

Division of Sudan – the causes and impacts of independence for South Sudan

By Alex Cooke

Synopsis

In 2011 the world's tenth largest state, the former state of Sudan, became two nations: Sudan and South Sudan. Both are rich in natural resources but there is much conflict over the use of many local resources. The struggle for political power in both Sudan and South Sudan is a major point of conflict due to the myriad of tribal groups vying for power, particularly in the South. It has been stated by the WHO that South Sudan is one of the world's poorest nations, with the majority living on under \$1.25 a day.

Abeyi in the South is an area of major dispute over oil, and the South Kurdufan and Blue Nile regions have potential for conflict over the issue of damming the Blue Nile in the South for water conservation and HEP.

The Dinka and Nuer tribes of the South, and the non-Arabic and Chadian-related Sudanese in the western region of Darfur, have always felt isolated and so have regularly taken up arms against seven presidents, resulting in two civil wars in the last 20 years

Some NGOs and tribal groups claim that up to 400,000 people have been killed in Darfur and the south since 2005 and that around 2.5 million people have been displaced from Darfur alone since then.

Throughout South Sudan there has been conflict over the redistribution of agricultural land, and people are becoming disheartened with the government's inability to push for better Red Sea trade links via Khartoum.

Instability in government and the security forces, and a lack of security over ownership of land means that investment by foreign transnational corporations is unlikely – a failure to attract potential employers who might raise levels of income and help to improve infrastructure.

This newest country is one of the world's least developed and poorest; the economic cost of conflict here to the international community is estimated at \$30bn; ethnic divides are heightened by a smaller but very diverse population living in closer quarters in competition for land and resources.

Key terms

Instability, conflict, developmental decline, ethnic tension, peripheral regions, social equality, trade links

Learning objectives

After working through this unit you will:

- have a better appreciation of different spatial, cultural and political contexts
- be able to identify some of the challenges arising from conflict between and within poor countries
- have a better appreciation of the wider environmental and social context within which a country is placed
- understand the links between the environment and political and economic contexts
- have a better understanding of processes and change in human geography.

Exam Board	Link to specification
AQA	Unit 3, GEOG3 Contemporary Geographical Issues, Option 6: Contemporary Conflicts and Challenges, see page 12 http://filestore.aqa.org.uk/subjects/specifications/alevel/AQA-2030-W-SP-14.PDF
Edexcel	Unit 1, Contested Planet, Topic 5: Bridging the Development Gap, The Consequences of the 'Development Gap', see page 65 http://www.edexcel.com/migrationdocuments/GCE%20New%20GCE/UA035234_GCE_Lin_Geog_Issue_4.pdf
OCR	A2 Unit F763: Global Issues, Section B, Economic Issues, Option B3, Development and Inequalities, see page 43 http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/69036-specification.pdf
WJEC	Unit G3, Section A, Contemporary Themes and Research in Geography, Theme 4, Development, see page 36 http://www.wjec.co.uk/uploads/publications/6312.pdf
CCEA	Unit A2 1: Human Interactions and Global Issues, Section A, Human Interactions, Option C: Issues in Ethnic Diversity, see pages 20–1 http://www.rewardinglearning.org.uk/qualifications/results.aspx?g=1&t=1&c=R&s=0&v=0&f=0&q=182&d=d
International Baccalaureate	Geography Diploma Programme, Paper 1, Core Theme, Patterns and Change, Disparities in Wealth and Development http://ibgeog2009.wikispaces.com/Disparities_Wealth_Development

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Figure 1 Sudan. An oil pipeline connects Port Sudan on the Red Sea coast and the border with South Sudan, which is landlocked both physically and in terms of major transport links. Many are migrating into Sudan from war torn and drought-affected neighbouring countries.

Situated in North East Africa, between Ethiopia and Eritrea to the east and Chad to the west (Figure 1), the former state of Sudan became two nations (Sudan and South Sudan) after a referendum in 2011.

Linking physical geography and conflict/tension in the region

The climate and dominant biomes of the region vary from desert in the north, to wet-dry season and grasslands further south, to sub-tropical rainforest in the far south. The Blue Nile flows through both

nations. Both nations are rich in natural resources (eg oil, grazing land, gold) but there is much conflict over the use of many local resources.

