# SUDANWORKINGPAPER

## The overlooked role of elites in African grassroots conflicts:
A case study of the Dinka-Mundari-Bari conflict in Southern Sudan

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# The overlooked role of elites in African grassroots conflicts:

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# Contents

# Foreword

This working paper is the last piece written by Dr. Paul Wani Gore who died in April 2008. Paul was an experienced and productive anthropologist who for many years worked as a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, University of Khartoum. The themes of his publications range from educational policy and demographic developments to agricultural studies and problems of national integration. During his last years, he wrote several excellent reports on grassroots conflicts in different parts of Sudan. He never came to experience the birth of South Sudan as the latest new nation in the world, but many will claim that he was his region's most prominent anthropologist. He is sorely missed.

Abdel Ghaffar M. Ahmed          Gunnar M. Sørbø

# Abstract

Many analysts of grassroots conflicts in African emphasized one of the following factors to be the most important: ethnic divisions, competition over resources or competition between pastoralists and agriculturalists. The role of elites has been down played in such conflicts. This argument is being challenged by current evidence as shown by the Dinka-Mundari-Bari Conflict in Juba County in Southern Sudan. The data for this paper is derived mainly from a longitudinal study dating back to 1972 using observation and interviews as the main methods of data collection. Other sources of data included historical and recent reports of conflicts in the area. The major findings of the study are that: While low-keyed conflicts between the Dinka-Bor and the Bari-Speaking group existed in the past over the ownership and use of natural resources, they have been transformed into violent political conflicts over the years. The fragmentation of centers of political power, the divide-and-rule strategy of the Central Government, and the divisions between the elites of the two ethnic groups, who weakened local administrative structures and traditional mechanisms in conflict management and resolution, have sharpened the ethnic differences and competition over resources. The manipulation of ethnic differences by opposing groups in the various civil was in Sudan and by the elites at the centers of political power is the main cause of transforming traditional competition over natural resources into violent conflicts.

# 1 Introduction

The majority of African countries have been plagued by ethnic conflicts especially after they gained independence from the European colonial powers[1]. In almost all cases these conflicts have spillover on community relations producing a multitude of grass-roots or second tier conflicts, most of them as violent as the civil wars. The genealogy and dimensions of these conflicts are quite complex and varied, with deep roots in the histories involving various socio-economic and political factors.[2] Therefore, the search for the roots of conflict in African countries and communities have produced varied explanations that have centered on many issues which included stress of modernization and nation building process; class struggle following pronounced societal inequalities; competition over limited resources; ethnicity/tribalism; imposition of ethnic/tribal sentiments by self-serving local extremists. The second-tier or grassroots conflicts have often been characterized as ethnic conflicts, resource-based conflicts or agro-pastoralists conflicts[3].

The role of ethnicity and ethnic identity in African conflicts has been emphasized but limited attention to the instrumentalist view of ethnicity and ethnic conflicts. This view suggests that "ethnicity is not a natural cultural residue but a consciously crafted ideological creation" and it results from the manipulation of elite who incite and distort ethnic consciousness into an instrument to pursue their personal ambitions. Tribal movements are created and instigated to action by the new men of power in furtherance of their own special interest which are the constitutive interest of emerging social classes.[4] But this view has been dismissed as an exaggeration, prejudicial and condescending.[5] However, recent writings on conflicts in countries outside Africa have used this argument has been used to explain the conflicts in Yugoslavia

The purpose of this paper is to chronicle three conflicts in Sudan and it attempts to explain why they occur, emphasizing the role of the elites in these conflicts. The paper provides an analysis of grass-roots conflicts in Sudan The paper uses the Dinka-Mundari-Bari Conflict in Central Equatoria State in Southern Sudan as a case study to expound the argument that elites play an important role in transforming low key community disputes involving competition over access and use of natural resources, into violent political conflicts. The fragmentation of centers of political power, the divide-and-rule strategy of the Central Government, and the divisions between the elites of the two ethnic groups, who weakened local administrative structures and traditional mechanisms in conflict management and resolution, have sharpened the ethnic differences and competition over resources. The

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1 - Okwudiba Nnoli,ed.Nottingham (1998); Ethnic Conflicts in Africa. CODESRIA. African Studies Quarterly; The Online Journal of African Studies

- Amoo G. Amoo, (1997); The Challenge of Ethnicity and Conflicts in Africa: The Need for a New Paradigm; Emergency Response Division, UNDP

2 - Lemarchand 1997; Patterns of State Collapse and Reconstruction in Central Africa: Reflections on the Crises in the Great Lakes; African Studies Quartely; The Online Journal for African Studies.

- Zartman W.; (1995). Introduction: Posing the Problem of State Collapse; in Zartman, W (ed); Collapses States; Boulder, Lynne Rienner

3 Abdulrahaman ame; (2006); Cross-Border Trade and Small Arms and Conflicts in Pastoral Areas of the Horn of Africa: Case Study from Southern Ethiopia and Kenya; IASCP's Biennial Conference

4 Sklar R. (1967); "Political Science and National Integration: a Radical Approach", Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. V, No.1

5 Sam G. Amoo, op.cit.

manipulation of ethnic differences by opposing groups in the various civil was in Sudan and by the elites at the centers of political power is the main cause of transforming traditional competition over natural resources into violent conflicts.

The data for this paper are derived from two sources, historical records and field visits. The historical records date back to the pre-independent period in 1956, and most of the records relates to conferences of chiefs conducted during the colonial period for the settlement of disputes and allocation of grazing land for pastoralists during seasons of flood. These conferences of chiefs ended when Sudan gained independence, but one such conference was organized in 1973 following an 8-year war between the Dinka and the Bari. Conference organized in early 1973 which brought together the Mundari, Dinka and Bari Chiefs This conference was observed by nearly all the leaders representing the major ethnic and tribal groups in Southern Sudan[6].

