CSRF Meta-Analysis: Peace in South Sudan

This Research Repository has been compiled by the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF) to assist donors and aid workers in South Sudan to better understand the context in which they work. The repository is searchable by key words, and it is categorized by "theory focus" and "practice focus" to enable easier exploration of specific topics. The CSRF has conducted a meta-analysis for eight theoretical categories, analysing a selection of relevant, key literature and extracting some of the most salient questions for donor-funded programming. This meta-analysis provides an overview of literature available on the peace in South Sudan.

The CSRF is implemented by a consortium of Saferworld and swisspeace and supports conflict-sensitive aid programming in South Sudan. The United Kingdom, Switzerland, Canada, the Netherlands, and the European Union have joined forces to develop shared resources through the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility in South Sudan.

Understanding the Literature

As the transition period established by the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS, or "Revitalised Agreement") draws towards its final stages, this literature review aims to look back on South Sudan's conflict and peace situation.

The literature on peace in South Sudan tends to focus on internationally-brokered peace processes including the process leading to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, post-2005 peace building engagement, the ARCSS in August 2015 and the R-ARCSS in September 2018. The literature also explores opportunities and limitations of local level conflict mitigation and peace building mechanisms in which traditional authorities and church leaders often play a key role. Among local level peace processes, notables are the Wunlit peace process that led to a conference in 1999, the Marial Bai Peace Agreement (2016, renewed in 2019), as well as the Pieri Action Plan for peace (2021). Despite being community or government led, these processes were funded and supported by international actors. In practice, local conflict resolution, peace building and local justice are deeply intertwined and difficult to disentangle. The questions below were developed with the aim of exploring past and current peace building processes and activities and thereby providing a better understanding of the opportunities and limitations of local and high-level peace processes and peace building activities.

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1. What is the legacy of South Sudan's formal peace agreements (the CPA, the ARCSS, and the R-ARCSS)?

2. Why has international peace mediation in South Sudan had limited success in putting an end to conflict?

3. Why did previous attempts at disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) fail?

4. What other conflict mitigation mechanisms exist in South Sudan, and what are their limitations?

1. What is the legacy of South Sudan's formal peace agreements (the CPA, the ARCSS, and the R-ARCSS)?

The foundational South Sudanese formal peace agreement, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), set the roadmap for South Sudan's secession from Sudan in 2011, and established the political institutions that South Sudan inherited at the time of independence. Its limitations in design, process, and implementation, remain relevant today, in both Sudan and South Sudan. Subsequent to its signature in 2005, civil war and cycles of localised violence have plagued the country, resulting in forced displacement and deepening of the humanitarian crisis. Since then, two peace mediation processes were brokered to correct course of South Sudan's conflict trajectory, with varying degrees of success: the Agreement on the Resolution on the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) in August 2015, and the Revitalised Agreement on on the Resolution on the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in September 2018.

As a bilateral agreement between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the National Congress Party (NCP), the CPA set the pattern for exclusive, non-representative, high-level political processes. Although providing a comprehensive reform agenda, it was largely seen in terms of its power and wealth sharing protocols, which gave the vast majority of political representation in Southern Sudan to the SPLM, and excluded other political forces.

The CPA provided the template for security arrangements in Sudan and South Sudan – the one country, two armies model. In then-Southern Sudan, this required militias that had been fighting independent of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), to formally align with one of the two legal armies. Most militias active in Southern Sudan chose to affiliate with the SPLA and were formally integrated in the SPLA.

More recent peace negotiations have largely drawn on the same models, even though the context has evolved significantly.

Although the CPA brought an end to the conflict between its signatories, the high-level agreement did not bring to a stop the continued localised violence across the country. As these were left unaddressed, and in combination with disputes over oil revenues as well as elite's power grab, hostilities escalated in the South Sudanese Civil War in 2013. Externally led peace mediation brokered the ARCSS in August 2015. While ARCSS contributed to a short-term reduction in the level of violence, conflict resumed as early as 2016 across large parts of South Sudan, including areas previously largely unaffected by violence, such as the Equatorias. A more robust cessation of hostilities followed the signing of the R-ARCSS in 2018. However, the Revitalised Agreement mainly affected conflict between signatories (i.e., SPLM and SPLM-IO) at national level, while localised violence still persists.

