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## Reports

# South Sudan and Kenya: The Relationships

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## Introduction

Kenya is a leading country in the East African region with better developed infrastructure and industry. The capital city is a regional hub derisively referred to by some neighbours as the London of East Africa. In addition, Kenya is strategically located within the East African Community and with its perceived relative stability, relatively better infrastructure – the country undoubtedly is influential in the region. This coupled with the country's quiet diplomacy and non interference in the neighbours' internal issues – the country has acquired a special place among the neighbouring countries in the region.

South Sudan remains a country with special links with Kenya premised on many factors ranging from cultural factors to social, political and economic among other strategic factors. Culturally a significant proportion of the Sudanese population has linkages to several other Kenyan communities. They share languages, culture and have a long historical linkage. This was further enhanced by the support the South Sudan refugees received during their refugee stay in Kenya. This has made it easy for the two countries to establish other relationships both at individual and country levels. Indeed following independence of South Sudan there have been several initiatives aimed at strengthening and formalizing relations between the two countries. A significant role played by Kenya was to support the country in establishing a new government system in South Sudan.

Indeed the facilitation of the negotiation processes between South Sudan and Sudan leading to the birth of a new country further enhanced the relationship. The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Nairobi remains significant in these relationships. Coupled to these, bilateral relations between Kenya and South Sudan seem to grow stronger by the day – arguably this is based on mutual respect for each other. It is important to re-emphasise the imperative of historical perspectives to this association. It is expected that South Sudan is likely to benefit further from Kenya's support in developing a stable, prosperous and peaceful state. Several Kenyan citizens currently reside in Southern Sudan, run businesses, offer technical expertise and human resource, notwithstanding the several other Kenyan firms investing in the new state. The recent deals to develop an extensive oil infrastructure traversing into Kenya from South Sudan include some of the indicators of closer ties.

### **Walking the delicate scale**

The history of South Sudan is replete with war that remains with unclear end. Independence ushered in tribal wars. Al Bashir's Sudan seem to have unfinished business with South Sudan. There are intermittent fights along the borders of the two countries. Media reports are increasingly reporting of fighting between the two countries, often using militias but at times their military forces, and so death and displacements continue unabated with each country flexing its muscles. Uncertainty remains the operative word, the future remains a dream.

Amidst all these confusions and frustrations, Kenya and South Sudan seem clear on the direction of their engagement – that is on a path of progress and development. Thus following independence of South Sudan; the governments of South Sudan and Kenya entered into a technical cooperation aimed at helping South Sudan develop technical capacity to run a government. Thus, the Government of Kenya has engaged in the training and supporting of the government of South Sudan government officials. This is being implemented through Kenya's Foreign Service Institute that has initiated trainings for South Sudan Foreign Service officials (PPS, 2012). It is envisaged that the program will build the capacity of the staff to achieve sustainable development. Kenya's support to South Sudan further includes addressing issues related to peace, insecurity, and post conflict reconstruction among others.

It is, however, worth noting that Kenya's relationship with South Sudan goes beyond the independence period. This coupled with the central role Kenya played in hosting peace

negotiations between North and South Sudan that led to the ending of over two-decades of civil war have all contributed to tightening the relations between the two countries. Besides, several leaders of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) lived in Kenya during the conflict which adds to warm relations between the two countries. Furthermore, Kenya has continued to assist the new state address some of its major challenges including developing a strong human resource base as well as infrastructural expansion.

However, security and political concerns remain a sensitive issue between the two countries. In this respect, Kenya has been accused of supplying weapons to the government of South Sudan. This has however been met with quiet disdain on the part of Kenya. However, the counter argument too, remains less than apologetic; that South Sudan has a right to arm itself, and cannot sit idly by while Khartoum increases its arsenal with the help of Chinese, Russian and Iranian suppliers. This coupled with the fact that the Kenyan army has been training South Sudan military officers as well as providing technical support such as training on demining adds to the complexity of the security relations between the two countries. Interestingly, Kenya also maintains a rotating battalion of peacekeepers in South Sudan as part of the UN Mission. All these point to the complexity of the interactions between the two countries – which is arguably based on the intrinsic socio-political connections with South Sudan right from a long time ago. Many, are therefore arguing that the leadership of the two countries have built a partnership based on mutual respect and shared values.

