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Women's Peace & Humanitarian Fund

A United Nations & Civil Society Partnership

Entry Points for Women's Engagement in Peacemaking Efforts in South Sudan

Policy Paper

SUMMARY

The Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) has given rise to a robust ceasefire at the national level since September 2018. However, peace in South Sudan remains fragile. This policy paper uses interviews with and an in-person convening of South Sudanese civil society actors, as well as secondary literature, to explore the factors that undermine the R-ARCSS implementation process. These include a lack of political will and funding, tensions between South Sudan's elite, and the high number of armed groups operating in the country. It also shows that persistent patriarchal norms and structural gender inequality, a continuously shrinking civic space, the disconnect between women in national political offices and at the grassroots level, increasing restraints on the work of women as peacemakers and peacebuilders, and divisions among women politicians constrain South Sudanese women's peacemaking activities more generally.

The policy paper uses the analysis of constraining factors regarding the R-ARCSS implementation process to formulate four overarching entry points for rethinking South Sudan's peace process:

- ***Creating inclusive, meaningful, and independent peacemaking processes at the community and sub-national level.*** This includes conducting local community dialogues; negotiating and implementing local (peace) agreements; relying on women as facilitators of local community dialogues; designing complementary peacemaking and peacebuilding activities; and conducting local monitoring and employing local early warning strategies.

- ***Enhancing the inclusivity of and reviving the R-ARCSS implementation process.*** Concrete activities in this regard could include getting non-signatories of the R-ARCSS on board, ensuring support from regional actors, creating partnerships between women peacemakers and government authorities, setting up an intra-parliamentary pressure group, organising a woman's national dialogue or conference, and mitigating tensions within the SPLM-IO.

- ***Identifying and engaging enablers of inclusive peacemaking in South Sudan,*** including religious actors, traditional and cultural leaders, elder man community leaders, and local authorities and security forces.

- ***Working on effective transfer mechanisms between community, sub-national, and national peacemaking efforts and initiatives,*** for example, creating mechanisms for disseminating information about national peace efforts among grassroots communities, mobilising community

members at the grassroots level to discuss their individual contribution to implementing the R-ARCSS, and setting up institutionalised spaces for exchanges between grassroots and national actors.

Various forms of external support could help South Sudanese women peacemakers to tap into the four overarching entry points presented above, including flexible and long-term funding to promote women's engagement in home-grown peacemaking approaches; trauma healing support; coalition building, networking, and peer exchange support; international diplomatic pressure for women's inclusion in peacemaking; and the establishment of a monitoring system that traces threats, assaults, and intimidation against women peacemakers.

Introduction

South Sudan has experienced armed conflict for more than four decades. The most recent episode at the national level stopped in September 2018, when the conflict parties signed the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS). South Sudanese women played an important role in pushing for the R-ARCSS, both inside and outside the negotiation room. They have also been actively lobbying for and advancing the implementation of the agreement.[1]

The R-ARCSS has given rise to a robust ceasefire at the national level. However, peace in South Sudan remains fragile. Inter-communal violence has intensified recently.[2] Many of the R-ARCSS provisions remain to be fully implemented, with civil society, including women peacemakers, struggling to influence the peace process at the national level.

The announcement of the Unity Government in August 2022 to extend the transitional period for another two years demonstrated both a lack of genuine initiative and ideas among the political elites for how to address the deadlock in the R-ARCSS' implementation. It also suggests that the political elites have reached something of a "post-conflict elite pact", under which they found consensus on how to share resources, power, and influence among themselves. This elite pact ignores the underlying causes of conflict and reduces the prospects for greater inclusion in the R-ARCSS' implementation.

The objective of this policy paper is two-fold. Firstly, it seeks to take stock of both the current challenges to an inclusive R-ARCSS implementation process and South Sudanese women's peacemaking activities.[3] Secondly, it aims to identify entry points for South Sudanese women peacemakers, national stakeholders in South Sudan, and the international community to achieve a more inclusive, sustainable peace process in South Sudan.

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1   E. Soma, "Our Search for Peace: Women in South Sudan's National Peace Processes, 2005-2018," UN Women, Oxfam (2020), https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620930/rr-women-south-sudan-peace-processes-300120-en.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y [last accessed: 16/02/2023].

2   Interviews with E and R II; International Crisis Group (ICG), "Toward a Viable Future for South Sudan," *Report N°300/Africa* (2021), https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/south-sudan/300-toward-viable-future-south-sudan [last accessed: 16/02/2023]; R-JMEC, "Report 17/22," (2022), https://jmecsouthsudan.org/index.php/reports/rjmec-quarterly-reports/218-rjmec-quarterly-report-on-the-status-of-implementation-of-the-r-arcss-from-1st-october-to-31st-december-2022/file [last accessed: 16/02/2023].

3   In the context of South Sudan and for the purposes of this policy paper, peacemaking can be understood as efforts that aim to further the R-ARCSS implementation process as well as contain sub-national armed violence and prevent a further escalation of local tensions. Peacebuilding, on the other hand, refers to the process of getting closer to building peaceful societies. This includes addressing the underlying drivers of armed conflict.

For its methodology, this policy paper is based on a qualitative analysis that included two sources of information. Firstly, a total of eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with diverse South Sudanese actors that have worked in the context of the R-ARCSS peace negotiations and its subsequent implementation. The interviewees came from diverse backgrounds and included executive directors of South Sudanese women's organisations, refugees, employees of international organisations that operate in South Sudan, and South Sudanese academics. The policy paper was also informed by an in-person convening bringing together South Sudanese women civil society actors. Secondly, a thorough review of secondary literature was conducted to substantiate and supplement the insights gathered during the interviews.

