



12 June 2023

Ebony Center Policy Note: EPN 2023-1

Integrated Rural Development: A Framework for Sustainable Peace, Economic Growth, and Poverty Eradication in South Sudan¹

Historical Context

The general concept of Rural Development, leave alone the Integrated aspect, has deep and long history in South Sudan (formerly Sudan) as it goes back to the 1960s and 1970s, especially after Addis Ababa Peace Agreement in 1972 when agricultural production was directly linked to government activities and projects that co-opted communities' involvement and participation into them.

With the rise of the Sudan People Liberation Movement (SPLM) in early 1980s, the economic development strategy through agriculture, remained at the core of the SPLM's strategic development plan. Its founding leader, late Dr. John Garang de Mabior, later emphasized in one of his trademark speeches of *"taking towns to the people"* – a concept that puts agriculture, not the vast hydrocarbon/fossil deposits, as the main driver for socio-economic transformation of the post-war South Sudan.

Integrated Rural Development in the Contemporary South Sudan

With the vast majority of South Sudan's population still dwells in rural or peri-urban setting and given the fact that over 70% of South Sudan is fertile arable land with heavily-endowed ecosystems, including the gift of the River Nile, it would be safe to assert that the primary source of livelihood and economic development, for most people lies in the agricultural sector. However, contrary to the above narrative and due to various contributing factors, such as conflict and violence, South Sudan cultivates only 4% of its arable land relying on traditional farming practices, where production remained for subsistence only with less commercial orientation. So, can South Sudan unlock its potential using an integrated rural development approach that ushers in agricultural transformation through modernization of crop production, animal husbandry and fisheries to facilitate inclusive growth and alleviate poverty?

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The Themed Monthly Policy Discourse

It was against this backdrop that the Ebony Center for Strategic Studies (ECSS), in collaboration with the World Bank Group South Sudan Office, through ECSS' Development Policy Forum (DPF) monthly discourse, jointly organized a session themed: *“Integrated Rural Development: Framework For Sustainable Peace, Economic Growth And Poverty Eradication in South Sudan”*.

The event took place on Saturday 27th June 2023, at the World Bank's Tukul. We were honored to have the presence of the Vice President Rebecca de Mabior, who also heads the vital government cluster for Youth, Culture and Gender, and other high profile government officials including the Minister of Agriculture and Food Security and Minister of Livestock and Fisheries, plus senior members of the Ebony Center for Strategic Studies and the World Bank Group. It was attended by a wide range of development practitioners, policy makers/analysts, diplomatic corps, students, youth, political party representatives, academics and members of the Development Policy Forum (DPF) fraternity.

The policy forum provided an excellent opportunity for key presenters/discussants and participants to dig into the challenges, potentials and prospects of rural development and agricultural transformation in South Sudan. This Policy Note highlights some of the impeding factors/conditions for integrated rural development in South Sudan, and provides plausible points that could be taken into consideration in revisiting the existing rural development policy.

1. CONSTRAINTS OF INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH SUDAN

1.1. Ambiguous Vision

Having no clear vision and strategic plan that spell out comprehensive agricultural development plans and programs that better-inform and guide policy makers, ensures community participation, and harness private sector investment, delays the required rural and agricultural transformation.

1.2. Parallel Plans/Programs

Lack of coordinated approach: When government plans/programs are not guiding and coordinating with those of the development partners/donors programs, and various government agencies are not working toward achieving common goal, achieving rural development through an integrated approach can be severely constrained and fragmented

1.3. Top-Down Approach

Adopting a top-down approach that is totally devoid of the communities' inputs and ideas would make it very challenging to attain the desired integrated and inclusive rural development and poverty reduction.

1.4. Lack of integrated approach

The vision of integrated rural development cannot be achieved without coordinating infrastructure development such as roads, telecommunications, health, and education.

