

SOUTH SUDAN'S \$225 MILLION MEGA HIGHWAY PROJECT

By Richard Ruati

Southern Sudan President Salva Kiir Mayardit and U.S. Consul General to Juba, Ambassador R. Barrie Walkley inaugurated an ambitious road project that will give the new country its first highway.

The project will see the tarmacking of the 192km of the Juba-Nimule Road in Eastern Equatoria.

Funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAid) in collaboration with the Government of Southern Sudan's ministry of transport and roads, the project's is meant to boost economic development in the region.

The inauguration of the Juba-Nimule Road project comes hot on the heels of another USAid project – the Kapoeta Power Project – that was commissioned on February 4 as part of the U.S.-Southern Sudan relationship.

"This project underscores the shared sympathy and long-term partnership between the U.S. Government and the people and Government of Southern Sudan," said Walkley.

He added: "The Juba-Nimule road is Southern Sudan's highest priority road. It links Juba with Uganda, and is the most efficient route to the Port of Mombasa in Kenya. As we embark on the final phase of this project, it is important to recognize the hard work accomplished to get us to this stage today."

On completion, the Juba-Nimule road will be the first major paved road to be constructed in southern Sudan since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005. The first phase of this project involved a feasibility study, engineering studies, repairs to existing bridges, and demining.

Economists in the region say that the Juba to Nimule Road is a vital link from Uganda to Juba and will aid the development of Southern Sudan. The construction of the road is being conducted in two phases; with the initial phase being the construction of seven new bridges at multiple locations along the route and which is now completed.

The next phase is the construction of the all weather sealed road being constructed in three sections. The Juba Nimule Road has been widened and expanded. It is now a two-way road with one lane in each direction, including drainage on both sides.



President Salva Kiir commissions the Juba-Nimule Highway

Ambassador Walkley stressed that completion of this economically vital road will catalyze business transactions between Southern Sudan and neighboring countries." He said he hopes that "when completed, an estimated travel time between Juba and Nimule will be reduced from 8 hours at the beginning of the project, to about 2 hours. It should be noted that already more than 20 buses use this road every day to travel between Kampala and Juba.

He pointed out that "our support for roads development does not end with this road. USAID is also funding 260-kilometers of all-weather gravel roads in Western Equatoria state, and we plan to support the development of high priority agricultural feeder roads in the future. We will also continue to support the development of local Sudanese contractors, some of whom have played an important part in the construction of the Juba-Nimule Road. We hope the government will use these contractors to maintain these and other roads."

President Salva Kiir was chief guest accompanied by the ministers of transport and roads, Anthony Lino Makana, minister of investment, Oyai Deng, minister of finance, David Deng Athorbei and minister of presidential affairs, Cireno Hiteng.

Others at the function included Eastern Equatoria governor Louis Lobong Lajore and Central Equatoria

President Kiir recalled that during the civil war he had ordered SPLA commander Oyai Deng to destroy the Aswa bridge to prevent Northern soldiers from recapturing Nimule town, which he described as strategic to the South.

Anthony Lino Makana, minister of transport and roads said he was thrilled to witness the first tarmac of highway in Southern Sudan so soon after the South Sudan referendum.

He revealed that "under the wise leadership of the SPLM (the south's ruling party) and spearheaded by President Kiir, Southern Sudan has rehabilitated 7,000-km of trunk roads and upgraded about 100 bridges in six years."

However, as the Juba-Nimule is being paved, there is an increase in fatal road accidents as a result of the high speed and increase in daily commercial traffic between Uganda and Southern Sudan. ■

IDPS RETURN HOME AMID TOUGH CHALLENGES

By Yuggu Charles

Internally displaced persons (IDPS) who have been living in the North due to the civil war in Sudan continue returning to their former homes in the South thanks to the concluded referendum.

But while determined to return home from where they were uprooted by the bloody war between the North and the South, the IDPs are bracing for hard times due to lack of social amenities and shelter.

Most of them have been living under squalid conditions in the North where they sought refuge during the more than two decades of civil war between north and south.