The interviewees' diverse backgrounds ensure that this policy paper captures the views of a variety of women peacemakers who contribute to the South Sudanese peace process in different ways. However, the relatively small sample size implies that the findings presented below may not be representative of all South Sudanese women peacemakers.

Context

Since achieving independence in 2011, South Sudan's political instability can largely be attributed to the politicisation of ethnic identity (and alliances). Competition between President Kiir (Dinka) and Vice President Machar (Nuer) around the leadership of the government party Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) escalated into a civil war between 2013 and 2015.[4] After the collapse of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS) in 2016, domestic and international pressure led both conflict parties to sign the R-ARCSS in September 2018. The R-ARCSS is a power-sharing agreement that embraces various opposition groups. It provides for the creation of mechanisms to monitor the implementation of the agreement, such as the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC), and is dedicated to transitional justice, accountability, reconciliation, and healing.[5] It also includes a 35% affirmative gender quota for all levels of government.

The share of women negotiators has incrementally increased across the distinct peace processes in South Sudan since 1999. The formal negotiations leading to the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement with Sudan by and large excluded

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4   D. Deng, "Compound Fractures: Political Formations, Armed Groups and Regional Mediation in South Sudan," *Institute for Security Studies East Africa Report 21* (2018), https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/ear-21-1.pdf [last accessed: 16/02/2023]; Soma, "Our Search for Peace."

5   The Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) (2018), https://docs.pca-cpa.org/2016/02/South-Sudan-Peace-Agreement-September-2018.pdf [last accessed: 16/02/2023].

women.[6] The share of women negotiation delegates later increased to 15 percent during the ARCSS negotiations and then 25 percent during the R-ARCSS negotiations, respectively.[7]

Besides their direct participation at the negotiation table, South Sudanese women engaged in various informal peace activities. These included the establishment of peace forums to facilitate local exchanges about peace and reconciliation, and the organisation of silent protest marches to push for a peace deal.[8] However, women's influence over the peace talks remained limited.[9] This was due to a variety of factors, including:

- Sexual harassment of women negotiators by their men counterparts;

- A restrictive mediation style, which gave women negotiation delegates few opportunities to contribute to the negotiations;

- A high illiteracy rate among women;

- Men negotiation delegates occupying the visible and influential positions in the negotiation process;[10] and

- Political rifts between and heterogeneous interests among women in political parties and civil society, which significantly reduced women's collective strength, both in the ARCSS and the R-ARCSS processes.[11]

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6   J-K. Westendorf, "Peace Negotiations in the Political Marketplace: The Implications of Women's Exclusion in the Sudan-South Sudan Peace Process," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 72:5 (2018), pp. 433-454.

7   S. Pelham, "Born to Lead. Recommendations on Increasing Women's Participation in South Sudan's Peace Process," Oxfam (2020), https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620934/bp-south-sudan-women-peace-processes-300120-en.pdf [last accessed: 16/02/2023], p. 2; see also L. Kumalo and C. Roddy-Mullineaux, "Sustaining Peace. Harnessing the Power of South Sudanese Women," *Institute for Security Studies East Africa Report* 30 (2019), https://journals.co.za/doi/abs/10.10520/EJC-1fda86a30b [last accessed: 16/02/2023]; A. Mattijo Bazugba et al., "Women's Experiences in the South Sudan Peace Process 2013-2018," Brief CMI, FBA and NTLI (2020), https://fba.se/contentassets/a6c7cb82878a47f98bdae88c729f0410/womens-experiences-in-the-south-sudan-peace-process-2013-2018_brief.pdf [last accessed: 16/02/2023]; Soma, "Our Search for Peace."

8   H. Kezie-Nwoha and J. Were, "Women's Informal Peace Efforts: Grassroots Activism in South Sudan," *CMI Brief Number 7* (2018), https://www.cmi.no/publications/6700-womens-informal-peace-efforts [last accessed: 16/02/2023]; Kumalo and Roddy-Mullineaux, "Sustaining Peace," p. 8; Soma, "Our Search for Peace"; T. Tindall, "Women's Participation and Influence in Transitions from Conflict: The Case of South Sudan," London: ODI (2022), https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/WPS_South_Sudan_Case_Study_FINAL_FCDO_v2_3eWbhFR.pdf [last accessed: 16/02/2023], p. 15.

9   Kumalo and Roddy-Mullineaux, "Sustaining Peace," p. 3.

10   Kumalo and Roddy-Mullineaux, "Sustaining Peace," p. 5; Soma, "Our Search for Peace," p. 5.

11   Soma, "Our Search for Peace," pp. 31 and 41.

Factors constraining the R-ARCSS implementation process

The R-ARCSS has managed to end armed fighting and created a robust ceasefire that holds until today.[12] South Sudanese women have used the R-ARCSS to enhance women's representation in high-level political positions. Women currently head seven out of 32 government ministries, including the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Gender, Child, and Social Welfare. One out of South Sudan's five Vice Presidents is a woman. However, the affirmative 35% gender quota that the R-ARCSS foresees for all government levels remains to be fully implemented.

