

Local initiatives for peace in southern Sudan and the support given to those by outsiders

Mathijs van Leeuwen

Pax Christi Netherlands
Wageningen Disaster Studies

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1. Introduction: support to local initiatives for peace

This paper is about local peace building initiatives in southern Sudan.¹ Southern Sudan has been ravaged by half a century of civil war, of which the latest phase started in 1983. While the southern resistance movement SPLM/A aimed to bring down the central government in Khartoum, the insurgency has been plagued by factionalism and the split-off of diverse militia. At community level, apart from the suffering inflicted upon the people in the South as a result of those divisions, local conflicts have flared up. Those include inter-ethnic, or inter-factional conflicts, and conflicts about resources; between communities, or between displaced and local populations. A number of indigenous organizations have taken up the challenge to address such conflicts at community and regional level, therein supported by a variety of international agencies. There are many questions about the support given to such initiatives. In how far indeed may they contribute to peace at local level? And if so, how best to support them? What to expect of the contribution of women initiatives in particular towards peace?

Over the last ten years, there is increasing attention for the role of civil society in peace building and reconciliation (OECD/DAC 1997). In a changing world, in which most conflict now is of an intra-state nature, conventional methods for building peace no longer apply. Where state institutions have broken down or take part in inflicting violence, civil society actors' contribution to conflict resolution is seen as essential. Moreover, in mainstream thinking peace is increasingly defined as something more than the absence of war. Peace should be sustainable, it should include conditions for the prevention of future conflict, and relate to issues such as development and justice (see Hilhorst & Frerks 1999). As a result, international funding and development organizations have put civil society and organizations working on peace high on their agenda. In this, special attention is given to initiatives taken by women. Sometimes this attention stems from the idea that women are more interested in peace than men; in other cases a particular interest for women is motivated by an observed lack of involvement of women and representation of women issues in peace processes.

So far, there is little insight in the sustainability of civil society initiatives for peace building, and in particular the role of women. Overt support to, or cynicism about the contribution of peace-NGOs, and women peace initiatives in particular, is often based on generalized notions about the position of civil society vis-à-vis conflict, and the role women would and could play in local peace processes. There

¹ This paper is the result of a research implemented between November 2000 and December 2003, and is based on a ten months stay in Kenya and Sudan in 2001, and short visits in 2002 and 2003. I am very grateful to Pax Christi the Netherlands that offered me a part-time contract in 2001, thereby tremendously facilitating the research work. I am also very grateful to the 'Stichting Nationaal Erfgoed Hotel de Wereld', that gave me a research grant to cover additional expenses in Sudan and Kenya, and to enable the writing of this paper. I am very much indebted to the women of the Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace, with whom I worked, lived, and experienced southern Sudan. In particular, I would like to mention the women of Narus and Mapel, and Dolly Anek Odwong. I am also most grateful for the valuable comments on my work and moral support by Thea Hilhorst and Georg Frerks of Wageningen Disaster Studies, as well as for the commitment from and company of Yvonne Heselmans and Edwin Ruigrok of Pax Christi. All these organisations and people have extended invaluable assistance to this research. However, the mistakes, lines of argument, and conclusions are my own. Correspondence regarding this paper can be addressed to: Wageningen Disaster Studies, P.O. Box 8130, 6700 EW Wageningen. Email: Disaster.studies@alg.asnw.wau.nl

is also little knowledge about the effectiveness and sustainability of the support given by outsiders to those initiatives. This paper looks into the opportunities and constraints of local initiatives for peace and their contribution to the resolution of conflict at the local level, with a particular focus on women initiatives. Secondly, it seeks to explore in what ways outsiders could provide meaningful contributions to such initiatives. The research focuses on the case of local initiatives for peace in southern Sudan, and in particular on the Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace, a Sudanese NGO.

In discussions at an international level one often talks of 'local capacities for peace', thereby referring to those efforts for building bridges between polarised groups, promoting dialogue and reconciliation. These may be initiatives of human rights networks, peace activist groups and independent media organisations, but also of community and religious leaders, traditional bearers of authority, trade unions, or professional associations (Development Assistance Committee, 1997). The term 'capacities' refers to certain dispositions of a community, which continue to provide continuity with non-war life and between people that have now been divided by conflict. Those may include shared markets and infrastructure, shared historical experience and attitudes, associations and institutions that are aimed at maintaining peace. Local capacities for peace, in this context, may be contrasted to what may be called 'capacities for war' (see Anderson 2000). This paper focuses on deliberate efforts of particular individuals or groups to contribute to peace, and therefore will talk of local 'initiatives' instead of 'capacities'. It discusses peace initiatives directed at the local or regional level. It focuses on civil society initiatives, which includes the work of NGOs, local organizations and churches, as well as the role of resistance movements and the emerging civil authorities.

There is a large range of strategies to support such initiatives. These include supporting local peace initiatives by funding or training new approaches for dealing with local conflict, or by capacity building. Some international agencies even directly intervene, for example by organizing reconciliation activities themselves or in close co-operation with local partners. Others guarantee the follow-up of peace-agreements through providing development services. Some explicitly regard development assistance as a conflict-related instrument, as is the case in so-called 'Development-for-Peace' projects. Notwithstanding the variety of possible approaches, the overall contribution that international organizations and NGOs could make to local peace building is often seen as limited. NGOs might create humanitarian space, and serve as catalysts, facilitators and enablers. However, while NGOs may mitigate the effects of the conflict on the most vulnerable, and do something about bottom-up violence, they cannot do much about top-down violence, as they lack the diplomatic weight of government (Goodhand & Lewer 1999). Others even argue that in many situations NGOs have not enough presence to direct projects towards the more deprived groups, to create jobs to provide alternative income to fighting or to bring parties together for discussion. This leads them to argue that the most valuable contribution of international NGOs is rather to help local players (including local authorities) to carry out their roles instead of implementing their own programmes for peace (Kane 1999). Lastly, there is discussion about the timing of outsiders' interventions. Nowadays, it is acknowledged that there is not a necessary, logical, and temporal order between relief, rehabilitation and development. Such activities may occur simultaneously or be linked in other ways in nearly any phase of the conflict. Likewise, it is difficult to indicate at which precise moment peace building could start. Peace building may take place simultaneously or be linked to any phase of conflict, depending on the local context. Moreover, while peace building may be a

separate project, it is often part of a wider strategy, as in those cases where development assistance is seen as a conflict-related instrument.

In the following section, an introduction is given of the context of southern Sudan, the dynamics of conflict and international conflict-related interventions at a diplomatic level, as well as the dimensions of conflict at different levels of society. In the next section, an overview is given of what southern Sudanese actors are doing for peace at community level. Furthermore, it is explored how the circumstances in southern Sudan have influenced and influence the further development of civil society, which circumscribes what could be expected of its involvement in local peace building. Thereafter, an overview is provided of what international actors are doing to strengthen local peace building, the strategies they use and the dilemmas they are facing. The remainder of the paper presents the case of the Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace, an indigenous women and peace organization. It is an example of one local peace building initiative, and aims to put into perspective the notions about and expectations of such initiatives in southern Sudan.

The major conclusion of the paper is that -so far- local initiatives for peace in southern Sudan are fragile. As a consequence, in the short term, expectations of supporting them should not be put too high. Nonetheless, often they are the only option available. Moreover, we should not disregard the symbolic value of such initiatives. In the long term, they could win a lot from further support, especially in the form of capacity building. However, this requires more commitment –in the sense of patience, and political will- from donor agencies than displayed so far. In addition, it requires caution, as too much enthusiasm for supporting local peace initiatives may well run the risk of destroying them.

Some remarks about methodology

The material presented in this paper has been collected over the period November 2000 to December 2003. In November 2000 and from January to November 2001, the author was working as Projects assistant Kenya-Sudan for Pax Christi Netherlands, delegated to the Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace, the indigenous organization of which a case study is presented in this paper. My assignment was to assist the Nairobi management team and advise them on the implementation of its programme in the field. I also assisted in setting up a training-of-trainers programme in community theatre, as part of which I gave workshops in Narus and Mapel. In addition to my work for Pax Christi, I implemented a research for Wageningen Disaster Studies, with a research grant from the 'Stichting Nationaal Erfgoed Hotel de Wereld'. At the start of this research project, the aim was to investigate how people as a group deal with their experiences, prejudices and identity after conflict, and how they give those a place in their current live. The envisaged approach was action research, whereby Theatre For Development would be a major methodological device. However, when I started working with SWWP, it turned out that its envisaged theatre programme was not yet operational. Moreover, from conversations with officials of different local and international aid agencies I developed an interest in their ideas about local peace organizations and discussions about how to support those. Several people suggested to me that it would be interesting to do a research into the opportunities and constraints for local peace initiatives in southern Sudan. This developed into the research on which this paper is based.

In total, I stayed six weeks (several visits) in Narus (Eastern Equatoria), three weeks in Mapel (Bahr el Ghazal), and two weeks in Yei (Western Equatoria). The remaining time I spent in Kenya, about half of which in Lokichoggio, where SWWP established a logistics office. Apart from the information I obtained through working with SWWP, attending conferences and NGO meetings, and secondary material, over this period I had conversations/interviews with representatives of 27 international NGOs and UN organizations, as well as a limited number of donor representatives. In addition, I spoke to the staff of 28 Sudanese organizations, and to numerous women and men in the communities in southern Sudan.

As part of an evaluation-mission, an additional visit was brought to Bor County (Upper Nile), Lokichoggio and Nairobi in March 2002. In December 2003, as part of an assessment of the Seeds for Peace programme of the Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace on behalf of Pax Christi Netherlands a visit was brought to Isoke (Eastern Equatoria), Lokichoggio and Nairobi. Part of the assignment was to update this paper.

2. The context of local peace building in southern Sudan

For almost fifty years a civil war between the central government in Khartoum and armed opposition movements has been ravaging Sudan.² The issues over which this war is being fought are multiple and changing. The origins of the conflict may be traced to the ethno-linguistic division in the country and a long history of northern domination of the central state. The north attained a higher level of economic development in colonial times, and the south felt marginalized and victim of discrimination. Opposition from the south has been fuelled by the imposition of a northern Islamic identity and the extraction of southern resources, ranging from slave trade to natural resources: arable land, water for irrigation, and –presently most prominent- oil. Traditions of northern warlordism and violent incursions into southern areas further fuelled the conflict, while several (neighbouring) countries have entered the stage as supporters of different parties in the civil war.³

The last ten years witnessed a series of international conflict-related interventions at a diplomatic level, which remained unsuccessful. At the time of writing, a series of peace-talks that had started in July 2002 was still ongoing. Before focussing on peace building interventions at regional and local level it makes sense to have a look at the national dynamics of conflict and the diplomatic responses to those, as well as to the dimensions of conflict at lower levels.

Phases of conflict and international responses

After a period of protracted civil conflict that started in 1955, in 1972 a peace accord was reached in Addis Ababa between the northern political elite and the southern Anyanya rebel movement. This agreement granted the three southern states of Equatoria, Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile limited regional autonomy under a Southern Regional Government. Nevertheless, against a background of a deteriorating economic situation, conflicts evolved between the central government and the Southern Region about the precise location of the borders of the South and the exploitation of its resources, particularly oil (Johnson 2000). Within the Southern Region, disagreement about the allocation of government jobs led to divisions. The Equatorians started lobbying for further regionalization and the creation of a separate Equatoria region. Meanwhile, the basis of the Addis Ababa treaty eroded with extremist Islamic politicians gradually gaining access to political decision making, and urging for the introduction of Sharia law. In 1983, Khartoum's decision for the transfer of some southern army garrisons to the north and the

² To give an impression of the scale of societal destruction: at the end of 2001, it was estimated that since 1983 (when the latest phase of conflict started), 2 million people in southern and central Sudan had died as a direct result of civil war or war-related famine (US Committee for refugees). More than 4 million of southern Sudan's estimated five million population had been displaced at some time since 1983 (Veen 1999; UN 2002). At the end of 2000, there were more than half a million internally displaced people (UNICEF 2000). In 2001, approximately 440,000 Sudanese were refugees or asylum seekers (figures UNHCR).

³ The Khartoum government received support from the Soviet Union (in the early 1970s), and the USA (in the late 1970s and 1980s (Veen 1999). Over the last years, support was given by Iran, Iraq and Libya, as well as private sources in the Middle East. In the past, the southern rebel movement SPLA has been supported by Ethiopia (until 1991) and Kenya (in the early 1990s). More recently, countries such as Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Uganda supported SPLA. Israel allegedly supplied arms to the SPLA, while USA allegedly provided support to NDA and SPLA through supporting neighbouring countries (see Prendergast 1997, and Van Baarsen 2000).

subsequent abolition of the Southern Region were the triggers for a mutiny and insurgency. When the insurgents were crushed down, they fled to Ethiopia, where they formed the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA), and started incursions into southern Sudan. With this the second civil war began.

In 1985, some prospects for a more democratic system appeared when a peaceful popular uprising resulted in a military coup, and elections in 1986. Those elections were followed by an agreement between the government and the SPLA, including a cease-fire and suspension of the Sharia, which were however never implemented. Through a military coup in 1989, led by Omar el-Bashir, power got in the hands of the National Islamic Front (NIF) and the country became a dictatorship. Over the 1990s, politics in Khartoum turned more and more radical. It has been argued that religion indeed became an element in the exclusion of the southerners from the central state and hence a topic of conflict. It appeared as if the NIF Government was trying to implement a massive policy of enforced acculturation (Prendergast 1997), thereby strengthening southerners' sentiments about the efforts of earlier governments to impose northern culture.