Many of them have returned home following the referendum that gave the Government of the semi-autonomous Southern Sudanese region a verdict to secede from the North.

One such IDP is Jane Simon Kulang Moses, a 38 year old mother of four, who has been living in Khartoum since 1990. She returned home last December and could not recognize her locality since so many things had changed since she fled with her family. "I had a home in Khartoum but not here in Juba. All the IDPs should be welcomed back home and provided with homes," she narrated as she inspected her makeshift shack, where she lives with her family.

Jane said she decided to return home after the Church in Khartoum mobilized many IDPs and facilitated their return to Juba.

She said that the government provided her and her family with a tent for shelter, upon her

arrival in Juba. Further help, she says, has not been forthcoming since then.

Life has become a nightmare. Even getting casual work is difficult," she said, adding that things could worsen for her family during the long rains envisaged in April.

As she awaits the official inauguration of a new nation slated for July 9th, Jane is crying out for help.

To her, peace should be translated into better education, jobs, good hospitals and good infrastructure. She complains that the price of food remains unaffordable in Southern Sudan.

"Things here are terrible, I cannot believe that we Southerners and Northerners live in the same country yet the cost of living remains different. I pay twice the cost in Juba as compared to Khartoum which enjoys good infrastructure, clean water, better basic health facilities and even accessibility to food," she said sadly.

Another returnee, Nelson Lasu Eliza, 45, left Juba for Khartoum in 1992 and has just returned home.

He says he is now happy that his country would soon be considered an independent nation. He described the referendum which showed that 99 per cent of Sudanese people favoured separation, as a milestone. Like other IDPs, he is living in a makeshift tent with his family. Lasu said that he will never return to the North which is predominantly Muslim. ■

CELEBRATING THE BIRTH OF A NATION

By Yuggu Charles.

When officials of the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission announced the much awaited final results of the plebiscite, Southern Sudanese across the world popped champagne bottles to celebrate the birth of a new nation.

Many of the Southerners who have been yearning for an independent nation for years and some of whom have suffered the vagaries of civil war, shed tears of joy after it became apparent there was no going back on the quest to divorce the North.

Official results announced on February 14 in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, indicated that an overwhelming 98.81 per cent of those registered in the semi-autonomous region opted to break away from the North.

An estimated 3,793,572 Southern Sudanese voted in the January 9 referendum, choosing between two symbols on their ballot papers: an open palm for secession and a handshake for unity.

Ariac Kuot Akuei, 64, waited in line for nine hours to cast her vote for separation after walking four kilometres to her polling station at Kuajoc Secondary School, in Warrap state. Roads barely exist in rural areas, and she had no choice but to go on foot.

When preliminary results from her polling station came in, Akuei donated one of her goats to a feast with her family and her neighbours.

"My children must know I was part of history," she said. "This will ensure the people of Southern Sudan become a free and liberated people, we will no longer be treated like third class citizens in our own country".

Akur Ayom Jok, 24, a mother-of-two, who sells groundnuts at the Wau open air market in Western Bhar El Ghazal travelled three hours to vote. "I couldn't miss out, there was no water and I was so thirsty but, the joy of casting my vote for separation overrode all this, it was my only source of consolation," she said, "This is the first time and last chance to vote for separation."

Southern Sudanese have high hopes for their new state, which will come



Southern Sudanese Women celebrate the results in style

into being on July 9.

"I voted so that we could own our own wealth and everything in Southern Sudan," said Awan Akuein, a security officer, from Jonglei state. "Some of us will be digging our gardens with no worry of exploitation. "I voted for separation just to get rid of slavery, oppression," he added. "I deserve to be Southern Sudanese."

For others, the priority is development in this vast, sparsely populated land in which 90 per cent of the population is unable to read or write.

29 years old Akur Ayom, a domestic health care worker in Wau town said, "We advised them to accept the situation of being poor now but, not forever. We will want to see some key development to be put as first priority like schools and health centres".

Since the referendum campaign began in November 2010, some half a

million Southerners living in the north have returned, the Government of Southern Sudan aiding their coming back home by providing trucks and barges to help transport them.