Importantly, the implementation of the R-ARCSS has stagnated recently. Interviewees consulted for this policy paper identified several constraints to the implementation of the R-ARCSS and inclusive peacemaking in South Sudan more generally, namely:[13]

- **Lack of political will:** Tangible benefits such as control over political decision-making, access to financial revenues, and protection from prosecution for war crimes incentivise South Sudan's incumbent government to maintain the political status quo and prevent the full implementation of the R-ARCSS accordingly. One interviewee mentioned though that the persisting ceasefire at the national level and unanimous support among the R-ARCSS signatory parties for the new R-ARCSS implementation roadmap demonstrates the commitment of the political elites to implement the peace agreement.

- **Absence of democracy:** South Sudan is yet to establish the democratic system of governance that the country's constitution enshrines. The Transitional National Legislature has been struggling to hold the Unity Government accountable for the limited progress they have made in the R-ARCSS implementation process. This is mainly due to the fact that the serving Members of the Revitalised Transitional National Legislative Assembly have been appointed rather than elected and thus feel less pressure to serve their constituencies.

- **Non-signatories:** Some armed groups have refused to sign the R-ARCSS and seek to undermine its implementation. Prominent examples are the National Salvation Front, which leads the ongoing insurgency in Equatoria, the South Sudan United Front, and the Real-SPLM, amongst others.

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12   International Crisis Group (ICG), "South Sudan's Splintered Opposition: Preventing More Conflict," *Briefing N°179/Africa* (2022), https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/south-sudan/south-su-dans-splintered-opposition-preventing-more-conflict [last accessed: 16/02/2023].

13   Interviews with A, I, M, P, R, RII, and V.

- **Tensions between the elites:** Interviewees mentioned that "there are two governments in one state"[14], alluding to the rift within both the Unity Government and the military. Limited reconciliation efforts have insufficient to mitigate the long-standing tensions between the elites.[15]

- **Multiple actors:** South Sudan hosts around 50 political or armed groups, which all seek to get involved in the peace process. Finding compromise and striking deals that are universally acceptable to all these groups is challenging.

- **Lack of funding:** One interviewee cited the high expenses related to the implementation of core provisions of the R-ARCSS as a constraining factor. Other interviewees rejected insufficient funding for the R-ARCSS implementation as an excuse, blaming the government for inappropriately prioritising how funds are allocated.

- **Poor infrastructure and language barriers:** A poor road network, limited access to television, and more than 60 indigenous languages across the country make it hard for high-level politicians and civil society to reach out to and share updates on the peace process with grassroots communities.

The stagnated implementation of the R-ARCSS amplifies the destabilising impact of several conflict drivers, namely:

- Long-standing grievances between the SPLM and the SPLM-in-opposition (SPLM-IO) around the planned security sector reform, the distribution of oil revenues, and political decentralisation;[16]

- Intensified inter-communal violence between local groups that have stronger affiliations with their tribe or ethnic group than with the South Sudanese state;[17]

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14   Interviews with I, M, V, and R II.

15   See also Deng, "Compound Fractures."

16   International Crisis Group (ICG), "South Sudan's Splintered Opposition"; International Crisis Group (ICG), "Toward a Viable Future for South Sudan"; International Crisis Group (ICG), "South Sudan's Other War: Resolving the Insurgency in Equatoria," *Briefing N°169/Africa* (2021), https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/south-sudan/b169-south-sudans-other-war-resolving-insurgency-equatoria [last accessed: 16/02/2023]; A.K. Nyuon, "Women in Mainstreaming Peace and Security in South Sudan: Lessons Learnt and Way Forward," *Galore International Journal of Applied Sciences and Humanities* 5:1 (2021), pp. 1-11.

17   Kumalo and Roddy-Mullineaux, "Sustaining Peace," p. 4; H.K. Logo et al., "Gender Norms, Conflict Sensitivity and Transition in South Sudan," *CSRF Better Aid Forum Briefing Paper* (2022), https://www.csrf-southsudan.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/BAF-Gender-Conflict-Sensitivity-and-Transition-in-South-Sudan_14072022.pdf [last accessed: 16/02/2023], p. 7; M-J. Zahar and E. McCandless, "Sustaining Peace One Day at a Time: Inclusion, Transition Crises, and the Resilience of Social Contracts," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 14:1 (2020), pp. 127 and 133.

- A winner-takes-all political system that incentivises political adversaries to win elections by any means possible;

- Land and border disputes, often along ethnic lines,[18] for example, the ongoing quarrels between the Shilluk ethnic group and the Dinka around the boundaries of Malakal city; and

- Communal grievances around limited access to basic services, such as education, health care, food, and hard infrastructure.

Women's peacemaking activities in contemporary South Sudan

South Sudanese women peacemakers have carried out various efforts to contain inter-communal violence and mitigate ethnic tensions, mainly at the grassroots level.[19] A key approach has been to create spaces for youth from different ethnic groups and tribes to discuss universally acceptable solutions to existing conflict issues. Other peacemaking (and peacebuilding) activities conducted by South Sudanese women include the following:[20]

- **Awareness raising:** South Sudanese women have sought to strengthen local communities' knowledge about the R-ARCSS and the rights it grants to the South Sudanese people. Awareness raising campaigns and community dialogues on the R-ARCSS have also been organised in refugee settlements in Uganda.

- **Coalition building:** Women's groups have organised and used an annual Women, Peace, and Security conference to invite and challenge embassies, government representatives, and international organisations about the limited progress made on women's meaningful participation in South Sudan's peace processes.