Monitoring visits were made to the area between 1973 and 1983 when it was possible to conduct interviews with community leaders and elites from the Bari, Mundari and Dinka communities. However, it was not possible to carryout interviews in rural areas of Central Equatoria State and in most cases it was not possible to access traditional rulers of the communities as most of them were recruited as security agents. Following the signing of the CPA it became possible to visit the rural areas of the State and access to written documents written during this period is now possible. But the fluid nature of the situation in the rural areas of the State makes it difficult to conduct interviews with communities. There is heighten tension among the three communities and armed conflicts

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6 The author of this paper was one of several translators in the conference, and part of the information on the Dinka/Bari Conflict and the Mundari/Dinka Conflict is based on his records during the conference. He was a translation of that conference and had access to some files in the Local Council responsible for organizing the conference. Observers who include the Reth of the Shilluk and the Chief Lolik Lodu of the Lokoya attended the conference.

# 2 The Context of Conflicts in Africa and Sudan

Internal violent conflicts are not new to Africa, although they have become so phenomenal that they have been described as 'new wars'.[7] Since 1960, 19 full pledged civil wars have been fought in Africa, and by 1980s, it had 43% of the global population of refugees, most of them from political violence. During the decade of the 1980s alone, it is estimated that conflicts and violence claimed over 3 million Africans in countries with civil wars. It is argued that such conflicts challenge the conventional wisdom of the nature of wars and their aftermath,[8] mainly because they are waged not by professional armies but by youthful combatants with little or no professional training. They tend to be more pervasive, more destructive but less decisive.[9] The list of African countries with recurrent conflicts include among others Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Congo Republic, Chad, etc. The list of the countries in conflict is long and they have also occurred in very swift succession.[10]

Sudan is a country that has experienced civil wars since independence in 1956 with only a brief pause between 1972[11] and 1983. Over the years since 1955 until 2005 the most dominant conflict was that between the Government of Sudan on the one hand and the Southern Sudan armed opposition groups[12]. But in 2003 another conflict of the same nature immerged in Darfur. Besides these dominant conflicts several low-key conflicts, generally referred to as "grassroots or second tier conflicts", between ethnic or tribal groups were taking place in different parts of the country. The intensity of these types of conflicts was often influenced by the major conflict, and since the early days after independence, local security was consistently undermined at varying degrees from one administrative level to another by these second tier conflicts. About 65% of the people live in regions that are defined as conflict-prone. The major areas of conflicts in Southern Sudan are in the Sobat Corridor of Upper Nile, Central and Eastern Equatoria States, and Bahr el Ghazal (mainly Lakes, Warab and Northern Bahr el Ghazal States). These conflicts are between the pastoral communities, and between the agricultural and pastoralist communities. On the surface of it the conflicts revolve around access to use of natural resources.

During the 21-year civil war induced large population movements, in particular the 1991 leadership contest within the SPLM, triggered the flight of over a quarter of a million people from Upper Nile to Equatoria. The Dinka from Bor who are mainly pastoralists sought refuge and safety in Equatoria region, an area dominated by agriculturalists. Equatoria offered good grazing and other economic opportunities for the Dinka internally displaced persons (IDPs). But over the years major

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7 Kaldor M. (1999); New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era; Stanford, Staford University Press.

8 Colletta N. and Nezam T. (1999); From Reconstruction to Reconciliation; Development Outreach, Vol. 1. No.2

9 Kaldor M. Op.cit; Collelta N. And Nezam T, ibid.

10 Amoo 1997; op.cit

11 The first conflict stated in 1955 as the "Torit Mutiny" by the Southern Sudanese Army Corps escalated into a full-blown rebellion in early 1960s. That war ended 1972 with the signing of the Addis Ababa Agremeent which granted Southern Sudan a Regional Autonomy with its own government. The Agreement was abrogated in 1983 by the Government in Khartoum and this marked the beginning of the second civil war which ended in 2005 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

12 The first conflict that stated in 1955 and ended 1972 was generally known as the Anyanya Movement; while that which started in 1983 and ended in 2005 was dominated by the SPLM/A.

complications arose as the Dinka-Bor occupied farmlands and grazing areas of Equatoria ethnic groups who felt that the IDPs were acting with impunity due to the political protection they were thought to receive. After over a decade in Equatoria, the Dinka Bor accumulated a vast herd of cattle. The ethnic groups in western Equatoria accused the Bor camp communities of damaging their croplands and water points and of lack of respect for local traditions and authorities. In 2004, the situation worsened in western Equatoria, and law and order broke down in the Mundri and Maridi areas as conflict between hosts and IDPs spiraled out of control.

The question that is persistently been asked is why conflicts are more severe in Africa than other parts of the world. Analysts of conflicts in the continent have provided various answers to the question. A persistent explanation is that ethnicity and poverty combine together to produce unstable situations in many African countries, and the "main contentions are that the multi-ethnic African state is inherently conflictual. Furthermore, poverty is the direct source of conflicts in Africa; poverty alleviation is therefore a panacea. But the contention that, "unattended poverty leads to conflicts in Africa" has been disputed by statistical evidence. While 38 of the 51 African countries fall into the low human development category, not all of these countries have conflicts. The magnitude of poverty is dynamic and consequences constitute an absolute indictment of the policies of the international community and the performance of the continent's elites. In fact poverty and deprivation are often both the deliberate creation and the unintended consequences of civil wars in Africa.[13]

Adefemi Isumonah[14] emphasized land as probably the most important issues in communal conflicts in Africa and argued that land tenure is a critical element of culture of the agrarian society. Ethnic conflicts existed in the past over the ownership of land and use of natural resources, and ethnic groups are often compelled to fratricide by such legitimate issues. The linked between conflict and poverty is extended by the upholders of the human needs theory who argue that conflicts result from ignoring or suppressing developmental needs which must be satisfied and catered for by institutions, if these institutions are to be stable, and if societies are to be significantly free of conflicts. "Sources of conflicts in Africa are located in basic needs for group (ethnic) identity, security, recognition, participation and autonomy, as well as in the circumstances, policies and institutions of political and economic systems that attempt to deny or suppress such basic needs."[15] As people perceive other groups to be more economically secure, they often turn to ethnicity as an anchor, particularly if those who are economically better off belong to a different ethnic group.

However, scholars[16] on African conflicts consider ethnicity per se as the most critical, if not the determinant, source of conflicts in Africa. The argument includes the contention that colonial

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[13] John M. Richardson Jr and Shinjinee Sen; (1996); Ethnic Conflict and Economic Development; School of International Service, American University March 24,

[14] Adefemi Isumonah; Nationalism; Race & Ethnic Studies; in Nationalism and Ethnic Politics, Volume 9, Issue 1 March 2003

[15] Amoo, Sam G.; op.cit.

