



THE SUDD INSTITUTE

RESEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL, JUST AND PROSPEROUS SOUTH SUDAN

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POLICY BRIEF

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CSOs/CBOs and faith-based organizations-led peace and reconciliation efforts¹

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Summary

While faith-based organizations have made significant contributions to peace and reconciliation efforts in the country, the CSOs have not done much. A key reason for this is the reluctance of the warring parties to include other stakeholders in peace talks. Indeed, in the ongoing peace efforts to resolve the violent conflict that began in December 2013, the CSOs were only allowed to participate in the peace process following a significant pressure from regional and Western bodies. Also, the weakness of the CSOs and faith-based organizations has worked against their full engagement with the peace processes. Possible actions to enhance their roles include increasing pressure on the warring parties and building capacities of these organizations through sustained funding and training.

1. Introduction

Since it was part of the former Sudan², a nation embroiled in war for decades, South Sudan has been experiencing deadly violent conflicts. The most recent conflict began in December 2013 and has resulted in a humanitarian disaster, as well as deep ethnic schisms. Because of this unenviable track record of war, South Sudan has also had a long experience with peace and reconciliation efforts. A briefing paper by the South Sudan NGO Forum, the body that seeks to coordinate the activities of international and national NGOs, notes that the CSOs “have played a significant role in South Sudan peace and state building journey, both in pre and post CPA period” (South Sudan NGO Forum 2014). It is argued, however, that the CSOs and faith-based organizations have played a marginal role in resolving the major violent conflicts in the country, but have made significant contributions to peace and reconciliation efforts at the community level.

Most of the notable peace efforts, however, have been spearheaded by regional bodies and neighboring countries, with the support of international actors. For instance, the talks, aimed at resolving the ongoing conflict, have been led by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which was behind the successful mediation efforts that gave birth to the

¹ The Sudd Institute acknowledges the financial support provided by United Nations Development Program (UNDP) through its Community Security and Arms Control Program.

² This is the Sudan before the secession of Southern Sudan in July 2011.

2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that brought an end to the war between the former Sudan government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). A Compromise Agreement was recently signed by President Salva Kiir and Dr Riek Machar, the leader of Sudan People's Movement/Army in Opposition, but the fighting has not stopped throughout the country.

Representatives of the CSOs and faith-based groups took part in efforts to restore peace to the country but this happened after lobbying and campaigning by the groups themselves, as well as a result of an international pressure. Obviously, their engagement has amounted to less than what is expected of them. The main reasons for this have been the negative stance of the warring parties, who have been bent on influencing the outcome of the talks to their advantage, and the weaknesses of the CSOs themselves. A CSO civil society paper made a telling observation about the stance of the government as follows:

Politics of the day however did not allow room for compromise on peace building and state building issues with any other stakeholders except those internal actors that wielded military power and have the potential of destabilizing the territorial authority and control of the government (Wani 2015: 16).

Nonetheless, there is potential for these groups to play a more active role in reconciling communities after the guns have fallen silent in the country and to restore trust and normal relations. The CSOs are close to ordinary people, and hence are more trusted than other groups, particularly government and opposition authorities.

To fully understand the role of the CSO and faith-based groups in peace-making and reconciliation it is helpful to look back at significant peace processes and reconciliation efforts that have taken place to solve the country's conflicts, particularly those in which these groups have taken part. This enables analysts and policy-makers to identify weaknesses that undermine the CSOs' role. Accordingly, the paper focuses on the role of the CSOs and faith-based organizations in the settlement of major and local conflicts that have thus far afflicted South(ern)³ Sudan.

The next section of the analysis briefly examines how the CSOs are defined and the key roles that they play. This is followed by a discussion of peace and reconciliation processes or initiatives in which the CSOs have played a significant role. Section four tackles the weaknesses that hinder active participation of the CSOs in peace and reconciliation efforts. The last section concludes the analysis.