- **Capacity building:** Women's groups and networks have worked to build the capacity of young South Sudanese women to develop an in-depth understanding of peace and mediate conflicts at the sub-national and grassroots level.

- **Service provision:** Women's organisations have provided multiple forms of basic services to the conflict-affected South Sudanese population, including peace education in so-called "peace clubs" or psychosocial support via hotlines and trauma healing initiatives.

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18   A. De Waal et al., "South Sudan: The Politics of Delay," *Conflict Research Programme Memo 3* (2019), https://www.politicalsettlements.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Politics-of-Delay-South-Sudan-3Dec19.pdf [last accessed: 16/02/2023].

19   Interviews with I, M, and R II.

20   Interviews with I, J, M, and R.

The list presented above indicates that South Sudanese women's peacemaking and peacebuilding activities do not involve the key stakeholders of the country's peace process, e.g., the Unity Government. Moreover, there are various significant factors constraining inclusive peacemaking in South Sudan. This is true for both the national and the grassroots level.

- Patriarchal norms and culture and structural gender inequality, including high levels of illiteracy that diminish South Sudanese women's agency in public life and prevent their meaningful contributions to peacemaking;[21]

- The volatile security situation, military display, and increasing intensity of communal violence, which impede women's mobility and render any peacemaking activity a personal risk for them;[22]

- A continuously shrinking civic space,[23] which makes it dangerous for citizens to express themselves freely, organise political events without strict government surveillance, and engage in open political discussions;[24]

- The refusal of elites to implement the 35% affirmative gender quota in many of the ongoing political processes, including the judiciary reform process;[25]

- A disconnect between women who occupy high political offices and their counterparts at the grassroots level[26] – the voices, interests, and strategies of the latter barely reach the former;

- Divisions among and inactivity of women politicians who promote the interests of their political party or ethnic group rather advancing the collective causes and experiences of South Sudanese women in a joint effort;[27]

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21   Interviews with J and R II; see also Kumalo and Roddy-Mullineaux, "Sustaining Peace," p. 4; N.J.H. Mai, "The Role of Women in Peacebuilding in South Sudan," *Sudd Institute* (2015), https://genderandsecurity. org/sites/default/files/Mai_-_Role_of_W_in_Pbldg_in_South_Sudan.pdf [last accessed: 16/02/2023], p. 8; Tindall, "Women's Participation and Influence in Transitions from Conflict", p. 7; UNDP, "Study on the Traditional and Changing Role of Gender and Women in Peacebuilding in South Sudan," UNDP South Sudan (2021), https://www.undp.org/south-sudan/publications/study-traditional-and-changing-role-gender-and-women-peacebuilding-south-sudan [last accessed: 16/02/2023].

22   Interviews with J, M, and R II; see also R-JMEC, "Report 17/22"; Tindall, "Women's Participation and Influence in Transitions from Conflict."

23   One interviewed women refugee cited repression from the Ugandan police as a major constraining factor regarding peacemaking activities by South Sudanese women.

24   Interviews with M, R, and R II; see also Mattijo Bazugba et al., "Women's Experiences in the South Sudan Peace Process 2013-2018," p. 8.

25   Interviews with J, M, and V.

26   Tindall, "Women's Participation and Influence in Transitions from Conflict," p. 18.

27   Interviews with E and V; see also Soma, "Our Search for Peace," pp. 31 and 41.

- A lack of awareness of the existence of the R-ARCSS among large parts of the South Sudanese population;[28]

- A neglect of women in far-distant peace talks such as the Sant'Egidio negotiations in Rome;[29] and

- A lack of accessibility to high-level political discussions inside South Sudan around the R-ARCSS, which are exclusively open to members of political parties.[30]

Two recent trends have further undermined the prospects of inclusive peacemaking in South Sudan. Firstly, there is a tendency to generally restrain women as peacemakers and peacebuilders, independent of political and ethnic tensions. Secondly, women peacemakers and peacebuilders encounter increasing restraints when doing their work behind doors and at the local level. This implies that the common spaces for women's peacemaking activities described above are shrinking too.

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28 Interview with I; see also Mattijo Bazugba et al., "Women's Experiences in the South Sudan Peace Process 2013-2018," p. 8.

29 Interviews with J and M. In July 2021, the community of Sant'Egidio in Rome provided a platform for peace talks between South Sudan's Unity Government, the South Sudan Opposition Movements Alliance (SSOMA), the South Sudan United Front/Army (SSUF/A), and SOOMA-Real Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SSOMA Real SPLM). Key topics of discussion were the inclusion of non-signatories in the Ceasefire Verification Mechanism and an initiative to tackle existing conflict drivers as part of a political dialogue. In November 2022, the Unity Government announced its indefinite withdrawal from the Rome peace talks. This decision came after non-signatory South Sudan opposition groups, formerly known as the South Sudan Opposition Movement Alliance, had changed their name to "the non-signatories".

30 Interviews with M and R II.

Entry points for sustainable, inclusive peacemaking in South Sudan

The South Sudanese context offers several entry points for inclusive peacemaking.[31] Several strong women's networks and organisations have formed during previous peace processes and continue to operate inside the country. South Sudanese women also hold leadership positions in government ministries. The share of women parliamentarians is 32%, offering women direct entry points to decision making around the peace process. While its implementation by and large has failed to materialise so far, there exists a robust peace agreement with strong gender provisions on paper.