[16] - Eriksen, T (1993); Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspective, London, Pluto Press;

- Verdery, K; (1994); "Ethnicity, Nationalism, and State-Making. Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: Past and Future"; in Vermeuthen, Hans, Govers, Cora (eds); The Anthropology of Ethnicity: Beyond Ethnic Groups and Boundaries, Amsterdam, Het Spinhuis, pp33-58.

- Denitch, Bogdan; (1996); Ethnic Nationalism, Minneapolis, Mn: University of Minnesota Press

- Amoo, Sam G., op.cit.

incursions exploited and compounded inter-ethnic inimical relations. The argument is that colonial powers utilized the segmentation of ethnic groups to their advantage through the divide-and-rule policies, which assured the docility of different ethnic groups. In other words, it was feasible to divide ethnic groups and pit them against each other so that they could focus their energies on fighting one another rather than overthrowing colonial governments. But other scholars on the subject argue that the totality of the colonial experience is not reducible to just segmentation because colonialism contained within it many cross-cutting contradictions, even at the level of identity formation and inter-ethnic relations.[17] Although ethnicity constitutes perhaps the most significant instrument in internal conflicts in Africa, the argument that ethnicity, ipso facto, is the cause of conflicts may be an invalid conception of the problem, and ethnic heterogeneity does not inevitably produce conflict.

One question that has resulted in some muted debate is: who are the beneficiaries of conflicts in Africa? Few analysts of conflicts in Africa have attempted to answer this question. Those who attempted to do considered the elites and those in power in post-colonial Africa as main beneficiaries of such conflict. Osaghae's[18] analysis is worth quoting: "Underneath conflicts which are apparently ethnic are personal (and class) ambitions which are desperate, opportunistic and violence prone. This argument is expounded by the instrumentalist view of ethnicity and ethnic conflicts[19]. The view holds that "ethnicity is not a natural cultural residue but a consciously crafted ideological creation"; ethnic conflict results from the manipulation of the (radical) elite who incite and distort ethnic/nationalist consciousness into an instrument to pursue their personal ambitions. Rawlinson[20] argues that the instrumental use of ethnic ties is successful because it goes hand in hand with a strong cultural identification with the ethnic group on the part of the followers.

This contention is not new; in 1967, Richard Sklar[21] submitted that, "tribal movements may be created and instigated to action by the new men of power in furtherance of their own special interest which are, time and again, the constitutive interest of emerging social classes. Tribalism then becomes a mask for class privilege. Recent writings on the subject continue to lay some importance on the role of elites in ethnic conflicts. Blumer and Solomos[22] argued that ethnicity as a category is best conceived as social and political resources that are used by both dominant and subgroups for the purpose of legitimizing and furthering their own social identities and

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- Ahmed, Imtiaz, (1999); "Ethnicity and Identity Politics", CODESRIA Bulletin, Nos 3 & 4;

- Brown, Michael, E. (2001); "The causes of internal conflicts: An Overview"; in Brown M, O. Cote, S. Lynn-Jones and S. Miller, (eds.) Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict; Cambridge MA: MIT Press pp 3-17

- Sambanis, N. (2001); Do Ethnic and Non-Ethnic Civil Wars have the Same Causes? A Theoretical and Empirical Inquiry (Part 1); Journal of Conflict Resolution Vol. 45 No.3

[17] Williams, P. & L. Chrisman. 1994. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory.* New York: Columbia University Press.

[18] Osaghae, E; (1996); Ethnicity, Class and the Struggle for State Power in Liberia, Michigan State University Press

[19] Assis Malaquias, "Ethnicity and Conflict in Angola: Prospects for Reconciliation," in Jakkie Cilliers and Christian Dietrich, eds., *Angola's War Economy: The Role of Oil and Diamonds* (Pretoria, South Africa: Institute for Security Studies, 2000), 110.

[20] Rawlinson A. (2003); The Political Manipulation of Ethnicity in Africa; www.Insolens.org.

[21] Richard Sklar, op.cit.

[22] Bulmer, J & Solomos, J; Introduction: Re-thinking Ethnic and Racial Studies; Ethnic and Racial Studies, Vo.21, No. 5 September 1998.

interests; ethnicity and consequent conflicts are an ideological creation by local elites to serve political and other purposes".

The role of elites has been expounded with examples from Yugoslavia. Sotiropoulou, Angeliki[23] argues, supporting the argument of Grillo and Hartmann[24] that the conflict in Yugoslavia's ethnic groups was not determined by ethnicity itself, rather that, ethnicity played an important role in the issue, as political elites took advantage of the symbolic power that ethnicity has to offer and used it as a tool for pursuing territorial, political and economic objectives. Thus, ethnicity became the basis of political mobilization in pursuit of resurgent claims to territory and power. N. Caspersen[25] extended the argument that ethnicity has come to play a more important role and suggested that elite interests are dynamic, arguing that in ethnic conflicts, the behavior of political elites constitute and important variable, both in the outbreak of conflict and in the attempt to find solutions.

A. Oberschall[26] had tried to explain why ethnic manipulation succeed by suggesting the concept of a cognitic frame which clarifies elite-grass-roots linkage and ethic manipulation; ethnic identity and attachments alone, however intense, do not explain grass-roots ethnic actions. In the decline of a dominant controlling force like communism, nationalists activated the crisis frame on ethnicity by playing on fears of ethnic annihilation and oppression in the mass media, in popular culture, in social movements. M.J. Balogun[27] summarizes this role in a dramatic way: "Ethnicity is a powerful mobilization tool in the hand of a group that is intent on consolidating its power."