2. Concept and Role of the CSOs

The term Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) does not have a common meaning. Chambers and Kopstein (2001: 854) rightly point out that, "civil society can be many things to many people". Nonetheless, many people perceive it as a societal realm different from "both 'economic society' (companies and co-operatives) and 'political society' (parties and parliament), and the political

³ Southern Sudan was part of the now defunct Sudan, and South Sudan is the new country born in July 2011.

role of civil society is limited to the generation of ‘influence’ in democratic associations and the public sphere” (see Goodwin, Pettit and Pogge 1996: 458).

The CSOs comprise a broad range of organizations or institutions, with the formal ones being the NGOs, trade unions and church bodies, and the informal being the networks and mutual support groups. They enable citizens to freely exercise their rights as guaranteed by the constitution and other laws, for example, by meeting to advocate for their interests, volunteering to forward a valued cause, or protesting a government policy (South Sudan NGO Forum 2014: 1). There are not less than 200 CSOs, comprising community-based organizations, national NGOs, business unions, farmers associations, faith-based organizations, media organizations, and advocacy groups, operating in South Sudan (ibid). They work at different levels, particularly national and community, and on a range of issues.

For a new country like South Sudan, which is heavily involved in peacebuilding and statebuilding processes, the importance of the CSOs cannot be overemphasized. The CSOs “have nuanced local knowledge and networks” which enable them to “provide more accurate assessment of conflict dynamics in a particular region” and to play “an important role in early warning of crises” (Persinger 2014). Moreover, many of them are actively providing services in collaboration with international organizations, filling a gap that governmental action has been unable to address due to lack of resources or neglect. Notably, when the country relapsed into violence in December 2013, local CSOs, such as HealthLink, Theso, Nile Hope, and faith-based groups responded to the needs of victims.

Participation of the CSOs in service delivery is often accepted, even encouraged, by government authorities. However, the necessary actions often aimed at fostering citizenry participation in policymaking and governance, are not always readily embraced by government authorities. In some fragile states, including South Sudan, “governments are hesitant to include civil society actors as partners, and some are wary of civil society’s efforts to hold them accountable” (Fairhurst and Wall 2014).

It is worth noting, however, that all CSOs do promote or support peaceful relations or work for the public good. Indeed, a group of scholars has written persuasively about “Bad Civil Society,” by which they imply that some groups have some attributes of the CSOs but also promote negative stances, for example, spreading hate against other peoples or groups (Chambers and Kopstein 2001). Indeed, a civil society “can be the home of dangerous illiberal elements” (ibid: 845). Such groups, according to the authors, often promote particularistic civility at the expense of democratic civility.

It is helpful to be careful about the activities of “dangerous illiberal elements”, particularly in a fragile country going through war. The climate of war and desperation is ideal for groups that champion particularistic ethnic interests. As the two authors rightly point out, “dissatisfied citizens may turn to groups that appear to offer answers to their frustrations but in fact offer only scapegoats” (ibid 856). The scapegoats may be ethnic groups that are blamed for all that went wrong in a country.

3. CSO engagement in peace processes

The CSOs have played varying roles in the peace processes that ended wars that afflicted the country from the time it was a region within the former Sudan. This section explores the engagement of the CSOs in the peace processes led by regional bodies, as well as those intended to reconcile groups or communities.

3.1. Regionally- mediated peace talks

3.1.1. Addis Ababa 1972

The 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement ended the 17-year war between the former Sudanese regimes and the Southern Sudan-based Anyanya rebellion. The negotiations took place in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, with the support of the then Ethiopian leader, Emperor Halle Salasie, who acted as the guarantor of the Agreement. It was, however, the World Council of Churches that played a pivotal role in brokering the Agreement, the result of which was peace in the country for about 10 years.

After the return of peace, many CSOs entered the Southern region to support returnees and development projects, as well as reconciliation efforts. This intervention proved crucial for creating a situation of normalcy at a time when the country was facing financial hardships and relying mainly on American largesse. Actually, in the Southern region “foreign agencies took over many of the functions of local government, including education, health, veterinary care, water provision, agricultural extension, road building and the like” (De Waal 1997: 29). The period of peace and development came to an abrupt end in 1983, when President Jaafar Nimeiri dishonored the key tenets of the Agreement and the second rebellion ensued.