At the same time, there is a need to rethink the stalled R-ARCSS implementation process and South Sudan's peace process more generally. This policy paper identifies four overarching entry points for embracing this challenge. The entry points are targeted towards South Sudanese women peacemakers, national stakeholders in South Sudan, and the international community. The following sections discuss each of the four overarching entry points in more detail, namely:

- Creating inclusive, meaningful, and independent peacemaking processes at the community and sub-national level;

- Enhancing the inclusivity of and reviving the R-ARCSS implementation process;

- Identifying and engaging enablers of inclusive peacemaking in South Sudan;

- Working on effective transfer mechanisms between community, sub-national, and national peacemaking efforts and initiatives.

Entry point 1: Creating inclusive, meaningful, and independent peacemaking processes at the community and sub-national level

The deadlock in the R-ARCSS implementation process and the prevalence of communal violence indicate the need to explore alternative spaces for dialogue and peacemaking in South Sudan.[32] Sub-national and community processes are vital compliments to the national process in this regard. Inclusive, meaningful, and independent peacemaking efforts at the sub-national and community level can

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31   Footnote 3 provides the definition for peacemaking that this policy paper employs. In the context of South Sudan, inclusive peacemaking refers to efforts that engage representatives from various South Sudanese groups (age, tribal affiliation, religion, socio-economic background etc.).

32   See also International Crisis Group (ICG), "Toward a Viable Future for South Sudan"; T. Paffenholz, "Perpetual Peacebuilding: A New Paradigm to Move Beyond the Linearity of Liberal Peacebuilding," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 15:3 (2021), pp. 367-85.

efficiently address the drivers of local conflict, including feelings of marginalisation and grievances. It is therefore important to investigate potential strategies for how to strengthen sub-national and community peacemaking efforts.

Conduct local community dialogues

Past peace processes in South Sudan have barely addressed local drivers of conflict.[33] One key opportunity for creating alternative spaces for peacemaking in South Sudan therefore revolves around local community dialogues that focus on specific conflict drivers at the local level.[34] This issue-based approach would allow actors on the ground to discuss and identify meaningful solutions to various forms of prevailing, context-specific grievances, irrespective of the stalled national R-ARCSS implementation process.[35] Community dialogues could start by forging consensus among local actors on the most pressing local grievances that they want to address. Agreement on a joint agenda could help to build trust among the participants of community dialogues, which would ideally include women, youth from cattle camps, and marginalised actors. Moreover, community dialogues would ideally refrain from formulating tight deadlines in order to give local actors sufficient time to address the issues at hand. [36]

Negotiate and implement local (peace) agreements

Local community dialogues would ideally produce local (peace) agreements to which all involved actors commit. Local peace agreements have been a rare phenomenon in post-R-ARCSS South Sudan.[37] However, the signing of a peace deal between two rivaling communities in Lakes State in February 2021 demonstrates that there is room to develop local peace agreements in South Sudan.[38] Lakes State's success story has replicability potential. State governors who take the initiative and reach out to rivaling local communities to jointly work on tailor-made local peace agreements offer a promising pathway to sustainable and inclusive peace in South Sudan.

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33   Kumalo and Roddy-Mullineaux, "Sustaining Peace," pp. 8-10.

34   One example is the dispute around the city of Malakal, which can only be resolved through community dialogue (see International Crisis Group (ICG), "South Sudan's Splintered Opposition").

35   D.N. Vincent and M. Comerford, "Practising Peacebuilding in South Sudan," South Sudan Peacebuilding Opportunities Fund, UK AID (2021), pp. 7-8.

36   See A. De Waal et al., "South Sudan: The Politics of Delay."

37   The PA-X Database, which is maintained by the University of Edinburgh (see: https://www.peaceagreements.org/ [last accessed: 16/02/2023]), codes one written local peace agreement in South Sudan since September 2018.

38   UNMISS, "Hope Floats: Two Communities Eschew Decade-Long Conflict in Favour of Peaceful Coexistence," (2022), https://unmiss.unmissions.org/hope-floats-two-communities-eschew-decade-long-conflict-favour-peaceful-coexistence [last accessed: 16/02/2023].

Rely on women as facilitators of local community dialogues

Women are in an excellent position to bridge existing ethnic divides and facilitate community dialogues at the local level. Their rich experience in local conflict mediation allows them to assume multiple responsibilities, e.g., conveying messages between adversaries, organising interfaith prayer meetings,[39] or actively contributing to the substantive discussions. Existing peace committees that South Sudanese women established in the past could provide a platform for women's local peacemaking activities.[40]

Design complementary peacemaking and peacebuilding activities

Ensuring complementarity and mutual reinforcement of peacemaking and peacebuilding is another approach to contain and prevent armed conflict on the ground.[41] The limited access to food, shelter, infrastructure, and education in South Sudan nurtures grievances among the local population and increases the risk of young men joining armed groups.[42] Women have played an important role in improving local access to education, food, and emergency relief, which interview partners identified as a powerful strategy to maintain peace on the ground. Acknowledging these peacebuilding efforts as complementary to peacemaking activities will allow women to embed basic service provision programs in local peace processes and thereby enhance their influence over the latter.[43]

Local monitoring and early warning

A broader understanding of peacemaking also includes violence prevention efforts like local monitoring and early warning systems. Women are well-placed to play a key role in those systems. Their experience and familiarity with the dynamics on the ground allow them to identify, mitigate, and prevent violence. Women's local monitoring services could therefore directly contribute to maintaining fragile peace on the ground and prevent highly localised inter-communal conflict from diffusing to other regions.