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[23] Sotiropoulou, A; (2002); The Role of Ethnicity in Ethnic Conflicts: The Case of Yugoslavia; MA In Contemporary European Studies, Euromaster; University of Bath; www.eliamep.gr/eliamep/files/04.02.pdf

[24] Cornell, S and Hartmann D. (1998); Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World, Pine Forge Press, London

[25] Caspersen N. (2003; Elite Interests and the Serbian-Montenegrin Conflict, Southeast Economic Politics, November 2003, Vol. IV, No. 2-3, pp.104-121

[26] - Oberschall, A; (2000); The Manipulation of Ethnicity: From Ethnic Cooperation to Violence and War in Yugoslavia, Ethnic and Racial Studies, Volume 23, No. 6, November, pp982-1001

- Somer, M. (2001); 'Cascades of Ethnic Polarization: Lessons from Yugoslavia'; Annals of AAPs. Vol.573, pp105-26

- Carment, David. (2007); "Exploiting ethnicity: political elites and domestic conflict.(reversing the trend: ETHNIC CONFLICT)." *Harvard International Review* 28.4: 62(5). *Expanded Academic ASAP*. Thomson Gale. UC Los Angeles. 27 May. 2007;

[27] Balogun; M.J. (2001); Diversity Factors in State Construction Efforts in Africa: An Analysis of Challenges, Responses and Options; African Journal of Public Administration and Management, Vo. XIII, No. 1 & 2, January and July

[27] The Sudan Population Census of 1955/56 provided some detail classification of the ethnic groups in the country and it also provides estimates of their numerical strengths. (See, Department of Statistics, (1960); Sudan Population Census, 1955/56, Khartoum).

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# 3 Case Studies: The Dinka-Mundari-Bari Conflicts

## 3.1 Background

Sudanese Society is heterogeneous with respect to ethnic or tribal and geographical identification. It has a population of about 7 million people classified into 9 main ethnic on the basis of linguistic, cultural and other ethnographic characteristics. These groups have been further re-classified into three major sub-groups; The Nilotics who include the Dinka, Nuer, (the Luo-group: Shilluk, Luo, Acholi, Lango etc.) in Upper Nile and Bahr El Ghazal, the Nilo-Hamites, who include the Bari-speaking, Latuho-speaking, and Anuak-Murle-Didinga-Toposa groups, and the Sudanic, who include the Azande and Madi-Muru in Equatoria, and the Bongo-Baka-Bagirmi-Balanda (or Fertit) groups in Bahr El Ghazal. The distribution of these groups corresponds very closely with the physical classification shown above. The Nilotics groups are generally found in the Central and Flood zones, with the exception of the Acholi and Lango who together with the Nilo-Hamites and the Sudanic groups are concentrated in the Equatorial zone and Western Bahr El Ghazal[28].

The agro-pastoralism dominates the economy of Southern Sudan. The population depends mainly on the vast and fertile agricultural land characterized by small farm holdings, and dependent on rudimentary technology, family labour and small farm holdings. Pastoralism is: widely practiced by the majority of the population, in particular the Nilotic and Nilo-hamitic groups. In areas were pastoralism dominates the form of animal management operates through the seasonal migration of herds, mainly for grazing and water during the dry season. The networks of pastoral migration routes show well defined the pastoral mechanism of resource management.

The pastoralists either have free access to pasture or it is under some kind of tribal administrative control where access depends on the tribal identity of the pastoralists. In general where pastoralists dominate, human and animal life depends on the delicate balance of ecosystem. During the last two decades this equilibrium was upset, particularly in the vast flood plains of the northern half of the region. In addition to the persistent floods, unsustainable security situation have forced many communities to abandon their areas and move to new ones in search of survival and protection. These pastoralists usually move to areas where agriculture is dominant. The result is increased competition for nominally abundant renewable resources. In some areas, rapidly expanding animal populations have been outstripping the carrying capacity of the local resource base. Together these conditions formed a powerful blend of insecurity. The conflicts involving the three communities, the Dinka, Mundari and Bari is described below.

The analysis of the relation between the Bari, Mundari and Dinka is important for several reasons. First, the area occupied by the three groups falls along an important water supply route, the River Nile, which has been and is vital for all Equatoria, Upper Nile, Jonglei and Lakes States. Second, the return of the Dinka Bor internally displaced persons and refugees from Equatoria, Uganda and kenya, and their ability to adopt to their previous way of life, (pastoralism), will depend on the post-conflict peaceful co-existence with the Mundari and the Bari who used to share grazing land with them. Third, the political stability of the post-conflict government of South Sudan could be threatened by conflict among the three communities, in particular that between the Mundari and the Dinka. Current re-

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arming of tribal militias in the area might indicate plans for future destabilization of a future government in South Sudan following a peace settlement. In all these conflicts, i.e. the Dinka/Mundari, the Dinka/Bari and the Mundari/Bari, there was both a direct and indirect involvement by authorities. These conflicts have been used as instruments of political control and domination by one group over the other.

The Bari and Mundari belong to Central Equatoria State, although they belong to two different Localities (Provinces), Mongalla Locality (Bari, with Juba as its Headquarters) and Terekeka/Tali Locality (Mundari, with Terekeka as its main administrative town). Villages of the Bari north of Juba are located on both bank of the Central Equatoria River; others are located on the numerous islands of the River. The Bari do not share borders with any of the Dinka groups, the Mundari have been a buffer between them. The Bari and the majority of the Mundari areas lie mainly outside the Flood Region, and the Bari being exclusively limited to the Ironstone Region. The Mundari do, however, inhabit the fringe of the flood region and the majority utilizes the flood plain of the Central Equatoria.

There are two Dinka groups north of Mundari territory, the Gok/Twic/Nyareweg/Ghol in Jonglei State with Bor as the main administrative town, and the Chiech/Aliab Dinka of Lakes State with Yirol as the main administrative town. All these groups, with the exception of the Bari, rely on the flood plain of the Central Equatoria for grazing in the dry season. The area is particularly susceptible to rain and river floods. The Dinka groups west of the Central Equatoria penetrate as far as Equatoria region for grazing. High land occurs both north and south of Bor as a narrow ridge just inland from the river. Most of the riverain swamp pasture is in the Aliab valley on the west side of the Central Equatoria, an area shared by the Bor Gok with the Aliab Dinka. Rainfall in this area range between 1200 mm and 900 mm per year, with extreme variability from month to month and year to year, with the result that drought and flooding can follow each other in quick succession. Crops planted in the early rain often suffer from drought in the middle months owning to the equatorial distribution of rain; and in September the soil is as often saturated, so that moisture conditions are normally unfavorable to the majority of crops.

