

Introduction

Why Write ESSCA-USA History

It is worth noting that since the formation of ESSCA-USA more than a decade ago, limited effort was put to research and document the history of the organization. Except for a brief critical analysis of the association by Robert Odeki titled, "General Look on ESSCA-USA from 2003-2011," published in the Equatoria2000 or E2K online forum in late 2011, no comprehensive documentation of goals, activities, founders, accomplishments, and shortcomings of the association has been made. As a result, in late 2017 ESSCA-USA administration under the leadership of Dr. Jane Kani Edward, embarked on documenting the history of the association for future generation of Equatorians. In other words, as one of the first social institutions created in the United States which brings together Equatorians from diverse background, to discuss issues of concern to them, and preserve their rich cultural heritage, it is imperative to document such history for young Equatorians and American South Sudanese. A research and documentation committee or taskforce was constituted to lead the initiative. Members of this committee were drawn from Equatorians with knowledge about the genesis of ESSCA-USA; those who served in the previous administrations of the association; as well as individuals with research and documentation skills. Although, the association's leadership reached out to several individuals to join the committee, only a few dedicated individuals agreed to participate. This publication covers the period from 1995 to 2020; the period during which ESSCA developed from its humble beginnings as a Midwest outfit to a national association encompassing the entire United States of America.

The history project committee was tasked to accomplish the following activities: 1) trace the founding of community association leading to the formation of ESSCA-USA and compile names of previous ESSCA-USA office holders dating back to the beginning of the association; 2) document the aims and objectives of ESSCA-USA, including why the association was founded; 3) document the achievements - and challenges of ESSCA-USA in the last nineteen years; and 4) review existing documents, e.g., conference programs, reports, resolutions, etc.

Methodology

Indeed, since the formation of ESSCA-USA, there is no known document repository created to keep and store all its valuable records. As a result, most of the information, and documents (conferences' reports, photographs, videos, and so on), related to the work of the association over the years, were or are often in the custody of its previous officials such as the President and the Secretary General. Some conference reports, flyers, press statements, conference resolutions, communiques, and presentations, are sometimes posted on E2K, the online forum for the general public. As a result, securing these documents for the history project was one of the challenges faced by the committee. To obtain these documents, and as noted above, ESSCA-USA leadership reached out to individuals familiar with ESSCA-USA history and activities to acquire the much-needed materials. Outreach to individuals with knowledge and skills on documentation and history writing, who would be tasked with reviewing, organizing documents based on various themes, and the writing process, was initiated. This was followed by formation of the Project Committee. Although several individuals agreed to join the committee, only two members, Dr. Edward Luka, and Dr. Henry Y. Lejukole, accepted and assumed the responsibility. The committee was coordinated by the President of ESSCA-USA Dr. Jane Kani Edward.

Given that members of the committee live in different states, biweekly teleconferences became the mode of interaction. The first meeting of the committee was held on January 31, 2018. Since then, the committee continued to meet regularly to assess their work progress, discuss and strategize on impending activities of the history project, until the completion and publication of this document.

To facilitate access to all the documents necessary for the writing process, all available documents of the association dating back to the beginning of its formative years in 1995 through 2020 were compiled and archived in a Cloud Drive shared folder setup by Dr. Lejukole. Following the review of all available documents, an outline of several working themes was developed, and the relevant documents were sorted in different folders created for each theme. Each member was then assigned or chose specific themes or chapters to work on. Information from E2K archives related to ESSCA-USA activities was also used to fill in gaps.

Due to limited documentation and preservation of information needed for writing the history of the association, it is crucial to note that, this publication does not present a comprehensive rendering of the association's activities, programs, achievements, and challenges. Rather it is an attempt to provide a descriptive summary of some of the activities undertaken by the association, and to offer an understanding of the purpose of the formation of the association, its

founders, various leaders and administrations, annual conferences held, as well as its engagement with South Sudan, the United States, Equatorians, and South Sudanese in the Diaspora and in the homeland. This publication does not include all the information related to the association's activities because the final reports presented at annual conferences, and programs are either missing, or if available are very sketchy. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of the association's performance is a task for further research and publication.

About Equatoria and Equatorians

What is Equatoria?