Entry point 2: Enhancing the inclusivity of and reviving the R-ARCSS implementation process

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39 Joint prayers between competing groups have proven to be effective in mitigating instances of communal conflict in South Sudan in the past (see interview with R).

40 Kezie-Nwoha and Were, "Women's Informal Peace Efforts"; Kumalo and Roddy-Mullineaux, "Sustaining Peace," pp. 7-8.

41 T. Paffenholz and C. Spurk, "A Comprehensive Analytical Framework," in: T. Paffenholz (ed), Civil Society & Peacebuilding. A Critical Assessment (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010), pp. 74-75.

42 Interviews with R and M; see also P. Collier and A. Hoeffler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," *Oxford economic papers* 56:4 (2004), pp. 563-595.

43 Interview with M; see also Kumalo and Roddy-Mullineaux, "Sustaining Peace," p. 7; Tindall, "Women's Participation and Influence in Transitions from Conflict," p. 11; UNDP, "Study on the Traditional and Changing Role of Gender and Women in Peacebuilding in South Sudan."

Re-invigorating the national R-ARCSS implementation process is a second entry point for achieving an inclusive, sustainable peace process in South Sudan. This is mainly due to the potential of the R-ARCSS implementation process to mitigate national tensions and in turn communal violence. This section highlights strategies to further the R-ARCSS implementation process in an inclusive way. It is interesting to note that interview partners made very little reference to the 2016-2020 National Dialogue as an entry point for the full implementation of the R-ARCSS.

Getting non-signatories of the R-ARCSS on board

Interview partners identified non-signatories of the R-ARCSS as spoilers to the implementation process and ongoing peacemaking efforts.[44] Reaching out to incentivising them to sign the R-ARCSS therefore denotes an important step in reviving national peacemaking efforts. The ARCSS and R-ARCSS peace processes have shown that South Sudanese women can convince reluctant opposition actors to join peace negotiations.[45] Women could therefore serve as mediators in renewed initiatives to constructively engage with the non-signatories. At the same time, it would be important to also convince diaspora members to respect the R-ARCSS and stop channeling financial support to armed groups.[46]

Getting support from regional actors

Interview partners called upon regional actors, including the African Union (AU), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the European Union (EU) to keep up the pressure on the Unity Government to implement the R-ARCSS. Financial measures that cut off the government from their revenue sources were mentioned as a potential strategy in this regard. This would require international oil companies and lenders to make future oil drilling activities and access to loans conditional on progress in the R-ARCSS implementation process.

Crafting partnerships between women peacemakers and government authorities/members of the Revitalised Transitional National Legislative Assembly

While pressure from the outside might pave the way for inclusive peacemaking, it is equally important for women peacemakers and civil society to seek partnership with individual government ministries or parliamentarians.[47] Women who hold influential positions in either the government or the Revitalised Transitional National Legislative Assembly are well-placed to exert pressure on the government to organise an accelerated and more inclusive peace process from the inside. Creating safe spaces for dialogue as well as organising trust-building exercises

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44   Interviews with I, R, and V; see also Deng, "Compound Fractures."

45   Mattijo Bazugba et al., "Women's Experiences in the South Sudan Peace Process 2013-2018," p. 6.

46   A.A. Awolich, "The Boiling Frustrations in South Sudan," *The Sudd Institute Weekly Review* (2020), https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep25119.pdf [last accessed: 16/02/2023], p. 3.

47   Interviews with E and P.

will be key to foster the exchange between women peacemakers, civil society representatives, and members of the Revitalised Transitional National Legislative Assembly.

Women peacemakers could also support the work of the RJMEC. This body was established under the R-ARCSS but lacks the necessary financial strength to fully deliver on its monitoring mandate.[48] Consulting women peacemakers at the grassroots level could allow the RJMEC to collect more information on obstacles to the local implementation of the R-ARCSS.

Setting up an intra-parliamentary pressure group

Women parliamentarians dedicated to inclusive peacemaking could set up an intra-parliamentary pressure group to streamline their demands regarding the implementation of the R-ARCSS. The public profile of these women could help to mobilise large numbers of women in civil society and thereby increase the pressure on the Unity Government to deliver on the R-ARCSS provisions.[49] Prominent women negotiation delegates or civil society actors from previous peace processes could also serve as role models for young women to call directly upon the government to make tangible progress on the R-ARCSS's implementation.

A women's national dialogue or conference

Division among women do not only exist in the political arena (see above) but can also be found on the ground.[50] A women's national dialogue[51] or conference could help South Sudanese women overcome ethnic, religious, and political divides, unify, and discuss solutions to address the gridlock in national peacemaking efforts. The 2017 "Joint South Sudan Women's Position on the Promotion of Durable Peace and Reconciliation" illustrates a potential format for the output of any women's dialogue.[52] In addition, South Sudanese women could consider building a community of practice, such as an inclusive alliance of women experts. That alliance could assemble on a regular basis to streamline women's perspectives and feed them into ongoing national R-ARCSS implementation processes.[53] Young South Sudanese women would ideally enjoy strong representation in any women's national dialogue, community of practice, or alliance.