Whereas in the end of the 1980s, the SPLA had managed to lay hands on vast areas in southern Sudan, this changed in the 1990s. With the end of the Cold War the two main contenders in the conflict largely lost their international military support, and especially the SPLA has since then been plagued by factionalism. The major split in the SPLA occurred in 1991, after the disposal of the SPLA's main supporter Mengistu of Ethiopia, and internal disagreement about what Sudan's future had to be like (see Johnson 2000, and Lesch 1998:157ff.). The major faction, SPLA-mainstream, was led by John Garang. It experienced serious losses on the battlefield, and GOS was able to recover a lot of the ground lost in the previous years. SPLA-Nasir, led by Riek Machar, established a stronghold in Central State and the neighbouring areas. A military stalemate developed: SPLA had lost a lot of its strength, but neither was GOS able to reach a final victory (van Baarsen 2000).

In 1993, a regional peace process was initiated by Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya and Uganda under protection of the regional organization IGAD (at that time, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Development, renamed in 1996 the Intergovernmental Authority on Development). SPLM/A signed up to a 'Declaration of Principles' for peace. However, the mediation process came to a deadlock in 1995. Breaking points included the principle of separation between state and religion and the rights of self-determination of southern Sudan and other marginalized areas. Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda blamed the uncompromising stance of the GOS and decided to step up support to the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), an umbrella organization uniting all northern opposition forces against the GOS. Successful military operations of SPLA in 1997, in combination with USA, EU and UN sanctions forced GOS back to the IGAD negotiation table (van de Veen 1999). Mediation talks were sponsored by the IGAD Partners Forum, a western support group for the IGAD mediation process. GOS stated that the 1994 Declaration of Principles could be taken as a starting point for further discussion, and accepted the south's right to self-determination. However, the protagonists could not agree on what precisely constituted the south geographically, and the negotiations again reached a stalemate during the course of 1998.

GOS managed to strengthen its position by concluding a peace deal with SPLA breakaway factions and by seeking rapprochement with the Eritrean government in 1999. The alliance of SPLA breakaway factions that were now on the side of GOS gradually fell apart as a result of warlord infighting over control of oil resources (van Baarsen 2000). The situation became rather hopeless for the

south. With the stepping up of the oil exploitation, and the enormous financial resources NIF was pumping into the war it was expected that this status quo could not remain for a long time (Anonymous 2001; Verney 1999). Moreover, GOS had done efforts to come closer to the western countries. A critical dialogue was started about humanitarian issues, human rights issues and resolution of the conflict (OLS 2000). The four main IGAD countries (Kenya, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Uganda) disagreed about the best overall solution for the Sudan conflict, putting the IGAD initiative at a side track. A peace initiative started by Libya and Egypt in 2000 also failed. International observers and Sudanese alike commented that for the smaller factions and militia the struggle was no longer about political ideology, but about control over natural resources and sheer survival. Many Sudanese I spoke to regarded reconciliation between the southern factions as an absolute necessity for peace: either for winning the war by fighting, or at the negotiation table.

Early 2002, the main breakaway faction SPDF, led by Riek Machar, agreed to join its military forces with the SPLM/A of John Garang. This was followed by the signing of a cease-fire agreement between the Sudanese Government and the SPLM/A in the central Nuba Mountains - a key stronghold of the movement. In July 2002, the Sudanese government and the SPLA signed a framework deal on ending the 19-year civil war. The talks are mediated by IGAD, and observed by representatives of Italy, Norway, UK, USA, African Union and the United Nations. Under the agreement southern Sudan will be able to hold a referendum on possible secession after a six-year power-sharing transitional period. For the time of the interim period, the SPLA and Sudan Armed Forces continue to exist as two separate armies. At the time of writing, remaining issues to be agreed upon were power-sharing and the future status of three conflict areas: Abyei, Nuba mountains and southern Blue Nile (Funj).

It is difficult to assess the prospects for a peace agreement between GOS and SPLM/A to become reality, and we can only speculate about the success of implementation. Pessimistic voices are afraid that signing of the agreements would result in fissures in the northern government, while others doubt that implementation will become a reality after "too many agreements dishonoured" (Alier 1990). Many argue that the peace agreement is a compromise to external pressure (in particular from the side of the US) rather than originating from below, or as a strategic move of both GOS and SPLM in an effort to strengthen their positions. It is for sure that if the agreements are signed a volatile period will start, in which government and local authorities will have to seek legitimacy from the population. Even then, the question remains if GOS will accept the outcome of a referendum if it results in a southern plea for independence.

Moreover, sadly enough, the hanging agreement between the SPLM/A and the government by no means sets an end to conflict in Sudan. The Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM/A), which has been fighting the government in the western region of Darfur since early 2002, is not involved in the deal. Apart from the fighting between SLM/A and the government forces, villages in the region are terrorised by militia locally known as Janjaweed, that have received their weapons from the army. The fighting has driven about 600,000 people from their homes. The areas along the border with Uganda continue to be plagued by insecurity caused by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Since March 2002, the Ugandan army has been fighting the LRA inside southern Sudan. Despite the fact the Government of Sudan has officially ended its support to LRA, rumours are that support continues.

Different dimensions of conflict

Over the years, the insurgence from the South and related factionalism have resulted in a complex conflict situation, manifested differently at different levels. When discussing initiatives for peace in southern Sudan, one should keep in mind those different levels and their impacts on the communities, as well as the opportunities and constraints they imply.

At the highest level is thus a conflict between the armies of GOS and the resistance movements in the east, south and west (Darfur, see below). The initiatives of IGAD and the Libyan/Egyptian initiative focused on this level of conflict. At the beginning of the millennium, GOS was in control of a series of the southern district headquarters established in the colonial period, such as Torit, Juba, Kapoeta (recaptured by SPLM/A in 2002), Wau, Malakal, Bor, Raja, and Pibor and some of the roads connecting them. The SPLM/A controlled large areas in Bahr el Ghazal (except for the utmost west), Equatoria, southern Blue Nile and the Nuba mountains and parts of Upper Nile. At the beginning of the millennium, especially Upper Nile region was divided. Large parts of the region were in hands of different political and military groups. The major one, the SPDF of Riek Machar, controlled the Nuer areas. Other areas were controlled by Nuer warlords that had been fighting each other since 1993. Midwest Upper Nile was under the command of Dr. Lam Akol's SPLM-United faction, which went over to the side of the government in 1997.

The strategy of the GOS seems to have been to grind SPLA down by undermining the population's livelihood (Christian Aid, 2000), through areal bombardments, and by fuelling the internal conflicts within the movement. This strategy of 'divide and rule' has resulted in fighting at regional level, where rebel factions and militias have received support from the government to counteract the SPLA,⁴ or to destabilize military strategic areas such as the oil fields. Since 1994, fighting between armies linked to the several rebel factions has decreased and has now become rare. Nevertheless, sections of those armies have been fighting more recently against each other, with or without support from GOS.⁵ The merger of military forces of the SPDF with those of SPLM/A in 2002, the support of SSDF to the peace process and the merger of SPLM-United with SPLM/A at the end of 2003 will further contribute to stability at the regional level.

At the local level, the widespread availability of light weapons, due to strategies to enarm split-off factions, and the overall insecurity in the Horn has contributed to the prevalence of conflict. In some case, those concern conflicts between ethnic groups or sections, which are linked to opposed factions. In others, conflicts are not related to factional divisions but concern struggles over control of resources, such as land and cattle between ethnic groups or villages, resulting from scarcity in the war situation, or conflicts between displaced people and the local population about scarce resources like land and food (Pax Christi 1999).

⁴ For example, in Chukudum county, Didinga militia under a former SPLA captain, were supported by GOS in their fighting against SPLA. GOS also supported the Ugandan rebel Lord's Resistance Army in the border areas with Uganda. In western Bahr el Ghazal, forces of the GOS army are assisted by militia from diverse local tribes and northern pastoralist groups (May 2001, 'Governance in South Sudan; The House of Nationalities')

⁵ In the oil rich areas in Western Upper Nile, militia-forces of Paulino Matip, allied with Riek Machar's SPDF, fought against SPLA-supported Peter Gadet. As a result of the fighting ten thousands of Nuer were driven to the south and west (UNICEF 2000/2001; 'Governance in South Sudan; The House of Nationalities')

Hence, even if a peace deal is brokered at the national level, this is no guarantee for peace at a local level. Likely, a national peace deal will make the local reconciliation efforts even more important than during the conflict. A 'peace and conflict analysis' mapping exercise at the end of 2002 as part of the Sudan Peace Fund (see below) has already pointed to the threat of *inter* and *intra* communal conflict to the future success of a peace agreement in Sudan. Many conflicts are likely to occur between returning refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) now occupying their properties, whom may not yet be able or not willing in the future to return home. The return of refugees and IDPs in several areas will lead to a higher pressure on the available (natural) resources. In addition, those returning from abroad to their home areas are likely to have received more education than those that stayed behind, which could lead to a situation similar to after the 1972 peace agreements, when returning Ugandan Sudanese came to occupy all the better positions. Current office holders in the local administration, many of whom have a military background, may turn out to be less qualified than returnees. The argument that positions with local organizations and authorities should be given according to qualifications will confront with (and is already confronting with) feelings about the right to positions in reward for merits in the war.

Within the SPLM at large, as well as among the commissioners in the different regions, it is being considered how to accommodate such problems. In several areas preparation for peace meetings took place, and county development programmes were developed addressing such issues, including the organizational set-up needed to implement them. Many assisting agencies are also preparing themselves how to address the particular needs that will arise. The discussion about some other sources of local conflict has only started to a limited extent. For example, those instances where IDPs will *not* want to return home. Resettlement of the internally displaced has only partly been dealt with in the peace agreement. The infighting in the movement in the early 1990s resulted in enormous movements of cattle-keepers to agricultural areas. The veterinary assistance of aid agencies contributed to the maintenance of their pastoral livelihood. To many pastoralists, their current home areas are more attractive than their original areas, and it can be expected that many of them will prefer to remain. This could result in confrontations between returnees and on-staying IDPs. In one example, returnees could not reconstruct their houses as the cattle of the IDPs had eaten all available grass. In another example, local agriculturists already announced that they would not like returning IDPs with their cattle pass through their areas.

Neither does a peace agreement settle grievances of people at the local level about injustices or atrocities committed against them during the war, by both the government and resistance movements. Negative feelings need to be reconciled, and revenge prevented. Both the government and the resistance movement will have to build trust and gain legitimacy from the local population.

The remainder of this paper will focus on the regional and the local level of conflict, and especially on southern Sudan, rather than on what happens in the north and the east. In particular, it will focus on the areas under (what was at the time of the research) SPLM/A, though the dynamics described to a certain extent apply to territories held by other movements as well.

3. Local initiatives for peace in southern Sudan

Until recently, efforts for peace building of the international community have been largely focussing on the north-south dimensions of conflict in Sudan. Attention for civil society initiatives for peace inside southern Sudan was limited, while attention for the contribution women could make to peace was even less. Over the last five years this seems to be changing: there is a growing attention for the role Sudanese civil society could play in facilitating peace in its own country. The topic of this section is the efforts of Sudanese organizations and individuals to contribute to peace building at local level. What kind of local peace building efforts may be encountered in southern Sudan and which local actors are involved? To assess the further prospects for civil society involvement in peace building we need to get an idea of how the circumstances in southern Sudan have influenced and are actually defining its further development. This is the topic of the latter half of this section.

Sudanese actors and their activities in local peace building

The Sudanese churches

Many regard the church as the major actor when it comes to local initiatives for peace in southern Sudan. The church⁶ is the most locally present institution in southern Sudan. In most initiatives for local peace churches played an important role. A well-known example is formed by the travelling peace committees sponsored by the Presbyterian Church among the Lou and Jikany sections of the Nuer population in Upper Nile (Prendergast 1997: 27). Another example forms Eastern Equatoria, where Catholic Bishop Paride Taban had been preaching reconciliation in different parts of the Diocese. In his Diocese, peace was a priority component in the mission. Since 1995, with support from CRS, co-operative societies were established in different locations, as well as schools and clinics, in response to conflicts at local level related to water points. The Diocese also facilitated a border harmonization programme sponsored by the Organization of African Unity Interafrican Bureau for Animal Resources (OAU/IBAR).

A prominent initiative among church-related initiatives for peace was the People to People Peace Process (often referred to as '4Ps') of the Kenya-based New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC), a council for both catholic and protestant churches in southern Sudan. NSCC supported the work of local inter-church organizations in most of territories in hands of the resistance movements in the south. The People to People Peace Process consisted of a series of grass-roots peace and reconciliation conferences that started with a meeting in Lokichoggio 1998 of thirty traditional leaders from Dinka and Nuer communities. This meeting resulted in a conference in Wunlit (Bahr el Ghazal) in early 1999. The Wunlit conference brought together traditional leaders, church leaders and community representatives. It resulted in an agreement for peace between Dinka and Nuer communities who had been in conflict over a number of years. It included resolutions for monitoring and maintaining peace in the future, such as the returning of properties and captives. The conference contributed to stabilization and normalization in the border area along the west bank of the Nile. Displaced Dinka and Nuer went back to their homes, and since the conference no important

⁶ Major churches in Sudan are the Catholic Church, the Episcopal Church, and the Presbyterian Church.

incidents occurred any more (OLS 2000). Observers ascribed the success of the first 4Ps Conference in Wunlit to the intense and highly participatory preparation. At the conference, traditional systems of justice were applied, as well as a cultural approach to conflict. It was the first time that traditional leaders were asked to represent their communities, instead of military leaders. An important issue behind the success of Wunlit was also the role of the SPLM/A, who had given the mandate for the talks. The movement committed itself to the resolutions of the conference (e.g. the establishment of police-posts along the borders of the communities, the supervision of traditional justice, the protection of natural resources used by both sides). The involvement of the churches was also crucial to mobilize local people for the process.

The success of the Wunlit conference led to similar conferences in other parts of the region. In the summer of 2001, a peace conference was organized in Kisumu, Kenya, to bring together the representatives of civil society along with traditional and church leaders in southern Sudan. The meeting resulted in further Nuer-Nuer peace talks and resolutions to solve their conflicts. It also called upon the factional leaders to forge unity in southern Sudan, and may have contributed to the merger of forces of SPDF and SPLM/A in January 2002. Indicative of the success was that many organizations claimed to have been involved in some way in '4Ps'.