The Mundari from both sides of Central Equatoria uses the Mundari-Gemmeiza *toich (dry season grazing land created by receding floods of the River Nile)* east of the Central Equatoria. On the east bank the Mundari extend from north of Mongalla to about 20 kilometer north of Gemmeiza, and the permanent villages are grouped along the ridge near the Mongalla-Gemmeiza road. On the Eastern Bank of the River, crop husbandry plays a more important part in the economy than among the Dinka, and it is possible to use the toich for this purpose as it is less frequently inundated than that in the Aliab Valley. Besides millet and groundnuts, maize and some tobacco are grown on the banks of the Central Equatoria wherever these are easily accessible.

The eastern riverain Mundari have permanent villages on higher grounds north of Mongalla and the area has sufficient annual grazing to support the local livestock during the rains. The sandy ridge, which runs northwards from the borders of the Mundari with the Dinka as far a Malek, was populated, except for the uninhabited gap between the Mundari and the Agok Dinka. There are several permanent villages and cultivation plots, but pasture of any real value is extremely limited. At the latitude of Bor land free from flooding is more scattered and extends inland to the border of the Eastern Plain

On the western banks, the riverain flood plain in the area in the Aliab Valley is used exclusively for dry season grazing. As the flood plain on the right bank of Central Equatoria is extremely limited in extent between the latitude of Tombe and Bor, the Bor Gok Dinka as well as the Aliab Dinka are dependent on the Aliab valley pasture. Although the Central Equatoria forms the boundary between

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Upper Nile (now Jonglei) and Bahr El Ghazal (Lakes State), the Bor Dinka cross the river to dry season cattle camps in the Aliab Valley; the River Aliab forms a rough boundary between Dinka Bor and Aliab Dinka camps, the former being to the east of its channel and the latter to the west, with a few camps on the east bank. The period of utilization varies from year to year depending on the rains and the fall and rise of the river. But the movement to toich is usually between November and January, while from it is at the end of April or beginning of May.

The villages of the Bor Dinka are found along the east bank of the Central Equatoria River, which in this area was high and well define. East of this ridge is the eastern plain, which provides intermediate grazing in the early part of the dry season. In most years re-growth of pasture on the eastern plains does not continue throughout the dry months, and in any case water supplies run dry. In very few years exceptionally heavy rain-flooding and late rainfall are sufficient to prolong the period of re-growth and ensure more lasting water supplies so as to accommodate the Bor Dinka throughout January, February and March. On the west bank of Central Equatoria River, the Aliab Dinka has little or no permanent grazing land. Thus both tribes are compelled to utilize the *toich* of the Aliab valley, which lies between them. In this reach levels in the river during the dry season are often high enough to reduce the normally accessible pasture by continued spill and inundation. The Dinka are predominantly pastoralists, and Bor area, in particular, was rich in cattle but poor for crop production. The Mundari are also pastoralists, but unlike the Dinka, there is a balance between agricultural production and animal husbandry.

## Case i: Mundari-Dinka Conflict

The Bor and the Aliab Dinka of Upper Nile and Lakes States, on the one hand, and the Mundari of Central Equatoria on the other hand, have always lived in relations alternating between war and peace. The Mundari-Dinka relations, in particular, have a long history of peaceful co-existence punctuated by periods of conflict over grazing land and cattle rustling. Records dating to 1900 showed that violent conflicts between the Mundari and the Dinka and between the Dinka Bor and Alliab Dinka were related to changes in the hydrology of the Central Equatoria. This pattern of relationship remained the same until end of the first Sudan civil war in 1972.

The movement of the people and animals in the area is governed by the hydrology of Central Equatoria River. In some years of the very high minima the area is not accessible at all, to the Bor Dinka at any rate. This inevitably leads to hardship and often losses to stock, since the Bor Agok have little toich grazing on their own bank and cannot graze their cattle on the edges of the toich in the Aliab; the main channel of the river intervenes. In such circumstances the area accessible to the Aliab Dinka is reduced and, though a proportion is usually still available at the western extremities, they too sometimes suffer from shortages. The result is that the Bor Agok (and to a much lesser extent the Aliab) have to seek alternative pastures elsewhere, either in the Eastern Plain, which can carry the cattle population only in some years, or southwards in the toiches belonging to the Mundari.

Political relations between the Bor Agok and the Mundari usually deteriorate in such circumstances; political relations between the Bor Agok and the Aliab are not affected, for these tribes are separated by kilometers of permanent swaps. In the years of low level, which follow, however, both tribes enter the valley and, since grazing may be much reduced by the swampy conditions, which prevail, or from other causes, disputes often arise

Past record of the events in relation to changes in river levels revealed a define influence of the hydrology of the river on political events in the area. However, hydrological conditions resulting in

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grazing shortages are not the only cause of inter-tribal disputes and breaches of security. Both good grazing conditions in a particular year and peaceful relations between tribe do not necessarily mean that no trouble was to be expected. Administrative interventions and control were also important factors. Fights arose between smaller sections and spread to larger ones and across tribal boundaries from a great variety of causes, fear of contagion from infected herds, unsettled legal claims, a sudden and sometimes inexplicable outburst of hostile feelings derived from former feuds. Shortages of pasture and unsatisfactory economic conditions, however, were often contributory even to these causes, and the correlation between high water levels in the *toiches* and deterioration in political relations seemed to be facts in the past.

The period following the settlement of the first civil war in 1972 and the establishment of the Autonomous Regional Government in Southern Sudan, with its headquarters in Juba, witnessed deterioration in Dinka-Mundari relations partly due to the increasing number of Dinka cattle in the area, but also resulting from the competition over grazing land, the cattle and meat market in Juba town and towns in Western Equatoria. The Dinka controlled the majority of the executive and security posts in the Regional Government, and the Bor and Aliab Dinka used this advantage to undermine the traditional agreements with the Mundari regarding dry season grazing areas. Moreover, the Dinka controlled the main cattle and meat market in Juba and the majority of licenses were granted to them.

Following the call to re-divide the Southern Region into three sub-regions in 1980 the Mundari expressed their desire to replace the Dinka in the meat and cattle market in Juba. The Mundari started to form militia groups during this period, assisted by authorities that belonged to the area; the leadership of the militia groups was placed under a retired police officer. They also started to acquire firearms from Zaire (now The Democratic Republic of Congo) and Uganda. The division of the Southern Region into three regions in 1983, which marked the start of the 21-year civil war, resulted in a violent reaction against the Dinka, and the Mundari killed many of those who remained in Juba town (in places such as Tong Ping, a small residential area Juba that was occupied predominantly by the Dinka).