The name Equatoria was originally used to denote the territory or region of Africa upstream of the river Nile starting from somewhere south of Upper Nile and stretching to the Equator (parts of present-day South Sudan and Uganda). In the 19th Century, Equatoria became subject of interest to European explorers who wanted to discover the source of the White Nile. The Egyptian rulers on the other hand not only wanted to gain control of the economic potential and trade in the region, but later also pursued the glory of discovering the source of the White Nile as well as political ambition to annex the region to Egypt and control the source of the Nile.¹ Under Khedive Ismail, Equatoria was established as a territory under Egyptian control by Samuel Baker (1870); Charles George Gordon (1874); and Emin Pasha (1878) until the Egyptian control was vanquished by the Mahdist revolt in 1889.² By the end of the 19th Century, British influence became established in Sudan (1896-99) and under the Anglo-Egyptian condominium rule (1899 to 1956), Equatoria and Upper Nile were two of the 8 provinces of the Sudan until Bahr el Ghazal split from Equatoria in 1948.

When King Leopold II of Belgium died in 1909, the Lado enclave (a portion of Equatoria leased to King Leopold II in 1894) was transferred from the Belgian Congo to Anglo-Egyptian Sudan on June 16, 1910.³ The territorial change meant Equatoria stretched as far south to Lake Albert and it aroused administrative concerns and the need to adjust the boundary of Sudan and Uganda. Sir Reginald Wingate, the Governor General of Sudan submitted a proposal on adjustment of

¹ Alice Moore-Harell, *Egypt's African Empire: Samuel Baker, Charles Gordon & the Creation of Equatoria*. Sussex Academic Press, 201

² Hassan G. Murad, "The Mahdist Movement in the Sudan," *Islamic Studies*, vol. 17, no. 3, (1978), pp. 155-184.

³ G.H. Blake (Ed), *Imperial Boundary Making: The Diary of Captain Kelly and the Sudan- Uganda Boundary Commission of 1913*.

the boundary of Sudan and Uganda to Viscount Kitchener in October 1911, in which he suggested the transfer of the Lado enclave to Uganda and transfer of parts of Uganda south of latitude 5° N to Sudan.⁴ The proposal made by Wingate was accepted by the Colonial Office and a Boundary Commission headed by Captain Kelly was established in late 1912 to work out a detailed delimitation of the Sudan-Uganda boundary. The Boundary Commission embarked on its work in 1913 and the boundary was formally declared by the order of the Secretary of State dated April 21, 1914. In 1926 a small area of the Tereteinia foothills was transferred to Uganda in the interest of tribal unity, and the Rudolph province of Uganda was transferred to Kenya.⁵

The boundary of the Sudan as it stood at independence in 1956 makes Equatoria as it currently stands, one of the three provinces of Southern Sudan including Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile. Southern Sudan became an autonomous region following the signing of the Addis Ababa Agreement on February 27, 1972 which ended Sudan's first civil war (1955-1972). The Southern Sudan Regional Government was first headed by Abel Alier Kwai and later by Joseph Lagu Yanga, under whose leadership the Southern Region was decentralized in 1983 to create three regions of Equatoria, Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile.

At independence on July 9, 2011, South Sudan inherited 10 of the 26 States of Sudan (as of reorganization on February 14, 1994). Three of the ten states make up Equatoria i.e., Central Equatoria, Eastern Equatoria, and Western Equatoria states. On December 29, 2015 President Salva Kiir Mayardit, dissolved the ten states and created twenty-eight (28) new States, eight of which make up Equatoria i.e., Imatong, Namorunyang (later renamed Kapoeta), Maridi, Amadi, Gbudwe, Jubek, Terekeka, and Yei River. On January 14, 2017, the President of South Sudan issued yet another Presidential Decree that increased the number of states from twenty-eight (28) to thirty-two (32), increasing the numbers of states in Equatoria from eight (8) to nine (9) with the creation of Tambura state in Western Equatoria.⁶ The creation of the 32 states remained a contested political issue following the signing of R-ARCSS in 2018. On February 16, 2020, President Salva Kiir relented and announced a return to 10 states and their previous respective counties in addition to three administrative areas of Abyei, Ruweng and Pibor, paving the way for the formation of the R-TGoNU on February 22, 2020. Equatoria Region,

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ "The 32 Federated States of the Republic of South Sudan," Paanluel Wel Media Ltd. – South Sudan (January 22, 2017), <https://paanluelwel.com/2017/01/22/the-32-federal-states-of-the-republic-of-south-sudan/> last accessed, June 13, 2019.

sometimes referred to as Greater Equatoria, particularly by Equatorians in the Diaspora is the home of Juba, the capital city of the Republic of South Sudan. The indigenous inhabitants of the Equatoria region, though more than half of the 64 tribes of South Sudan, commonly refer to themselves, and are referred to by others as Equatorians.

