



CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

BUILDING PEACE IN SOUTH SUDAN: PROGRESS, PROBLEMS, AND PROSPECTS

Cape Town, South Africa

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Introduction

The Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR), Cape Town, South Africa, hosted a two-day policy advisory group seminar at the Vineyard Hotel in Cape Town, from 14 to 15 December 2016, on the theme “Building Peace in South Sudan: Progress, Problems, and Prospects”.

The meeting brought together about 30 key policymakers, academics, and civil society actors to reflect critically upon the challenges of, and prospects for, peacebuilding in South Sudan; and to examine the role of major actors – such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the African Union (AU), the United Nations (UN), the Troika (comprising the United States [US], Britain, and Norway), and China – in supporting local and national peace processes.

1. The Challenges of Building Peace in South Sudan

The violent conflict that began in December 2013 and, after a brief hiatus, resumed in July 2016, is the gravest challenge facing South Sudan’s fragile peacebuilding and state-building processes. The humanitarian costs of the crisis continue to be extremely high, with one in four people displaced, four in ten severely food-insecure, and thousands of homes destroyed.¹ An emphasis on humanitarian and emergency relief has, furthermore, shifted the focus away from development assistance. Low state absorption capacity and donor concern about the diversion of funds amidst widespread corruption have also contributed to the limited availability of resources for state capacity-building.

An acute, unresolved crisis of national identity lies at the heart of the conflicts within both Sudan and South Sudan, as well as between them, that reflects their failure to manage internal diversity constructively. The current civil war in South Sudan began as a power struggle within the ruling Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), but rapidly descended into a violent, inter-ethnic conflict. The renewed violence, since July 2016, reflects, in part, the weakness of the August 2015 Addis Ababa agreement in addressing fully the role of ethnic-based grievances as a driver of conflict. It also reflects an overemphasis on elite-level conflict resolution and concomitant lack of attention to peacebuilding at the grassroots level in a context of widespread poverty, inequality, and a weak economy.

South Sudanese leaders need to recognise the country’s ethnic and cultural diversity as an asset that can contribute towards the building of a strong state and resilient society. Successful diversity management must also include bottom-up processes that provide space for participation by an engaged citizenry. This requires greater awareness of South Sudan’s pluralistic heritage; and, just as important, visionary leadership to build a modern state that draws its strength from grassroots experiences and indigenous institutions.

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CHILDREN DISPLACED BY RECENT FIGHTING STAND OUTSIDE A TENTED SCHOOL RUN BY UNICEF, IN THE TOWN OF MINGKAMAN, SOUTH SUDAN, IN MAY 2017, WHERE HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IS BEING PROVIDED.

Image source - Humansphere
Photo - UNICEF/Holt
<http://www.humansphere.org/global-health/2017/05/drought-violence-taking-toll-south-sudans-children/>

¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), “South Sudan: Humanitarian Response Plan 2017”, December 2016, p. 6.

2. Challenges Facing South Sudan's Transitional Government of National Unity

South Sudan's Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU) – created under the terms of the Addis Ababa agreement, but without key SPLM-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO) members after July 2016 – faces severe, inter-locking political, economic, and security challenges. In early 2017, the UN declared famine in parts of the country, with an estimated 100,000 people facing starvation. Persistent violence, increasing insecurity, and limited access to basic services are continuing to cause displacement and distress, even as humanitarian agencies struggle to provide assistance in difficult conditions. Both government and rebel forces have been implicated in human rights violations; and the SPLA remains a deeply fractured force, controlled by warlords and divided along ethnic lines.

South Sudan's \$9 billion economy, meanwhile, is heavily reliant on oil, which comprises 90 percent of government revenues. These have been badly affected by reduced oil production, as well as lower international oil prices and Juba's fixed oil transit fee agreement with Khartoum. At the same time, subsistence agriculture – the mainstay of local livelihoods – has collapsed in the face of renewed violence and drought. These problems have been compounded by increasing levels of militarisation, and youth unemployment and marginalisation. Two-thirds of the South Sudanese population is below the age of 30.