The move was equally coordinated by the local state government's office in collaboration with the south's dominant party, the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement's (SPLM) liaison offices in northern sudan.

Few could afford the cost of a flight between Khartoum and Juba, so the majority relied on the Southern Sudanese government's sponsored transport arrangement.

Government-sponsored returnees are ferried in barges on three-day trips down the River Nile and held for registration before the United Nations High Commission for Refugees transports them to their villages.

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COMMUNITIES SET TO BENEFIT FROM FISH FARMING

By Poni Jeremiah

"Fish farming in South Sudan has got a shot in the arm"

The Department of Fisheries in State Ministry of Animal resources and Fisheries in Central Equatoria State has received 2,500 Tilapia Nilotica fingerling species from Uganda to help promote fish farming in the new country. The fingerlings worth US\$ 3,800 were stocked at Gandaru Demonstration Fish Ponds at Khor-Romula Village 3 kilometres south of Juba Town.

State Minister of Animal Resources and Fisheries, Central Equatoria State, Professor Lodu Bureng said the introduction of fish farming in the State aims at training indigenous communities on fish rearing to reduce dependency on imported fish.

"As citizens of a new independent nation, there is need for the people in the region to work hard and produce enough food for themselves," Professor Lodu Bureng stated. He thanked the community of Gandaru Village for donating land for the project.

Meanwhile, the Acting Director General of

the Directorate of Animal Resources and Fisheries, Mr. Soma Francis said the Fish Farm, which is the third project to be implemented in the State after poultry and goat rearing, will be extended to Yei, Kajo-Keji, Lainya, and Morobo counties.

The Director of Fisheries in Central Equatoria State, Morghan Bakheit Lukak said the project will succeed because of the availability of qualified staff and urged members of Gandaru Village Community to view Gandaru Fish Demonstration Farm as an opportunity to improve their livelihoods. Gandaru Village has two Fish Ponds

established in 2009 by the government. The experimental project was tested with fingerlings of tilapia Zilai species from Khartoum, but the fish did not grow to the expected size prompting the officials to turn to Uganda for fresh stocks of Tilapia Niloticus from Uganda.

Gandaru Fish Demonstration Ponds cover an area of 300 square meters. The water is being pumped from the River Nile. The 2,500 fingerlings are divided between the two fish ponds and will undergo intensive feeding for six months before harvesting. ■



EDITORIAL

IMPROVE ON FOOD SECURITY

The Government of South Sudan (GoSS), should focus more on improving food security across the region. Enough measures need to be put in place to produce food locally.

Emphasis should be laid on strategies that could define Southern Sudan as Africa's next breadbasket when it comes to agricultural production.

Unless South Sudan becomes self reliant in food production, food security will always remain a pipe dream for the world's youngest nation.

Food security for South Sudan is an important aspect of economic growth and has a direct bearing on population growth, child survival, infant and maternal mortality rates and so on.

There is need for the government of Southern Sudan through the Ministry of Agriculture to begin empowering local farmers by training them on modern farming techniques and giving them proper farm impliments, fertilizers, seeds and other farm inputs necessary for agricultural production.

It is important to note that Southern Sudan has quite a huge chunk of idle land that could be put into agricultural production to enable the economy of the new country deviate from over reliance on oil proceeds. ■

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CELEBRATING THE BIRTH OF A NATION

In a refugee camp in Wau town, where temperatures can reach 47 degrees Celsius, several women carrying young children have lined up to register with the UNHCR. Some have lived in the north their whole lives, and don't have home villages to return to. They will be handed over to the state government.

Returnee Aguet Ajang, 45, did not manage to vote in the referendum because she had registered in the north's South Kordofan state. "I am happy that even if I did not vote, I am back home and I can hear the good news on separation on my radio," she said, nursing her three-month-old son. "Here the pit latrines have polythene

papers as doors which at times are blown off while you are inside, this place has no limits for privacy but we have learned to live with this as long as we are not in Khartoum where we are never respected", she added.