Other actors at community level

Next to the churches, other important actors at community level are local leaders, commanders and elders, traders, and local self help groups, such as women and youth groups. It is difficult to generalize about the details and extent of their efforts. Several Sudanese and expatriates observed that as a result of war, the position of the elders to solve conflict at local level had severely eroded. In many instances, traditional peace councils were no longer able to deal with the large amount of deaths of current fighting, and the impossibilities for proper settlement and indemnity payments as a result. Yet, others argued that traditional structures are still very important for local peace. Prendergast (1997), for instance, concluded that the "most successful efforts at conflict resolution in Sudan during the past five years have been initiated by local leaders, merchants and commanders". Examples of those are initiatives of different groups of cattle keepers, living in the border area between northern and southern Sudan. As a result of the government depredations, and recruitment for the Public Defence Forces, cattle keepers from the north no longer had access to southern pasture grounds during the dry season. Among themselves, chiefs managed to negotiate peaceful movement for the northern groups into the southern grazing areas. In 1994, truces were made between different sections of the Nuer (Lau and Jikanyi) that competed over grazing and fishing right, in advance of the expected movements of people in the dry season. In that case it was a SPLA-United commander that organized the chiefs of the two groups to come together (see Prendergast 1997:80-82). Several agreements have been reached between different cattle keeping groups in the border areas of Kenya, Sudan, and Uganda. Thus, despite the erosion of traditional authority, chiefs have an important role to play in local peace building. However, there is no agreement among Sudanese intellectuals as to whether those traditional structures should be re-established and strengthened or not. The Southern Sudanese Lawyer's Association, for example, does not promote the re-establishment of the central role of elders in civil structures. NSCC, on the other hand, sees an important role for them, while many (international) NGOs use the elders to identify local needs.

Self-evidently, in many instances of local peace building, the resistance movement or its local representation (in the person of the area commander and armed forces or the local authorities) also played a role. In the first place, they were involved in the sense that they had to give permission for any activity in the areas under their control co-ordinated from outside. Often, they were the ones that were able to keep parties up to locally agreed peace resolutions. In other cases they were essential players in local conflict. Further onwards, the policies of the resistance movements regarding local conflict will be discussed.

It is repeatedly emphasized by both Sudanese and employees of international organisations, as well as observed in several reports (Simonse 1999, AU/IBAR 2003) that women have an important potential in local peace building practices in southern Sudan. It is pointed out, for example, that women from different sides share similar experiences, which facilitates them transcending ethnic borders, while traditions regard women a 'neutral' in or no part to conflict. Stories from different regions in southern Sudan abounded about women standing up in peace meetings to confront the men of their communities with their feelings about local conflict. Skilfully playing with cultural repertoires (e.g. taking men on their laps and asking them to listen to their mothers; questioning the need of bearing sons that will be killed in the fighting) they urged them to reconcile. Other instances are of women outside the reconciliation meetings urging their men to continue when negotiations have reached an impasse. While women may not be the ones organizing reconciliation processes, they are able to draw the attention of authorities or elders to local conflicts.

The extent to which women are able to have an impact on local fighting seems to change regionally and situationally. In Nuba mountains, for instance, women were taken more serious than in Eastern Equatoria, not in the least because the soldiers in Nuba were from among the community, but also because of different status of women. At the same time, it is also clear that in many instances women are still very afraid to speak out, and that it is necessary that in order to get their voices heard they have to be facilitated. In other instances, although women were considered a 'neutral' party and could safely move between fighting parties, their men nevertheless were too concerned for their security to let them shuttle between the parties involved in the fighting. Lastly, it should also be acknowledged that women can have a role in promoting conflict. In workshops facilitated by AU/IBAR in Eastern Equatoria, for example, women related how they incite youngsters to raid cattle.

Sudanese indigenous NGOs

The number of Sudanese organizations that primarily aimed at working on peace was very limited. An inventory of the Sudan Ecumenical Forum (a platform for advocacy between the churches of Sudan, church related agencies and international ecumenical councils) in 2001 listed 65 Sudanese NGOs. Several of those organizations had their head-offices in Kenya and Uganda, and are the result of efforts of Sudanese in exile. Many of those NGOs worked in the field of relief, though in many of their programmes peace was integrated in some way. Especially organizations that started more recently had programmes that included activities for building bridges between polarised groups, promoting dialogue and reconciliation. Examples of indigenous organizations working on peace are the following:

The *Nuba Relief, Rehabilitation and Development Organization* (NRRDO) is an indigenous organization, that developed from a consortium of different international development NGOs. In 2001, it

was the only indigenous organization working in Nuba mountains. The majority of its activities is in relief and rehabilitation. Through the Dutch NGO Novib, NRRDO facilitates workshops in local reconciliation. Next to that they give some support to facilitate agreements about cross border trade. As the director explains: "NRRDO helps to establish the rules for the agreement, for peaceful co-existence, for example through installing observers". The latter activity is not so much the result of 'planned peace activities', but merely of the organization being present in the area and being asked by the population to assist.

The *Institute for the Promotion of Civil Society* is an indigenous organization, operating from Yei-Rubeke (Yei county). Supported by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, IPSC aims to train people at the lowest administrative level (*Boma*) in civil rights and duties, management, and principal issues of humanitarian rights and peace.

The *Bahr el Ghazal Youth and Development Association* (BYDA) was involved in the preparation of the NSCC-conference in Wunlit (see above). BYDA sees peace as closely related to development. To contribute to the resolution of conflict at local level, in several villages in Bahr el Ghazal region, BYDA introduced cultivation, to lessen cattlekeepers dependence on cows, while providing them with cash to be able to pay for schoolfees.

The *Network of New Sudanese Indigenous NGOs* (NESI) was launched in march 2000. It is a group of ten local organizations, which focusses on the development of a effective, strong and independent civil society. The partners of the network collect and monitor human rights violations, including issues pertaining to the rights of women and girls in their respective programs. NESI also aims to promote participatory governance and protection of civilians' rights. To this aim, NESI established partnership relationship with civil and other local authorities. The *Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace* -of which a case-study follows later in the report- is also a member to this network.

The scope of civil society concentrates mainly on peace building at local and regional levels. To understand why this has been the case, we have to go back in history. Similarly, to assess the prospects for civil society involvement in peace building we need to get an idea of how the circumstances in southern Sudan have influenced and are actually defining the development of civil society in general.

Space for civil society initiatives

Historically, opportunities for civil society organizations to flourish were limited. Neither the British/Egyptian colonial authorities nor the post-independence government were interested in the establishment of a socio-political infrastructure in the south. Before independence, positions in the bureaucracy were fulfilled by educated and trained northerners, while afterwards hardly any agricultural development projects were implemented in the south, while only limited schooling was available in the cities of Rumbek and Juba. In order to get education southerners had to go to the North. Wider employment opportunities kept them

there, while efforts to keep scarce positions within the family also did not contribute to spreading a feeling for participation in governance in the south (Weber 1997). That does not imply that there was no civil society at all. There were churches, traditional chiefs, and other structures of self-governance. Nevertheless, the influence of civil society on politics was very limited, and civil society was never able to stand up and adjust mistakes of governance.⁷

The war further limited the emergence of civil structures, as a result of displacement and loss of life, while traditional structures for self-governance eroded. Traditional structures were co-opted by the new leaders for extending their power and securing their power-basis after the war (ibid.). Besides, next to new forces such as the army, the influence of traditional structures greatly diminished. As a former SPLA-military (who now works in an indigenous NGO) expressed it: "In many communities the chiefs are still very much respected, but the problem is that the army is outside their authority. If a soldier does something wrong, nobody at the local level can persecute him, and the only thing the army leaders do is transferring him". Others are less pessimistic about the role of the chiefs. According to a Sudanese consultant on civil society, there is still a lot of confidence in the chiefs, clan-leaders and councils of elders: "However, some chiefs look too much to the vision of the movement and are influenced by the top-down structure, and behave top-down when representing the liberation hierarchy".

Civil society and the liberation movement SPLM/A

To understand the dynamics of current local initiatives for peace in southern Sudan, those should be seen in the wider context of space for civil society initiatives in southern Sudan. An important factor in this is the relationship between the liberation movement and the local population. As in large areas in the south the liberation movement forms the *de facto* authorities, it has an important role to play in issues of local peace. In the past, the SPLA used to have a bad human rights record, having little respect for the judicial system, while soldiers felt they could commit human rights abuses (such as forced recruitment, raping, forced marriages) unpunished (see Amnesty International 1995). Referring to those earlier years, Prendergast (1997) observes that "the abuse and manipulation of humanitarian assistance, the undermining of commerce, and the authoritarian political structures [...] have stifled any efforts at local organizing or capacity building in the south". In his view, from the beginning, SPLA's strategy for reforming Sudan was by waging war, thereby neglecting the civilian support needed in the long haul.

Next to the originally authoritarian character of the liberation strategy, however, the difficulties also have to do with the fact that the SPLA seems unable to be inclusive and to function as a platform for representing the interests of all different groups in the south. Many of the leaders in the SPLM/A originate from one particular region, and often the SPLA is seen as basically a Dinka movement. In the past, the leadership of the movement has been accused from different sides of deliberately trying to maintain the dominance of Dinka in the movement. Such feelings seem to be particularly strong among people from (eastern) Equatoria. Some Equatorians I spoke to claimed that their people have been kept out of important positions. They related this to the Equatorian lobby for further autonomy in the south in the 1970s, which weakened the power basis of Dinka politicians and civil servants (see also Prendergast 1997: 57), and the continued support for southern independence, which contradicted with SPLM/As vision of a New Sudan. At local level, many Equatorians attributed to the Dinka a certain haughtiness

⁷ This in contrast to the North, where existed doctor and student unions, for example.

towards other groups. They related of instances that SPLA soldiers occupied land in their areas, claiming that they had been the liberators, and that it was their right to do so. Such abuses of power by SPLA soldiers have motivated several instances of resistance against SPLA and even alliances with GOS. Some people explained SPLA's enormous losses in the early 1990s (which brought the movement close to collapse) as directly resulting from the way cadres and ordinary SPLA soldiers treated the population in the 'liberated areas', and the consequent rebellion of those people against SPLA and their joining forces with GOS.

Over the last ten years, however, the relationship with the local population has become a topic for discussion within the movement. In 1991, in response to the split-off of the Nasir faction, SPLM/A convened a meeting in the southern city of Torit (Lesch 1998: 158). This meeting started a process of reconsidering the way how the movement governed the areas under its control, and was a first step to establish a civilian administration. It got a follow-up in the SPLA Convention in April 1994, where SPLA stated a desire to build civil structures. At this meeting, amongst others, was decided to establish Revolutionary Councils at all levels of society, and the establishment of a sort of mini-state at the local level, in which the military movement was clearly separated from the civilian authorities (see SPLM 2000). An important outcome of the Convention was also to select local authorities originating from the areas under their control, rather than setting up structures with 'alien' people.

At the time of the research, to some extent the latter approach had been brought in practice. In most counties, Commissioners had been selected by the elders from the area from among candidates proposed by the movement. In some counties this had not happened yet, especially in those considered sensitive, such as those where there were SPLA military bases nearby. The extent to which the new structure of governance had been established also varied widely. In several locations in Western Equatoria so called 'County Liberation Councils' had been established. At lower levels there were 'Payam', and 'Boma Liberation Councils'.⁸ As a result, as far down as the Boma level supposedly existed a separation of the three state powers. Legislative power was in hands of the Liberation Councils that should discuss relevant issues in their communities and take decisions. Parallel to this, executive councils were established to take care of public administration and policy execution, security, and the maintenance of law and order. At County level, an SPLM County secretary was being appointed (in effect, replacing the function of Commissioner), as a head of the County administration, to maintain contact with the movement. The Liberation Councils should bring together representatives of all layers of the community. The responsibility for the judiciary and the implementation of the law remains with the council of elders, who are assumed to represent their communities. Although in the new civil structure the role of the traditional leaders has lost importance in comparison to the past, some of their traditional roles are legitimized and some new roles have been given to them in relationship to the movement. The new civil structures may also provide space for others to play a role in local decision making.

Nevertheless, the process is still in the beginning. As a Sudanese employee of an international NGO, who is facilitating training for a Sudanese organization working on the development of civil society told me: "Often the relationships are still very unclear: young elders do not dare to take their position, while County secretaries are often dominant." In other locations I visited in Eastern Equatoria

⁸ A Boma is the lowest administrative level in the organizational structure implemented by SPLM/A since 1994. Boma's include about 10,000 people. About 6 Boma's together form a Payam (about 50,000 people), while about 6 payams constitute a County (about 300,000 people).

and Bahr el-Ghazal, those institutions were still under formation or almost absent. Several observers pointed out to me how the civilian wing of the movement SPLM never completely gained autonomy from the military movement SPLA. To them the use of the distinction between SPLM/SPLA had no real meaning, as the SPLA directed all political and military operations. A lot of southern Sudanese and expatriate observers I spoke to had serious doubts as to the commitment inside the movement to provide space for devolution of power to local authorities. They related, for example, how the Marxist roots of the movement were reflected in leadership styles, which were irreconcilable with independent, locally developed civil structures. "People see firstly their military interests, only secondly interests of civilians", a Sudanese remarked. In a meeting of several indigenous NGOs about training cadres in southern Sudan, a political leader reportedly remarked that the chapter about good governance should not be included in the report presented at that occasion, as it was 'not relevant'. Others described the difficulties of intellectual reformers within the movement to deal with hard-liners.

