



THE SUDD INSTITUTE

RESEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL, JUST AND PROSPEROUS SOUTH SUDAN

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The Dialogue Brief

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The National Dialogue Strategy

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Summary

This concept paper outlines some of the principal elements involved in promoting peace, unity, reconciliation and a shared sense of national identity, the overriding goals of the National Dialogue. The National Dialogue is an opportunity to address the complex web of conflicts afflicting South Sudan through a top-down-bottom-up process that links the national, regional, and the grassroots levels of the interconnected conflicts. Achieving the National Dialogue's goal requires reinforcing and strengthening traditional authorities whose ability to contribute to the maintenance of law and order and to the security and stability of the country at the grassroots level, has long been tested.

The Dialogue's Steering Committee needs to be assisted by resource persons to carry out consultations with stakeholders at these levels and to report to the National Conference which will then prepare an integrated report to the President for the final submission to Parliament for adoption and implementation in collaboration with the Executive.

Thus, the National Dialogue should aim at both ending armed conflicts with a sense of urgency and creating an on-going process aimed at engendering and sustaining a culture of Dialogue that is in conformity with the traditional African method of preventing, managing, and resolving conflicts and fostering reconciliation. Thus, the following recommendations are in order.

- *Commit to undertaking the National Dialogue as an opportunity to genuinely address the root causes of the crises afflicting the country and to consider with sincerity and credibility its recommendations;*
- *Undertake to fully implement the recommendations of the National Dialogue that make a legitimate and credible case for the reform and transformation of the system toward a more appropriate, contextualized and effective form of governance that might require major changes in the current system;*
- *Embark on a national campaign aimed at:*
 - *informing the public to ensure inclusivity, credibility, and transparency of the National Dialogue process and the commitment of the Government to consider its implications with the clear objective of serving the overriding interest of the nation;*

- *challenging communities to serve as agents of the required transformation, by owning the resolutions of the National Dialogue, and assisting in their implementation; and*
 - *identifying creative ways to harness internal resources, as part of a collective responsibility, to rescue their country and set it on a new path of socio-economic recovery and development.*
- *Engage and impress upon the international community the sincere commitment of the Government to the principles of inclusivity, credibility, and transparency of the National Dialogue process and its determination to give its recommendations serious consideration for credible implementation, and evidencing that commitment through a methodology of outreach, data collection and analysis that engages the public and unlocks their full participation.*

1. Introduction

The overriding goal of the proposed National Dialogue is to promote peace, national unity, equitable socio-economic development, and a shared sense of national purpose. To achieve this objective, it is essential to identify the underlining causes of the prevailing discord, confrontation and violent conflicts. As the President observed in the Concept Note on this initiative, “National Dialogue is both a forum and a process through which the people of South Sudan shall gather to redefine the basis of their unity as it relates to nationhood, redefine citizenship and belonging, restructure the state, regenerate social contract, and revitalize their aspirations for development and membership in the world of nations.”

While the details are bound to be more complex, it is safe to assume that these issues have much to do with identity conflicts and the challenges they pose for managing diversity constructively. Identity is an important element of self-awareness and solidarity with members of a kindred group. It is both objective in the sense that it is based on discernable factors, such as ethnicity or region. But it is also subjective in that it is what people believe themselves to be, rather than what they are objectively, that counts the most. Identity can also be inclusive and accommodating, or exclusive and intolerant. Whether it is objective or subjective, inclusive or exclusive, identity must be taken seriously. As the President stated affirmatively in his address to the nation, “no grievances will be left unaddressed in this process of national dialogue.”

While ethnicity as such is not a source of conflict, it offers opportunities for ambitious politicians to mobilize support and rally masses on the basis of ethnic solidarity and shared sense of grievances. These alleged grievances could be objective in the sense that they are well founded or subjective in that they reflect the feelings and perceptions that may not be supported by objective facts or based on unfounded assumptions and misinformation. In either case, they need to be addressed, whether by responding to genuine grievances or by correcting misperceptions and distortions.

2. Principles of Governance

The principles of Governance that are currently applicable in South Sudan, as in most independent African countries, were inherited from the colonial rulers and reflected in constitutions that were imposed upon them at independence. These principles derived primarily from Western experience and embodied norms that were based on assumptions of significant racial, ethnic, and cultural homogeneity. They also represented ideals of democracy and fundamental liberties to which the colonial rulers themselves did not adhere, being essentially authoritarian and dictatorial. African principles of governance, which rested on autonomy, dialogue, persuasion and consensus building, were never observed. The colonial rulers, in particular the British in the Sudan, however, used indirect rule as an inexpensive means of maintaining peace, security and stability, but as a separate and isolated system that did not feature as part of the modernizing national political framework. This system did not treat all groups equitably; some groups were more privileged, while others were marginalized or ignored.

