

ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN SOUTH SUDAN: WHICH ROLE CAN CIVIL SOCIETY PLAY?

1. Introduction

After the outbreak of violence in South Sudan in 2013, a number of internationally mediated talks in Addis Ababa, Nairobi and Entebbe have failed to establish peace in the country. In July 2017, South Sudan President Salva Kiir launched the South Sudan National Dialogue process. Not only did he appoint all the 93 members of the dialogue committee, but he also made himself the patron. After several criticisms that the dialogue is a one-sided initiative, Mr. Kiir [opted out](#) as the patron. Furthermore, in October 2017, 14 South Sudanese civil society organizations published an open letter criticizing their exclusion from the IGAD Consultation for Peace Revitalization Forum¹, displaying the need for an inclusive peace process.

South Sudanese civil society organizations face a number of challenges: they have been operating in a climate of fear, intimidation and harassment, which has undermined their peacebuilding role. Furthermore, the relations between and within them have been damaged due to polarizations drawn along political and ethnic lines. Understanding the context and nature of roles played by CSOs organizations is crucial as they fill various voids created by the spoils of war and conflict. For instance, after the outbreak of violence, South Sudanese civil society played an important role in the delivery of humanitarian aid as well as in bringing security concerns to the attention of national and international actors. Similarly, civil society also has the potential to play a central role in peace processes. Civil society actors can provide crucial knowledge about the realities on the ground: their work gives them and understanding of the local culture and traditions as well as the positions, needs and interests of local communities.

¹ <https://africanspress.org/2017/10/03/south-sudanese-civil-society-in-kampala-uganda-position-paper-on-exclusion-from-the-current-igad-consultation-for-revitalization-of-peace-agreement/>

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However, in South Sudan, just like any conflict context, civil society organizations often face a plethora of challenges ranging from direct threats to their lives during humanitarian campaigns to being excluded in efforts to bring about peace. In the case of South Sudan, the civic engagement space has severely been attacked as warring factions; especially the government of Salva Kiir accuse them of being noise makers. As such, many many civil society organizations in Juba have heard their accounts frozen and operations halted. Some of these CSOs include, Centre for Peace and Justice, South Sudan Human Rights Alliance (SSHURSA) to mention but a few. Staff of these organizations had to flee, consequently making them both refugees and political asylum seekers in neighbouring countries especially in Uganda and Nairobi.

Placed between a rock and a hard place, many of these now exiled civil society activities have considered continuing with their work in Uganda. After all, Uganda is currently host to the biggest number of refugees from South Sudan. By the end of 2017, UNHCR had estimated that up to about 1.4M South Sudanese refugees were now domiciled in Uganda as refugees. At both the resettlement camps in the West Nile and Northern regions, refugees continue to face even more challenges like inadequate access to basic needs of life like food, shelter, clothing; limited access to healthcare and educational facilities. Generally, refugees have no clue where to start from. Most of them wake up in the morning with the hope that things should be fine but very quickly pessimism sets in especially when they are consumed by this feeling and reality of hopelessness.

But some South Sudanese civil society activists have already started civic engagement drives to restore hope, dignity and empower the refugees with relevant skills, knowledge and encourage them to appreciate basic things like their rights as human beings, amplifying their voices to be heard by whoever cares to hear, providing humanitarian assistance among others. But their work is riddled by a plethora of challenges. Not only are they constrained in human and technical capacity, but their operations are also rather small and disjointed to create a significant impact in addressing the complicated challenges that South Sudan as a country faces and the difficult encounters refugees confront on a daily basis. It is on this basis that the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Uganda and South Sudan hosted a roundtable discussion with South Sudanese civil society organisations (CSOs) in Kampala on 7 December 2017. The main topic of the event was to explore the question of how South Sudanese civil society can contribute to establishing sustainable peace in the country. The roundtable brought together over 30 representatives of youth, women, artists and religious groups in the South Sudanese civil society dias-

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pora in Kampala with the aim of increasing their dialogue and collaboration and gaining an increased understanding of the challenges and opportunities CSOs are faced with in the peacebuilding and reconciliation process in South Sudan.

For KAS, the roundtable contributes to its overall goal of supporting the process of sustainable peace and dialogue in South Sudan. Prior to the outbreak of violence in the country in 2013, KAS implemented a number of activities on the ground. However, due to the deterioration of the security situation in Juba and other parts of the country, activities directly implemented in South Sudan have been temporarily suspended since 2016. Since then, a number of events in the formats of public dialogues and roundtable discussions have been hosted with different organisations and actors in Kampala to explore how sustainable peace can be attained in Uganda's northern neighbour.