The referendum was the culmination of a six year peace agreement after two decades of war between the Sudanese People's Liberation Army and the Sudanese government, killing more than two million people.

Veronique De Keyser, Chief Observer of the European Union Election Observation Mission in Sudan described the referendum as a "credible process".

"We are happy and relieved. People

predicted great turmoil but thankfully that has not materialised," said De Keyser who headed a team of 104 observers and analysts from the 27 EU member states as well as Norway, Switzerland and Canada.

Yet a vote for secession does not mean the end of the challenges for this region.

De Keyser warned that a strategy is urgently needed to diffuse the ongoing tension in the oil-rich border area of Abyei, where dozens were killed in clashes during the voting period.

"The situation is explosive. If a solution is not found, all the other political issues could be blocked", she said. ■

GRANNY URGES YOUTHS TO OBEY SOCIETAL NORMS

Rebecca Kadi, a 115-year-old grandmother is a legend in her community. A Fajulu by tribe, she was born in Lainya in 1924. Kadi spent her childhood in Lainya and got married when she was 20 years old. She was blessed with several children and grand children. During the South Sudan referendum in January 2011, Lily Nelson Michael of The People's Voice caught up with her and asked her a few questions.

Lily: What is the secret behind your longer life?

Rebecca: First of all, the Holy Book says, if you respect your father and mother, God will make you live longer on earth. In addition, I used to assist aged people when I was young and I served them with all my faith. What they gave me in return was always abundance of blessings. They prayed for me and asked God to prolong my life to enable me see my grand, grand children. I thank God for his abundant grace to me. Secondly, the type of food we used to eat in our times is different from today's foods. We used to rely on traditional vegetables and fresh lean meat. These helped to build our bodies.

Lily: What made you register and vote in the current referendum?

Rebecca: The oppression of Northerners on Southerners made me register and vote. I had been praying to God to prolong my life so that I could live to see 9 January 2011 and cast my vote for Southern Sudan's independence. We have known nothing but injustice since we were born. We cannot let the same injustice be handed over to our children and grand children.



Kadi and Lily during the interview

The outcome of the referendum will bring freedom and dignity to my young grand children in their own country. The government in the North has done little to improve the lives of the Southerners. It is only the British who did something that has changed the lives of people of South Sudan through improvement of infrastructure in the capital Juba. I can therefore say, like Prophet Simon, now you can take me, Lord, for I have seen independence of South Sudan.

Lily: Do you think the separation will lead to wars and tribal differences in South Sudan?

Rebecca: There is no ruler on earth governing a people with his/her own power. Rulers are mandated by God to govern the people and territories. President Salva Kiir for example has been chosen by God to lead the people of South Sudan to independence. One thing I would like to tell the people of South Sudan is that they always have to be patient, tolerant and united if they are going to achieve lasting peace and prosperity in the South. Leaders need to govern and control all the resources, which God has given the nation without being greedy, jealous and tribal. ■

February 2011

JOY AS KAPOETA LIGHTS UP

By The People's Voice Reporter

A joint effort between the United States of America and the Government of Southern Sudan has put smiles on the faces of Kapoetta residents.



Kapoeta Power Plant in Eastern Equatoria State

The residents who live in Eastern Equatoria state will have their homes and businesses lighted up by an ambitious electricity project.

The U.S. Consul General in Juba, Ambassador R. Barrie Walkley, and the governor of Eastern Equatoria state, Louis Lobong Lajore, inaugurated the 894-kilowatts power plant built as a post-conflict peace gift to the people of Kapoeta.

The inauguration ceremony attracted a large crowd many of whom expressed hope of an improved economy. A bull was slaughtered for a feast and traditional dancers were at hand to entertain the guests.

Speaking at the ceremony, Ambassador Walkley said the plant was the second largest electrification project to be completed after the South's successful completion of the referendum. He said USAID was hoping to open another power plant in Maridi later this month. Another power plant was opened in Yei in 2008.

Since 2005, USAID has provided nearly \$20 million to support three power plant projects, building electric generation and distribution infrastructure, in Yei, Kapoeta, and

Maridi.