Mitigating tensions within the SPLM-IO

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48   In the summer of 2022, the RJMEC publicly called on the Unity Government to provide additional funding to them. The public requests followed the withdrawal from US funding to the RJMEC.

49   Interview with E.

50   Tindall, "Women's Participation and Influence in Transitions from Conflict," pp. 10 and 18.

51   In 2015, the SSWPM already organised a women's national dialogue, called "The South Sudan We Want" (see Soma, "Our Search for Peace," p. 33).

52   Kumalo and Roddy-Mullineaux, "Sustaining Peace," p. 8.

53   Interview with J.

The recent breakaway of two influential military commanders from Machar's troops demonstrates the rift inside the SPLM-IO, which could potentially escalate into armed violence in the future.[54] Trust-building exercises within the SPLM-IO might help to avert a violent breakup of the political party. The wives and women relatives of competing SPLM-IO commanders could facilitate these efforts. Relaying messages between SPLM-IO adversaries or trying to convince their husbands and men relatives to resolve the internal tensions in a constructive manner are two potential initiatives in this regard.

Entry Point 3: Identifying and engaging enablers of inclusive peacemaking in South Sudan

Religious actors enjoy high levels of moral authority among several ethnic groups and are therefore well-placed to influence South Sudan's peace process. This is particularly true for those ethnic communities to which religion is of overarching importance.[55] Moderate religious leaders who acknowledge women's peacemaking capacity and are open to more inclusive peace processes could fulfil multiple roles, namely:

- Mediating thematic discussions between adversaries about how to address conflict drivers at the local and national level;

- Enhancing the legitimacy of women's peacemaking activities in public;[56]

- Supporting South Sudanese women to identify peacemaking strategies that respect cultural sensitivities and therefore mitigate the risk of conservative backlash; and

- Mobilising community members to support local peacemaking activities.

Other gatekeepers and power holders inside South Sudan could equally act as enablers for a more inclusive, sustainable peace process in the country. Elder male community members, for example, often have significant influence over local decision-making and profound experience in local conflict mediation.[57] Engaging local authorities and security forces could also pave the way for an inclusive peace process. One interview partner indicated that there is regular interaction between women's organisations and traditional and cultural leaders on the ground.[58] Building on and expanding the existing interactions with local gatekeepers can

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54 International Crisis Group (ICG), "South Sudan's Splintered Opposition."

55 UNDP, "Study on the Traditional and Changing Role of Gender and Women in Peacebuilding in South Sudan," p. 8.

56 Interviews with J and R; Vincent and Comerford, "Practising Peacebuilding in South Sudan," p. 3; UNDP, "Study on the Traditional and Changing Role of Gender and Women in Peacebuilding in South Sudan," p. 16.

57 Logo et al., "Gender Norms, Conflict Sensitivity and Transition in South Sudan," p. 5.

58 Interview with R II.

therefore pave the way for inclusive discussions about how to tackle the underlying causes of local conflict. Integrating local gatekeepers into peacemaking activities would also create opportunities to learn from and emulate existing local conflict mediation strategies at the national level.

Entry point 4: Working on effective transfer mechanisms between community, sub-national, and national peacemaking efforts and initiatives

Academic research has identified distinct tracks, spaces, and locations for peacemaking and peacebuilding.[59] National peacemaking and peacebuilding activities often involve only a limited number of actors. Transfer mechanisms that allow sub-national and community actors to influence national processes are therefore key to enhance the latter's inclusivity. However, the concept of transfer remains ambiguous and there is little systematic evidence about effective transfer mechanisms. This is why the transfer of peacemaking activities from the community and sub-national to the national level is an inherent challenge in every peace process.[60]

Discussions had with interview partners revealed four effective transfer mechanisms that South Sudanese women's groups have been employing for some time, namely:[61]

- Arranging physical encounters of grassroot women peacebuilders with national political actors involved in the peace process, first and foremost the Ministry of Gender. These meetings have normally taken place in Juba, but also occurred in refugee camps in Uganda, with facilitation support from international actors;

- Organising talk shows called "Women of Peace", which have given women peacebuilders a platform to publicly elaborate on their work at the grassroots level. International organisations and agencies have also invested into platforms that help locals raise their voice, e.g., the UNMISS-hosted "Radio Miraya program" and Oxfam's "Born to Lead" initiative;

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59   See e.g., V. Dudouet et al., "From Policy to Action: Assessing the European Union's Approach to Inclusive Mediation and Dialogue Support in Georgia and Yemen," Peacebuilding 6:3 (2018), p. 190; J.P. Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), p. 39; T. Paffenholz and K. Hashem, "Track Two Peacebuilding to Track One Peacemaking: Insights from Yemen and Syria," Geneva: Inclusive Peace, November 2022.

60   T. Paffenholz and K. Hashem, "Track Two Peacebuilding to Track One Peacemaking: Insights from Yemen and Syria," Geneva: Inclusive Peace, November 2022.

61   Interviews with E, M, and R.

- Establishing an on-the-ground presence in various regions to collate, streamline, and share information about the work of women grassroots peacebuilders at the national level;[62]

- Assisting young women at the grassroots level to write advocacy letters to share their peacemaking activities and their associated needs with national political leaders.