This synthesis report explores challenges and opportunities for selected civil society actors in the context of current efforts to restore peace in South Sudan, taking into consideration the outcomes of the KAS roundtable.

2. Negotiations: a new chance for peace?

2017 marks the fourth year of civil war in the world's youngest country. Since the outbreak of violence in South Sudan in 2013, more than four million people – between a third and half of the population – have been displaced from their homes. Nearly eight million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and the economic situation has become dire. After almost four years of civil war, conflict has devolved into fighting across multiple fronts.

A number of internationally mediated talks in Addis Ababa, Nairobi and Entebbe have attempted and failed to establish peace in the country. The talks have been led by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which reached a peace agreement between the troops of Salva Kiir and Riek Machar in August 2015. However, the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ACRSS) collapsed after heavy fighting broke out in Juba in 2016.

Attempts by IGAD to re-establish peace have focused on a three-pronged approach ahead of the elections coming up in the country in 2018. One of the three elements is a 'revitalization' of the 2015 agreement. IGAD began consultations with stakeholders from Juba, Addis Ababa, Khartoum and Pretoria in the summer of 2017, with the aim of holding a High Level Revitalization Forum (HLRF) in Addis Ababa in December 2017. The consultations were con-

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ducted by the IGAD Council of Ministers and seek to review the progress of implementation and identify problem areas, such as incorporating of all the disgruntled groups that were not part of the agreement. The HLRF was held in Dec 2017 and the restoration of a permanent ceasefire was the main area of discussion. On the 24th Dec, members [signed a commitment](#) agreeing to give peace a chance by not resorting to violence and fighting (cessation of hostilities), not engaging in hate speech, protecting vulnerable persons such as children and women and allowing media and civil society organizations to continue doing their work. Alas, just few days after agreement to these commitments, atrocious acts of violence continued unabated, civil society space continued shrinking and many women and children continued to wail in desperation and hopelessness.

The national dialogue is another negotiation attempt to restore sanity and peace in South Sudan. On May 22, 2017, South Sudan President Salvar Kiir, flanked by regional neighbour and Ugandan President, Yoweri Museveni along-side other international diplomats launched the South Sudan National Dialogue process. At the launch, he pointed out that the dialogue presents a [unique bottom-up approach to addressing the conflict](#) in his country. The National Dialogue aims to be a broad based process for the country's population to address grievances in order to establish a permanent ceasefire. However, all 93 members of the dialogue committee were appointed by the president himself. Going by the loose definition and understanding of dialogue as a space for civility and/or equality where those who differ may come and listen to each other, the president shoots himself in the foot from the onset. ()

Perhaps what South Sudan needs is a deep reflection about its political vision and a more thoughtful process to overcome the deep societal polarization that inevitably lead to more violence. To overcome these obstacles, new approaches are needed, such as the empowerment of civil society and other constructive forces.

3. Civil Society in Peacebuilding Processes

With the increasing complexity of violent conflicts and therefore peacebuilding efforts confronting the international community, civil society actors have received increased focus by the donor as well as academic community.

The term 'civil society' is widely used with no commonly agreed definition. Approaches to its definition usually encompass the following characteristics: 1) voluntary character in institutions that are distinct from the state, 2) di-

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verse and autonomously organized organisations with specific interests that are not purely economic or private, 3) independence from the state but close interaction with political sphere (Paffenholz & Spurk 2006: 4).

The role of civil society is often controversial, especially in non-democratic political systems such as South Sudan, as they hold governments accountable and demonstrate the will of the citizens. As one roundtable participant put it, “according to the South Sudanese government,



Donnas Ojok, Programme Manager KAS Uganda and South Sudan

CSOs are very stubborn people that should be punished, kidnapped and killed”. The core functions of civil society were defined by roundtable participants as the intermediation between state and citizens, the communication of citizen’s interests, and the offer of alternatives to government in areas which CSOs have more expertise in. These functions are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary (Paffenholz & Spurk 2006: 8).