### **Fulfilling Long held Africa's ambitions**

About two months ago the countries of South Sudan, Ethiopia and Kenya held a ceremony in Lamu, Kenya. The ceremony was the ground breaking ceremony for the proposed new port, complete with a new oil refinery to take care of South Sudan's oil and now hopefully Kenya's new oil find. The project also comprised of a railway line connecting South Sudan and Ethiopia all the way to Cameroon. The project dubbed LAPSET is expected to help South Sudan and Ethiopia have access to a port as both countries are landlocked. On the one hand, in the process, the tensions between Sudan and South Sudan will be reduced and so will the tensions between Ethiopia and South Sudan on the other hand. Ostensibly, this would bring sustainable peace in the horn of Africa.

Kenya and South Sudan are keen on a relationship geared towards developing their respective nations. There are many areas of cooperation between the two countries and on the table there have been joint ventures between the two countries. Several interactions reveal that the two states will explore more avenues to boost relations both at the political and economic levels. The delegations from each country visiting their capitals point towards more negotiations in this regard. A consistent argument often presented is that the emerging ties merely affirm existing ties between the two countries.

The ties between the two countries go beyond the new investments. For instance, as several observers posit that South Sudan has invested efforts and determination, through regional support from Kenya to review its interim constitution so as to make the region more investor-friendly. Further it continues to seek for close co-operation with relevant authorities in Kenya to enhance co-operation and potential investment. This is mainly because Kenya is widely accepted as a bridge between the East African community and the rest of the world.

As has been observed by other commentators, the relationship between Kenya and South Sudan today revolves around three key areas — boosting of cross-border trade, enhancing manufacturing capability and the implementation of infrastructural networks linking Kenya and South Sudan. This has been enriched by Kenya's recognition of the potential of South Sudan as a key partner. This has seen Kenya contribute to infrastructural investments within South Sudan – which of course includes the proposed rail line and oil pipeline agreement.

The Lamu Port and Lamu-Southern Sudan-Ethiopia Transport Corridor (LAPSSET) is a huge project that involves development of airports, railways, roads and notably, an oil pipeline between Lamu (where a new refinery will be built) and South Sudan. The transport links are meant to join cities in Kenya, Ethiopia and South Sudan. Indicatively, the current Rift Valley transport corridor links Mombasa and Uganda, leaving Sudan an important absentee from Kenya's infrastructural venture aimed at promoting regional trade. As a key player and host of the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) peace process that founded the CPA, Kenya has a specific great interest in ensuring that it is effectively implemented. As the economic giant within the region, it stands to benefit from the growth of a considerable market and major infrastructure in the South, including as a conduit for oil.

The economic links between Kenya and South Sudan are being strengthened by the day. The focus remains national growth and development of the respective countries. The likely benefits are legion and include creating employment opportunities, business opportunities and resultant benefits to consumers in the countries. Observers further point out that Kenyan citizens take active roles within the South Sudan's private sector, offering potential skills and expertise in construction, air transport, insurance, infrastructure development and informal goods markets, as well the NGO sector. In this category is Kenya Commercial Bank that has opened eight branches across South Sudan since 2006. Apart from these, there are indications of more expansion even with the inception of key and transformative banking industry players such as Equity bank and Barclays. Already, Kenyan-owned Equity Bank has negotiated with the government of South Sudan its interest in oil development, and numerous foreign investment institutions have explored using Kenyan banks as intermediaries for ventures in South Sudan. In addition, Kenyan leaders envision prime markets for Kenyan exports in South Sudan.