Due to the relative 'peace' and 'stability' in the three states of Equatoria, prior to the 2013 South Sudan civil war, as compared to other regions of South Sudan, some people from the region believe that Equatoria is "South Sudan's Keeper." In other words, Equatoria is seen as South Sudan, and that without Equatoria there will be no country called South Sudan. Similarly, the recent history of South Sudan, particularly during the 21-year civil war (1983-2005), reveals that the Equatoria Region served as a safe haven for people from the other two regions of South Sudan, and a base for political and military activities of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and Army (SPLM/A).

In April 1994, the first national convention of the SPLM/A was held in Chukudum, in Eastern Equatoria. The convention was intended to layout the political structures of the SPLM. Similarly, after the capture of Yei by the SPLA on March 10, 1997; coupled with the hard work and hospitality of its inhabitants; the town (now in Central Equatoria State) became a hub for trade activities, refuge, and settlement of internally displaced people (IDPs) from the other two regions of Upper Nile and Bahr el-Ghazal. Indeed, Yei also represents one of the permanent bases for the SPLM/A, inside Sudan during the 21-year civil war. Yei remained under the SPLM/A control until the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005. Other cities such as Kajokeji in Central Equatoria, and Yambio and Maridi in Western Equatoria, were also areas where many South Sudanese sought refuge and safety. Many SPLM official activities were conducted in these areas as well. For instance, from July 17-19, 1997, a "Model Development Workshop for Kajokeji and Yei Counties" was held in Kajiko village, in Yei. The main purpose of the workshop was to design a model of governance for the people of Yei and Kajokeji areas. The workshop was followed by a meeting of members of the "New Sudan Council of Churches and the SPLM/A" at the same location. Thus, without the hard working and hospitable character of the Equatorians, it would have not been possible for such events to take place. Indeed, Equatoria and its people afforded not only a permanent base for the SPLM/A in Sudan, but a refuge for those fleeing insecurity, poverty, and economic hardships in the other regions of the country.⁷

⁷ Jane Kani Edward, "Reflecting on Untold Stories of Southern Sudanese Women," Sudan Tribune, (March 5, 2011), <http://www.sudantribune.com/Reflecting-on-untold-stories-of,38193>, last accessed on June 12, 2019.

Who are the Equatorians?

Defining an Equatorian or the people of Equatoria is indeed challenging due to several factors. Firstly, given the diversity of the indigenous people who inhabit the region, there is no single way to describe the people of Equatoria. Secondly, not much is written about this topic. Lastly, individuals from Equatoria might have particular views about themselves, while others not from the region might perceive them differently as well. Consequently, defining an Equatorian is multifaceted and should take into consideration issues of identity, sense of belonging, and regional and geographical aspects. In other words, self-identification and how others define or perceive an Equatorian should be considered in the process. Therefore, based on perspectives of some participants at the fourteenth ESSCA-USA annual conference, in Des Moines Iowa 2014, the term Equatorian means different things to different people.⁸ It encompasses geographical location, socio-cultural characteristics, political affiliation, as well as how individuals from other regions of South Sudan perceive the people of Equatoria.

Self-identification

For majority of people of Equatoria, the term Equatorian(s) is used to describe people who trace their ethnic origin to one of the three states of Equatoria – Eastern, Central, and Western Equatoria. In this context, geographical location is emphasized. Generally, “Equatorians ‘love’ to interact with each other, and they also have respect for other ethnic groups of South Sudan.” As a result of their cordial attitude toward fellow Equatorians, non-Equatorian South Sudanese, and foreigners; Equatorians also expect them, particularly those residing in Greater Equatoria, to reciprocate such geniality as well. Some Equatorians perceive themselves as “smart, analytical, peaceful, beautiful, self-dependent, respecters of human rights, and love to gain knowledge.” Others argue that Equatorians are “not cowardly people,” as many in South Sudan from the other two regions of Upper Nile and Bahr el Ghazal tend to describe them. Rather they view themselves as “peace makers and caring people.” Others maintained that, Equatorians are “patriotic and peace-loving South Sudanese who could help anybody in need.” That, the “people of Equatoria were the ones who started the liberation war in 1955” against the central government in Sudan, which ended in 1972 with the signing of the Addis Ababa agreement. Equatorians also view themselves as “united and believe in their being together as one people” regardless of their various ethnic backgrounds, political, economic, and social differences.⁹

⁸ Participants’ views on how to define an Equatorian, at the 14th ESSCA-USA annual conference in Des Moines, Iowa, 2014.