1.5. Conflict and Insecurity

Protracted civil war prior to 2005, the 2013 and 2016 conflicts, and continued violence in the country have been hampering sedentary farming, and long-term investments in agriculture, and concerted efforts of rural development.

4.6. Unskilled Labor/Workforce

South Sudan is a youthful country. It has the highest proportion of youth and women who are unskilled and unemployed

2. POTENTIAL POLICY OPTIONS FOR INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH SUDAN

2.1. Peace and Stability

Ensuring peace and security is the foundation, not only for rural development but also for promoting inclusive broad-based growth and poverty eradication in South Sudan. Without peace and stability, any form of agriculture, be it related to primary production of crops, fisheries and livestock or value addition/processing, would not be attainable. Plans and visions would remain in vain. It is, therefore, imperative that peace, stability, and conducive environment must prevail for the rural population to enhance agricultural practices, and agricultural firms to effectively engage in their agricultural production, agro-processing, and freely and safely move across the country.

2.2. Empowering the youth and women

Equipping the youth and women with the required basic skills through technical and vocational (TVET) school trainings, Farmers Training Centers, and promoting commercial agriculture among the youth would help in transforming agriculture and expands rural off farm employment.

2.3. Adaptive Technological Advances

Back in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, agricultural production in the old Sudan (formerly part of South Sudan) was pretty basic and rudimentary. Given that we are in the 21st Century, South Sudan stands a very high chance to efficiently scale-up its agricultural output if it adopts and integrate some of the available and adaptive technological advances,

especially in the areas of irrigation, seed control, value addition, marketing and branding, land management and introduction of identification and traceability micro-chips/devices. These technological advances must also include early warning systems that incorporate climate modelling components to enable farmers know any climatic changes/trends and adjust their plans accordingly.

2.4. Coordinated Mechanism

To achieve integrated rural development in South Sudan, there must be a coordinated and comprehensive mechanism that puts agriculture at the center, while concurrently undertaking the other critical infrastructure investments in road and telecommunication infrastructure, clean water, power and energy, access to market, etc.

2.5. Adequate Funding & Financing

To complement a good integrated rural development vision, the government must avail adequate funding and financing systems from within its public coffers, as well as from its development partners and international financial institutions like the World Bank Group (WBG), African Development Bank (AfDB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (UN-FAO), United Nation Development Programme (UNDP), and leverage the private sector investment in agribusiness.

2.6. Shifting From Subsistence to Commercial Agriculture

South Sudan needs to shift its focus from subsistence to commercial farming by effectively utilizing the 33 million hectares of arable land as highlighted in the Comprehensive Agriculture Master Plans (CAMPs) that has also identified 7 climatic and agricultural zones across the country. This can be done by making agriculture attractive, especially to the youth and urban demographics since they are resourceful enough to embrace it.

2.7. Promoting Local Produce and Market Access.

As one of the import-substitution measures, promoting local produce and creating a local market access would bring about the real meaning and adoption of integrated rural development amongst the grassroots communities, which would eventually wean us off from the heavy dependence on imported goods.

2.8. Coordinating Stakeholders towards a Common Goal

The government should establish multi-sectoral inter-agencies coordinating platform that convene within government stakeholders, synchronize their annual plans towards rural development and agricultural transformation, monitors progress, propose supportive policy measures. This same institution coordinates donors' programs and projects, consult with development partners in order to jointly plan, mobilize, coordinate and implement

strategies to achieve the integrated rural development and agricultural transformation in South Sudan

2.9. Going Backward In Order To Go Forward

To achieve the integrated rural development, South Sudan needs to re-visit, re-construct and re-vive the former training centers that were set across the country to provide adequate and relevant trainings on fisheries, crop production, animal husbandry, and wildlife management and conservation.

2.10. Community Driven Approach

To realize rural development, ensuring community participation through consultations and trainings and organization of farmers into cooperatives and involving them in every decision-making process ensures that they fully own the development approach and work toward achieving it.