The current conflict reached Mundari area in 1986 with disastrous effect on Dinka-Mundari relations. The SPLA/M forces that attacked the major Mundari settlements such as Gemmeiza and Terekeka were composed predominantly of Dinka, some of who were identified to be from the groups who shared the same toiches with the Mundari. There were reports of violation of human rights, girls were raped in front of their relatives and wives were also raped in front of their husbands. Graphic descriptions by eyewitnesses of events during the first entry of SPLA/M into the area still persist today. Other actions included the planting of mines in water points, fruit trees and farms.

The behavior of the SPLA/M forces in the area was interpreted as a revenge on the Equatoria for the division of Southern Sudan Autonomous Region into three sub-regions, but in particular against the Mundari for what they did during the period leading to and following the division of the Southern Region into three sub-regions. Reports of similar actions were not made in the Bari area; the general feeling of antagonism was expressed against the SPLA, which was regarded as a Dinka movement by both the Mundari and the Bari. The emergence of Mundari militias and their continued resistance against the Dinka appeared to have been a result of the initial entry of the SPLA into the area. During the course of the 21-year civil war the Mundari Militias organized themselves into a commando unit under the leadership of the present Governor of Central Equatoria State, and they were sent to fight in Eastern Equatoria, Eastern Sudan, and Darfur. Although the majority of these militias have been integrated into the SPLA forces, others have diffused into their communities with their weapons and are now the core group that is fighting the Dinka and the Bari.

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The Mundari who joined the SPLM/A deserted the movement and were recruited as militias by the Government of Sudan under the command of a senior army officer who himself was a Mundari. This officer was made the overall commander of the militias in Central Equatoria and in 1994 he was a made a Commissioner of Terekeka Province. He amassed a great number of cattle and could be considered as the warlord of the area. He was made the Governor of Central Equatoria (Bahr el Jebel) State in 2004, and he maintained this position after the signing of the CPA and when the SPLM assumed control of Government in Southern Sudan. He was able to maintain this position partly because he was able to control the Mundari at the grassroots not to go to armed conflict with the Dinka.

Contact between the Dinka and the Mundari has reduced to a minimum as a result of the current civil war in South Sudan. Moreover, the majority of Dinka-Bor has been displaced to many areas in Equatoria, in particular Eastern Equatoria State. The probable return of these IDPs into Bor area could be source of future conflict. Following the signing of the CPA in 2005 the Dinka-Bor IDPs were forced out of Western Equatoria by the Zande and the Moru ethnic groups. Some of the IDPs returned to their areas in Bor, while others remained in Central Equatoria in Mundari and Bari areas. In the process of their movement the Dinka IDPs took many cattle of the Mundari and the Bari, and this has resulted in the resumption of armed conflict has resumed between the Mundari and the Dinka. In the period between 2006 and July 2007, six major armed confrontations have been reported between the Mundari and the Dinka.

## Case ii: The Bari-Dinka Conflict

Between 1965 and 1968, the Bari north of Juba town was engaged in series of bloody battles with the Dinka from Bor in Upper Nile and Yirol Bahr El Ghazal. The precipitating events were that the Dinka did not respect past agreements concerning restricted areas for grazing their cattle and the incursion of their cattle into agricultural land owned by the Bari. Crops were destroyed the leadership of the law-enforcement agents were controlled mainly by Dinka police officers. In addition, the Bari alleged that the northern Sudanese who controlled the administration of Juba were seen to favor the Dinka since they were unable to un able to enforce the law. Moreover, the local chiefs reported that Dinka policemen assisted their kinsmen during the fight with the Bari using government firearms.

The Bari elites were able to mobilize their neighbors, the Mundari and Nyangwara to assist them in the war against the Dinka. The two communities responded by joining to fight against the Dinka. This war brought a temporary alliance between the Bari, the Nyangwara and the Mundari who all share the same language, against the Dinka. The war ended when the Dinka realized that they could not face the combined forces of these three Bari-Speaking groups. The Bari and the Dinka did not, and still do not, share a common boundary. The Mundari separated the two groups. But dating back to the 1920s, the Dinka of Bor and Yirol were forced by frequent floods in the Sudd area to move with their cattle southwards into Mundari area where grazing was available throughout the year. The movement of the Dinka into Mundari territory resulted in increased conflict over the use of grazing land. The Mundari, like the Dinka, are cattle owners; their relations had usually been that of competition over grazing land but also over possession of cattle. Cattle rustling were common in the area.

During the colonial period the Mundari and the Dinka were able to co-exist in the same territory, through agreements among their chiefs. The Mundari would agree to allocate area to the Dinka for own use. New areas could be added to those agreed upon through other agreements. But as both the Dinka and Mundari human and animal population increased, grazing land became limited and scares,

and there was no possibility for the Mundari to allocate new areas to the Dinka. Thus, the Dinka were often pushed south of Mundari area until they reached Bari territory. The Mundari kept to their own land and did not need to use Bari land for grazing, except during periods of extreme droughts when grazing along the River Nile was the only option, and the land available to Mundari cattle was not enough for their survival.

Over the years prior to interdependence of Sudan, the Dinka were allowed to move into areas south of Mundari land into the Bari areas for grazing, through the same types of agreements among the three tribes, the Bari, the Mundari and the Dinka. The frequent and long periods of flooding of Dinka land made grazing impossible for most of the year, thus most of the areas that were designated for Dinka cattle became permanent grazing areas, and there was little movement of Dinka back to their areas of origin The colonial authorities at that time organized annual meetings to allocate specific grazing areas to the Dinka during the most critical parts of the year when grazing was difficult for the Dinka in their areas.

These annual meetings became less frequent following the independence of Sudan in 1956, although the three groups honored the previous agreements until they broke down following the intensification of the first civil war in South Sudan in the early 1960s. The last meeting of the chief of the three communities was held in 1957 in Terekeka. No other meetings were organized by the post colonial authorities to allocate grazing land and resolve disputes until 1973 when the Southern Regional Government organized a meeting of the chiefs of the three groups in the presence of chiefs from the major tribes of South Sudan who acted as witnesses to the agreement that was expected to be reached after the meeting.