It may also be questioned in how far the stipulations of the 1994 SPLM/A Conventions provided a context in which civil society may flourish. Even if authority is indeed handed over from the military to the civil authorities, this does not guarantee space for the development of a civil society that is an agent of social change rather than an implementer of tasks delegated to them by the authorities. As one international observer expressed it to me: "There is no civil society, because everybody is SPLM". Many officials within SPLM/A tend to see the movement as the "vanguard" body, the supreme political authority in the south. Though they accept the existence of civil society organizations, they find it difficult to imagine them as alternative political entities, functioning outside and independent of the structure of the movement. Several local authorities I spoke to see civil society as part and parcel of the movement (and thus of the authorities). As one commissioner explained:

"Community Based Organizations (CBOs) act as constituency for the SPLM. Civic authorities should not talk to individuals, because then you cannot determine unequivocally what a community wants. As part of grassroots CBOs know what is important, and if they are properly organized, people will talk in one voice. If they are trained, they could provide better information to civic authorities, to identify needs and to point out possible gaps in their strategies. The burden of the authorities is already too heavy. A division of tasks is necessary: while governance is the domain of village and payam chiefs, development should be the task of CBOs".

Lastly, in the experience of several staff of sudanese NGOs, many in the movement were simply not interested in civil society. In those cases that SPLM/A was actually supporting civil society this was explained as opportunism. Other observers, however, really see some opening up. Initially, the 1994 Conventions formed no real threat for the old style leaders in the SPLM/A. More recently, however, the conflict about different leadership styles has become more prominent in the movement, and the old leaders start seeing the new ones as a menace. In such an interpretation we may see SPLM's ban on members of the movement to participate in a peace conference in Kisumu in June 2001. It may be seen as resulting from fears among the more conservative elements within the movement for the newly emerging civil structures, and for the threat to the established order they actually have come to be.

Space for women (political) participation

The issue of the space for the development of civil society becomes particularly difficult when it comes to women initiatives and organizations. The important role of women in the socio-economic settings of southern Sudan is emphasized by many people: women contribute most in agriculture and have large responsibilities when it comes to child-bearing. The war has made them the main providers of their families, and changed their gender roles, it is argued. To some extent, women have been able to get access to domains previously dominated by men, such as the judiciary at local level. In other cases, however, impediments to women participation still prevail. Some of those are cultural. As one member of SWWP put it: "in workshops women are put forward as very knowledgeable and outspoken, but in the communities they are treated like children. And if women are invited to take part, it are often the wives of the authorities that appear in the meetings". As one expatriate said it rather bluntly: "All current leaders come from chiefly families. The chiefs do not listen to their women anyway, so how can you expect the current leaders to listen to the women?". The lack of participation in decision taking of women at local level was often explained from the fact that few women had received formal education. In many instances, however, it appeared that women were simply 'forgotten'. Authorities in Mapel several times experienced that invitations for workshops organized by the SRRA (the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Agency, the humanitarian wing of the SPLM) came very late, with as a result that at such short notice women could not be mobilized, and did not participate. A Sudanese facilitator in the field of civic-education said:

"The problem with the new institutional structure is that it is being run by men. Women remain absent. Men say: 'the women apparently are not interested', rather than calling them forward."

It appears as if the cultural impediments to women (political) participation are reproduced within the system of governance developing in southern Sudan. Within the structure of the mini-state as designed by the SPLM, women were not formally included at all levels. A secretariat for women, gender and child welfare, established in 1998, supposedly functions at different levels of the civil administration, with the aim of mobilizing women for development and the exchange of viewpoints. At lower levels, women assemblies could link up to the women secretariat. However, it is questionable whether the women secretariat was able to accommodate this, taken into account the very limited resources available. As a result, the women secretariat remained a rather top-down structure, trying to get initiatives off the ground through providing training of women on a very incidental basis. It may be argued that as a result of this meagre institutionalization, women representation hardly could take off at the local level.

At higher levels of policy making, the involvement of women is even more limited. As one of the SWWP members observed: "if meetings are really about something, only men are invited. And if ever a woman is invited it is for a ceremonial position, such as the chairlady". Only 3 women were participating in the peace negotiations facilitated by IGAD. Regarding women's absence at those levels the co-ordinator of a network of indigenous NGOs commented, that "the equality discourse of the movement always concerns the *men* from the North and the South".

Over the second half of 2003 a series of Regional women conferences was organized in the different southern regions, facilitated by PACT.⁹ Those

⁹ PACT is an international non-profit corporation that focuses on organization and capacity building, and is one of the organizations co-ordinating the USAID-funded Sudan Peace Fund programme.

conferences were the result of the All South Convention in 2002, which included as one of its resolutions the creation of a forum for women. In each region about 300 representatives from different counties came together, including representatives of both local authorities and organisations. In each region a council of women was chosen, with 65 members, out of which 17 were to form executive bodies. Apparently, the precise role of the regional conferences still has to be defined, which led some people to comment that the initiative is mainly the result from external pressure. According to some the regional women conferences are to serve as a sort of civil society platforms, that draw attention to the specific needs of women in particular areas, and that eventually could get a co-ordinating role in the provision of assistance to women. In how far the conferences will be given decision-taking powers or discusses matters other than programmes for women remains unclear. Others, in particular the SPLM/A expect the regional women conferences to fulfil a more political role. To the SPLM/A the meetings also served as a forum to present the SPLM/A women structure to the women. In the year 2004, a national conference will be convened in which representatives elected from the various regions will contest among themselves to take up the 25% seats in the National Liberation Council.¹⁰ The regional conferences might serve as the 'pool' from which to chose those women. From the discussions I had it appears as if the SPLM/A sees the regional conferences as a suitable alternative for the weakly functioning structure of the women secretariat. The emphasis of the SPLM/A seems now to emphasize inclusion of women at all levels of the political structure. So far, it remains unclear what will be the link between SPLM women secretariat regional directors and the executives elected at the regional conferences.

Constraints within civil society itself

While there remains discussion about the question in how far the movement provides opportunities or constraints to the development of civil society, others also point to constraints within civil society itself. Over the last years, a huge number of indigenous Sudanese NGOs have come into being. Discussion is going on about those new Sudanese NGOs and especially about in how far they represent or are able to strengthen civil society in southern Sudan. Many expatriates and Sudanese alike were very critical about the fact that many of those organizations were operating from Kenya rather than in Sudan itself. Some doubted whether those organizations were really working for southern Sudan. They feared that the massive emergence of Sudanese NGOs in Kenya, rather than resulting from sincere commitments was simply a reaction to the availability of resources for indigenous initiatives and lack of critical position of funding agencies. The attention for those NGOs, which in their eyes represented only a small elite and were not accountable to the people, was at the expense of other representations of civil society. In particular, there are severe criticisms of women's organisations as being Nairobi-based elite who do not represent the women on the ground, despite their regular visits to Sudan. At the end of 2003, many Sudanese NGOs had moved their main offices into Sudan, and their former main offices now functioned as liaison offices. Nevertheless, to critics this move into southern Sudan mainly existed in employing local staff rather than moving staff from the liaison offices to the field.

In addition, if organizations were sincere, it was doubted whether they knew what they were doing. "The people that are sitting here do not know what is

¹⁰ as part of the SPLM/A policy for women emancipation, it was agreed that 25% of seats in the National Liberation Council are reserved for women representatives, while women are allowed to compete for the remaining 75% seats.

happening in Sudan”, was an observation I heard several times. A lack of organizational capacity was observed in the indigenous organizations, with a lack of impact as a consequence. More severe were allegations that many indigenous organizations were not politically neutral, but more or less hidden followed the political movements, or otherwise were the initiative of opportunistic people within the movements that saw chances for creating an income.

Others, however, observed that despite their difficulties in getting properly organized, the indigenous organizations at least started getting a feeling of what their contribution could and should be. As a western consultant remarked: “The NGO sector is very young, but they start realising what their role is. Compared to that, within the movement I see much less engagement for strengthening organizations at community level”. Their rather anarchistic way of organization is seen as not so surprising, taking into account that those organizations came into being only recently. Some even hail the development that suddenly so many NGOs see the light. As a representative of an East African NGO, supporting Sudanese organizations to address peace building, remarked:

“the more indigenous NGOs there are, the better. In the past, there was no civil society at all. It is good that now there are many different groups. The best will survive. Sudan is such enormous, that the more groups are working there, the better. Moreover, so much money is spent ineffectively on diplomatic meetings, you do not hear funding agencies complain about that”.

It may be concluded that the context for civil society in southern Sudan has not been very favourable. While historically the growth of civil society organizations was limited by the power-bearers, the liberation movement SPLM/A has started reconsidering its role *vis-à-vis* the population under its command. However, the outcomes of this reform are still to be awaited. The establishment of a civil administration provides both chances and limitations. While the Liberation Councils may return responsibilities to the traditional structures of self-governance, they also provide space for others to take part in local decision making. The question remains in how far individual commanders are willing to delegate some of their powers, rather than allowing superficial changes only. In addition, it remains questionable in how far women will be able to share in the opportunities now provided. Most important in this is the commitment of the movement to support changes in its power-structure and to hand over authority at the local level, and provide opportunities for participation at higher levels as well.

4. International support to local initiatives for peace

Over the three-years period in which this research took place, a significant transition took place in the attention of both Sudanese and international agencies for local peace building. In the year 2001, to describe the amount of peace work in southern Sudan as 'limited' would do no justice to the focus on peace in many international organizations, and to the discussions that were going on about the subject. Nevertheless, not many organizations were working specifically on local peace in southern Sudan. As a representative of UNICEF expressed it:

"Though many people have the feeling that all this emergency aid is thrown away money, the complexity of peace makes that one does not jump on it massively".

At the end of 2003, however, within many organizations peace building had become a theme at least of discussion.

This section aims to sketch the complexity of supporting peace building in southern Sudan. How did different local and international actors perceive of the possibilities to implement peace programmes and to support local initiatives? What different actors were active in local and regional peace work? What kind of discourses had they developed around what they were doing? And what questions, considerations and dilemmas were underlying the support of international organizations to local initiatives?

Opportunities for contributing to peace at local level

In 2001, regarding perceptions of the possibilities to support local initiatives for peace, in the first place, different opinions existed as to in how far the time was ripe for peace-work in southern Sudan. The UN and most donor agencies maintained that southern Sudan was still an emergency, and observed a continued need for providing emergency assistance (see e.g. UNICEF 2000, and UN-OCHA 2001). The institutional setting of Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS),¹¹ through which a major part of assistance to southern Sudan was provided, reflected this. Many international NGOs were relief focussed: even those organizations whose core activities were developmental.

Nevertheless, there was a growing realization that while some areas were unstable,¹² in some areas in the south, reconstruction could and was taking place.¹³ The apparent possibilities in particular regions made some observers annoyed with labelling the whole of southern Sudan as an emergency. Due to this emergency status, many donors refrained from giving money to rehabilitation or more development-oriented interventions, or projects with an emphasis on human

¹¹ Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) was established in April 1989, as a consortium of two UN agencies -UNICEF and the World Food Programme- as well as more than 35 non-governmental organizations. It was the result of a tripartite arrangement between the UN, the GOS and the SPLM/A to deliver humanitarian assistance to all civilians in need, regardless of their location. Apart from legal access to southern Sudan, OLS takes care of the security of the member organizations and functions as a mechanism for the co-ordination of assistance.

¹² At the time of the research, areas generally regarded as unstable due to war and conflict were Unity State and the western Upper Nile region, the Nuba Mountains, northern and western Bahr El Ghazal and Eastern Equatoria (see UN-OCHA 2001; OLS 2000; Amnesty International 1999).

¹³ Those included areas in Western Equatoria, and places like Rumbek (Bahr el Ghazal).

rights. UNDP, for example, was not working in southern Sudan, because it classified southern Sudan as emergency area, and hence not eligible for UNDP, that has a mandate for rehabilitation and development only.

Moreover, in many donor agencies and organizations the notion was developing that after ten years of emergency assistance through OLS, aid to southern Sudan -where possible- needed to get a more sustainable character. Rather than life-saving only, emergency assistance would have to generate sustainable results, e.g. through training of medical staff and emergency education for children. In the light of such changing perceptions, we may see the recent developments within OLS, where one was now talking of a 'prolonged emergency', rather than of 'direct emergency', which provided some space for activities other than emergency aid. Since 2000, OLS adopted a 'County Approach' to areas with relative stability (UNICEF 2000). This new approach implied closer co-operation with the local governance structures established by the resistance movements.

Some donors -such as USAID and the British Government- saw opportunities for a more far-reaching approach. They observed possibilities for development, including rehabilitation and strengthening local governance and civil society at the micro level, and provided long-term budgets (in contrast to the one year funding cycles of emergency assistance). An important initiative along these lines was the STAR (Sudan Transitional Assistance for Rehabilitation) programme. Through this programme USAID and UNICEF gave support to the development of local authorities in territories in hands of the resistance movements. So far, the EU was not willing to finance development assistance, though through a new 'emergency+'-structure some assistance could be given to long-term sustainable assistance. Such developments were also reflected in the formation of an office within the SPLM, which was to co-ordinate and streamline the development efforts of international organizations.

This move away from the perception of Sudan as an acute emergency situation also provided space for activities in the field of peace. Since 1999, human rights and peace building had become 'priority components' of the core-programme of OLS (OLS 2000). In the Consolidated Appeal for Sudan 2002, peace building (facilitating community-based rehabilitation of services, conflict resolution and mediation at the grass-roots levels, and the promotion of communal harmony) and the promotion of human rights had become one of the central themes to be reflected throughout the programmes (UN-OCHA 2001).

Despite changing notions about opportunities for activities beyond relief, in practice, in the year 2001 the 'space' for activities for peace at local level remained limited. Over the proceeding years, many organizations had experienced difficulties in securing funds for southern Sudan. Many organizations (in particular those of the UN) had to reduce their operations. (OLS 2000; see also UN-OCHA 2001). It seemed even *more* difficult to get money for peace activities in Sudan. An indication was the mid-term review of the Consolidated Appeal for Sudan of 2002: on a total budget of 25 million USD, 525,000 USD had been asked for Grass Roots Peace Building Initiatives. In June 2001, only 8% (41,884 USD) had been pledged for this purpose, as compared to 33% for the overall budget. Especially European donors seemed reluctant to sponsor peace programmes.