At independence, African Governments, fearful of ethnic diversity as a threat to the fragile unity of the infant nations, and in order to prioritize national unity and social and economic development, suppressed diversity, centralized governance, and postponed civil liberties and respect for human rights as luxuries the new states could not afford. Access to central power became the principal means of receiving services, employment opportunities and socio-economic development projects. Once the uniting objective of the independence movement was removed, the struggle for central power and national resources and services ensued, in some cases resulting in armed struggle for justice or independence from what was perceived as internal colonialism. Such was the case in the Sudan.

3. South Sudan's Liberation Struggle

The conflict in the Sudan essentially reflected an acute crisis of national identity. The core of the crisis was twofold. First, the dominant group, a hybrid African-Arab race, perceived itself as Arab and reinforced that self-perception with an extreme version of Islam that was exclusive and discriminating. Second, this distorted self-perception was then imposed on the country as the national identity framework, despite the immense racial, ethnic religious and cultural diversity of the country.

The struggle of South Sudan was for equality of citizenship and non-discrimination on any grounds, including race, ethnicity, religion, culture and gender. This was essentially a struggle for freedom, fundamental rights, civil liberties, and human dignity for all. If this was not possible within a united New Sudan, as stipulated by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and Army, SPLM/A, then the right of self-determination amounting to independence was the obvious alternative. This is what led to the independence of South Sudan.

4. The Legacy of Independence

The legacy and indeed the challenge of South Sudan's struggle are to build on the ideals for which the people fought and sacrificed so much for half a century and even longer. This means guarding against the causes of conflict that had torn Sudan apart. It is obvious that South Sudan does not have the elements of diversity that were at the core of Sudan's conflict of identities, since South Sudanese are not divided by race, ethnicity, culture or intolerant approach to religion. But identity can also be relative and can be reflected in various social configuration, including tribe, lineage, or family. These factors must also be put into consideration in managing diversity constructively. As the President stated in his address to the nation, "All my colleagues and I fought for this country, not to tear it apart, but to preserve its unity, guarantee its economic viability, and ensure enduring freedom and equality for its people."

It also requires designing a system of governance that is based on the indigenous cultural values and institutions of the People of South Sudan. The indigenous societies of South Sudan are among the most studied by anthropologists in the world. These societies are widely recognized as segmentary, acephalous, decentralized, self-governing and fiercely antagonistic to centralized authoritarian rule. Every group is exceedingly proud and resistant to domination. It is a society in which dictatorship cannot succeed.

5. The Challenge of Endogenous Governance

Given these fundamental principles of endogenous governance, the choice the people of South Sudan must make is whether to build their nation on the governance and constitutional principles that have been applied by African countries, with varying degrees of successes and failures, or to design an original system that is founded on the realities of the South Sudanese societies. Either choice will require creativity and hard work to make it effective and sustainable. It is also possible to build a hybrid system that is based on integrating elements of both, tailored to the particular needs of South Sudan.

6. Guidelines for Implementation

On the assumption that the current conflicts in the country are based on real or perceived grievances of the people of South Sudan at various levels of National Governance, the proposed National Dialogue must design a strategy of implementation that will entail gathering and processing information from targeted groups at all levels, from the grass roots up the governmental hierarchy to the national level. As the President outlined in both the Concept Note and the address to the nation, National Dialogue will be conducted at three interrelated levels, stages, or phases. The first phase will entail grassroots consultations aimed at mapping out and addressing grievances that are particular to each community or group. The second phase will be at the regional level to address and resolve inter-communal conflicts. The third and final phase will involve convening a national conference to tackle national issues not addressed and resolved at the first two levels. The implementation process should entail the following steps:

- Identifying grievance-bearing or interest groups whose views are to be solicited;
- Selecting resource people who will conduct focused group discussions;

- Deploying the resource people to conduct the field investigations at the various levels of the governance structure, from local to national;
- Submitting the reports of the resource people to the Steering Committee for consideration;
- Preparing the reports of the Steering Committee with recommendations for submission to the National Conference, which then gets submitted to the President;
- Finalizing the report of the Presidency for submission to the Parliament for endorsement;
- Launching a national campaign to explain the process and the outcome to the people of South Sudan; and
- Embarking on a diplomatic initiative to explain the National Dialogue process and its outcomes to regional and international partners.

7. Prioritizing the Goal and Objectives

While the above measures are generic to the implementation of the National Dialogue in general, the overriding goals and specific objectives of the National Dialogue should be prioritized and placed at the top of the agenda to resolve the current violence that is tearing the country apart. This requires engaging the key parties to the conflict, in particular the Government, the opposition in its various configurations, and those communities most affected by the conflict. The second order of priority would be engagement with the wider South Sudanese populace in its more inclusive configuration at all levels to broaden the basis of peace. The third order of priority would be a longer term search for a system of governance and constitutionalism that promotes an inclusive national identity framework, durable peace, unity and harmony, social cohesiveness, solidarity in nation building, and the pursuit of socio-economic development as a process of self-enhancement from within.

To summarize the process, the Steering Committee will need to employ teams of resource people who will go to all the States, Counties, Payams and Bomas to organize meetings with representatives of the relevant groups to seek their views on the grievances held by their people. These alleged grievances could be classified into those that are reasonably well founded and need to be effectively addressed, and those that are based on perceptions and misinformation that should be corrected. The results of these discussion groups would then be reported to the Steering Committee, which will then filter and summarize them for presentation and discussion by the larger Dialogue Committee. The process will end with recommendations that will be presented to the National Leadership, under the Presidency and Parliament, for final adoption.

