



View Point

Emergence of South Sudan: Challenges and Prospects Ahead

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On July 9, 2011, the world's newest state the 'Republic of South Sudan' (RSS) came in to existence as a result of referendum that took place in January this year, in which 98 percent of the people from South Sudan voted to secede from North Sudan. This historic event acknowledged the end of long unrest between North and South Sudan. Fortunately, this event has also opened the door of new opportunities for RSS to build a more sustainable and peaceful relationship with Khartoum and its neighbors. Now, the key challenge is to establish RSS as a full functioning state which would be a daunting task. At this point of time, citizens and leaders of South Sudan would be anxious about how to move the country from one having the worst human indicators in the world towards the path of prosperity, by avoiding the errors that the other African countries made after gaining independence?

Although, Sudan was the first African country to gain independence in the African continent, its post-colonial experience was characterized by war, civil strife and religious intolerance. The handover of the power from the British colonialist to the Sudanese Arab political elite in 1956 signified the beginning of long lasting unrest in the country. The two civil wars between 1956-1972 and 1983-2005 marked this phase. These civil wars had largely been attributed to Britain's failure at independence to redraw the Sudanese map in order to appropriately accommodate diverse cultural and ethnic pluralities. It is estimated that about two million people died as a result, while many more has displaced.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of January 9, 2005 at Naivasha (Kenya), ended almost 22 years of armed conflict between the Government of Sudan (GOS) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPML). This agreement was envisaged to provide a permanent ceasefire between the GOS and SPML; political and wealth-sharing arrangements to address the grievances of South Sudanese and mechanisms to resolve long term future of disputed areas. CPA also provided an arrangement to setup the semi-autonomous region of South Sudan (to be ruled by SPML) and mandated a referendum in the South.

The major challenges for RSS ahead includes the absence of good infrastructure and skilled labor, high level of corruption and heavy dependency on oil revenues. Although RSS, one of the poorest in the world, is rich in natural resources but many of its resources remain untapped. According to 2010 estimates, about 98 percent of RSS's revenue comes from the oil sector. Transportation is a major problem due to lack of roads and airports. The only major airport with limited capacity is in the capital, Juba. Moreover, the RSS is land-locked, making a negotiated agreement important for the exportation of its oil through Sudan's pipelines or through other means. Telephone services are limited to major towns and dependent on cell phone services from Uganda and Khartoum. The percentage of the population with access to electricity is very low, currently only about 1% and most of these consumers are in Juba.

In addition, the relations between Juba and Khartoum are still fragile and there are numbers of unresolved issues between them. The crisis in the disputed area of Abyei remains a contentious issue. However, the ongoing conflict in the border state of Southern Kordofan could have potential to a major crisis if left unresolved. The parties have yet to reach agreements on border demarcation, citizenship rights, security arrangements and use of the Sudanese port and pipeline for oil exports.

Significantly, India was one of the first nations to accord diplomatic recognition to South Sudan. On this historic event, Vice-president of India Dr. Hamid Ansari, represented the world's largest democracy and the Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh greeted the people and government of the 193rd country of the world. India has drawn out an elaborate blueprint for engaging oil and resource-rich South Sudan. India has shown keen interest in increasing its investments in the oil

fields in South Sudan which now owns over two-thirds of the erstwhile united Sudan's oil fields. On the other hand, India can also extend their assistance to RSS through engaging itself in infrastructure development, training to their officials, improving health, enhancing education and rural development.

In order to boost political, economic and social development, RSS can take inspiration from many developmental models from all over the world, but it should ultimately follow one of its own fashioning. Any approach could be effective if Africa's youngest nation would take lesson from African experience and try to emulate an African example. To that end, Juba needs to give priority attention to at least in some important areas. It is important to prioritize the actions which are the need of the time.

In fact, the quality of the population has great bearing on national strength. If the state can utilize its human resources effectively and ensure them a decent standard of living and provide constructive outlets for their talents and energies the people can be an asset. Similarly, after getting independence, RSS is left with total population of eight million, among them only 27 percent is literate and more than 51 percent lives below poverty line. With this strength, one can point out that 'the people' are the most important resources that the new South Sudan have and by investing on them the government could create the conditions for citizens to do their best in diverse areas particularly in the field of crop farming and animal husbandry, on which about 78 percent of households depend for their livelihood. To achieve that end, considerable amount of attention should be given on education and skill training for the citizens.

Certainly, for the RSS the best approach should be one which is bottom-up, inclusive and consultative. Common people should be welcomed along with leaders and the political elite of the RSS in deciding national developmental strategies. The roles and responsibilities of different institutions such as government, private sector, civil society and ordinary citizens should be demarcated. In fact, a careful analysis regarding opportunities and weaknesses in the country are needed before finalizing and adopting any development approach. Apart from this, the RSS should give priority to build necessary institutions to guarantee security for its citizens, provide basic social services, create jobs and enhance livelihoods, bridge its infrastructure

gap, and boost political and trade relations with its neighbors (including the North). Significantly, the principles of transparency and accountability should be molded in to the fabric of the newly independent country. Besides, the government should have to try to diversify the economic base by focusing on growth of private sector and small scale industries which are considered as the engine of jobs and wealth creation in any economy.

Today, Juba needs to rebuild from and reconcile after a brutal war that has cost more than two million lives. The new nation faces daunting challenges, including the lack of basic capacity to handle core functions of the State. Undoubtedly, RSS's independence is a historic moment and certainly it offers to the citizens a unique opportunity to put an end to over a century of conflict and marginalization. International support can help state building but its sustainability will only come from the political vision and hard work of the South Sudanese themselves.

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