⁹ Some responses from the 14th ESSCA-USA annual conference, in Des Moines, Iowa, 2014 attendees.

Unity in Diversity

As indicated earlier, the people of Ekuatoria are not homogenous in terms of ethnicity. Rather, they belong to different ethnic groups or “tribes” who speak different languages, such as the Azande, Bari, Moru, Otuho, Madi, Toposa, Mundari, Acholi, Didinga, Lokoya, etc. Despite the existence of different ethnic groups in the region, and occasional disputes, historically, Ekuatorians have managed to peacefully coexist and thrive. Over many decades the people developed social mechanisms for peaceful coexistence and corporation between the different ethnicities. Mutual respect, reciprocity, inter-ethnic and inter-regional marriages, and emphasis on non-violent means to resolve disputes, etc. describe some of these social mechanisms.¹⁰

Apart from ethnic origin, Ekuatorians are differentiated by their political affiliations, religious beliefs, social status, and economic conditions. Because of the influence of Christian missionaries’ activities during the British colonial rule, majority of Ekuatorians adhere to Christianity. A good number of Ekuatorians are also Muslims. Ekuatorians further belong to different political parties that exist in South Sudan today. In terms of livelihood, many Ekuatorians, and in particular those who live in rural areas, practice agriculture and keep small, domesticated animals like goats, sheep, and chicken. Others combine agriculture and cattle keeping. Given the level of urbanization in the Ekuatoria Region, many Ekuatorians today, live in urban areas such as, Juba, Torit, Kapoeta, Yambio, Yei, Maridi, and other major urban centers in South Sudan. Others who were forced to flee the 21-year civil war (1983-2005) became part of the new African Diaspora in North America, Europe, and Asia. As a result of the civil war that started in 2013, insecurity, targeted ethnic killings and other forms of human rights violation including sexual and gender-based abuses, many Ekuatorians were uprooted from their homes and livelihood. Most people became internally displaced, while others sought refuge in the neighboring countries of Uganda, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt and Sudan.

South Sudanese in the USA: Reasons for Immigration and Settlement Patterns¹¹

The period from the early 1990s to the beginning of the twenty first century witnessed the arrival of many South Sudanese immigrants and refugees to the United States. The 21-year civil war (1983-2005) between the Sudan People’s

¹⁰ Peter Koplring, “Peaceful Coexistence: How the Ekuatorians got it right!” South Sudan Nation (SSN), June 29, 2014, www.southsudannation.com last accessed, May 30, 2019.

¹¹ Jane Kani Edward, “Importance of Women’s Education,” paper presented at the Sudanese women’s conference, Des Moines, Iowa, 2012.

Liberation Movement and Army (SPLM/A), and the successive Northern-based governments in Sudan; economic hardships; pursuit of higher education and better economic opportunities were some of the major factors that pushed and motivated majority of South Sudanese to immigrate.

South Sudanese currently living in the United States settled first in other countries before immigrating to the United States. Countries such as Egypt, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Cuba, India, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and other European, and Asian nations were the first destinations for South Sudanese before finally settling in the US. The majority of South Sudanese in America came as refugees through the United States Refugee Resettlement Program. Only few came as economic migrants, and students, while others came through the US Diversity Visa or 'Lottery' program.

South Sudanese, like other African immigrants in the United States, settled in major metropolitan cities including Washington DC; Baltimore, Maryland; San Diego, California; Houston, Texas; Phoenix, Arizona; Omaha, Nebraska; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Trenton, New Jersey; Rochester, New York; Seattle, Washington State; Salt Lake City, Utah; Denver, Colorado; Boise, Idaho; Des Moines, Iowa; and Kansas City, Missouri, among others. Indeed, the Mid-west is home to the majority of South Sudanese, and Equatorians in particular. This explains why the formation of ESSCA-USA began in the Mid-west.

Similar to the other African immigrants, the South Sudanese experience numerous socio-cultural and economic challenges as they adjust to life in the United States. However, the United States also offered many opportunities, both educational and economic. As a result of these opportunities, some South Sudanese enrolled in schools, colleges, and universities to further their education, and educated their children as well. Others joined the formal and informal labor market, sometimes working multiple jobs to sustain their families here and in South Sudan, and to achieve the "American Dream."