8. External Outreach

Although the proposed strategy is essentially domestic, it is important to bear in mind that foreign policy is an extension of domestic policy. This means that reaching out to regional and international actors or partners should build on representing and promoting a

positive domestic agenda as a basis for gaining support and cooperation from regional and international actors.

South Sudan was a major beneficiary of regional and international support for its independence and cooperation in addressing the security and development needs of the new country. However, since the outbreak of hostilities in 2013, and the renewed hostilities in 2016, South Sudan is being scrutinized and criticized for the conflict and its devastating humanitarian and human rights consequences. This has resulted in tensions and confrontations that threaten to turn former allies and friends into foes.

But South Sudan has nothing to gain from hostile relations with regional and international actors and much to gain from cooperation and partnership. As the President noted in his address to the nation, we should remember that “the International Community always stood by us. Therefore, we cannot turn our own frustrations into hatred against them. As friends, we must work together with them in the spirit of building our nation.” The President also appealed to the International Community to support the Government, National Dialogue efforts, and the entire peace implementation process. The first challenge for South Sudan is to acknowledge that despite the partitioning of the Sudan, South Sudan and Sudan remain bound together in various ways. One of these are the historical ties that cannot be totally obliterated. Another is that there are unresolved issues that relate to the sharing of long borders, and internal conflicts that spill over these borders and involve support for each other’s rebel groups. The on-going confrontation and conflict between the two countries need to be reversed in favor of cooperation and some form of close association.

South Sudan also needs to improve relations with its neighbors and the international community generally. Building foreign relations on the basis of domestic policies means that strategies aimed at promoting peace, security, stability and development should reverse the negative attitude and foster regional and international support and partnership. The National Dialogue process and its positive outcomes should provide a basis for restoring confidence in the country and promoting cooperation and partnership with regional and international actors.

9. Concluding Comments

As indicated in the President’s statement to the nation, National Dialogue is not only a forum with specific objectives and outcomes that can be acted upon immediately, but also an ongoing process aimed at continuously fostering peace, security, stability and prosperity for the people of South Sudan.

These reflections present opportunities for discussion by those involved in organizing and directing the National Dialogue process. They are broad principles that can be debated, reformulated or changed, as appropriate, to serve the fundamental goal of the National Dialogue process. While the debate continues, the following recommendations could be used to innovate the process.

- Commit to undertaking the National Dialogue as an opportunity to genuinely address the root causes of the crises afflicting the country and to consider with sincerity and credibility its recommendations;
- Undertake to fully implement the recommendations of the National Dialogue that make a legitimate and credible case for reforms and transformation of the system toward a more appropriate, contextualized and effective form of governance that might require major changes in the current system;
- Embark on a national campaign aimed at:
 - informing the public to ensure inclusivity, credibility, and transparency of the National Dialogue process and the commitment of the Government to consider its implications with the clear objective of serving the overriding interest of the nation, and
 - challenging communities to serve as agents of the required transformation, by owning the resolutions of the National Dialogue, and assisting in their implementation, and
 - identifying creative ways to harness internal resources, as part of a collective responsibility, to rescue their country and set it upon a new path of socio-economic recovery and development;
- Engage and impress upon the international community the sincere commitment of the Government to the principles of inclusivity, credibility, and transparency of the National Dialogue process and its determination to give its recommendations serious consideration for credible implementation, and evidencing that commitment through a methodology of outreach, data collection and analysis that fully engages the public, and unlocks their whole participation.

About Sudd Institute

The Sudd Institute is an independent research organization that conducts and facilitates policy relevant research and training to inform public policy and practice, to create opportunities for discussion and debate, and to improve analytical capacity in South Sudan. The Sudd Institute's intention is to significantly improve the quality, impact, and accountability of local, national, and international policy- and decision-making in South Sudan in order to promote a more peaceful, just and prosperous society.

Author's Biography

Francis M. Deng has recently been assigned the position of South Sudan's Roving Ambassador after having been the country's first Permanent Representative to the United Nations. Prior to that, he served for five years as the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide at the level of Under-Secretary-General. From 1992 to 2004, he served as Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons. His first position in the United Nations was that of Human Rights Officer in the Secretariat from 1967 to 1972 when he was appointed Sudan's Ambassador

to the Nordic Countries. He was also Sudan's Ambassador to Canada and the United States of America and was also Minister of State for Foreign Affairs for five years. After leaving his Government's service, he held a series of positions in leading think tanks and universities in the United States. Dr. Deng graduated with an LLB (honors) from the University of Khartoum to which he was appointed member of the Law Faculty and then sent abroad for post-graduate studies. He holds an LLM and a JSD from Yale University Law School. Dr. Deng has authored and edited over thirty books in a wide variety of fields and has written two novels on the crisis of national identity in the Sudan.