

# Community Needs and Assets in Maar Village, South Sudan: Local Governance, Health and Fish Production

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**Introduction:** Emerging from half a century of war and neglect, South Sudan, the world's newest nation, faces an uncertain future filled with extreme challenges and opportunities. Despite possessing vast natural resources, development indicators rank South Sudan among the poorest and most dangerous countries in the world. Facing depleted government funds, volatile security issues, a sparse infrastructure and limited capacity for delivering public services, the Government of South Sudan and its development partners are tasked with building a healthy and functioning state.

## Relief to Development Continuum

- Civil War: 1955-1972, 1983-2005
- Chronic state of emergency
- Millions killed and displaced
- 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement
  - January, 2011: referendum & independence
- Current economic crisis and insecurity

To aid in development planning there is a great need for information on enduring social and economic constraints and resources in communities throughout South Sudan. Contributing research should simultaneously address community needs and assets while taking into account political and ethnic factors at the heart of the regions instability. The following research took place between April and July, 2012 in the remote village of Maar, Pakeer *Payam* (district), Twic East County, Jonglei State, South Sudan

## Methods and Objectives:

- Identify the most important needs of the community, “set by the free choice of the community;” this was conducted as part of a state initiated assessment of every *payam* in Jonglei state
- Using appreciative inquiry, conduct a situation analysis of existing social and economic activities; further analysis was conducted as part of my own personal research

## 1. Emerging from a long and violent war, what are the community's greatest needs?

Needs assessment information was gathered through a series of four focus group discussions in Dinka with competent translation, composed of: 1) 15 youth; 2) 13 elders; 3) 14 women and; 4) 20 elders including chiefs from all of the surrounding bomas