Part of the explanation is that, as interventions in the precarious context of southern Sudan were insecure, donors preferred short-term projects, and one year funding cycles. Such conditions are difficult to meet for projects concerning (local) peace, as those often involve longer timelines and results that can only be expected in the longer run.

Although some representatives of donor organizations did like to sponsor peace activities at local level, they found it difficult to identify how it should be done, and whether at all it could be done. It was discussed if it made sense anyway to work on peace in the southern part of Sudan, in the absence of prospects for an ending of the so-called North-South conflict. In addition, it was observed that the continuation of the war in Sudan mainly depended on interests in the north or regional interests, which required other types of intervention, especially a focus on diplomacy at higher levels rather than on grass-roots peace work. These considerations mirrored the position of several indigenous Sudanese organizations which argued that resolution of the North-South conflict (whether or not through peace-full means) depended on unity among the southern leaders, which should be sought through formal mediation efforts rather than through grass-roots peace activities.

Lastly, different international organizations and observers expressed concerns about the peace building potential of indigenous organizations. According to them, they lacked capacity, had too little experience, or could not be trusted. In their view, as a result, there were basically not so many possibilities to work on peace. The latter issue will be discussed below in more detail.

With the prospects for peace becoming more and more of a reality, over the period 2002-3 conflict at the local level was becoming more and more of a priority issue. With improving security in southern Sudan, it became increasingly possible to move physically into the communities. International organizations had started discussing how to organize and provide support to returning refugees and IDPs and how to deal with the conflicts likely to occur between them. Disarmament and what to with demobilized fighters was seen as a priority, and it was being considered how to disarm without weakening one local conflictive parties at the expense of the other. To some donors, the time seemed ripe to address issues of governance. Many people and organizations emphasized that to guarantee the success of implementation of any peace deal it is important to inform the people inside southern Sudan on the progress of the peace agreements and its results. Hence, there was a need for civic education, addressing issues of law, local governance and how to involve communities in compliance with the peace agreements.

Parallel to this, the willingness of international agencies to contribute to local peace building increased tremendously. At the end of 2002, USAID established the Sudan Peace Fund (SPF), a large programme to encourage and support local initiatives for reconciliation, focussing on economic growth and rehabilitation in communities that have been ravaged by inter-tribal conflict, and for resettlement of internally displaced people. The total budget of the SPF is expected to amount up to \$20 million over a five-year period. The SPF programme is being co-ordinated through a consortium of agencies, including PACT, the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC), Christian Aid, and the African Union's Inter-Africa Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR). Among those, PACT is administering the fund. The programme started with a 'peace and conflict analysis' mapping exercise in each of the southern regions. Activities so far sponsored by SPF include reinforcing several peace agreements in Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile (including the people to people peace process, see below) and consolidate them with service provision, while peace dialogues and conferences are supported in Nuba Mountains and Eatoria. The SPF aims to form a platform for the different partners in peace building. Several western governments and embassies are also sponsoring peace building activities.

International organizations supporting local initiatives for peace

Among organizations working in southern Sudan there was a large diversity in the extent to which peace building was part of their strategies. In addition, there was no single standard of what 'working on peace' actually constituted, and there was a large diversity in approaches. All the organizations, in different ways, struggled with the implication that an orientation to development and peace implies closer co-operation with local authorities and resistance movements as well as local organizations. Moreover, such an orientation is hardly imaginable without investing in capacity building of local authorities and civil society organizations. The question was if and how this could be done.

Only a few international agencies specialized in peace building and had working on peace as a principal objective. Those agencies aimed *directly* at influencing or preventing hostilities, for example through organizing peace conferences and platforms for mediation, supporting the activities of peace and human rights groups, local committees or women groups, or through training in approaches for dealing with local conflict. One of those organizations was the Swedish Life and Peace institute, which formerly supported some Sudanese initiatives in Nairobi. From 2001 onwards it started supporting Sudanese indigenous organizations in civic education. Peace-work was also central in the mandate of the Kenya based NGO People for Peace in Africa (PPA). Rather than on local peace building, its capacity building programme for indigenous Sudanese organizations focused on international awareness raising, and negotiating access to diplomatic meetings for grassroots representatives. PPA organized, for example, an international meeting to discuss the implications of GOS' oil-exploitation for the Horn of Africa. Another organization that can be mentioned was the Catholic Relief Services (CRS). In 2001, next to water and sanitation programmes, rehabilitation activities, community health education, and agriculture, CRS had a Grant Making and Capacity Building Programme, funding different workshops, training and peace-conferences for CRS' partner organizations. In 2002, peace building –with a focus on supporting partners on grassroots peace building- became even more formalized as one of the sectors of CRS' activities. Lastly, the activities of Pax Christi the Netherlands in Kenya and Sudan also focused primarily on peace in southern Sudan. Together with the New Sudan Council of Churches they established a radio-station 'Radio Voice of Hope', that aimed to transmit independent news and messages of peace to the southern Sudan. In Eastern Equatoria region, Pax Christi supported the establishment of a network for indigenous initiatives working on the resolution of a local conflict in that particular region. Pax Christi also supported the indigenous organization Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace, of which a case-study follows below. In addition to the activities of international NGOs, there was the 'engendering the peace' project, which was being carried by the Netherlands Embassies of Nairobi and Khartoum. This initiative aimed to increase the participation of women in the peace process, through empowering women. For the purpose, the Embassies had facilitated meetings of women groups and representatives of different resistance and opposition movements in Khartoum and Nairobi. There had also been workshops and meetings in The Hague, Cairo, and South Africa, as well as some visits to southern Sudan. Over the years 2002-3, activities of the Netherlands Embassy focussed more and more on capacity building of Sudanese NGOs and representatives.

In addition, many of the international NGOs formerly mainly involved in relief activities now have adopted 'peace' as one of their strategic objectives, or tried to integrate peace in their work. In 2001, CEAS (a consortium of LWF, Caritas international and the Sudanese churches) was training all its partner organizations on the notions of Local Capacities for Peace. Some other organizations, such as International Aid Sweden and ACORD, were considering how to give peace building a place within their programmes. In 2001, Oxfam UK established a peace-desk, to integrate peace in all of its programmes. In addition, the peace-desk would support some particular peace and reconciliation projects, as well as advocate on Sudan in the region. OAU/IBAR (see above) was implementing pastoral harmonization programmes in the border-areas of Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, and Somalia, after being confronted by cattle-related conflicts impeding their activities in the control of animal diseases.

Efforts to integrate peace building could also be observed within some UN offices. Within UNICEF a 'preparation for peace' office had been set up. In 2001, the unit was looking for funds for research and facilitation in specific local conflicts. UNICEF and partner organisations, in close co-operation with community leaders, had also been involved in a programme for the demobilization of almost 3,500 child soldiers. Early 2001, those children were taken to transit camps and prepared for their return home. UNIFEM's 'Africa women for conflict resolution and peace' programme aimed to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations in the peace process, as well as to promote women participation in the political process. During the peace talks in 2002, UNIFEM supported the presentation of technical papers prepared by women's peace activists to the negotiators on all sides. Though UNDP (whose mandate includes rehabilitation and peace building) was not working in southern Sudan, it's Nairobi office had a 'planning for peace'-unit, which was making an inventory of development activities that should be implemented if peace would come in southern Sudan.

Development and peace building?

Most international organizations (and local organizations alike) approached peace building through development. The idea of this strategy was that peace will follow development. It is based on a notion that the root cause of local conflicts is often found in competition over (limited) resources. Hence, by providing additional resources and services, conflict will be prevented or resolved. In UNICEF's 'preparation for peace' programme, for example, offering services (such as boreholes, or schools) was the major strategy. 'Peace through Development' was also part of official policy of the SPLM. The policy included several strategies: building the SPLM as a democratic movement; the transformation of the SPLA into an organic army of the New Sudan; the development of civil authorities, empowering civil society; and the development of the economy and provision of social services (SPLM 2000). On paper, the SPLM policy of 'peace through development' started thus from an integrated approach, combining development of services, civil authorities and civil society.

This attention for 'Development for Peace' in southern Sudan, should be seen in the context of international discussions about the conflict aggravating effects of relief and development (for which the relief work in Sudan provided an important input) and dissatisfaction with the enormity of relief operations. Those factors urged for new approaches that would have a positive and more sustainable impact on peace. The question seems justified, in how far particular programmes that are coined 'Development for Peace' are more than just development programmes with a strategic focus on preventing doing harm, and indeed actively contribute to local peace building.

Looking at what 'Development for Peace' meant in the practice of implementation of southern Sudan, it appeared that the emphasis was on economic development and provision of services, rather than on capacity building of local organizations. This was especially the case for the indigenous organizations. Many of the Sudanese indigenous organizations came into being in response to an emergency situation in their area to which they responded by the provision of services. Though these organizations were reforming themselves to become more development oriented, the range of their activities did not change significantly. In addition, indigenous organizations were often the ones to implement programmes, and were the ones that experienced the confrontations with local authorities that, in contrast to whatever commitment of SPLM at a 'national' level, often saw civic education as 'too political'. That matters were neither sorted out yet among indigenous organizations may be illustrated by a discussion about civil society and peace building I attended at a 'Sudan in the New Millenium' workshop, organized by UNESCO in December 2000. Among the representatives of different indigenous organizations and the movement there was a lot of confusion about 'civil society' and 'peace', and in how far discussing those meant talking about politics. Some participants understood 'development for peace' as closely related to the provision of services, and as an a-political activity. Remarks like "We have to look from within the civil society and leave out political views", abounded. They were annoyed to hear others talk about politically empowering civil society. The discussion clearly showed the area of tension concerning civil society among Sudanese organizations. Though, such uncertainties could also be observed within international organizations, some of whom worried to compromise their image of neutrality by supporting civil society groups that could be considered party to conflict (see also Macrae et. al. 1997).

The development-oriented approach to peace building that was the dominant INGO strategy views conflict-resolution as something a-political. It implies that conflict stems from unaccomplished development and can be countered by bringing development (see Duffield 2001). Such a notion may leave organizations unequipped for recognizing or addressing aspects of conflict that are not (exclusively) resource-related, but that are mainly about visions or identity and involved the resistance movements.¹⁴

The above does not mean that all (international) organizations gave so much emphasis to service provision. Several organizations took a more integrated approach and envisaged combining service provision with activities to develop civil society and local authorities. CRS, for example, had an explicit focus on peace, and apart from its more development-oriented programmes put a lot of efforts into supporting 'civil society for peace'. The earlier mentioned STAR programme also focussed on supporting civil society at community level, while some Scandinavian countries provided support for such initiatives.

Investing in capacity building of local authorities?

To organize relief, international organizations have always had to work with the authorities of the resistance movements, in particular their humanitarian offices, such as the SPLM/A related SRRA. However, most organizations were very reluctant to go a step further and actually engage in support activities to build the capacities of the emerging civic authorities installed by the resistance movements, especially when rival movements were still actively combating each other. Despite the commitment of SPLM/A, expressed in its 'peace through development' policy,

¹⁴ When talking about such conflicts, people often point out the example of Chukudum, where people are suspected of liasing with the government in response to feeling excluded by the movement.

to helping to establish civil structures and civil society, many international organizations had their doubts about further involving the movement in supporting civil society and local peace than was absolutely necessary. They agreed that presence of and support from SPLM/A was indispensable in peace building efforts, to keep parties up to locally agreed peace resolutions or because they were essential players in the conflict. However, they thought the movements of no use of or even incapable in establishing local civil structures. Besides, they feared that support to civil authorities would be at the expense of civil society. International organizations were also worried to compromise their image of neutrality by working with the movement.

On the other hand, others argued that for the upscaling of peace building and development efforts, capacity building of the movement was indispensable. Taken into account their wide access to the communities or their control of the army, it was argued that the political movement had to carry it forward. Moreover, one way or the other, in the eyes of people in southern Sudan, they represented the legitimate authorities on the ground. In addition, as some people argued: "the best people are exactly the military leaders. *They* are the graduates. The qualified people occupy the administrative military ranks". Others indeed had seen changes taking place since the 1994 SPLM Convention, and thought that SPLA was at least to some extent committed to peace and human rights. They referred for example to HACDAD, a think-tank within SPLM, which had to provide an intellectual framework around issues such as peace (they were responsible for the 'development for peace' approach of the SPLM), human rights, and education. Often, the development of civil society was also seen as very closely linked to and dependent of the development of civil authorities.¹⁵ It was for such reasons that USAID and UNICEF, for instance, launched the STAR (Sudan Transitional Assistance for Rehabilitation) programme, to develop local authorities in territories under the resistance movements.

Investing in capacity building of local organizations?

Despite a willingness to work with local NGOs, with regard to the capacity building of local NGOs, international organizations were very cautious. Several international funding agencies and NGOs had doubts about the organizational capacities of indigenous Sudanese NGOs, and were concerned as to in how far indigenous organizations were indeed able to implement their peace programmes. Many concerns centred on the capacities of indigenous NGOs to manage their finances, and to set up proper accounting systems. In some cases those concerns indeed had been justified and international organizations had stopped funding indigenous organizations for financial mismanagement. Regarding some peace organizations, doubts were also expressed about their lack of particular skills in peace building.

In addition, many questioned the independence of NGOs, which were considered to be in one way or the other linked to the resistance movement. Some international organizations feared that those organizations could thus not be sincere in their peace building activities. Others, because of their mandate, did not want to get associated with organizations that (possibly) were partisan. That his

¹⁵ This was also the position of the SPLM/A, as Samson Kwaye, spokesman of SPLM/A explained it to me: "So far, organizations contribute little to peace. They say: 'no, you are the movement, and then refer to examples like Chukudum. However, as the movement, we have contact with the people. SPLM has a commission for civil society. Civil society is indispensable for peace. It is important that the civil authorities of New Sudan (the County commissioners, Payam administrators, the chiefs at village level) are strengthened. If they are strong, civil society may grow and can play a role in the peace process".

issue was complicated can be illustrated by the case of church involvement in peace processes.