### **Building on the past**

Kenya's relationship with neighbours is premised on peaceful co-existence. This saw Kenya trying to reconcile the North and South during the two decades of war in vain. At the end Kenya was able to facilitate the IGAD-sponsored dialogue that yielded the agreement. As many political commentators have observed, Kenya has not failed in her desire to foster peace in the now two countries. The efforts, are on the one hand, based on the fact that it remained home to a large population of influential political class from South Sudan, and on the other hand, it had to respond to pressure from an international community that saw Kenya as better situated to lead the process. In addition, the question of peace and stability in the South became a Kenyan problem with citizens urging the leadership to find a solution.

It is not lost to all that Kenya had other than supporting SPLA opened her borders to South Sudanese refugees and hosted nearly 100,000 Sudanese refugees at the peak of the war. Although support to the refugees came from different sources it none the less led to unforeseen fiscal and humanitarian costs and strains on the country. Despite the strains the country further allowed SPLA to set up their operations in Kenya after their eviction from Ethiopia. Thus, Kenya became home to what is today the ruling class in South Sudan, and as social commentators observe Kenyans psyche and relationship with South Sudan was best seen in the mourning of the Dr. John Garang. The death became a significant issue in Kenya and so is the general feeling and concern with happenings in South Sudan to date.

The past has remained influential in shaping interactions between countries in Eastern Africa. In particular, Kenya continues to maintain robust support, commitment, and intercession on behalf of South Sudan to facilitate its integration with the rest of the East African countries and enhance peaceful co-existence with Sudan for stability of the region. This has been encouraged by the prevailing close socio-political as well as economic ties between these two countries. More relationships are expected to be developed around the existing ones.

It is rather obvious that Kenya must continue to drive efforts towards having a stable government in South Sudan. Today this is driven by political, economic and social pressures from within Kenya and South Sudan. The benefits that accrue from stability of South Sudan are numerous to both countries. Some of the benefits are resulting from the tensions between Juba and Khartoum. However, even they will begin facing implementation problems given that the main project the pipeline appears to be overly ambitious – aimed at completion within 11 months. This may be unrealistic optimism that will be difficult to achieve unless more innovative approaches to implementation are employed. But it will help the countries further cement their relationships.

The horn of Africa remains a fragile neighbourhood with South Sudan resting in a war-torn neighborhood and Somalia perpetually at war with itself. Evidence from studies in the region confirms the popular argument that such conflicts have detrimental effects on neighbouring countries. A clear case is the effect of the Somali war on Kenya. After many years of hijacking ships on Somalia waters and intensified patrol by international community limiting their capacity to hijack ships, the pirates thought they would be soft target. And sure, for some time it remained so and they kidnapped tourists from Kenyan beaches and hotels. In the end, Kenya had to enter Somali and the results remain significant – deaths and commitment of resources to a war that could have been avoided. The relationship between Kenya and South Sudan must therefore be seen in this perspective.

Stability and peace in the region will remain depended on collaborative relationships. Thus, regional groupings such as the East African Community, the Nile Basin Initiative, IGAD and the African Union remain central as they facilitate fostering of the collaborative relationships. The interactions between Kenya and South Sudan must be seen in this dimension. It must only be seen in a positive light for the gains outweigh the negative aspects. The benefits to the region and the two countries are huge. Each participant in the relationship will benefit depending on their capacity. What with a huge market of about 140 million people but also that South Sudan is a net importer of goods from Kenya and Uganda since its manufacturing sector is still in its infancy. Members of the East Africa Community too intend to benefit from the enormous untapped resources in South Sudan.

However, Ethiopia despite the citizens embracing independence of South Sudan has remained jittery. This is based on the fear that the separatists' movements in Ogaden may find a good example that will give them the impetus to separate from Ethiopia. Interestingly, there has not been any serious threat to Ethiopia despite the independence of South Sudan. On the whole, all of the countries are expected to benefit from South Sudan's huge oil resources and agricultural potential. But it is also clear that South Sudan would find it difficult to compete with mature economies like that of Kenya.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the region will need collaborative efforts in meeting its development goals and in order to maintain peace. To this end, Kenya - South Sudan relationship is a good example of relationships based on multiple factors but geared towards development. It is neither exploitative nor manipulative but based on mutual respects of shared history and culture.

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