3.1.2. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) 2005

The CPA was negotiated between the government of former Sudan, under Omer el Bashir, and the SPLM/A, under Dr. John Garang. The IGAD, with support of the USA and other Western Countries, mediated the Agreement. The negotiations were essentially bilateral, and hence excluded many interest stakeholders. The CSOs did not have a direct and significant role in the process that led to the agreement.

In general, however, the Sudan Ecumenical Forum supported the search for peace and reconciliation in the country. Other CSOs also played some role in supporting the implementation of the agreement, which was not an easy task as Khartoum was determined not to carry out all that was required of it.

In particular, the CSOs play a key role in the conduct of the January 2011 Referendum, which led to the independence of the country six months later (Moro 2013). Churches and affiliated groups as well as women and youth groups mobilized the Southern Sudanese people to vote. For example, a youth group called Youth for Separation organized large crowds in Juba in support of the referendum, which went smoothly. Then, the activism door was wide open, as the government was solidly behind the successful conduct of this exercise. After independence of the country, this door began to narrow. As attention of citizens turned to how the new country was being run, the attitude of the government hardened against people and groups that questioned the performance of leaders. Appeals to the country’s leaders by influential individuals, including

prominent church personalities, to steer the country away from imminent violent conflict in late 2013, fell on deaf ears. In December, the split of the SPLM/A happened and the country descended into violence. The attitude of people in government further hardened in the midst of the fighting and the “space” for the CSOs to carry out activities further narrowed.

3.1.3. Compromise Agreement 2015

In recent times, the CSOs and faith-based groups have not done much to restore peace to the country. Indeed, the South Sudan Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches acknowledged this as follows:

The Church has always been an instrument of peace and played a major role in bringing about the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972 and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, but recently the council of churches has been less effective. Now SSCC has new leadership and a fresh commitment from the heads of churches, and hereby announces to the people of South Sudan and the world that it is determined once again to take a leading role in bringing peace to South Sudan (World Council of Churches 2015).

The process that led to the Compromise Agreement, spearheaded by IGAD, did not significantly involve the CSOs. Actually, the CSOs were reluctantly allowed to take part in the peace process by the warring parties.

3.2. Grassroots Peace and Reconciliation Efforts

The CSOs and faith-based organizations do serve as links between national leaders and international actors, helping to pass relevant information and hence fostering peacebuilding and reconciliation. They can lessen local tensions by acting on problems affecting local communities, which are often neglected by their own leaders. Thus, the CSOs can play an important role in implementing peace efforts done at the national level, as well as addressing local conflicts.

CSOs and faith-based organizations have an advantage in grassroots peacebuilding because they have local knowledge and also are aware of the hindrances to reconciliation. Many of them are part of the local communities and hence are trusted by them.

In South Sudan, the CSOs have indeed done a lot for the cause of peace and reconciliation as violence has disrupted normal community relations. Many communities have been sucked into violent confrontations, fuelling inter- and intra- ethnic distrust. Even traditional authorities that used to play key roles in reducing local tensions have been disoriented by violence, and in some cases have become parties to violence. Instead of promoting peaceful relations among their communities, some of them have actively mobilized young people to attack other groups. This section covers some of the notable peace initiatives in which the CSOs and faith-based groups have played significant roles.

3.2.1. Wunlit peace process

In the past, the Dinka and Nuer fought each other over resources, such as grazing areas and water points. These normally lasted only for a few days, and were peacefully resolved through traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. During the second war, however, conflicts between

the two ethnicities acquired political overtones and hence became intractable and more deadly. These local conflicts were exploited in Khartoum by those who wanted to further their political and military ambitions, including defeating the SPLM/A following its split in 1991, and spreading death and destruction in Southern Sudan.

One faction, led by Dr John Garang, was dominated by his ethnic Dinka and the other faction, led by Dr Riek Machar, was mostly made up of his ethnic Nuer. Civilians from both sides suffered unprecedented violence that local leaders on both sides were unable to resolve for many years.