The Libyan, Sahara and Nubian Deserts in Sudan have a wealth of oil reserves extending across the border of both nations. In South Sudan, there are also huge reserves of iron ore, copper, silver and tungsten. Moreover, further gold reserves have been discovered near to Juba, with Khartoum now casting an envious eye towards its new neighbour.

Given the southern wet season, agricultural production and cattle

farming are productive. Arable agriculture varies from crops such as wheat, sugar cane and cassava to fruit such as mango. In a region where malnutrition is a major health issue, farmland is important; a person's status is dictated by their ownership of land and cattle. Consequently, in both nations, land is fiercely fought over. The issue of desertification is an added problem; in both countries the combination of conflict and desertification has locked their people into a cycle of developmental decline caused by social, food and environmental insecurity.

Animosities toward those of Bedouin-Arabic descent in the east were consolidated by President Bashir's rapid development of the north and eastern regions in the 1990s and 2000s; building highways, oilfields and bridges across the Nile. The uprisings in both west and south Sudan led to President Bashir taking severe military action in those regions. He is currently indicted for war crimes, including genocide, with some NGOs and tribal groups claiming that up to 400,000 people have been killed in Darfur and the south since 2005 and that around 2.5 million people have been displaced from Darfur alone since then.

As exemplified in the DR Congo, it is virtually impossible for the government of a huge, developing, war-torn, drought-inflicted country to build infrastructure, tackle famine and pursue development for all civilians equally. Consequently, the South Sudanese split to form a new nation, and Darfur remains a volatile region of the old state of Sudan.

What the split means for relationships between two new nations

Tensions remain over oil. Production was well developed in the old Sudan and trade was feasible via the busy Port Sudan on the east coast. South Sudan is now a landlocked state without trade links, and although it is rich in resources such as oil, access is a problem.

The Heglig oilfield, situated on the border near Abyei, contains much of Sudan's proven oil reserves. It is an area of major dispute between the South and Sudan. In April 2012 the South Sudanese Army captured it; later that year it was retaken by Sudan. The Sudanese-owned oil

pipeline that connects Sudan to the Red Sea stops here, isolating landlocked South Sudan from trading its reserves.

South Sudan: a new nation

The joy of independence has been short-lived for many. South Sudan has some of the worst levels of development and social equality on the Human Development Index. Since 2011, up to 10,000 are reported to have been killed in local conflicts with rival army factions and tribal groups unhappy at the election of the country's first leader, President Kiir. He is of Dinka tribal origin, representing a majority group. However, other groups have a strong presence and compete for grazing land with the Dinka – particularly the main opposition tribe, the Nuer.

President Kiir has already been the target of an attempted military coup. Throughout the new state there has been conflict over the redistribution of agricultural land following the split, and people are becoming disheartened with the government's inability to push for better Red Sea trade links via Khartoum.

It has been stated by the WHO that South Sudan is one of the world's poorest nations, with the majority living on under \$1.25 a day. Urgent strategies are needed, exemplified by the following WHO statistics:

- high infant mortality rates (1 in 9 dies before the age of 5)
- over 50% of the population lack access to clean water and sanitation and are subject to life-threatening diseases such as cholera
- most people are illiterate, including 84% of women
- HIV and particularly malaria are prevalent.

Impacts of the recent conflict within South Sudan

- Since the attempted coup in 2013, 200,000 people have been left homeless and displaced.
- Over half of the internally displaced peoples (IDPs) in the region are living in refugee camps with rudimentary sanitation and a lack of access to clean water. Cholera is the major issue here.
- Ethnic tensions between the Dinka and Nuer tribes are heightened by the power struggle and redistribution of land. There have since been claims of genocide on both sides.
- Nuer forces have taken control of key industrial towns in the South Sudanese oil-producing region (Bar and Bentia). Instability and conflict over ownership of oil and other important resources slows production and hinders economic development.
- Both President Kiir and his opponents are militarily inclined and, it is argued, lack the foresight to unite people and help the nation progress.
- South Sudan currently has an ambiguous national identity, unified by name and flag only. There are tribal differences between the Dinka and Nuer as well as ethnic tensions between Arab and African ethnic groups.