As described above, the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC) led the important People to People Peace Process. By some, NSCC was criticized for being too dependent from the SPLM/A, which had resulted in that in some cases of local conflict (particular reference was made to Chukudum) SPLM/As strategic interests inhibited closer involvement of the council of churches. Others argued that precisely those close contacts between NSCC and SPLM/A facilitated the 4Ps process, as SPLM/A was willing to support its implementation, while they also provided space for quiet diplomacy. To others, conflicts in the past between NSCC and SPLA, as well as SPLM's apparent difficulties with the 2001 Kisumu conference provided evidence of NSCC's ability to also take distance from SPLM/A.

The problem of trust was exacerbated because NGOs, operating in a competitive field, often accused each other of linkages to the resistance movement or corrupt practices.

Besides, questions abounded about the genuineness, democratic organization and accountability of NGOs. When in the early 1990s the first indigenous NGOs came into being, there was a lot of attention for those initiatives from the side of international agencies. The number of NGOs had mushroomed in just a couple of years, partly because of the financial opportunities that had presented themselves in the wake of the relief operations. At the time of the fieldwork, however, there were a lot of doubts about those organizations. A consultant on civil society initiatives remarked: "Organizations get money if they do something with peace and leadership, with no regard for quality". Several people were very concerned that this availability of financial resources also had stimulated divisions within indigenous organisations. Some representatives of international agencies even portrayed Sudanese NGOs as only 'money-minded', and blamed them for being based in Nairobi rather than in Sudan. To them, Sudanese NGOs represented mainly a small elite and were hardly representative let alone accountable to the people. The attention to such NGOs was at the expense of support to traditional leadership, churches, women, youth.

It has to be emphasized that, to a considerable extent, the problems international organizations attributed to local organizations were produced by the very funding practices of those international organizations. Many international agencies had been especially interested to support initiatives in 'women and peace', and at instances had been rather uncritically in supporting them.

A Sudanese representative of an international agency financing and supporting indigenous initiatives gave me the instance of a women and peace organization that had complained to his agency's back-donor in the USA about a request for funding that had been rejected, because the agency was insecure about the viability of the proposal. The back-donor then reported back to the agency that they would be pleased if this decision was reviewed and that they would support this peace initiative.

However, it was not only because of concerns about local NGOs that the support of international organizations for capacity building was very limited. To a large part it had to do with their own funding practices, or their need to account to their back-

donors and produce results. One-year funding cycles inhibited investment in long-term processes of capacity building. Several representatives of Sudanese NGOs working on peace building commented also that the support of international organizations for peace was often incidental. This 'one-shot money' resulted in short term survival strategies for organizations or persons, and hardly contributed to the capacity building of the organizations concerned. Apart from that, from several sides I was told that funding agencies seemed not very much interested in capacity building of Sudanese NGOs. Some people were very frustrated with what they considered as the hypocrisy of donors complaining about lack of professionalism without willing to really help indigenous organizations to improve their performance.

To return to the example of the NSCC, in 2001, representatives of different donor agencies expressed doubts as to whether NSCC would have the capacity to give the necessary follow-up to all the conferences organized so far, taking into account that the field presence of NSCC was limited in particular areas. Ironically, others observed that the problems with the capacity of NSCC partly resulted from the very success of the initiative, resulting in more requests for NSCC to assist. Others, including NSCC itself, also saw capacity problems result from a lack of commitment from the side of the very donors. While many organizations were in favour of the process and liked to fund individual conferences, NSCC found it difficult to find money for consolidation of the initiatives, and for institutional strengthening. Many international NGOs and funding agencies that formerly supported 4Ps even left the process, and did not see it as a priority anymore.

5. Local initiatives for peace in practice: the Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace

To provide a closer insight in the practice of local peace work in southern Sudan and to elaborate on some of the themes discussed in the preceding section, this chapter turns to the case of the Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace, an indigenous women and peace organization. What are the opportunities and constraints for this group to work on local peace in southern Sudan? The case aims to draw wider lessons for supporting peace initiatives in southern Sudan.

Record of a women and peace organization

Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace (SWVP) took off in 1994 with the aim of promoting dialogue among all sectors of Sudanese society, focusing primarily on women. Although SWVP recently got the status of an NGO under Kenyan law, it started as a voluntary membership organization. The main office of the organization is in Nairobi, and it has a large part of its membership among the exiled Sudanese women living in that city. Inside southern Sudan, in different communities there are women-groups that over the past few years received assistance from the office in Nairobi, which is the *de facto* executive office.

The Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace (SWVP) is born out of a meeting organized by an East African NGO, the People for Peace in Africa. When peace negotiations between southern resistance movements continued to fail, in 1993 this organization approached the wives of factional leaders living in Nairobi, hoping they would be able to change the rigid stance of their husbands. A meeting was organized where the wives of significant political leaders participated. The workshop started conflictuous, with one woman of the Nasir faction being physically attacked in the streets outside of the workshop venue, after which all Nasir women threatened to withdraw. However, the conflict was resolved and the workshop became a success. At the end of the workshop, the women decided to form an organization promoting the interests of the women. They did not want to engage in politics, which they wanted to leave to their husbands.

SWVP formally started in 1994. SWVP intends to unite southern Sudanese women of different ethnic groups and religions. It wants to accomplish "what men have failed to achieve": peace in Sudan. SWVP emphasizes the central role of women in the resolution of conflict. According to the initiators of the organizations, women as mothers are united in their desire not to see their sons killed in conflict. Besides, they consider having more interest in peace, because they suffer more than men do from the war. Finally, they are convinced that women by their innate character and by traditional heritage are natural peacemakers. The initial membership of SWVP consisted of wives of political leaders and women who had become active in organizations and peace building initiatives. Their ethnic origin was diverse, they were generally educated and all lived in exile in Nairobi. SWVP thus started as a membership organization in Nairobi that, due to the ethnic diversity could claim to represent southern Sudanese women in peace building processes. At the same time, they saw their initiative as the seed of a southern Sudan-wide women's movement for peace.

In the first year of its existence, SWVP organized several public events to draw attention to the plight of women and children in the war. They were able to

get modest support from different organizations, including Bishops and UNIFEM. They used this for training of their members and made a visit to an area in southern Sudan where they had a workshop with women and introduced the SWWP to the military command in the area. The SWWP stood out and attracted attention of international organizations. Within one year, after having had just one activity in southern Sudan, the organization was launched internationally. A delegation of SWWP was invited to attend the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, where they were exposed to international discourses around women and peace. Their presence in Beijing furthered the visibility of SWWP and it attracted increasing international support in the form of training, funding for activities, and invitations to international events. Immediately after the initiation of SWWP, the organization thus became discursively and organizationally intertwined with the international community working for Sudan.

In the five years following Beijing, SWWP started to move from a city-based membership organization with the aim of becoming a country-wide women's movement. Some of the Nairobi members received training from international organizations in conflict resolution and civic education. They travelled to different communities inside southern Sudan, where they organized and trained women-groups, until they had formed a network including ten organizations. SWWP facilitated several workshops for peace building and human rights advocacy, and for trauma-counselling. A couple of these trainings were facilitated by international experts, flying in for the occasion. In these years, SWWP developed a vision of forming a country-wide women's movement. The Nairobi women started to present themselves as one chapter of this movement, even though the movement had not materialized in a formal sense and the groups had never had opportunity to meet together. The Nairobi 'chapter' had grown by this time to about 90 members. SWWP still maintained contact with a number of different support organizations. Among others, they had developed a cordial relation with Pax Christi, a Dutch (originally) church-based peace organization, which helped them to secure financial assistance in the Netherlands, facilitated several of SWWPs activities in the field, and tried to draw attention in Europe for the suffering of Sudanese women. In the course of time SWWP and Pax Christi started to visualize a project to embed SWWP in southern Sudan.

In January 2001, SWWP started a three-year programme, called 'Seeds for Peace', facilitated by Pax Christi but financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The 'Seeds for Peace' programme aimed to empower local women to participate in conflict prevention and peace building on local and regional level. Part of the programme was the establishment of four regional 'Peace Demonstration Centres' (PDC) that would function as focal points for awareness raising, training, and income generating activities. In each PDC a core group of 15 women would be trained to become trainers in human rights, reconciliation, and trauma counselling. The programme would include small income generating projects. Through a general training once a year, a wider network for women in southern Sudan would be created. This training would further inform the Nairobi women to be able to represent the southern Sudanese women in the international community (Pax Christi 2000).

No one realized at the start, how much the programme would change the relations between the organizations and the work-style of SWWP. One of the changes that took place is that SWWP had to register as an NGO, thereby transforming into a service organization for the local women groups in South Sudan. This change in organizational identity led to numerous problems.

Dynamics within the organization

At the beginning of the 'Seeds for Peace' programme, SWWP had about 90 members among the Sudanese refugee community in Nairobi. A core-group of about 10 to 15 women regularly visited the office and volunteered in activities. Most of the core-group members of SWWP had an urban background, and had received quite some education. A couple of them had experience with working in (international) NGOs. A co-ordinator and a secretary, at times assisted by a treasurer, took care of the daily affairs in the office. Over the course of 2001, the function of a co-ordinator was replaced by the function of a director, and a programme co-ordinator and a Lokichoggio-based logistics officer *cum* field co-ordinator were appointed.

Several dynamics played a role in the way the organization was functioning. In the first place, the context of southern Sudan poses a lot of constraints to the work of (local) organizations. Visiting the area is difficult, dangerous and extremely expensive. Some of the SWWP women groups could be reached over-land, though this would involve travelling through areas plagued by rebels of diverse groups such as the Lord Resistance Army. Other locations were far away, and could only be reached by plane from Lokichoggio, thus making a visit an expensive exercise.¹⁶ SWWP had to cancel several visits to the field, as the security situation on the ground was too tense. Co-operation with the resistance movements and their humanitarian wings on the ground was not always easy. In some cases, visits were hampered by local officials that wanted to assert their authority or interfered with the work of SWWP (e.g. by putting their relatives in delegations to workshops in Lokichoggio). Some local officials had prejudices against the emancipatory work of SWWP and their advocacy for peace, or even suspected SWWP of promoting tensions. In addition, as a Sudanese organization in Kenya, SWWP had many difficulties in getting properly registered. They had to deal with prejudices against Sudanese migrants and were not familiar with the proper procedures of bureaucracy and red tape.

In the second place, SWWP's day-to-day functioning was influenced by personal issues. Most women of the Nairobi SWWP group lived separated from their husbands, and had to take care of their children on their own. These women could not afford to devote much time to the SWWP if the organization was not going to help them to make ends meet. They would much prefer to be employed by SWWP, rather than to work as a volunteer. There were always discussions about the finances of the organization, and in how far the members should get daily allowances. When through the 'Seeds for Peace' programme the management team started to receive salaries, these discussions intensified. In addition, a number of the women suffered from their traumatic experiences, while SWWP's work could at times be very stressful. Trauma and stress probably contributed to a culture of suspicion and gossip in SWWP. In particular, members started to accuse each other of corrupt behaviour. Such an atmosphere was further increased by the political sensitive context of a peace organization functioning in a country at war, which urged for a certain level of secrecy, with more suspicion and conflict as a result. Furthermore, SWWP had a rather authoritarian management style, and the members had no repertoire of problem solving mechanisms or ways to express their discomfort about the state of affairs. Due to those personal conflicts a number of members left the organization. Due to their departure SWWP lost its multi-ethnic

¹⁶ For instance, for a single trip to Mapel (Bahr el-Ghazal region), prices ranged from about 300 to 850 USD for the planes of the World Food Programme. One may also imagine the difficulties of making budgets with such wide variations in the ticket prices.

composition: women from SPDF areas were hardly represented, only one of the remaining core-group members was Dinka, while a large number of women originated from a particular region in Ekuatoria. It is difficult to say in how far the personal conflicts within SWWP were related to political affiliations rather than to differences of characters and personalities. Some outsiders perceived SWWP as being torn apart by the struggles and the fissures within the liberation movement at large. Though in the early years this might have been the case, in my perception the infighting in the SWWP in later years was everyday politics of an organization (Hilhorst 2003): it concerned a struggle for power about leadership among the members. The selection of the regions to work in (thereby creating expectations in certain communities) became a strategy for strengthening positions in this struggle. Cohesion within the organization was based on social networks of family and shared background. As a result of the conflicts and power struggle, a core group of women developed, and when more and more women outside the 'trust-group' left the organization, SWWP lost its multi-ethnic character.¹⁷

Thirdly, there were organizational problems within SWWP, which inhibited its functioning. Those included unclarities in the distribution of responsibilities, the absence of procedures for communication, but also a lack of experience in project planning and budgeting. Those were compounded by the personal issues elaborated above. The 'Seeds for Peace' programme implied a number of changes that resulted in further organizational problems. SWWP transformed from a voluntary organization to an organization where some members received salaries. It also changed from a flat organization into one with specialized and differentiated functions. Finally, the budget provided by the Ministry was substantially larger than any budget received so far by the organization. Since only few women got a salary, the other members of SWWP grumbled about the lack of fair recruitment procedures and started to reassess their willingness to work for SWWP as a volunteer. The re-division of tasks was little discussed and clarified and led to all kinds of problems in the everyday division of responsibilities. The size of the programme to be implemented put strains on the management capacities of SWWP. 'Seeds for Peace' implied, for example, visiting and assisting the women groups on a more structural basis, which required lots of travelling and logistics. Though a few of the women had experience with working in (international) NGOs, they lacked experience in project planning and budgeting. In addition, the availability of relatively large funds put the relation with the local 'chapters' of SWWP under strain. It raised unrealistic expectations, and fed rumours about misuse of funds.