The purpose was to agree on new re-location procedures for the Dinka to graze their cattle, and the old grazing areas allocated to the Dinka prior to the 1965-68 conflict between the two ethnic groups were confirmed in addition to new areas. The local authorities were asked to remove the Dinka cattle to the designated grazing areas and the Regional Government of Southern Sudan gave the promises to support the local authorities in the implementation of the agreement. The agreement that was reached after two weeks of deliberation was not implemented and the Bari alleged that this due to the fact that the people in power in Juba were predominantly Dinka who had vested interest in keeping the cattle in the present grazing areas, and they did not wish the agreement to be implemented. These people had large numbers of cattle in the area that would have to be moved to the designated grazing points.

In 1983 the Government in Khartoum abrogated the Addis Ababa Agreement by dividing the Southern Region into three sub-regions. The demand for the division of the South was spearheaded by the major ethnic groups in Equatoria, in particular the Bari. The word "kokora" which became synonymous with the division of Southern Sudan, was closely associated with the Bari-Speaking Groups. When the civil war broke out again in 1983, many people from Equatoria associated it with the Dinka reaction against the Government of Sudan division of the South into three sub-regions. The formation of the SPLM/A, the control of the Movement by Dinka and the actions taken by them during the first years of the rebellion were considered as clear indications of their anger over this division.

The 21-year civil war in a way reduced the contact between the Bari and the Dinka. Most of the Bari area was under the control of the Government, and the Dinka who were largely associated with the SPLM/A could not find refuge here. After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), the Dinka Bor who took refuge in Western Equatoria were forced to move to their homeland, and the only route safe for them was through Bari Land. Although the majority of the Dinka have moved to Bor, a significant number have remained in Bari area, and this has heightened the tensions between the

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two communities. It was clear that even after the long period of conflict, memories of the division of Southern Sudan Autonomous Region into three sub-regions which was spearheaded by the Bari continued to generate bitter feelings between the two communities.

The 17-year civil war in South Sudan increased the conflict between the Bari and the Dinka, as they were forced to move into few secure areas where the two practices, agriculture and grazing. The two groups were bound to compete and conflict over the different uses of same land. The conflict that emerged during this period produced who, though they lived in proximity to each other, did not have mutual social interaction. The local government authorities in Juba organized the 1973 Bari-Mundari-Dinka Conference.

## Case iii: The Bari-Mundari Conflict

The Bari share a common boundary with the Mundari, and they belong to the Bari-Speaking Group. Relations between the Bari and the Mundari have been poor prior when Terekeka, made up of only one tribal group, was created as a new province separate from Juba Province. This gave rise to administrative control of a territory by Mundari elite, who operated mainly in Juba town because of lack of security in most of their territory. The 21-year civil war also resulted in a movement of a large number of Mundari with their cattle into, mainly from SPLM/A controlled areas into Bari land, in search of security and pasture. They occupied the areas where once the Dinka used to graze their cattle north of Juba used by the Bari for agriculture; Mundari cattle often destroy the crops of this people, resulting into confrontations. The poor relations between the two communities resulted in non-sharing of social services, e.g. water, health and education most of which were located in Bari territory. The Mundari elites campaigned to raise money to provide services to their Mundari in rural areas. Through the assistance of OXFAM (UK), the elites of the two communities established two separate organizations ACCOMPLISH for the Mundari, and NILE MILK for the Bari. These two organizations provided veterinary and milk marketing services to owners of animals of the two communities. The Mundari elites used this organization as a rallying point to obtain support from the grass-roots.

Over the period the Mundari began to lay claim on land that belonged to the Bari, specifically Mongalla which has been ear-marked for the location of a sugar-plantation and industrial complex. Following the military take over of government in 1989 in Khartoum and prior to 1994 when Sudan was divided into 26 States, some of the communities in Juba Province started to express their dissatisfaction with the old boundaries, claiming possession of the territory of the other communities. In 1994, the Commissioner of Terekeka Province (County) in Central Equatoria (Bahr el Jebel) State claimed Mongalla as part of Mundari territory. In June 2006 the Commissioner of Terekeka County demonstrated this practically by pulling down the flag of Juba County and hosting the flag of his County.

In 2004, a Mundari was appointed Governor of Central Equatoria State and was confirmed into office by the Government of Southern Sudan following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The change in political leadership from the Bari to Mundari control also resulted to a change in the lower levels of government. The Governor of Central Equatoria State ordered the division of Mongalla into two sectors, the northern for the Mundari and the Southern Sector for the Bari. In May and July 2007 the Mundari militias attacked two Bari villages, killing a number of people and taking away cattle. The Bari elites explained these incidences as instigations by the Mundari elites who they alleged were supported by Governor of Central Equatoria and their allies in the Government of Southern Sudan.

One of the main complains of the Mundari was that the Bari controlled all the political and administrative positions in the state, excluding other groups in the state from participation. The Bari alleged that the Mundari militias were used to intimidate them when the cattle trespassed into their cropland. In response to this threat, the Bari started to obtain arms from its para-military personnel in the Government, and some military balance between the groups was maintained in this way, partly contributing the temporary peace in the area.

Following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended the 21-year civil war in Sudan, the poor relations between the Mundari and Bari deteriorated into an armed conflict. One factor was the claim over land and the administrative headquarters of Northern Bari Payam (or local administrative unit).

# 4 Discussion

The role of the elites in ethnic conflicts among the three communities should be looked considered at different levels of perspectives. First, it is generally accepted that tribal conflicts existed in the past over the ownership and use of natural resources, mainly grazing land and cattle, exacerbated by the growing pressures resulting from population movements. The different patterns in the use of the ecosystem often result in conflict. The Bari community is predominantly agriculturalists, although they keep a few cattle and other small ruminants. Their cattle did not compete with agriculture for land. The Dinka and the Mundari are agro-pastoralists, although pastoralism is more important than agriculture. There was limited competition over the use of land for agriculture and pasture. However, when the Dinka came into contact with the Bari in early 1940s, cattle and agriculture started to compete with each other. The Bari would accuse the Dinka of letting their cattle graze in their fields and destroying their crop. During the period following independence the absence of an effective administration in the south partly contributed to the inability of the two groups to settle their disputes over the use of land for agriculture and grazing, as it was the case in the past.