As the title suggests, the R-ARCSS seeks to revitalise the ARCSS, and includes provisions similar to its predecessor: a permanent ceasefire, a power-sharing transitional government, and elections in three years (i.e., in 2021) from its signature. The implementation of the R-ARCSS however has been substantially delayed, with an agreement between its signatories to extend it by 24 months in August 2022. This was a result of a number of factors, credited largely to political will and the persistent failure to meet set deadlines of the Agreement's implementation. It is now envisaged that the first general national elections ever held in South Sudan will be in 2024, and the conclusion in February 2025 of the transitional arrangements within the framework of the R-ARCSS.

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2. Why has international peace mediation in South Sudan had limited success in putting an end to conflict?

The CPA and interim period until independence received substantial backing by Western countries, especially from the Troika (United States of America, United Kingdom, and Norway) which were CPA guarantors. Externally led peace mediation also brokered the ARCSS in August 2015 and the R-ARCSS in September 2018. As such, international peace mediation efforts have characterized the peace process in South Sudan from the beginning, involving both neighboring countries (in particular the sub-regional organization IGAD) and those outside the region (Toika, EU, but also a recent involvement of China and the Gulf States). Nevertheless, these formal peace agreements have had varying degrees of success in setting course for a cessation of hostilities in South Sudan, despite – to their credit – providing a comprehensive roadmap to work towards it. Failure, it appears, can largely be allocated to the challenge of their implementation.

Different models of explanations for the limited success of the peace agreement exist. Theorists of the political marketplace argue "no peace agreement in Sudan or South Sudan has been implemented without an expanding budget," which implies that the collapse of the oil price and shrinking national budget undermine ARCSS (De Waal 2016). These theorists contrast with other voices suggesting that the parties lacked the political will or that the peace process, or the agreement itself, was flawed in how it shaped incentives. It is also clear that the actors to the conflict had concluded that military victory could yet be achieved, or that the costs in returning to conflict would be less than those of working for peace. It is apparent that the mistrust between political elites ensured that any agreement reached would be fragile. International mediation typically succeeds where there is an alignment of interests between internal and external actors – third parties, however, cannot want peace more than the South Sudanese signatories and the parties to the conflict themselves.

An additional critique, prevalent in particular in reference to the ARCSS and R-ARCSS, puts forward the argument that the failure of the agreements to foster a cessation of hostilities at local level is to be assigned to their framing. In fact, as these agreements target peace between national-level warring parties, they leave unaddressed grievances – ethnic, economic, local in nature – outside of their scope. Brokering peace at high level thus cannot result in a cessation of localised conflict and the fostering of peace at the local level. This ultimately also highlights a fundamental issue of the international influence on peace in South Sudan: while mediation efforts can have an impact of warring parties at the national level, the fallback and political trajectory of the subsequent implementation of the agreement cannot be influenced, nor controlled.

Go to the source
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3. Why did previous attempts at disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) fail?

The 2005-2011 DDR programme in Sudan constituted an important dimension of the post-conflict peace building endeavour, and was expected to be the largest ever implemented. Massive resources were allocated to the effort, but to little effect. The programme's mid-term review found that the support offered "was more of an expensive livelihoods support program for a limited group of people than a relevant contribution to peace and stability in Southern Sudan…and was not effective in terms of contributing to the reduction of military capability, military expenditure, nor to confidence building measures" (UNDP 2013). The situation had not improved by the project's completion, as the final review found: "the programme did not achieve its objective of downsizing the army and releasing resources from defence to peaceful developmental activities…. The contribution… towards reducing threats to human security was also minimal" (Ibid.).

Despite official acceptance of the DDR process, the SPLA was not committed to it, as there were fears that the war with Khartoum could reignite before independence was achieved, and the army would be needed. The target caseload of ex-combatants was determined through a bargaining process that bore little relation to the genuine capacity or needs of the SPLA. Further, despite concerns that many global DDR 'best practices' were inapplicable to the South Sudanese context, lessons from other DDR programmes remained largely not adapted to local circumstances.

DDR processes envisioned in the R-ARCSS encountered similar challenges, while still expressing the fundamental need to undergo and invest in DDR (e.g., Chapter II, Clause 2.4.10 of the R-ARCSS). The R-ARCSS, for instance, includes provisions for starting the DDR process as a matter of urgency, and to be conducted in parallel with the army unification process. This urgency was recognised particularly crucial to avoid further alienation of young men, already vulnerable in the heavily militarised environment of South Sudan. Nevertheless, in an echo of the issues that characterised the DDR process under the PCA, as – in a heavily militarised environment, where control over military forces equals to political and economic power – there is no real incentive for generals to diminish the size of their forces. This issue of control of military forces is also common to the army's unification of the agreement's signatories, which is not taking place for the same reasons. In a context where control over a sizeable military force equals access to wages, political and economic power, it results counter-intuitive to give it up – even in the face of peace.