The New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC) became heavily involved in efforts to reconcile the Dinka and Nuer communities by engaging their traditional leaders, women and youth in dialogue. In these ethnic groups, traditional leaders have a particularly vital role in the security of their communities, including protecting their people from violence by talking to their enemies.

In 1999, the NSCC, with the support of the SPLM/A, facilitated the Wunlit Dinka-Nuer Conference. It brought together traditional leaders, women and youth from six Dinka and Nuer counties on the West Bank of the Nile. In total, 360 delegates, 180 from Dinka and the same number from Nuer, were formally invited for the conference. These were accompanied by advisors and others, bringing the total number of over 1,000 representatives together (Kundu 2003: 20). Local administrators, security functionaries, and international observers also took part in the conference. During the proceedings traditional rites and Christian practices were conducted.

After five days, the Wunlit Covenant/Agreement was concluded. This restored peace to the war wary communities. Moreover, some people have argued that the reunification of the factions led by Dr John and Dr Riek in 2002 was made possible because of the Wunlit spirit (ibid: 28).

3.2.2. Current Dinka and Nuer elders reconciliation efforts

It is not known whether what happened in Wunlit can be repeated in the present time. Since December 2013, the Dinka-Nuer relations have been severely strained due to mutual attacks on each other. The hostility was seemingly sparked off by death of an unknown number of Nuer in Juba following the December 2013 political violence. In retaliation, Dinka civilians were killed in Nuer areas. The attacks mirrored the massacres of the 1990s, which followed the first split of the SPLM/A that occurred in 1991. As discussed already, the New Sudan Council of Churches led the process, which ended in the reconciliation between the two groups after years of animosities.

There have been attempts by elders from both groups to reconcile their peoples. This year, the former President of Kenya, Arap Moi, convened a meeting of leaders from Dinka and Nuer ethnicities in his home in Nairobi, and they reportedly agreed to work for peace.⁴ The fighting, however, has not ended and so it remains to be seen if the elders' efforts will bear fruits. In the long run, it might be a risky strategy to focus on groups that promote the particularistic interests of their groups in a country blessed with many ethnicities. The excluded groups might view the

⁴ See Sudan rival tribes seal deal, agree to merge. <https://saakam.wordpress.com/2015/06/13/south-sudan-rivals-tribes-seal-deal-agree-to-merge/>

two groups with suspicion, which undermines nation-building. Perhaps the focus should be on inclusive groups that have members from different ethnicities.

3.2.3. *Other community based efforts*

There are CSOs that are engaged in peacebuilding and reconciliation among local groups. Some of them have done good work. For example, in Nimule, an organization called Reconcile organized workshops to lessen tensions between local Madi and Dinka people. The Madi harbor several grievances against the Dinka including the danger Dinka cattle pose to crops, disrespect of customary norms and institutions, and human rights abuses (Shanmugaratnum 2014).

4. **Hindrances to effective engagement**

4.1. *Interference by the authorities*

The CSOs often operate in highly polarized and politicized settings. In times of violent conflicts, the warring parties do all they can to compel the CSOs to reflect their views. This is what is actually taking place in South Sudan as violence continues despite ceasefires. The government has piled pressure on CSOs operating in the country to comply with its wishes. The NGO bill, which had been neglected for some time, was quickly rushed into law in May 2015, raising fears that some CSOs will face reprisals in the country.

As mentioned earlier, the space for the CSOs to carry out activities has significantly narrowed since violence resumed in the country. This has had negative impacts on groups and individuals. The difficulty that befell a leader of the South Sudan Civil Society Alliance is a case in point. On 24 November 2015, the government organized the National Consultative Conference to solicit the views of stakeholders about the IGAD-led peace process. Some 250 people, drawn from the three branches of government, academia, political parties and civil society, reportedly attended. However, reportedly 15 opposition parties stayed away from the gathering.