As the conflict continues, agricultural production slows and yields become less profitable. The fighting and lack of development in rural parts of South Sudan has prompted many to migrate to the new capital Juba in search of perceived job opportunity and better infrastructural provision. This has led to homelessness and unemployment in Juba.

Instability in government and the security forces, and a lack of security over ownership of land means that investment by foreign transnational corporations is unlikely – a failure to attract potential investors who might raise levels of income and help to improve infrastructure.

Spending on conflict resolution or continued warfare means that the country fails to invest in its education, healthcare or agricultural systems. Consequently, levels of illiteracy and ill health will remain high and progress in more sustainable farming techniques is unlikely, leading to the likelihood of desertification and famine in the future.

Wider impacts of the creation of South Sudan

Sudan is feeling the impact of the split. It has lost oil reserves and other resources to the south and is facing a severe financial crisis, as 20% of all its export income is made up from oil. Although a tentative ceasefire prevails, the conflict in Darfur has put around 2 million people at risk according to the UNHCR. 500,000 people are currently displaced in Darfur or

neighbouring Chad and experience major epidemics of measles and cholera.

If conflict occurs between the two nations, it is estimated that it would cost at least \$100bn, reducing the GDP of both nations by around \$50bn over 10 years. The consequences for development would be catastrophic. Emigration of displaced people would cost neighbouring countries like Chad (experiencing development issues themselves) around \$25bn to house refugees.

The global cost of oil would likely rise with reduced output from these nations and with the possibility of reduced availability due to a number of conflicts ensuing in other oil-producing regions.

Conflict resolution in South Sudan

- The UN has set up a base camp (partly housing IDPs) and deployed troops to maintain peace between warring Dinka and Nuer people.
- The UK government has sent food, water and medical aid, as well as sanitation aid.
- UNICEF and Save the Children are providing localised health care

and food aid. This included an emergency measles vaccination programme in early 2014.

- Some politicians affiliated to the Dinka and Nuer tribes have distanced themselves from the rebel groups that claim to represent tribal interests and have engaged in peace talks in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. These peace talks initially broke down but a ceasefire was confirmed in May 2014.

Summary

Darfur's predicament was very much in the international press, but recently other global issues have overtaken it. Darfur is nevertheless a major drain on Sudan's economy and is a hindrance to progress and development here.

The impact of independence in South Sudan is even less well observed. Yet this newest country is one of the world's least developed and poorest; the economic cost of conflict here to the international community is estimated at \$30bn; ethnic divides are heightened by a smaller but very diverse population living in close quarters in competition for land and resources. South Sudan has plentiful resources but lacks the wealth to exploit them profitably and while it remains landlocked will find trading oil difficult.

Suggested Reading

Fadlalla, MH (2007). *UN Intervention in Dar Fur*. New York: iUniverse.

National Geographic Online: 'Why South Sudan may face the worlds worst famine in 25 years': <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/04/140420-south-sudan-famine-africa-hunger-war-world/>

Watch:

IRIN Film: 'South Sudan: Shattered Dreams' <http://www.irinnews.org/southsudan/index.html#/part2>



Figure 4 Separation Restaurant, Terekeka, South Sudan, on 11 June 2011. The restaurant name highlights South Sudan's future independence from the North.

Source: Frontpage/Shutterstock.com

Focus questions

- 1 Discuss the causes of conflict that have led to the independence of South Sudan and tension in Darfur.
- 2 Discuss the national and international impacts of independence for South Sudan
- 3 Explain how climate and physical geography enhance the likelihood of conflict in this region.
- 4 Contrast the socio-economic futures of the two new countries.

Learning checkpoint

While you're studying the unit, consider the following questions:

Suggest some ways of improving South Sudan's predicament.

Which natural resources are found in Sudan and South Sudan?

South Sudan's natural resources are plentiful – so why is it one of the world's poorest nations?

South Sudan is one of the world's poorest nations. Can you think of any other poor countries that are NOT affected by war and strife?