on beneficiaries or fueling tensions between communities. A response-wide mechanism will help foster a better understanding across agencies of how their collective response is being perceived by host and IDP beneficiaries, particularly community perceptions around how needs are being identified and targeting criteria developed. Such mechanisms will allow the broader response to identify if, or when,

activities are being perceived as benefiting one community more than another, which is critical at the moment given the existing dynamics among the communities concerned.

- **Promote positive peace by ensuring that the humanitarian response is linked to and does not undermine ongoing peacebuilding programs or other conflict mitigation efforts.** While such opportunities may be limited in the context of a short-term flood response, there are several measures that humanitarian organizations should adopt to identify potential entry points. Initial conflict assessments and needs analyses should also map any existing peacebuilding programming or conflict mitigation efforts and consider how the response could positively or negatively impact on these activities. For example, the restoration of the health center in Mangalla, if approached in a consultative manner with relevant constituencies among the host communities, could help to reduce tensions among Bari and Mundari groups while also increasing access to health services for host communities and IDPs alike. In addition, efforts to rehabilitate relevant infrastructure in flood affected areas in both Mangalla and home areas can help to reduce disaster risk and promote greater climate resilience in the longer-term.
- **Ensure that a conflict sensitive approach is used when engaging with local authorities in the area.** Given that Mangalla is a contested area, agencies should not be seen to be favouring the Bari, Mundari, or Dinka, but should instead speak to representatives from all the groups. This will help mitigate conflict among the various communities in Mangalla, as well as between the communities and humanitarian agencies. As noted above, a coordination group that includes leaders from the various communities already exists on the ground in Mangalla, and the fact that they were able to agree on the temporary allocation of land for IDPs suggests that they have a certain capacity for collective decision-making. Humanitarian organizations could help to reinforce such structures and relationships by including them in decision-making around the humanitarian response.

- **Humanitarian agencies should ensure that the humanitarian response does not inadvertently undermine livelihoods.** There are a range of livelihood patterns among IDPs and host communities, which include both agro-pastoralist and agriculturalist practices. A first line of defence is to ensure the equitable distribution of relief among both host communities and IDPs. As the floods subside, the different livelihood patterns are likely to increasingly interact with one another, which can trigger conflict. Humanitarian agencies should anticipate these conflicts and put in place appropriate conflict mitigation mechanisms before they arise. These mechanisms should be established in consultation with affected communities to determine how best to manage cattle migration and pasture. The affected communities should also consider how best to manage cattle belonging to IDPs in the current context. The presence of cattle in the IDP settlements not only increases the pressure on land and natural resources, but also introduces serious security risks associated with cattle raiding.
- **Consider the impact that humanitarian assistance has on the environment and wildlife in the area.** Mangalla sits at the edge of the Bandingilo National Park, one of the six national parks in South Sudan, which is home to a diverse array of wildlife and has also attracted various groups seeking to earn a living from charcoal production, timber and the sale of bushmeat. There is a risk that a prolonged IDP settlement in Mangalla could contribute to deforestation, poaching and environmental degradation. In addition to the impact on the wildlife and fauna, such changes could also serve to increase tensions with local communities over the management of natural resources. In parts of southern Mangalla, the local authorities and communities are already known to levy taxes on people who want to access resources in the forest. Such a system would be difficult to implement in central Mangalla given its contested administrative status, and the lack of regulations could serve to attract people who would seek to exploit forest resources in the area.