During the meeting, the Chairman of the South Sudan Civil Alliance, Deng Athuai Mawir, criticized both parties to the conflict, and called for an immediate signing of a peace agreement. He alleged that the sons of President Salva Kiir and former Vice President and leader of the armed rebellion, Dr Riek Machar, were not engaged in fighting while children of other people were dying. In response, President Salva Kiir said that:

I cannot talk on behalf of Riek Machar on what you allegedly said that I have no child in Mathiang Anyoor and no child for rebel leader Riek Machar in white army that are fighting, but I want to assure you before all these people that I have my son in SPLA conquers unit not logistics (Ariath 2014: 1).

Shortly after the conference, some members of the Alliance made moves to oust Deng Athuai from the chairmanship of the Alliance. Moreover, some CSOs activists, including Deng Athuai, have been harassed by the South Sudan National Security organization or targeted by unknown people. Some newspapers and other media outlets have faced ban orders. A number of journalists have been detained. The most recent action was directed at the biggest and best known independent newspaper, *The Citizen*, which was forced out of circulation. In exasperation, the editor in chief of the paper, Nhial Bol, declared that he had quit journalism and would

embark on other pursuits that hopefully would not antagonize the government. In a letter to the Association for Media Development in South Sudan, which was published in the *Juba Monitor*, he stated that the decision serves two purposes: notable reduction in tension with security agencies and to save his life from possible risk (*Juba Monitor* 2015: 3).

Indeed, journalists have increasingly come under pressure in South Sudan. Since the country was born, seven journalists have reportedly lost their lives (Opio 2015: 3). The latest victim, Moi Peter Julius, was gunned down in the night of 19 August 2015, near his home in Hai Golomoy area of Juba (BBC 2015). No one has so far been arrested, and there is no hope the perpetrators of the crime will face justice as the country is not known for tracking down on and apprehending assassins. In fact, an assassination of a prominent freelance journalist, Isaiah Diing Abraham Chan Awuol, in the night of 5 December 2012, remains unsolved, even though the United States of America FBI was involved in the case (Committee to Protect Journalists 2012).

4.2. Inadequate capacity

In fragile states, such as South Sudan, a lack of resources and institutional capacity impedes the ability of local civil society actors to participate fully in peacebuilding activities (Fairhurst and Wall 2014: 1). Most CSOs look to donors, international organizations and other foreigners for financial support, which is not always guaranteed.

Unfortunately, the donors have been preoccupied with building the capacity of government institutions. In the past, for example, they set up pooled funding mechanisms to support the building of the capacity of government institutions but a special funding arrangement was not established for the CSOs. Most of the funding that benefited the CSOs was for specific projects, and not for long-term capacity building. As a result, local CSOs have been weak and vulnerable.

5. Conclusion

As part of the former Sudan, South Sudan experienced many violent conflicts. Because of this history, it also has a good experience dealing with peacebuilding programming. Often, the peace processes to end major wars, including the ongoing one, have been spearheaded by regional bodies, particularly the IGAD and AU, with the support of global powers. The CSOs and Faith-based engagements with these processes have been insignificant. However, these groups have been more active and successful in promoting reconciliation at community levels. A notable CSOs-led peacebuilding effort was the 1999 Wunlit Peace Conference that reconciled the Dinka and Nuer after eight years of hostilities in the 1990s.

There are two major explanations for the poor participation of the CSOs in ending the big wars. First, the warring parties are often opposed to robust involvement of the CSOs in peace processes, preferring to cut deals among themselves. For example, in the current peace process to end the fighting that broke out in Juba in December 2013, the government and the armed opposition have been keen to confine the talks to their members and groups allied to them. The CSOs got only involved after externally concerted campaign and pressure.

Secondly, the CSOs are weak and vulnerable and therefore are not able to actively participate in peace processes. After the signing of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the CSOs

became even weaker, as some of the prominent activists were absorbed into the government. Moreover, the Government of Southern was tolerant to the CSOs' involvement in service delivery and not political engagement. The space for the CSOs to conduct their activities, especially those dealing with governance issues, became narrower following the resumption of fighting in December 2013.

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