The violence since July 2016 has, at best, severely set back the Addis Ababa agreement and, at worst, fatally undermined it. Influential figures within South Sudan remain opposed to the peace accord, with the ruling elite continuing to prioritise self-enrichment and ethnic-based interests over nation-building. Politics beyond Juba and below the national level, combined with a proliferation of informal conflicts, has only added further depth to the challenges facing the transitional government.



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OIL STORAGE FACILITIES AT BENTIU, UNITY STATE, SOUTH SUDAN.

Image source - Inter Press Service News Agency

Photo - Charlton Doki/IPS

<http://www.ipsnews.net/2011/10/south-sudan-oil-conflict-threatens-to-break-out/>

3. Implementing the 2015 Addis Ababa Peace Agreement

The Addis Ababa peace agreement was the result of an intense IGAD-led mediation process, with critical support provided by key external actors such as the AU, the UN, and the Troika. The negotiations featured sharp differences between the South Sudanese government and the SPLM-IO; and President Salva Kiir eventually signed the accord, under immense international pressure, nine days after opposition leader Riek Machar had done so. In these circumstances, implementation was, from the outset, characterised by a lack of confidence, trust, and ownership of the agreement.

Initial progress included the establishment and partial operationalisation of mechanisms such as the Joint Military Ceasefire Commission, and the Strategic Defence and Security Review Board. However, differences quickly

emerged between Kiir and Machar, including on the creation of 28 states, before the outbreak of violence in July 2016 amidst rising tensions, mistrust, and frustration. Machar's subsequent flight from Juba, his replacement by Taban Deng Gai as first vice-president, and the fracturing of the SPLM-IO have since imperilled the peace agreement, and the transitional government remains bitterly contested.

Amidst a worsening humanitarian crisis, the imposition of an arms embargo and individual sanctions has been raised at the UN Security Council. However, IGAD remains strongly in favour of continuing dialogue; and has continued to assert its support for the Addis Ababa agreement and the deployment of the UN-authorized Regional Protection Force (RPF). In early May 2017, though, this force was still to be deployed.

4. Human Rights

In March 2017, there were an estimated 1.9 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in South Sudan, with about 1.6 million South Sudanese refugees having fled to neighbouring countries, including Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Violations of international humanitarian law, including attacks against UN personnel and humanitarian workers, and restrictions on movement and access, also continued to impede efforts to protect and provide assistance to civilians. Rural populations, as well as vulnerable groups such as women and children, have been particularly badly affected by the conflict, including the concomitant decline in spending on social services.

With both warring sides accused of committing human rights violations, there has been very little discussion of accountability at the national level. Strong doubts also remain about whether an inclusive national dialogue can be held and transitional justice dispensed, as envisaged under the Addis Ababa agreement, in an environment characterised by fear, intimidation, and violence. The UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has, meanwhile, faced criticism over its failure to protect civilians during the July 2016 violence in Juba, and the mission, as well as other UN agencies, continue to face significant challenges in carrying out their mandates.

5. Gender and Peacebuilding

Even before the outbreak of the current conflict, translating constitutional principles on gender equality into practice was a formidable challenge in South Sudan, which has since been exacerbated by the ongoing violence. Patriarchal gender norms and traditional practices, such as the payment of bride prices and cattle-raiding among pastoral communities, are deeply implicated as drivers of conflict and insecurity in South Sudan. Similarly, sexual and gender-based violence was widespread in South Sudan prior to December 2013, but has since increased. Women and children compose a majority of those displaced by the ongoing conflict, including the over 214,000 people sheltering in UN protection-of-civilian (PoC) sites across the country.

Meanwhile, the role of women as actual and potential agents of peacebuilding in South Sudan has been neglected. South Sudanese women, though, campaigned actively to strengthen their representation in the Addis Ababa peace negotiations and the incorporation of gender-based perspectives in the resultant agreement; and have

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SOME OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WALKING FOR HOURS TO REACH A FOOD DISTRIBUTION SITE IN MALUALKUEL, IN THE NORTHERN BAHR EL GHAZAL REGION OF SOUTH SUDAN, IN APRIL 2017.