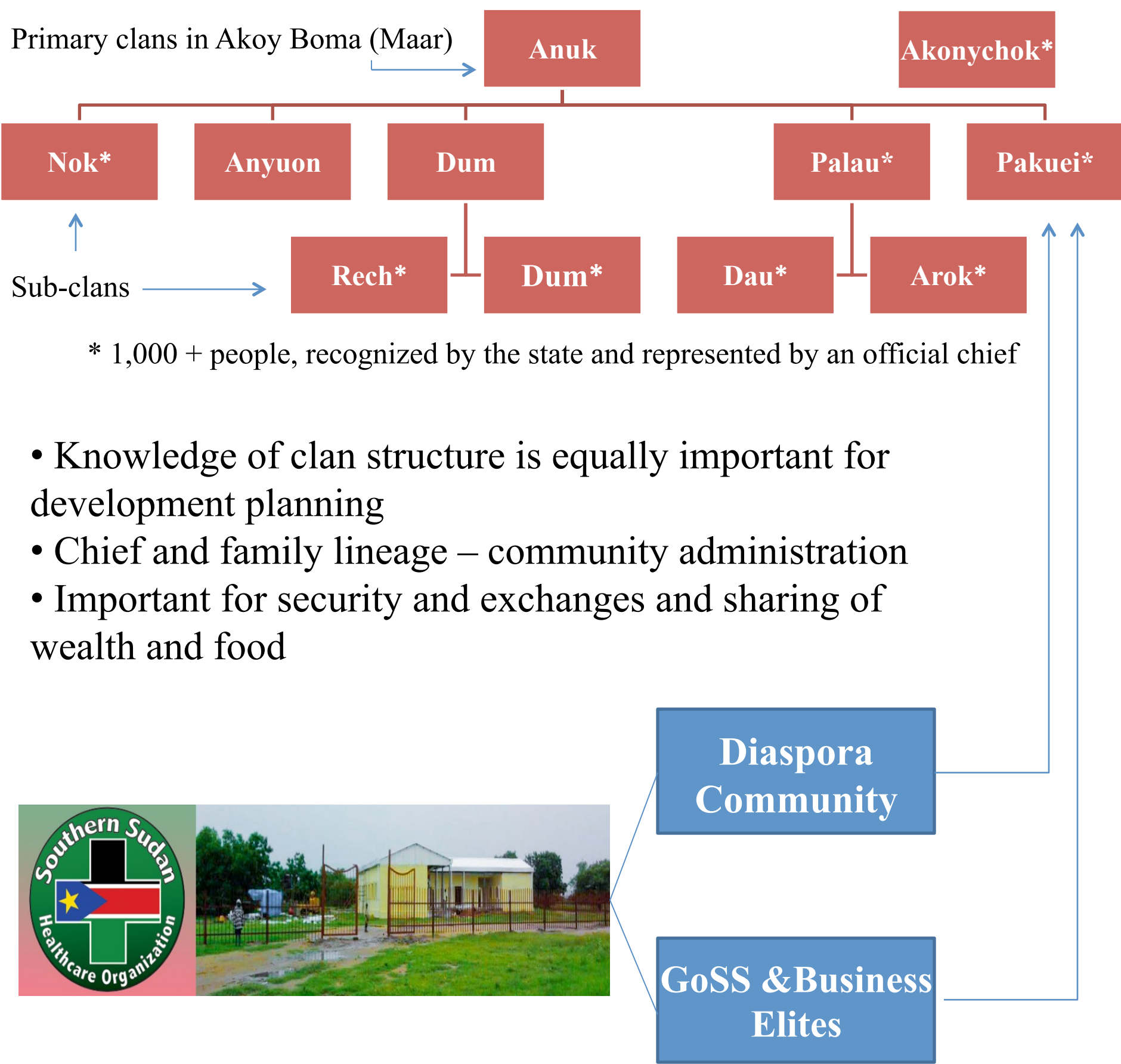


Needs Assessment Results	
Roads	roadway access to Bor and Panyagor
Healthcare	maternal deaths, waterborne illness, respiratory illness and malaria
Telecommunications	cell phone service
Livestock Health	treatment and prevention of known and unknown diseases in cattle, sheep and goats
Flood control	weak levy structure, crop damage, stagnant water, waterborne illnesses and mosquitoes
Security	vulnerable to attack and theft; recent attacks, murders and cattle raiding by neighboring Murle
Nutrition and Food Security	lack of seed variety, pesticides, improved tools and mechanized equipment; poor soil and storage capacity; crop destruction: animals, pests and flooding; inadequate food intake and stores
Education	primary school quality: teacher payment and quality; curriculum; institutional capacity; school supplies; improved facilities; access to secondary education; access to alternative learning programs: literacy, numeracy and skills and vocational training
Water	Haffirs for cattle and more functioning boreholes and hand pump stations

## 2. What is working in the community?

After gaining an understanding of community challenges, I employed appreciative inquiry in order to assess the strengths of the community. Information was gathered through participatory methods including mapping tools, transect walks and assisting with the opening of the Maar Health Centre. Despite Maar's recent and tragic history of war and isolation, they remain incredibly resilient, with robust social structures forming perhaps their greatest asset of all.

*“Once needs are identified, knowledge of clan structure becomes important. When boundaries are crossed, then decisions of where and how much is dropped in each area can be made without polarizing clan tensions.”* – Jonglei Field Officers Handbook, 1998



Community ties with the Diaspora and government and business elites also provide vital financial resources and are increasingly helping to provide access to services such as health and education

## Participant observations – challenges of opening a health clinic in Jonglei state



- Lack of infrastructure strains all operations
- At times no transport for days due to flooding
- Exorbitant transport costs
- Emergency patients unable to reach care
- Transport, in addition to no cell service, severely hamper communication



- Highly eager but unskilled workforce
- Little to no formal education for most women and men
- Lack of adult education services
- Social constraints for women and girls wanting education



- Clan disputes over the land on which the health center was built threatened to jeopardize the entire future of the health center
- The conflict arose after cleaning positions at the center were awarded randomly, therefore not favoring the Akonychok



- Sustainability remains a major concern
- Operational costs, medical supplies, lack of skilled personnel, infrastructure and social constraints
- Failure would have been certain without key strategic partnerships

## 3. Which community assets have the greatest potential for enhancement?

One example is fish production as a means for enhancing income and nutrition. Why?

Because some pioneering women from Maar are already struggling to do so:



- 34 fish bought for 250 SSP
- 5-7 days to collect and dry
- Transport: 100 SSP/ person; 50/ bundle; 100 return
- 1-3 days to sell in Bor for approximately 900 SSP
- Profit: 400 SSP (\$80)
- Profits typically used for purchasing grain and oil

### Greatest challenges to scaling up:

1. Transport to local fishermen and markets
2. Lack of nets for fishermen

### Participant Observations:



- Given the resources, community members are highly proficient at making and using nets



- Drying and storing fish is common practice by many women



- Local expert knowledge is available on improved methods and uses e.g. fish jam, fish oil, fish meal, etc.



### Increasing market access remains one of the most elusive issues

- Would a cooperative system, in which transport costs and benefits are shared be a potential solution?
- How might such cooperatives affect and be affected by existing social structures?
- How would gender constraints influence such activities?
- What is the potential for developing an intervention aimed at linking:

### Economic cooperation

### Women and fish production

### Nutrition and life skills education

**Issues that still need to be addressed:** Governance and sustainability will be critical for scaling up fishing. South Sudan currently does not have a legal framework governing fishing. Issues such as proper mesh size and duration of fishing periods must be addressed with fishing communities in order to avoid rapid depletion.

**Food for thought:** Empower communities such as Maar to access markets through cooperatives, infrastructure or other measures, provide them with technical skills and critical resources and incomes will rise in rural communities as food prices and insecurity fall in urban centers. Do not focus all investments on large-scale schemes carried out by a few outsiders

### Sources

Greathead, Hugh and Yol, Goi. The Jonglei Field Officers Hand Book: Base Line Study. 1998. Save the Children Fund (UK). Retrieved online on 11/26/2012 at [www.riftvalley.net](http://www.riftvalley.net).