Peacebuilding can be understood as “an overarching term to describe a long-term process covering all activities with the overall objective to prevent violent outbreaks of conflict or to sustainably transform armed conflicts into constructive peaceful ways of managing conflict” (Paffenholz & Spurk 2006: 15). Four pillars of peacebuilding can be established: security, governance, just and reconciliation, and socio-economic development (Mai 2015: 2).

What is then, the connection between civil society and peacebuilding processes? What role can CSOs play in establishing lasting peace?

Historically, peace and security have been considered strictly matters of the state. CSOs are therefore sometimes viewed as irrelevant, a threat to state sovereignty or further complicating complex issues in peace processes. On the other hand, it is argued that violent conflicts have gotten too complex in scale and diversity for just one entity to solve. This argument has been reaffirmed through the increasing involvement of CSOs in peace processes such as in Bosnia-Herzegovina or Rwanda.

CSOs can take on a myriad of functions in war-torn societies, although they are often unable to transform violent conflict into peace on their own. How-

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V. ever, it is also unlikely that government actors alone are able to create “positive peace”² without the wider involvement of the affected societies.

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Eight broad functions of civil society actors in peacebuilding processes can be distinguished (Barnes 2009: 135):

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The Role of Civil Society in Peacebuilding Processes:

- Waging conflict constructively
- shifting conflict attitudes
- defining the peace agenda
- mobilizing constituencies for peace
- reducing violence and promoting stability
- peacemaking/conflict resolution
- community-level peacemaking
- changing root causes and building cultures of peace.

4. Challenges and Opportunities for CSOs in South Sudan

Applied to the South Sudanese context, civil society organizations face a number of challenges: they have been operating in a climate of fear, intimidation and harassment, which has undermined their peacebuilding role. Furthermore, the relations between and within them have been damaged due to the polarization of divisions based on political and ethnic affiliations. These challenges and opportunities were explored comprehensively by a wide range of stakeholders at the roundtable discussion hosted by KAS.

Special focus was placed on representatives of women, youth, religious groups and artists, as these are all crucial stakeholders in South Sudanese society which have previously been underrepresented. These representatives all brought forth their views, highlighting obstacles to their work specifically as well as general challenges they are faced with in South Sudan.

4.1 Women

Women are an underrepresented and marginalised group in peacebuilding processes, worldwide and in South Sudan specifically. South Sudanese women face a range of cultural, political, social and economic barriers that hinder their progress and participation in political, social and economic processes.

² “Positive peace” as defined by Johan Galtung goes beyond the absence of violence and refers to the restoration of relationships, the creation of social systems and the constructive resolution of conflict.

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V. For instance, and estimated 84% of South Sudanese women are illiterate. Although they make up around 27% of the South Sudanese National Parliament, women are underrepresented in cabinet and the judiciary.

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Amani Roselyn, Eve Organisation

Research has shown that when women are involved in peace processes, peace is more likely to persist. Women make up over 60% of the South Sudanese population and must therefore be equally and equitably represented in any peace effort in South Sudan. Bringing their perspectives to the table ensures that gender equality is attained and their special needs are met. In the peacebuilding process in South Sudan, they are a crucial stakeholder that must be involved for peace to be sustainable for a number of reasons: they have played an instrumental role in solving past conflicts in the country; and war impacts them differently, which is why they have different needs in peacebuilding processes.

Despite their marginalisation, women have consistently played an important role in bridging conflict divides in South Sudanese society in all phases of conflict. For example, during Sudan's second civil war, women's organizations provided education for displaced children, skills trainings for women as well as adult education. Women's organizations such as the South Sudan Chamber of Women Entrepreneurs (SSCWE) and Sudan Women Entrepreneurs Association (SWEA) have been providing information to women in the private sector and working for gender equality. In the political sphere, the SPLM Women League has been working to increase female participation in politics. Women have also been playing an important role in reconciliation processes: a group of women's associations was instrumental in preparing and implementing the Wunlit peace agreement (Mai 2015: 3).

