

great shift

After decades of bitter hostilities and a 'divorce' from the North, South Sudan has its work cut out for it on its new development path beyond oil. KERRY DIMMER investigates



Jubilant South Sudanese in the capital Juba celebrate independence from the North

A crisis is often followed by dramatic socio-economic leaps forward, and that is exactly what everyone wants to see from Africa's newest country, South Sudan, since it gained independence in July.

Unfortunately, there is no magic wand that can erase the decades-long war that took the lives of at least 1.5 million people and displaced another 4 million, and that strained co-operative agreements between the North and South. But what there is, is oil and this is both a blessing and a curse.

Were it not for oil, neither country would have survived. Sudan exports billions of dollars of oil per year. The bulk is sourced from the South and then piped through to the North for refining and export via the Red Sea. According to a Global Witness report, in 2009 South Sudan derived 98% of its income from oil, which accounted for some 50% of domestic revenue and 93% of exports for the North.

However, along with succession comes a myriad of sticky problems compounded by rumours. For example, South Sudan is now entitled to 75% of the 500 000 barrels a day of oil production, which means North Sudan may lose approximately 35% of its income, especially if the now landlocked South Sudan goes ahead with a new oil pipeline route through Kenya. This is becoming increasingly

more likely given that the North's capital Khartoum has reportedly demanded US\$32 per barrel in fees for the use of its oil facilities.

There are also reports suggesting that current reserves will run out in 20–30 years. And because history shows some discrepancies in oil-production figures, transparency in the sector is imperative for progress and to ensure that any North-South agreement is equitable and palatable.

Without oil South Sudan's economy is very vulnerable. The war has left it wounded in every sector – infrastructure, healthcare, education, agriculture, food security and investment, to name just a few. There is some good news, however: North Sudan has in principle offered to keep all of Sudan's US\$38-billion debt, so in effect South Sudan, as one of the world's poorest countries, is actually debt free.

This gives South Sudan a strong foundation on which to rebuild. Part of that process must include weaning itself from its dependency on oil, and commercial agriculture may provide a partial solution. South Sudan has vast areas of arable land that has mainly been used for subsistence agriculture. According to South Sudan's National Bureau of Statistics, some 78% of households are dependant on crop farming or animal husbandry as a primary source of livelihood at a subsistence level.



Subsistence farming is still the essential source of income for the majority of households

Anne Itto is the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) minister of Agriculture and Forestry. She says the South has great potential for agriculture development with more than 640 000 km² of land, of which only 4% is being farmed.

'The government has given priority to agriculture,' she said days prior to independence, indicating that the nation had the potential and goal to become the breadbasket for the East African region. 'We are working towards increased food production through expansion of the production area from 3–5 ha of farmland,' she added.

What South Sudan is optimistically looking to produce in the next year is 2 million tons of cereals. Of this, 840 000 tons will be for local consumption, and the balance for trade. But these goals cannot possibly be reached without private-sector and foreign investment partnerships.

Aid couldn't have come at a more opportune time as food security issues, particularly in the Warrap State, are mounting at an alarming rate

Welcome then is the collaboration of GoSS with the International Fertilizer Development Centre, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID), to ensure the development of a viable commercial agriculture sector by supporting agribusiness and improving agricultural research and technology.

This aid couldn't have come at a more opportune time as food security issues, particularly in the Warrap State, are mounting at an alarming rate. Many exiled returnees have been reported as dying from hunger, and the failure to deliver on food security promises are creating new tensions.

In particular, hunger is a serious plight for the elderly and children. Unicef reports that 200 000 South Sudanese children are either severely or moderately malnourished, and less than 3% are receiving the full protection

of immunisation. The country is also one of the most dangerous places for women to bear children, with an average rate of 22 women dying daily from complications with pregnancy and childbirth – a keen indicator that health facilities remain poor.

Doctors Without Borders estimate that 75% of the population does not have access to medicine or healthcare. It falls to international NGOs to provide medical services and even they are unable to quell the spread of preventable diseases like malaria, measles and those related to malnutrition. The problem is compounded by the lack of trained and skilled health workers.

Much of the health sector's development depends on the success of the Sudan Health Transformation Project Phase II (SHTP II), led by Management Sciences for Health and funded by USAID. SHTP II has a two-pronged approach: it aims to improve accessibility of and demand for services, while simultaneously building the capacity for services and staff. This essentially means that healthcare in the region now moves from relief to development.



President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir Maryadiit at a ceremony announcing the election preliminary results

'If South Sudan develops the vast natural resources at its disposal, its development is not going to come from foreign aid'

This has led, for instance, to the creation of the Community-Led Total Sanitation project which aims to decrease occurrences of typhoid, diarrhoea and cholera, by educating communities in the most effective means to construct latrines and waste-disposal sites.

Education is yet another area that has to be addressed. Only 27% of the adult population is literate which means that the future of South Sudan literally lies in the hands of its children. Consider too that around half the population is under 18 years of age and that many girls never manage to complete school due to early marriage.

While the new government rallies together, and it's clear they have a huge task ahead trying to prioritise all the challenges, Plan International (a children's organisation working with communities in 50 developing countries to alleviate child poverty), has introduced a

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number of programmes that will help promote sustainable livelihoods by supporting young people to acquire employable skills through technical and vocational training. Importantly, Plan is investing more than US\$56 million over the next five years to help improve access to basic education.

Even with these developments, there's very little progress without adequate infrastructure in place. With just 80 km of tarred road, the country desperately needs roads and bridges that will connect not just its territories, but vital links to borders where trade can be expanded on. The South Sudan Roads Authority will be overseeing the revamping of existing roads and maintenance, but a limited budget means it will be dependent on development partners.

The first major paved road is under construction between Juba, the capital, and Nimule, and again USAID has provided the much-needed

funding for not just this project but also the construction of 1 500 km of emergency access roads that has allowed for critical food and relief supplies to reach people in need.

There are talks of the development of an airport hub, not unlike that in Dubai, and explorations are already under way to develop hydroelectric power. Riek Machar, the region's vice-president, has said that there is some US\$500-billion worth of investment available for infrastructure development over the next five years.

It's going to take a very long time for South Sudan to be able to provide for its people on its own. While it appears obvious that development aid will help the country get on its feet, South Sudan will ultimately develop independently. At least, that's the view of John Prendergast, a human rights activist and co-founder of the Enough Project.

'Resource revenues will build safety nets and help catalyse opportunities,' he says. 'If South Sudan develops the vast natural resources at its disposal, its development is not going to come from foreign aid.' **AD**