

## TOWARDS LOCAL APPROACHES AND INCLUSIVE PEACEBUILDING IN SOUTH SUDAN

Peacebuilding is at a crossroads in Sub-Saharan Africa. The past two decades have witnessed a transition from post-Cold War peace processes shaped by state-centric discourses of liberal institutionalism to a resurgence of interest in the “local,” involving a re-engaging of local communities’ concerns, ownership of processes, and capacities. These approaches, including the micro-theoretic turn, local turn perspectives, African Peacebuilding, and decolonial peace theories explore the space beyond the liberal peace dimensions in research, policy, and practice, arguing that local actors can and must be included in international and governmental efforts to manage conflict.

The post-liberation peacebuilding in South Sudan, which largely drew from liberal peace theory, was employed between 2005 (after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and before the referendum, secession, and independence in 2011) and December 2013 (when it imploded into a civil conflict) and proved insufficient to sustain the fragile peace that briefly existed after the country’s secession from Sudan. After a protracted conflict lasting almost half a decade and the presence of multiple peace actors, the lack of a comprehensive and coordinated peacebuilding strategy proved detrimental. This failure is partly due to poor coordination between stakeholders and lack of local/domestic legitimacy, leading to insufficient peacebuilding and an aggravation of the 2013 conflict.

For more, see: Liaga, Emmaculate Asige. *Towards Local Approaches and Inclusive Peacebuilding in South Sudan*. RESOLVE Network, 2021.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensuring sustainable peace through peacebuilding projects that develop effective relationships with local organizations and communities will require action on the part of the international community, the Government of South Sudan, and local actors.



**The Revitalised Government of South Sudan (R-TGoNU) should ensure inclusive investments in the implementation of the R-ARCSS, conflict prevention and mediation of local level conflicts among communities through a cooperation and partnership framework. This should include participation of local leaders, especially those with influence on community-based armed groups.**

**The R-TGoNU should also revitalize the 2020 recommendations concluded by the National Dialogue committee.** The National Dialogue was based on the notion of inclusivity; the R-TGoNU should consider further development of such channels to encourage inclusive and open discussion. Given the importance of the inclusion of marginalized voices in encouraging the buy-in of peace at the local level, the R-TGoNU should strive to create political space for open dialogue. This could be done by identifying local leaders, peace actors and processes, and by actively engaging them in the National Dialogue as representatives of their communities.





**International governmental actors should restructure peacebuilding interventions to establish links** with local organizations. Most international actors' engagement in peacebuilding is tilted in favor of elites, forgetting the potential power of local actors. The gap between international actors and the local can lead to misrepresentation, or no representation, of local grievances in strategies formed by international organizations. Fostering dialogue could bridge this gap. International actors can more thoroughly consult with local organizations in South Sudan. Consultations with genuine, open, and continual dialogue will promote the exchange of ideas and further collaboration to develop bottom-up peacebuilding approaches. The decentralization of peace initiatives will help to transfer responsibility for peacebuilding from political elites to grassroots and local actors, further allowing for more effective and tailored processes.



**Regional stakeholders should include local stakeholders in peace processes.** Given the peace agreement negotiated in 2015 and 2018 by IGAD member countries, IGAD-Plus, they now must consider bringing local groups to the table as participatory members instead of just observers. The engagement of the "local" will not only ensure group ownership of the peace agreement but also facilitate citizens putting pressure on the government to uphold the agreement. Local groups should represent youth, women, civil society, religious groups, traditional leaders from key areas (especially areas with active conflict), local government, and parliamentarians. These local groups can fill important roles in the revitalization process, including direct representation, consultation, observation, and participation.



**International governmental actors can also focus efforts on building and strengthening the capacity** of local actors to build genuine partnerships: INGOs could effectively use their financial resources to help build the capacity of local groups, especially in states with active conflict, including Jonglei, Lakes, and Unity. In some instances, relationships between INGOs and local NGOs in South Sudan are characterized by paternalism. More could be done to develop meaningful partnerships that involve the exchange of ideas and skills, with the intent of external organizations implementing projects that also include existing local ideas and methods. INGOs need to recognize the efforts of local peace initiatives as potential project starting points and foundations, rather than introducing new and foreign, unknown programs and strategies.



**South Sudanese NGOs should coordinate through the available unions and forums, such as through** the South Sudan NGO Forum. Through these forums, NGOs can better coordinate and jointly articulate their programs to further strengthen their leverage in complex peacebuilding funding mechanisms.

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RESOLVE would like to thank the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) for its generous support for this report and RESOLVE's Community-Based Armed Groups Research Initiative.