Women in South Sudan have been able to bridge conflict divides by creating networks and associations spanning across religious, ethnic and tribal lines. Examples after the second Sudanese civil war are the Sudanese Women Association in Kenya (SWAN). SWAN was able to bring women from the SPLA and women from the Nasir faction together to engage in peacebuilding activities. In the peace negotiations leading up to the ACRSS, women groups formed a Women's Bloc representing both women in government and the opposition, while also reaching out to women in the two warring parties (Mai 2015: 4). Another organization, South Sudan Democracy Monitoring Programme (SSUDEMOP) has also previously collaborated with KAS to launch the

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V. [South Sudan National Women's Strategy](#) as a tool to promote gender equality

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ty in different sectors of the South Sudan society. The strategy strives to ensure that women's participation and contribution in decision making at national level is seen beyond the limitation of the 25% threshold of gender quota as enshrined in the constitution as an Affirmative Action for women

During violent conflicts, women are among the most affected. They become victims of traumatizing experiences, such as sexual and gender-based violence and displacement. Because these human rights violations are gender-based, healing can only take place through women's engagement in decision-making during peace negotiations as well as implementation of peace agreements.

“Governments led by men have failed – give women a chance now”, said Amani Roselyn from Eve Organisation highlighting the need to include women in the peace process. Eve Organisation is a CSO established in 2006 in Khartoum, focusing on women's rights in South Sudan. Women make up 60% of the population in the country and form the group suffering the most from the violence. Effective representation goes beyond mere quotas in peace negotiations: there need to be powerful voices at the table, raising women's issues.

4.1. Religious groups

The peacebuilding role of religious groups has moved from the margins towards the centre of the field of conflict resolution in recent years. Religious leaders have traditionally played a unifying role since 1965, when the Sudan Council of Churches was established. In 1989, the New Sudan Council of Churches was founded to serve the southern regions of the country. In 1999, religious leaders played an integral part in the peace and reconciliation conference in Wunlit, Bahr El Ghazal between Dinka and Nuer groups that had been fighting each other.

Religious groups play an important role in peace-making and reconciliation in South Sudan, as they are the only actors than can reach the population across ethnic, geographic and political boundaries. In addition to their convening role, they are also trusted intermediaries in society with access to the elites, politicians and armed factions. They are able to traverse the gap between the grassroots and elite level. They derive their legitimacy from both the doctrines of their faith as well as trust from their followers. Because religious actors were largely responsible for the provision of basic services during periods of conflict and war, they also derive their legitimacy from being present among the population during times of violence. Furthermore, religious actors are often parts of a larger, transnational network of religious actors.

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Over two thirds of the South Sudanese population is under 30 years old. They are among the most affected by the ongoing violence: witnessing violence, the loss of family, friends, and livelihoods. These experiences and vulnerabilities can have lasting consequences for an entire generation of children and youth. Youth have specific needs which must be addressed after conflict, for example: missing education, unemployment, and trauma. Additionally, intergenerational relations may be strained in the aftermath of conflict because youth may mistrust or blame adults for violence and adults may misunderstands young people's needs. If young people are not given a stake in post-conflict peacebuilding, there is a large risk that they may return to violence. Large and idle youth refugee populations without support for their trauma or poor socio-economic situation are at risk of manipulation and being unable to break free from a cycle of violence. However, with adequate support, these young people can also be crucial actors for change and sustainable peace in South Sudan. The recently adopted UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security marks the formal recognition of the positive role young people can play in building peace and maintaining security.

A number of South Sudanese youth have therefore formed organisations dedicated to empowering youth to become positive agents of change.

Malual Bol Kiir, founder of the African Youth Action Network (AYAN) and youth peace activist, highlighted the fact that the young generation in South Sudan is fighting in a war started by the older generation. Although young people make up the majority of the population in South Sudan, they are not given a voice at the decision making level. Rather, they are divided and instrumentalized by the political elite. What is needed are investments into youth to enable them to strengthen their platforms and become independent. At the moment, AYAN is active in Juba to create synergies with other youth initiatives in South Sudan.



Malual Bol Kiir, African Youth Action Network

5. Conclusion

One core issue raised was the ineffective coordination and cooperation among South Sudanese CSOs in Uganda. An existing consortium of organizations has thus far not been successful in speaking with one voice. Aside from

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V. a lack of resources, one of the underlying causes of this issue is the polarization and divisions among the organizations, which need to be overcome.

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The discussions and debates at the roundtable made clear that the current cycle of violence in South Sudan can only be overcome if all relevant societal stakeholders are involved in dialogue and peacebuilding. Civil society organisations play a crucial role due to a number of advantages: they are rooted in local communities and therefore know the realities ‘on the ground’; they are able to bridge societal divides; they can bridge the gap between political actors and the local population. However, this potential is yet to be mobilized in the ongoing efforts at bringing peace to South Sudan.

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