Ironically, the failure of the SWWP women to improve their performance partly resulted from donors' assistance. The provided financial support compounded the personal issues at stake and complicated the organizational difficulties within the SWWP. An example of this is when one of the donors had committed funds for paying the management staff over the latter half of 2000. Although a management team had been selected by that time, at the end of 2000, there was yet no agreement among the women in Nairobi how it was going to operate, in particular, whom should get paid and how much. To prevent forfeiting the money, the distribution of money was agreed upon in a hasty procedure among the members of the management team, with a fresh round of disputes as a result. The women found it generally difficult to meet the deadlines for activities, stipulated in the funding conditions which resulted in rush implementation without proper

¹⁷ At the end of 2003, this type of dynamics could also be observed in some other women organizations working from Nairobi.

preparation. At the same time, that several donor organizations were eager to sponsor peace initiatives created a context in which women did not feel the need to solve the problems in their organization but rather left to establish their own organisation, and to realize personal ambitions for leadership.

Pax Christi and Cordaid, another Dutch donor, were aware of the organizational shortcomings and problems. Already before the start of 'Seeds for Peace', workshops were facilitated to identify strengths and weaknesses in the organization and to develop strategic planning. An organizational consultant was hired to support the management team, as well as a consultant on financial management. A major concern of the donors was also that SWWP failed to take off in the field, inside southern Sudan. To help SWWP in this aspect, the author was given a contract to assist SWWP. The donor representatives, especially from Pax Christi considered that these efforts did not result in substantial improvements and they gradually started to lose confidence in the women in Nairobi. Their intensive efforts to request, facilitate, and eventually demand increased accountability and more visible activities in southern Sudan were not given adequate response. Finally, in the summer of 2002, Pax Christi decided to sever its ties with the Nairobi women of SWWP and to focus on supporting the PDCs in southern Sudan directly.

On the other hand, among the SWWP women the perception was increasing that its Dutch partners interfered too much in the aims and direction of the organization and its programme. The money provided by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs was to be administered through Pax Christi. As a result, from an equal partnership between a northern and a southern peace-organization, Pax Christi became *defacto* a donor, and SWWP a receiving organization. Suddenly, Pax Christi had to ensure that SWWP followed the funding conditions, which put the relationship under strain. In addition, despite the agreed upon commitment to concentrate SWWPs activities more inside southern Sudan, some members of SWWP were annoyed by the donors' insistence on working within Sudan rather than in Nairobi.

The SWWP group in Narus, Eastern Equatoria

SWWP's 'Seeds for Peace' programme aimed to empower local women to participate in conflict prevention and peace building on local and regional level, through the establishment of a network for awareness raising and training women within southern Sudan. To provide insights in the local dimensions of this programme I will now turn to the SWWP group in Narus. 'Peace Demonstration Center Narus' (as it is referred to within the organization at large) was one of the women groups that over the last few years had been supported by the Nairobi office of SWWP, and that was included in the 'Seeds for Peace' programme.

The setting of Narus

Narus is located just over Sudan's border with Kenya, on the road from Lokichoggio to Kapoeta, in SPLM/A-held territory. The community of Narus started as a displaced camp. In 1985, the region became the scene of intense fighting between SPLA and the government, and in the years to follow, displaced from various locations sought refuge in and around Narus. Kapoeta County was originally inhabited by the Toposa, a pastoralist group, of which many escaped the fighting and came to Narus. The location also hosted a large number of people that had fled from Ethiopia after the fall of Mengistu, as well as displaced from Torit,

Bor, and Juba area. At the end of the 1990s, Narus had about 8,000 inhabitants, of which the Dinka were the majority, followed by Toposa, and a smaller group of displaced Equatorians. The village is divided in 10 sectors (which are now used as administrative units), which correspond to different influxes of displaced people, and thus to different ethnic groups.

Over the last few years, Narus has been hit several times by government bombardments especially in 1998 and 1999. In 2000, Narus was hit 4 times, with serious results, such as the destruction of the hospital and the killing of 9 people. In 2001, Narus was hit once. Everywhere in town, dugouts and shelters could be seen. The few corrugated iron roofs were covered with branches in an attempt to make them less obvious from the air. After bombardments, many people had fled to the refugee camp of Kakuma, 90 kilometres over the border into Kenya.

As Kapoeta town (the former county seat) had been reconquered by GOS, Narus was now the residence of the SPLA-Commissioner of Kapoeta County. A 'County Liberation Council' had been established, but to many people the distinction between civil authorities and the army was unclear. The person appointed as a Commissioner was also the army commander of the area. And though the offices of the SRRA (the humanitarian wing of the SPLM/A) were only responsible for the distribution of relief items and the co-ordination of and negotiation with the NGOs, in the perception of the people, the officials of the SRRA were the local authorities. The SRRA availed of financed to implement activities, rather than the Liberation Council.

Apart from the SRRA, the most prominent organization in Narus was the Diocese of Torit (DOT). The Bishop established his residence in Narus after the government captured Torit town in 1992. DOT had a development desk that operated like an NGO, and had further offices in Lokichoggio and Nairobi. DOT had the largest relief and rehabilitation programme in the area, including education, water, and health programmes. In Narus, the Diocese ran a primary school for girls, and recently started vocational training. DOT was also constructing a new hospital. In addition, the Comboni-fathers, an Italian order, ran a boys school in Narus, and several schools in surrounding villages, while the indigenous NGO Sudan Medical Care had a small hospital and dispensary in Narus, and a number of dispensaries in the villages around. At the time of fieldwork, a group of Toposa had just established their Toposa Development Association, which aimed to implement development projects with a special focus on contributing to local peace. Other organizations working in Narus included NSCC, though its field-office was not very active, and UN-WFP, which had a small basis. A water project of UNICEF had recently left Narus, as well as the Widows, Orphans and Disabled Rehabilitation Association of New Sudan (WODRANS), an indigenous NGO initiated by the wife of SPLM/A leader John Garang.

Conflict in Narus

Insecurity and conflict in Narus was strongly related to the earlier mentioned resentment among Equatorians towards the SPLM/A and the Dinka in particular. Many people in Narus related to me of the difficulties between especially the Toposa and the Dinka soldiers of the SPLA. Those tensions partially stemmed from the difficult relationship between Toposa and SPLA in the early 1990s, when SPLA entered the area. Fortunately, compared to the early 1990s, the overall situation in Kapoeta County was said to have improved substantially. SPLM/A now ensured that local authorities consisted of locals. In 2001, the SRRA office existed of a mixture of different groups, and the SRRA secretary and Commissioner were Toposa. At the time of the research, resentment was mainly related to the fact that many Dinka soldiers had established themselves with their families in Narus, and

had started occupying land. People commented that the Dinka hesitated to return to their home-areas, which were 'land locked', while in Narus there were possibilities for trade with Kenya and Uganda, minerals and fertile land. In the past, there had been fighting in the market place, which had resulted in a split of the market in a Toposa part and a Dinka part. The situation was said to have improved as a result of the intervention of several Toposa elders, though incidences still occurred. People also observed that as a result of fighting between Didinga and Dinka in Chukudum (see above) the situation in Narus had grown tense as well. The authorities responded to this, it was said, by limiting the number of military around and in Narus. The different sentiments at stake clearly came to expression in an incident and its follow up that occurred in early 2001:

Unhappy with an arms deal with a soldier of the SPLA in Narus, a Toposa came back with some friends, to confront the soldier and his friends. The confrontation resulted in an exchange of fire and the Toposa was killed. The following night, an armed gang of Toposa came to Narus to take revenge on the soldiers, which was narrowly prevented by the guards of the commissioner. In the commotion created by the attack from the Toposa, different stories circulated about the original incident. According to one story, SPLA soldiers had shot a person who refused to come out of his house, while the whole population of Narus had been commissioned to be at a road-block to welcome a visiting delegation of American Bishops, and then run away and was shot. Another story was that a Toposa liaising with the government troops in Kapoeta had come to get information about Narus under the cover of trading goats, and that suspicious soldiers had shot him when he ran away. When more details became known, there was also quite some argument about the background of the soldier. Some people argued that it was a Dinka, while the local authorities insisted that it had been a Murle. Some people speculated that the authorities were afraid for further escalation in case it had indeed been a Dinka, and therefore insisted that that was not the case. Coming back to Narus a few months later, I was told that the soldier concerned had been condemned to death and executed. People rumoured that the soldier had indeed been a Murle, but had been summoned to shoot by a Dinka commander. In the eyes of some people, this made it very unfair that the Murle had been condemned for the killing, and the Dinka commander exonerated and relocated.

The stories surrounding the incident illustrate the resentments against the Dinka and the SPLA, as well as the suspicions about the reliability of the Toposa. They further portray some of the resentment with regard to the authorities, that commissioned people to be at the road-block. The legitimacy of the authority of the SPLM/A was disputed. Several people commented on the crude practices for mobilizing youngsters for the army in 1998-99, and on the practice that those responsible for mobilization exempted their own relatives. References were also made to incidences of harassment of NGOs or the church by the local authorities in the wider region. Over the past few years, Bishop Taban of the Diocese of Torit, together with the elders in the area, had several times addressed the leadership of SPLM/A to undertake action against the unjust practices of the army.

Another conflictive issue in Narus was cattle raiding and related violence. The ethnic groups living in the area know a tradition of cattle raiding, which is closely related to cultural practices such as paying bride-wealth, and male pride. In

the area of Narus, cattle-raiding mainly involved raiding between Toposa and Turkana, who live at the Kenyan side of the border, but also between cattle-keepers that have been displaced from elsewhere. With the increasing availability of guns in the region cattle raiding had become a deadly practice, in which herders got killed which provoked revenge killings. But hostility also has turned against outsiders, such as SPLA and foreigners. To observers in the region, violence and looting seemed to concur with cattle raiding, and some suggested that attacks on cars had become seen as an extension of the cultural practice of raiding. Aid agencies had to travel under armed escort to prevent attacks.

The Diocese of Torit had managed to improve the safety situation by bringing some development to the area, in particular by digging wells. DOT had set up a peace desk, to co-ordinate its peace building activities. Over the year 2000, some reconciliation efforts had been done through the Interafrican Bureau for Animal Resources of the Organization of African Unity (OAU/IBAR), and agreements had been made between chiefs of the different groups. The peace desk of the Diocese was also much involved in these efforts. In the summer of 2001, the security situation deteriorated again with a series of attacks on project vehicles. The authorities seemed to be pretty powerless and put the blame for those incidents on the Turkana, coming from over the border with Kenya. And although the Commissioner himself was a Toposa, he appeared unable to respond to the incidences effectively.

Lastly, several informants referred to insecurity as a result of the wide availability of alcohol. In a participatory exercise as part of a UNICEF workshop for SRRRA officials, 'insecurity as a result of brewing of beer to make a living; and as a result of people drinking because of tediousness or to forget', was identified as a major problem affecting the local people in Narus. Several people commented on the high levels of domestic violence as a result of drinking alcohol. In several instances, the combination of drinking alcohol and loaded guns had resulted in - sometimes deadly- incidents.

The women group of the SWVP

The women group of SWVP in Narus started in 1997, at a workshop in Lokichoggio, organized by the Nairobi-office. Women from several locations in southern Sudan participated in this workshop, where they were mobilized by the women from Nairobi to establish women and peace organizations in their communities. The 15 initial participants, who had been selected by the SRRRA on the request of SWVP, included representatives from all major ethnic groups in Narus: Dinka, Equatorians (including Toposa), and Murle. In the early years, the women of SWVP played a role in a number of local conflicts. For example, in 1998 they were able to halt the escalation of a fight between Dinka and Equatorians in Narus. One Dinka lady called together three other members of the SWVP group to warn the SPLA commander, thereby preventing escalation of the conflict. A second incident concerned two sections of the Toposa that quarrelled over a dry season well in the riverbed, which resulted in the killing of two men. Together with a Toposa chief and the Deputy Commissioner, the women went to the scene of the fighting. The chief and Deputy Commissioner separated the two groups and started talking to them. So did the SWVP-women, and the conflict was settled and both parties convicted to slaughter some bulls to underwrite the settlement. A conflict over the language to be used by the church-choir, either Dinka or Toposa, was averted by a proposal of the SWVP women to alternate the languages. In those conflicts, the women were not centre-stage actors, but they played an important role in warning that violence was about to break out, and managed to mobilize the appropriate authorities to solve it (Simonse 1999).

After these initial years, the women of SWVP Narus wanted to expand. They wanted to get actively involved in the resolution of ethnic conflicts and cattle-raiding in the area, and aimed to spread the message of peace by visiting surrounding communities, and educating the women over there. To enable their expansion, they wanted to build an office and compound where they could meet, receive and train visitors. To sustain this centre, it would include a shop and tailor workplace.

The centre never materialized, due to constraints to be discussed below, and the women's group started to change character in the years to follow. The women still wanted to address local conflict, but in addition the group turned more and more into a kind of social club, or mutual support network. At the 2001 Lokichoggio workshop, the chair-lady summarized the peace activities of the group as:

Monthly bible sharing after church (as people do pray in churches of different nominations, they regard this as an activity); home visits every Sunday; dispensary visits when a member or her child is ill; women cook or dance when they are asked to do so by the church or the authorities; attending funeral rites as a group; collecting money for needy people.

The PDC women regarded those activities as working on 'peace among ourselves'. Those activities included assisting fellow members in need, but also other people from the village. For the women, this kind of activities was clearly 'peace-work'. As one of them explained it:

"Helping each other creates an environment of peace. If you have to carry your problems on your own it is heavy. When you are together you can deal with them. The most important is being together. Even if our centre is not yet there we can start doing something".

Several of these activities were continuations of pre-SWVP social life now headed under the label of SWVP. Apart from activities organized by outsiders, in particular the SWVP-Nairobi, there were no formal meetings. Many of the original members of the core group no longer participated. This had implications for the ethnic composition of the group. SWVP-Narus had come to operate as a social network, mainly of Toposa women. Only when official activities took place, with SWVP-Nairobi, they invited all the members. As a result, the women outside of this network felt increasingly alienated from SWVP-Narus. These women developed more comfortable relations with INGO initiatives for women that were ongoing in the area.