Additionally, a wider issue, divergent from the DDR process under the CPA, is the significant lack of funding DDR has in the framework of the R-ARCSS. This is partly due to a lack on national interest and political will, but significantly also by a lack of interest by the donor community in investing in it, especially following the failure of its previous iterations. As such, DDR continues to be of even less interest in South Sudan, effectively feeding the militarised political economy in the country.

Go to the source

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4. What other conflict mitigation mechanisms exist in South Sudan, and what are their limitations?

From traditional authorities to faith-based actors, there are many other mechanisms for conflict mitigation in South Sudan, including local level conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms (CPRMs). Some of these are a heritage of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium government, which, for instance, introduced meetings between communities who annually met in the dry season because of livestock migration, which were mediated by traditional leaders.

As mentioned above, the signing of peace agreements, the latest in 2018 (R-ARCSS), has significantly reduced the degree of fighting at the national level. However, since then, South Sudanese society continues to be plagued by localised conflicts. With peace at the local level being left outside of the scope of national peace agreements, the onus of fostering peace is left in the hands of CPRMs, involving an array of diverse actors and with varying degrees of success.

Generally, CPRMs in South Sudan include actors across the social strata, with more or less traditionally defined roles: these can be local level officials, chiefs, chief courts' members, community and spiritual authorities, women leaders, youth leaders, elders, etc. The strength of CPRMs specifically in the South Sudan is the intrinsic knowledge of the context, of the conflict dynamics and sensitivity, as its members are rooted within the community they aim to foster peace in. The literature has showcased that many CPRM members are informal mediators with significant experience with and expertise in conflict prevention, resolution, and reconciliation, having spent years resolving conflicts within and between their communities.

Increased prevalence of CPRM structure has also been beneficial towards awareness raising across communities on the benefit of the rule of law, and with the goal of preventing militarisation of youth. Additionally, the inclusion of elements of mental health and trauma healing in CPRMs has also gathered positive results – especially given the pervasive and decades-long cycles of violence most South Sudanese have experienced throughout their lives.

It must be noted that CPRMs, however, are not a "one size fits all" solution, as their strength also lies in their adaptability to local needs: the diversity of actors that may be called to mediate a specific conflict is defined by the type of issue at hand. This is also why women find to have a strong positioning within CPRMs in South Sudan, despite the country's heavily patriarchal society. In fact, women mediators are preferred in cases of conflict within families, within and between women's groups, and in the widespread disputes related to SGBV. This is also thanks to the uniqueness recognised to women in South Sudan: women are considered somewhat "neutral" when compared to men, and thus better positioned to undertake a mediator role.

In addition to their adaptability, CPRMs are thus flexible, locally owned and guided. This last point in particular contributes to the resilience of CPRMs when faced with a lack of external funding or wide-spread crises.

Nevertheless, CPRMs are faced with a series of challenges, both structural and material. Short-term material challenges refer specifically to a lack or restricted external funding, which oftentimes leave these mechanisms with limited resources. Their efficacy is also tampered by the members inconsistent access to communication and transport due to the country's infrastructure. Political interests also present a crucial challenge for CPRMs, particularly as chiefs and other local actors sometimes make use of their platform for the advancement of their own specific agendas. A particularly strong criticism on this matter is put forward in relation to local actors' (partial) disregard of human rights of specific segments of society, particularly women and children.

Political interests also have an impact in the appointment structure of local actors (e.g., political appointment of chiefs by local authorities instead of communities to achieve favourable election results or political influence), further entrenching issues of political polarisation and marginalisation, and opening these mechanisms up to criticism over their supposed impartiality and credibility.

Lastly, the success of CPRMs in certain contexts is linked with a severe involvement by security forces – effectively putting into question the sustainability of such mechanisms.

These challenges can be once again a reminder that just as much as conflict, peace too is a multi-layered, and in order to foster sustainable peace there is a need to address underlying local and national grievances.

[Further publications on international engagement in South Sudan are available in the CSRF Research Repository.](#)

Go to the source

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