About ESSCA-USA

The Equatorian South Sudanese Community Association in the United States of America (ESSCA-USA) is a nonprofit community-based organization of the Equatorians in the United States. ESSCA-USA (formally ESCA-USA) was formally launched in 2003 and incorporated in the State of Iowa in 2004 as a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization. In a Midwest Equatorian conference held in Omaha, Nebraska, in 2002, the participants adopted the name Equatorian Sudanese Community Association (ESCA-USA), along with an expanded scope

of the association's mission.¹² The name changed to Equatorial South Sudanese Community Association (ESSCA – USA), following the independence of South Sudan from Sudan in 2011. ESSCA-USA has approximately 25 state chapters across the United States. It works with these chapters to promote its objectives and the hopes and aspirations of Equatorians in the United States.

Vision and Mission

ESSCA-USA's vision is that of a united, self-supported and strong South Sudanese Equatorial community in the United States. The mission of ESSCA-USA is to empower Equatorians in the United States through community mobilization, advocacy, education, promotion of cultural heritage, and self-help initiatives.

Programs

Some of the association's programs include community development, advocacy, women empowerment, youth, and leadership development. Certainly, one of the primary objectives of ESSCA-USA is to help Equatorians settle and build roots, and to become independent and productive members of the society in the United States. ESSCA-USA works with state chapters and other community organizations to tailor community development programs. As far as advocacy is concerned, ESSCA-USA conducts advocacy on issues that the Equatorians in Diaspora care about both in South Sudan and the United States. In South Sudan, the association advocates for rule of law, democracy, and people centered public policies that would improve the lives of South Sudanese people. In the United States, ESSCA-USA educates American friends of South Sudan, policy makers, and members of congress on the challenges that South Sudanese face and provides insight so they can make informed decisions when dealing with South Sudan foreign policy issues.

Women's empowerment is another initiative that the association emphasis. ESSCA-USA strives to empower women through education and economic independence. By embarking on activities such as awareness raising programs, training, workshops, seminars, and conferences on issues pertaining to women's conditions in the United States and the homeland; promoting women's involvement in decision-making process; and encouraging women to engage in entrepreneurship, etc. Likewise, ESSCA-USA strongly believes that in order to build a strong and viable community, strong and capable leaders should be prepared to lead the association. Centered on the role of youth in the association

¹² Details about the genesis of the association are discussed in chapter one of this publication.

and community, the leadership program targets both the Diaspora and people in South Sudan. Through a series of trainings, seminars, conferences, fieldwork, mentorship, leadership development programs are used to help prepare the next generation of Equatorian leaders.

Organization of the Publication

This publication is organized into several chapters. The first chapter discusses the genesis of the community organization up to the formal launching of ESSCA-USA. The formative years of the association are traced from its roots in 1995 through its progression in the Midwest to a national association representing all Equatorians in the United States. The chapter outlines the birth of Equatoria community in Minnesota, the formative years of ESSCA-USA in the Midwest and the three important meetings or conferences that cemented the foundation of the association.

Tracing the leadership of ESSCA-USA from 2003-2019 is the focus of chapter two. The chapter includes the names of Presidents, Board Chairs, and members of the Executive and Board of Directors. Chapter three focuses on the annual general meetings and conferences of ESSCA-USA. It describes the key events around the conferences including the themes, speakers and guests who attended, as well as the summary of key issues discussed, conference resolutions, and final reports of the conferences.

The fourth chapter examines ESSCA-USA's interaction with the United States and South Sudan since its formation more than two decades ago. While the association challenges some of the oppressive policies, and abusive and discriminatory practices perpetuated by the government of South Sudan in particular against civilian population, it also engages with the United States administration, and American friends of South Sudan to influence the US foreign policy toward South Sudan. The chapter emphasizes the association's advocacy initiatives on a variety of issues including, peace negotiations, constitutional review, South Sudan referendum, justice and accountability, insecurity, the impact of South Sudan's civil wars on civilian population, and human rights violations. The association's collaborative efforts with other entities such as the Equatorian Leaders in Diaspora (e.g., in United Kingdom, Australia, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Canada) to ensure the realization of just and lasting peace in South Sudan are discussed as well.

The vision and mission of the Secretariats of Women Affairs and Youth Affairs, their programs and achievements over the years is the focus of chapter five. The chapter further discusses some of the difficulties encountered and proposes pathways for the advancement of the two Secretariats.



The sixth and last chapter discusses special projects proposed by the association over the years, aimed at supporting Equatorians both in the United States and South Sudan. The projects include, the Lord Resistance Army (LRA) Victims Emergency Funds, Juba Public Library, Equatorian Scholarship Fund, ESSCA-USA Development Fund, Diaspora Secretariat and Coordination Office, humanitarian assistance, among others.