The existing transfer mechanisms offer a solid foundation for future investigations of how to facilitate the transfer between the different spaces for peacemaking and peacebuilding. To this end, it would be important to:

- Set up a central committee that streamlines existing efforts to collect voices from the sub-national and community level;

- Explore online tools to facilitate the exchange between the different peacemaking and peacebuilding spaces;

- Organise women's conferences at the national level, which give women peacemakers and peacebuilders operating at the community level the opportunity to share their perspectives on and advocate strategies to strengthen peace at the local and national levels;

- Organise dinners with women leaders and ministers as well as commissioners operating at the national level to exchange on peacemaking strategies and mechanisms;

- Create robust mechanisms for disseminating information about national peace efforts among grassroots communities[63] to complement awareness raising exercises, enhance the understanding of the peace process among the local population, and increase the pressure on the Unity Government to act; and

- Mobilise community members at the grassroots level (including ring leaders in cattle camps) and invite them to discuss their individual contribution to implementing the R-ARCSS until 2024.

In combination, the transfer mechanisms presented above might create a conducive environment for peacemaking activities at the local level directly feeding into national peace efforts.[64]

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62 Interview with R II; For example, the South Sudan Women's Coalition, which participates in national R-ARCSS implementation mechanisms such as the RJMEC, has representatives in all ten states.

63 Using cartoons and other creative ways to visually present information updates on national processes will facilitate the mobilisation of illiterate community members.

64 Interview with P.

Support needs for women peacemakers in South Sudan

The list presented below indicates what forms of external support could enhance women peacemakers and peacebuilders' agency. The focus first lies on achieving meaningful, inclusive peacemaking efforts at the sub-national and community level. It then shifts to different forms of support that could prop up national peacemaking efforts and render them more inclusive. Listening to the actors on the ground and hearing their needs rather than implementing a fixed support agenda will be key for the international community to design meaningful support initiatives.

Women's support needs to enhance sub-national and community-level peacemaking:

- **Flexible and long-term funding:** Flexible funding would allow women to engage in those home-grown peacemaking approaches that they deem most meaningful in their respective contexts, e.g., mediation or basic service provision.[65] Moreover, one interviewee mentioned access to long-term funding as a prerequisite for strengthening the existing exchange and transfer mechanisms between women at the grassroots and at the national level.[66]

- **Trauma healing:** Creating safe spaces for women peacemakers to share their experiences as well as reflect on their situation will be conducive to trauma healing and strengthen women peacemakers' mental resilience. The prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence corroborates the importance of psychological support for women peacemakers and peacebuilders as well as ordinary South Sudanese women.[67]

- **Training:** International actors could provide financial and technical support in organising targeted trainings on mediation, monitoring, and conflict analysis skills, particularly in rural areas.

Women's support needs to influence formal talks about the R-ARCSS'

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65   Interviews with I, J, M, and R. See also Mattijo Bazugba et al., "Women's Experiences in the South Sudan Peace Process 2013-2018"; Kezie-Nwoha and Were, "Women's Informal Peace Efforts"; Tindall, "Women's Participation and Influence in Transitions from Conflict," pp. 11 and 24; UNDP, "Study on the Traditional and Changing Role of Gender and Women in Peacebuilding in South Sudan," p. 24.

66   Interview with R II.

67   According to figures cited by the South Sudan Nutrition Cluster, 65 percent of South Sudanese women and girls have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their life (see https://relief-web.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-nutrition-cluster-2021-gender-based-violence-gbv-action-plans [last accessed: 16/02/2023]).

implementation

- **Formal talks inside South Sudan:** It would be important to provide targeted technical and, if necessary, financial support to create safe spaces for formal peacemaking efforts *inside* South Sudan, which women can physically access.[68]

- **Coalition building:** Facilitate the convening of a group of South Sudanese women that represents the diversity of women in the country, streamlines women's positions, and helps women to formulate common positions on different peace process-related topics.[69]

- **Mobilisation of youth:** Targeted technical and financial support could allow women's groups to mobilise young women around the issue of the slow implementation process and thereby increase public pressure on the Unity Government.[70]

- **Diplomatic pressure for women's inclusion:** Continuous, coordinated international diplomatic pressure on the political elites in Juba could help to pave the way for women's meaningful contributions to the ongoing implementation process. This applies particularly to IGAD, the AU, and the Troika. The latter consists of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Norway, and has provided extensive support to the IGAD-led peace process leading to the R-ARCSS.

General support needs for South Sudanese women peacemarkers

- **Protection:** Technical and financial support to establish a robust monitoring system that traces threats, assaults, and intimidation against women peacemakers would help to better understand the latter's specific protection needs and develop tailor-made protection strategies. Assisting South Sudanese peacemakers in forming solidarity, knowledge sharing, and mutual assistance networks could also increase their resilience against external attacks. Existing peace clubs and a hotline for victims of sexual and gender-based violence denote best practice in this regard.

- **Networking and peer exchange:** Platforms that allow the South Sudanese youth to interact with their counterparts from other (previously) conflict-affected countries in the region, such as Chad, DRC, Ethiopia, Rwanda, or

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68   Interview with J.

69   In 2016, South Sudanese women used several consultation meetings to develop a seven-point agenda called "The South Sudan We Want" for a gender-inclusive peace agreement. It might be promising to emulate such an initiative (see Soma, "Our Search for Peace," p. 45).

70   Interviews with E and V.

Sudan, could expose them to effective conflict mitigation strategies. Researchers and international actors with experience in peace processes could also join these exchanges to further enrich the learning experience.[71]

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71   Interview with M; see also Tindall, "Women's Participation and Influence in Transitions from Conflict," p. 24.