The project, he said, would promote economic activity by enhancing security through street lighting. It would also improve electricity supply to schools and clinics, besides households.

"I want to tell you that on behalf of the American people, we stand with you in hope and partnership, looking forward to a bright and prosperous future for southern Sudan," he said.

With an output of 894-kilowatts, the plant will cover roughly 900 customers by September this year. Currently the Kapoeta power plant can only serve about 725 clients.

Garang Diing Akuong, Government of South Sudan (GoSS) Minister of Energy and Mining said: "Residents of Kapoeta deserve this project as a compensation for their struggle in the liberation of Southern Sudan. There are no more wars. We need to educate our people so that we can enjoy the fruits of peace," he said.

He thanked the U.S. government, through USAID, for investing millions of dollars in the market towns of Yei, Kapoeta and Maridi.

The USAID-funded project covers 20 kilometers of power lines or poles. It started delivering its first stream of

electricity to clients last month, a move which saw the county authorities pay its first power connection bill.

Louis Lobong Lajore, said at the ceremony that the project seeks to open new income-generating opportunities to the energy sector, which still formally and informally employs idle youth members of the communities in Kapoeta town.

"Energy is essential in improving living conditions and the economy of a state or a country. Eastern Equatoria like the other ten states in Southern Sudan depends on firewood as source of energy for cooking and heating. The state runs the risk of deforestation and environmental degradation – if the illicit indiscriminate cutting of wood for fuel continues," Labong said.

Political unrest and war destroyed much of infrastructure in Southern Sudan. The lack of electricity, in particular, has contributed to making life hard for many in the region and paralyzes the region's economic recovery. Electricity is one of the basic needs Toposa communities in Kapoeta county say they need to improve their quality of life.

Ambassador Walkley told the communities that they played an active part in determining how the utility should be managed. During a meeting in Kapoeta last September, the community resolved that the utility should be managed and operated by an electric cooperative society similar to the model now used in Yei. Next month, USAID will assess the economic and financial viability of the cooperative model compared with others, and provide recommendations to promote financial sustainability.

Kapoeta on South Sudan's border with Kenya, is one of the main towns in Eastern Equatoria. It was also a place of strategic importance during the long civil war that raged on and off nearly for 23 years before a peace deal in 2005. The indigenous or Toposa pastoral communities are located in the semi-arid county of Kapoeta South in Eastern Equatoria.

Like most areas in Southern Sudan, it is remote, and the first to cross to from neighboring Kenya. The town of Kapoeta is set to change in the near future when electric power is finally restored through combined efforts of

local communities in Kapoeta.

The facility is changing the face of Kapoeta; the town is expecting a flock of industries and big businesses after the independence of the south, due to take place in July following the referendum in January.

David Koriang, Kapoeta, a youth Leader told *The People's Voice*: "We shall dare to share the price as consumers will save 50 percent of what they are spending on kerosene and diesel to power noisy-inconvenient generators, and they're getting much larger output from investment by the American people."

Koriang adds that, "electricity shortages can directly impede the economic development of a strategically positioned town like Kapoeta, apart from the environmental pollution caused by the use of dirty kerosene and diesel."

"Today's electrification project represents a viable market for modern energy services. The rural communities are much in need of reliable electricity services," he stressed.

Kapoeta town is looking eagerly to the day in mid December when the lights are expected to banish darkness on the Kapoeta streets when the power plant is switched on. Thereafter, until the project is completed in September 2011, the young utility will be consolidated with staff trained in all aspects of utility operation and households will be connected to electricity and businesses revitalized with new electricity services.

The United States is the single largest donor to Sudan, contributing nearly \$10 billion in assistance to Sudan and eastern Chad since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005.

The Kapoeta project is implemented by USAID partner the Louis Berger Group, in partnership with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. The project comprises construction of power generation and distribution facilities, customer connections, establishment of a utility, and training of utility staff. Training provided in Kapoeta covered commercial and technical aspects such as meter reading and billing, accounting, linemen skills, and human resources and customer relations, among others. ■