Dynamics in SWVP-Narus

An important constraint to the development of the peace demonstration center was that it lacked the necessary resources and capacities, and supportive institutional environment. Most of the Narus women had to balance their activities for SWVP with taking care of children and relatives, making a living, while often their husbands were absent. Living close to the border provided the women of the SWVP group with many opportunities. Several of them were involved in cross-border trade, buying a crate of soft drinks, some cloth, treats for embroidery, in Kenya and selling it in Narus. Moreover, the amount of time available to women to attend the activities of SWVP also depended on their participation in other NGO projects. The Diocese of Torit had a women group, which ran a tailoring project. Assisted by the NSCC, women of an inter-church group had set up a women co-operative shop, which was quite successful, and a sewing project. In the past, the

New Sudan Women's Association, a group residing under the civil authorities, had run a grinding mill, some sewing machines, and a restaurant. The indigenous NGO WODRANS had also had some women activities. Many of the SWWP women also participated in one or more of those other activities. In addition, the women had little resources to bring in to the centre, and actually hoped that the centre would serve them as a future source of income. When this prospect faded, many of them lost interest and left. Finally, many of the women of the group were not permanently based in Narus. Many of the women had relatives, or school-going children in Kakuma, the large refugee camp in Kenya. The situation of making a living in Kakuma was generally regarded as worse than inside Sudan. Therefore, people preferred to stay in Narus, but regularly moved over the border to meet their relatives or in response to the aerial bombardments. All those factors added to that the membership of the group was not very stable.

Another difficulty was that the skills and organizational capacities of the group were limited, with for example only 3 out of 20 women capable of writing. SWWP Nairobi was a distant supporter that could not train the women in the daily running of an organization. The members of the Narus group had limited experience in how to establish an organization, and were confronted with several hurdles with which they found it difficult to deal. For instance, when the wife of the Commissioner was selected as the chair-lady of the group and subsequently failed to properly account for expenses done with funding from Nairobi, the Narus members did not know how to make this a subject of discussion in their group.

A major constraint was the lack of co-ordination between the churches, international and local NGOs in Narus providing income-generating activities to women. Groups of women were loosely organized around such initiatives. Several women participated on an unstructured basis in more than one initiative, though some differentiation along ethnical lines could also be observed. This dynamics could also be seen within the PDC group. This resulted among others in that over the years peace-initiatives taken by women could be claimed by different organizations or where seen as initiated by them. Possibly, this also resulted in some competition between different organizations in Narus. Unfortunately, it also resulted in that none of these organizations extended assistance to the PDC women's group as such, or perceived supporting women in Narus a shared responsibility, preferring instead to bind individual women to their own initiatives. The irony was that they nonetheless frequently complained about the lack of capacity of SWWP Narus, and expressed disappointment that the women were not able to realize their commendable objectives.

In addition, while the authorities acknowledged the value of projects for women, in practice, this was not reflected in support by all office holders. For example, over the period of my stay in Narus, the women group made a lot of effort for securing a plot for its compound, but several times plots that had been allocated to them had finally been destined for other purposes. When this problem was finally overcome, there turned out to be no agreement among different office holders about the property status of the plot. As a compound built by another women organization in the end had been claimed back by the authorities, the PDC-women were hesitant to continue.

The meaning of peace

How significant is SWWP Narus for peace? This depends, of course, on how one defines peace and what expectations exist about peace building. The Narus women were convinced that their activities were leading to a more peaceful society. The women of the group often referred to their roles as 'natural peace makers' and told of the instances in the past in which they had had a role in conflict

prevention. The PDC women developed a definition of peace that started from below, from the unity of the core-family, and primarily worked on "peace among ourselves", by cultivating peace in their families and homes.

Several members described family to me as the heart of society: "If the heart of society is rotten, peace can not be expected", they would say, "How to bring peace around you, when your own heart is not at peace?"

Besides, they considered development as an important prerequisite for peace. As they claimed: "you cannot have peace in your mind without peace in your stomach". They therefore considered income-generating projects also as peace work, and saw as their first objective the establishment of a physical Peace Demonstration Centre, which would facilitate this income generation. They maintained this mission as advocates for peace in the wider context of Sudan. After the training in trauma counselling organized by the SWWP in 1999, they were motivated to communicate what they had learnt to others, and came up with a declaration to campaign against small arms in public places. Unfortunately, these activities could not be realized due to lack of facilities (such as bicycle to visit the villages, and the failure to produce the posters necessary for the campaign). A community theatre workshop facilitated by SWWP resulted in a performance for the community of Narus. As SWWP, they were often invited to other organizations' peace activities, where they could bring out their message for peace, such as the OAU/IBAR peace workshop between the Toposa and the Turkana.

Otherwise, they saw little opportunity to translate their mission in concrete activities. The North-South conflict and the bombardments were clearly beyond their realm of influence. Locally, it was acknowledged that women had an important role in cattle-raiding and related violence and could play a role in its resolution.¹⁸ However, since the majority of members were not from cattle holding families or were widows with little leverage in cattle-raiding issues they also saw little scope in addressing cattle-raiding. Addressing alcohol-related violence, on the other hand, found no constituency in the group because many of the PDC women brewed alcohol to earn an income. The concern of outsiders that SWWP Narus lost credibility as peace building organization because they had largely lost their multi-ethnic character was not shared by the women. The ethnic composition of the group seemed, in their perception, to present no barrier whatsoever to continue their peace work.

Nevertheless, some church workers and people working with other (indigenous) organizations in Narus expressed disappointment with what PDC Narus had managed to do so far regarding local conflicts. They considered the women of the group little serious in their efforts, and commented on the various intentions that were not realized. At the same time, they blamed SWWP Nairobi for being incapable to assist the group. Others, including fellow villagers, remarked that while the SWWP 'pretended' to be for all ethnic groups, several ethnic communities in Narus were not represented in the group. In my view, these observations say less about the SWWP women than about how some people in the community of Narus looked at group. The question is whether the expectations of those outsiders about PDC Narus were realistic.

¹⁸ In several workshops facilitated by OAU/IBAR in the area, women related of how they incited their youngsters to raid cattle. Women praised and chanted at the cattle raiders upon return. They told stories to their young children, such as that all the cows in the area originally belong to their family or tribe, and that it was their right to take back what belonged to them.

The significance of SWWP Narus is not restricted to its peace related activities. Clearly, for the women who constituted the organization, peace (in a strict sense) was important, but did not have the overwhelming priority outsiders attributed to it. They were primarily occupied with the demands of making a living and driven by the desire to realize good community relations in a more general sense. Apart from the question how SWWP Narus effectively built peace, there is no doubt about the fact that the group was very important for the identity and social relations of the women members, who found in the group a venue to share the hardships of life with likeminded women.

Finally, I like to mention the symbolic significance of groups like SWWP Narus. In Narus, the women group was quite well known, and there seemed to be a moral support basis for the initiative, among women and men. The very name of the organization 'women for peace' generated a lot of credit by itself. Several men commented to me about 'the gifts of women to solve conflicts', and made remarks such as: "Women are more committed to work for peace than men". Through their work, the concept of peace entered the everyday vocabulary of people in the community, which contributed to a slowly growing constituency of peace. This effect radiated far beyond their immediate activities. The fact that these women of Narus belonged to a larger women's movement for peace was widely known and appealed to many men and women in and outside of Narus.

Development for Peace, the case of Narus

In the view of the SWWP management team priority should be given to the income generating activities of the Narus group, to ensure a continued interest of the women in their PDC, and to generate some resources for its activities. However, though the SWWP Nairobi group had experience in training women in trauma counselling, and conflict resolution, and while some of the women had a background in relief-organizations, they had not much experience in the field of more development related activities. Moreover, with the limited opportunities the SWWP Nairobi women had to visit Narus, it would almost be impossible to effectively supervise such a process. One of the problems in doing socio-economic work is, in addition, that it can only address a limited number of women, excluding other women from joining the activities. Despite the importance of income generating activities, the question rises whether SWWP should accept responsibilities in this domain.

The example of some of the other six PDC groups supported by SWWP provides an answer. Some of these groups had successfully developed a wide range of (income generating) activities.¹⁹ Those groups had been able to profit from the presence of other organizations in their regions. In Palotaka, for example, apart from SWWP several other organizations provided training to the PDC. In Akobo, the PDC also got assistance from the Southern Sudan Women Association, and UNICEF. In those cases, the women groups regarded SWWP as just one of the opportunities for strengthening their group. When asked about the relationship between the Akobo group and the SWWP office, the chair-lady responded, for example:

¹⁹ In Palotaka, for example, a strong self-help initiative had come into being, with sub-groups in other villages, and in which more than 500 people participated. This group -which also included men-availed of 8 sewing machines, while 15 women were being trained as trainers in tailoring. The group co-operatively cultivated sorghum. Some members had been trained by an Ugandese organization in making bricks, and a training centre had been constructed by local means. There were many plans for training in trauma counselling and conflict resolution, but also for adult education. The women groups in Akobo and Mapel also had constructed compounds, largely by their own means.

"We sometimes invite them. We work hand in hand. However, they only support a few people. Akobo is big and one organization can not serve everybody".

In the case of Narus, closer co-operation between SWWP Nairobi and the other church-related organizations and NGOs working in Narus, would possibly resolve the unease of the different organizations with the unstable participation in simultaneous (and therefor to some extent competitive) women initiatives. Closer co-operation might enable addressing every day conflict issues in Narus. Most important, however, was that it would enable the Nairobi women to work in their field of expertise: peace building.

Focussing on peace building would not only enable SWWP to improve the quality of its work, but also the quantity. Actually, many of the PDC groups were disappointed about the amount of assistance resulting from participating in the network, which in some instances even resulted in blaming the Nairobi office for withholding funds. Likely, in earlier visits and workshops SWWP had raised too high expectation about what SWWP could do in the communities. Focussing on its core activity -peace building- would enable SWWP to include more women in its activities.

6. Conclusion

In southern Sudan, different actors are working for peace between factions and within communities, including churches, traditional leaders, resistance movements and international organizations. Though at the local level, openings appear for local initiatives for peace to take off, such initiatives are often hampered by attitudes towards civil society and in particular towards women initiatives. Many civil society organizations in southern Sudan are still very young and lack organizational experience. In view of these impediments, it is impressive that Sudanese organizations have been able to develop and accomplish peace building activities. The experience of the SWWP makes clear that -whatever small- such initiatives are important. Taking serious and supporting such initiatives gives southern Sudanese the hope that peace remains a possibility. On the basis of this report, the following recommendations could be given regarding supporting local initiatives for peace:

- *More attention for the internal dynamics of local peace organizations*

As the case-study of the SWWP suggested, the implementation of local peace programmes has a lot to do with the life-worlds of the individuals constituting local organizations, the context of war in which they work, and their organizational capacities. More attention for those internal dynamics would tone down unrealistic expectations, and would facilitate that support provided to them is timely and adequate. The case of Narus underlines the importance of realistic expectations about what local organizations are capable to achieve, and the need to take account of how local partners themselves make sense of what they are doing.

- *Effective peace building requires not eschewing political involvement*

In the practice of supporting peace work many international organizations struggle with the question if and how to invest in the capacity building of authorities and local organizations. A central concern is how their efforts will work out in a political sense. This concern might easily end in passivity. Otherwise, it may result in a preference for approaches that are supposedly 'neutral', resulting in development for peace approaches that rather focus on service provision than on capacity building. Bringing 'peace in the stomach' should not exclude more direct strategies for peace building. This is especially important in conflicts that involve different visions or identities rather than struggles about the use of natural resources.

- *Need for long-term commitment and patience from the side of the donors*

It needs emphasizing that a number of the problems attributed to local NGOs and that were used to dismiss the feasibility to support them, were co-produced by the funding practices of international organizations. The case of SWWP illustrates how funding can aggravate such problems in local NGOs. In southern Sudan, donor practices tended to drown or divide promising initiatives, while refusing to commit to long-term capacity building. If sincere to work for development and peace in southern Sudan, donors must start to make major investment in time and resources in capacity building of local organizations. The experience of SWWP shows a need for realistic expectations about the organizational capacities of local organizations working on peace building in southern Sudan at the moment. It may take a long time for initiatives to take off properly. Peace is something of the long breath, which needs long-term investment.

- *Taking account of the lessons from development assistance, especially regarding co-operation*

The risk is great that in a context of war, years of experience in development assistance in more 'normal' situations are forgotten to give in to the exceptionalities of war. However, if supporting local initiatives for peace work is regarded as the groundwork for development after the war is over, it could profit from more development oriented approaches. For this, in the process of capacity building, donor agencies should give clear messages about what is acceptable to them and what not. There is a need for co-operation between, and specialization among local peace organizations. Donors should facilitate these processes.

- *Need for co-operation and specialization between supporting organizations*

At the same time, there is a need for co-operation and specialization among international agencies. Often they appear focussed on supporting or initiating their 'own' initiatives, rather than seeking for possibilities for further co-operation, and specializing in their expertise. As one Sudanese aptly observed: "How to expect us to co-operate if they themselves don't?". Co-operation and specialization between supporting organizations also is important to prevent that the (complicated) political side of local conflict is lost in the strategies.

- *Need for attention to the role of churches in peace building*

Remarkably, with the non-church related INGOs there seemed little attention for encouraging development and peace by strengthening the capacities of church-related programmes. There are some indications that INGOs had limited confidence in church-related initiatives, which they suspected to be too much integrated with the resistance movements. Nevertheless, churches are the oldest civil society organizations and have the largest outreach and legitimation in southern Sudan. Again, peace building in southern Sudan would profit from approaches that focus on co-operation and linking different initiatives, rather than on selectively working with particular organizations.

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