Image source - The Washington Times
Photo - AP Photo/STR
http://www.humanosphere.org/global-http://www.washingtontimes.com/multimedia/image/south_sudan_facing_famine_44698jgg-5b3a6jgg/

More sustained efforts are needed to bridge the gap between the country's female elite and women at the grassroots level.



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION IN SOUTH SUDAN, HELD AT NYAKURON CULTURAL CENTRE IN 2016.

Image source - Impakter
Photo - UN Photo/JC McIlwaine
<http://impakter.com/african-caribbean-and-pacific-group-of-states-acp-countries-unite-to-empower-rural-women-and-youth/>

since continued advocacy efforts to strengthen their voices in peacebuilding processes. However, greater efforts are needed to ensure that their participation in decision-making structures is both adequate and meaningful. More sustained efforts – such as the creation of UN Women-supported rural empowerment centres – are also needed to bridge the gap between the country's female elite and women at the grassroots level.

6. The Role of Civil Society in Peacebuilding

Civil society in South Sudan has for a long time played a critical role in resolving and managing conflicts, building peace, and delivering services. Despite myriad challenges, South Sudanese civil society groups have continued to support peacebuilding in several ways, including through the dissemination of the Addis Ababa agreement to local communities. Local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), furthermore, remain a key conduit for sharing information on the human rights situation in South Sudan with external actors. There are doubts, though, about the extent to which South Sudanese civil society can influence elite-level politics and achieve impact beyond local-level improvements in human security.

Intrusive government interference, economic volatility, and weak rule of law have altogether led several South Sudanese NGOs to re-locate to neighbouring countries such as Uganda, Kenya, and Sudan. The working environment for media groups and journalists, in particular, has become hugely restricted, even dangerous, in South Sudan. The lack of democratic political institutions and an independent and functioning judiciary have added to the vulnerability of

NGOs. Furthermore, relations between civil society organisations have tended to be characterised by competition, in a context of resource scarcity and dependence on external funding. Local NGOs also have significant capacity deficits, and several lack clear and achievable objectives, while others are struggling to maintain non-partisanship in an increasingly polarised context. Church leaders and groups remain active and influential peacebuilding actors, but face growing challenges, including a perceived loss of relevance.

7. The Role of External Actors in South Sudan

Despite an increasingly difficult relationship and a decline in its influence with Juba (since December 2013), the US remains one of the most important extra-regional actors engaged with South Sudan. External pressure, led by Washington, was key to getting the Addis Ababa agreement signed, and in 2017 the US remains the largest single donor of humanitarian aid to South Sudan. Domestic pressure for an aid drawdown has, however, increased in the face of growing attacks on aid workers and humanitarian convoys. Since December 2013, at least 79 aid workers have been killed in South Sudan. Though Washington has continued to reiterate its support for the Addis Ababa accord, unlike IGAD it favours the imposition of an arms embargo and individual sanctions to resolve the crisis.

China – the largest investor in the South Sudanese economy – has also continued to offer diplomatic support for the IGAD-mediated peace process. However, Beijing's approach has been cautious and reactive, while seeking to balance the country's relations with Khartoum and Juba, with Chinese diplomats seeing their engagement primarily in terms of a learning process. There is also limited understanding in Chinese society at large about how the crisis in South Sudan affects China, or about the position of Africa in Beijing's foreign policy.

Meanwhile, the role of neighbouring countries – including Uganda, Sudan, and Kenya – has varied and evolved since December 2013, as part of a changing constellation of regional circumstances and interests. Outside the region, South Africa's engagement has continued to be notable, mainly for its diplomatic support for AU and IGAD efforts to address the South Sudanese conflict. South Africa's ruling African National Congress (ANC) is also co-guarantor – alongside Tanzania's ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party – of an intra-party dialogue process aimed at promoting SPLM unity.