Second, over time these conflicts have taken a much wider political dimension than previously. It appears that while the causes of conflicts appear to revolve around access to the use of natural resources, a number of factors including historical grievances, alleged economic deprivation by some groups, perceived disparities in power relations and control over it and lack of participation in the State Government, are changing the perceptions of the protagonists at the grassroots levels over the years, in particular starting from mid-1960s.

This period also coincides with the weakening of traditional administrative system that has grown incapable of maintaining good relations among communities and resolving conflicts among groups who share the same eco-system, and this has been regarded as another factor contributing to the persistence of poor communal relations in the area and increased in conflicts in the area. These administrative bodies are of paramount importance in influencing conflicts and their resolution. This period coincides very closely with the emergence of urban military elite in Southern Sudan. Groups are turning to ethnic based organizations for assistance, protection and identity, thus, leading to the deterioration of relations with other groups.

One important legacy left by the colonial administration is been used by the elites as a mobilizing tool. During the colonial period the authorities relied largely on what was called "Native Administration" under the chiefs to maintain law and order among the different ethnic and tribal groups. The dominant form of administration instituted by the colonial administration was the chiefs' court. The members of the chiefs' courts were representatives of tribal segments and followed the general organizational structure of each tribe. The chiefs' courts were both the administrative bodies, in the sense that they were responsible for justice and the execution of judgment, and for other obligations of government such as collection of taxes, the maintenance of roads and court buildings. They were also responsible for resolving inter-tribal conflicts. The traditional leadership controlled the decision-making processes at the village. Village heads and elders solved village problems and ran the affairs of the village. The village head took decisions after consulting village elders and all respected such decisions.

Several political and socio-economic factors worked to undermine the effectiveness of native administration, in particular the development of an urban wealthy elites and the politicization of native administration resulting native administration becoming outdated. One important development that was taking place in Southern Sudan after independence was the emergence of urban elite that was

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acquiring wealth in the form of cattle which they bought from the rural communities, and a shift in the number of cattle owned by this group. The administrators and those working in the organized forces based in urban areas acquired wealth in the form of cattle and they kept them in the rural areas near the towns where they worked. The accumulation of wealth in the form of cattle by the urban elites changed the relationships with the traditional rulers (the chiefs). For the chiefs, wealth in the form of cattle was an important source of power and patronage. Overtime, they lost this important aspect to the new groups in the urban areas.

Furthermore, as the new administrators in urban areas acquired education and wealth, the chiefs lose the sanctity of traditions and customs, the backbone of a successful native administration, and they were turned into instruments of political and military mobilization. The increased in the intensity of the 21-year civil war forced the chiefs with some of their people to move to urban areas where they sought the protection of the new leaders in society. The increased in the power of militias and the acquisition of modern firearms reduced the effectiveness of the traditional administration.

One of the important sources of current conflict in the area is the extent to which the Bari community is alleged to dominate the politics of Central Equatoria State, and the control over the allocation of rewards. Some groups, like the Mundari, feel deprived of leadership opportunities now as well as in the past, because they were less exposed to the sources of power in Juba. The Bari had easier access to education and hence political participation because of Christian mission education. Moreover, services, like health and education continue to be poor in the Mundari area compared to those in Juba and Bari area. These feeling of exclusion might ferment future conflicts in the area.

The Mundari and the Bari share the same state of Central Equatoria, and the majority of the Mundari from Tali currently live in Bari area. A number of social services, i.e. health centers, schools and water, are located in Bari villages. The Mundari do not want to use these faculties; instead, the have tried, through their elites, to establish similar services in areas they occupy with limited success. For example, they have built their own schools; but lack of water and teachers in these schools has resulted in very low enrolment and high drop-out among children.

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# 5 Conclusion

A Central conviction emerged in this paper that there is some relationship between natural resources and grassroots conflicts. Many grassroots conflicts in Sudan are characterized as resource-based and are predominantly between agriculturalists and pastoralists. Environmental degradation may be an apparent cause of some of the current conflicts. The concentration of large populations in the few areas meant an increased competition in the use of these resources. It might be concluded that the triggering factors might be competition over resources and unequal access to and distribution of resources, both national and local. The pluralistic nature of Sudan is reflected in the conglomeration of many tribal groups, which descended from different cultural backgrounds. The groups in Sudan are social, regional and cultural units to which the members share common sense of belonging.

The fragmentation of centers of political power, the divide-and-rule strategy of the Central Government, and the divisions between the elites of the two ethnic groups, who weakened local administrative structures and traditional mechanisms in conflict management and resolution, have sharpened the ethnic differences and competition over resources. The manipulation of ethnic differences by opposing groups in the various civil was in Sudan and by the elites at the centers of political power is the main cause of transforming traditional competition over natural resources into violent conflicts. These conflicts have affected the production potential of the rural population, and coupled with nature, it has rendered the local population unable to produce enough food for their survival, and this have produced a situation where poverty level is the highest recorded in the world.

But while poverty, which is the result of lack of development, is prevalent in most of the regions, grassroots tend conflicts to hinder any effort to eliminate or reduce it. An important contention in this paper is that specific interventions on conflict management should include strengthening social institutions and mechanisms for example by supporting democratic reforms advising the government in organizing its legal systems, and promoting the civil society.

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Many analysts of grassroots conflicts in African emphasized one of the following factors to be the most important: ethnic divisions, competition over resources or competition between pastoralists and agriculturalists. The role of elites has been down played in such conflicts. This argument is being challenged by current evidence as shown by the Dinka-Mundari-Bari Conflict in Juba County in Southern Sudan. The data for this paper is derived mainly from a longitudinal study dating back to 1972 using observation and interviews as the main methods of data collection. Other sources of data included historical and recent reports of conflicts in the area. The major findings of the study are that: While low-keyed conflicts between the Dinka-Bor and the Bari-Speaking group existed in the past over the ownership and use of natural resources, they have been transformed into violent political conflicts over the years. The fragmentation of centers of political power, the divide-and-rule strategy of the Central Government, and the divisions between the elites of the two ethnic groups, who weakened local administrative structures and traditional mechanisms in conflict management and resolution, have sharpened the ethnic differences and competition over resources. The manipulation of ethnic differences by opposing groups in the various civil wars in Sudan and by the elites at the centers of political power is the main cause of transforming traditional competition over natural resources into violent conflicts.