Policy Recommendations

The following ten key policy recommendations emerged from the Cape Town seminar:

1. Visionary and transformative leadership by the South Sudanese ruling elite that prioritises inclusive state-building and peacebuilding is an imperative. Traditional authorities can play a critical role in this endeavour, but need to move away from ethnic exclusivism. Efforts should be made to encourage the creation of a National Council that brings together ethnic-based institutions, such as the Dinka and Nuer Councils of Elders, and aims to promote inclusivity and unity, while exerting a positive influence on the conduct of SPLA and SPLA-IO soldiers, as well as militia fighters.
2. African leaders and organisations, including, in particular, IGAD and the AU, need to engage South Sudan's political leadership in constructive dialogue for greater accountability for the protection and promotion of human rights, as well as respect for international humanitarian law.
3. The AU Commission needs, as a matter of urgency, to establish the Hybrid Court of South Sudan, as envisaged in the Addis Ababa peace agreement, to investigate and prosecute the perpetrators of atrocities, and end impunity for crimes against humanity, war crimes, and other serious crimes under international and South Sudanese law including sexual and gender-based violence.
4. Conflict analysis and peacebuilding interventions need to address both notions of masculinities and women's issues, for a holistic approach to achieving gender equality in South Sudan. Civil society organisations need also to be innovative in designing and implementing programmes that address patriarchy and gender inequities in South Sudan, while key external actors – including the UN as well as major donors such as the US and the EU – must seek to continually assess that their interventions do not inadvertently promote gender inequality.



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SOUTH SUDAN'S PRESIDENT SALVA KIIR (RIGHT) IS RECEIVED BY THE THEN CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE SUDAN PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY, PAUL MALONG AWAN, AT THE AIRPORT IN JUBA, UPON ARRIVING AFTER ATTENDING PEACE TALKS IN ETHIOPIA IN MARCH 2015.

Image source - ACCORD

Photo - Gallo Images/Reuters/Jok Solomun

<http://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/how-the-use-of-targeted-sanctions-can-undermine-peace-in-south-sudan/>

5. It is vital for South Sudanese civil society organisations to focus on becoming more professional and to avoid being seen as partisan actors, in order to (re-) gain their legitimacy in the eyes of the communities that they engage with and to have an impactful role at the grassroots level. Civil society and faith-based groups also need to make more effective use of coordinating bodies, such as the South Sudan NGO Forum and the South Sudan Council of Churches, to avoid conflict and competition; and to be able to have greater influence at the national level.
6. There is a need for closer coordination between IGAD, the AU, the UN Security Council, and the Troika, as well as other relevant actors including China, on the situation in South Sudan and on strategies to restore order and stability in the conflict-affected country.
7. The deployment of a Regional Protection Force has to be treated as a matter of priority for the restoration of law and order in Juba, with more careful consideration given to the timing and potential impact of an arms embargo and sanctions.
8. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan must take greater responsibility for the provision of security to internally displaced persons under its protection and in its protection of civilian camps. In this regard, UNMISS should further consider initiating dialogue and educational programmes to promote human rights among, and provide conflict management skills to, IDPs to limit violent clashes.
9. Once the situation in South Sudan stabilises, peacebuilding efforts should focus on improving economic conditions, particularly in the agricultural sector, to strengthen community resilience; improve food security; and reduce the vulnerability of ordinary South Sudanese to conflict. Just as important, civil society must be supported in its efforts to combat corruption and address the nexus between conflict and oil-based patronage more effectively.
10. It is vital that security arrangements – including, in particular, issues related to the integration of armed militias – are properly addressed in the peace process in South Sudan, with a view to transforming the SPLA into a professional conventional national army, with a shared institutional culture, that is less likely to fragment along ethnic lines during political crises.

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MEMBERS OF THE SUDAN PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY STAND AT ATTENTION IN JULY 2011.

Image source - Time
Photo - AP Photo/Pete Muller
<http://world.time.com/2011/07/08/lessons-from-east-timor-for-south-sudan-three-things-nation-193-can-learn-from-191/>