

BUILDING A CONSTITUENCY

FOR PEACE IN SOUTH SUDAN

KATIE SMITH

NOVEMBER 2017



BUILDING A CONSTITUENCY FOR PEACE **IN SOUTH SUDAN**

KATIE SMITH

NOVEMBER 2017

Search for Common Ground

Search for Common Ground (Search) is an international organization committed to conflict transformation. Since 1982, Search has led programs around the world to help societies transform the way they deal with conflicts, away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative solutions. With more than 600 staff and 1200 partners in 43 countries around the world, our programs reach 4.2 million people each year. Our Common Ground Approach enables us to bring together individuals and organizations with diverse political, socioeconomic, and ethnic backgrounds for lasting change based on common interests. This approach allows individuals and groups to understand their differences, uncover shared interests, and explore potential win-win solutions. We work in many of the world's most difficult conflict environments to prevent and mitigate violence, empower local and national actors to build peace, and support reconciliation. We do this by supporting inclusive dialogue and dispute resolution processes, advancing arts- and media-based approaches that promote fact-based public information and tolerance, and strengthening collective and community actions that solve local challenges.

Search for Common Ground in South Sudan

Search for Common Ground has been in South Sudan since 2014 with the overall objective to promote social cohesion, resilience, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts among individuals and communities. We work across all levels of society to support diverse and constructive dialogue, positive peace-focused media, and access to justice mechanisms. To promote hyper-localized stabilization, we primarily work at the community level, engaging civil society organizations, women's groups, youth, and media professionals to bridge divides within communities, promote tolerance and social cohesion, and advance inclusive and non-violent conflict resolution. We do this through conflict transformation and conflict-sensitive journalism trainings, participatory theater, radio programming, and youth-focused radio programming; also through community-led dialogues and peace initiatives. Search connects local-level initiatives and expertise with national and international policymakers and experts to ensure that local voices and local solutions are at the forefront of decision-making.

Acknowledgments

Search for Common Ground is grateful to the Carnegie Corporation for its generous support of this report and would like to extend our gratitude for all those who made this report possible. The field research that this report draws on, was made possible by the European Commission, Canada's Peace and Stabilization Operations Program, and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). We would like to offer special thanks to colleagues from Search for Common Ground's South Sudan country team, Institutional Learning Team, Central, East, and Southern Africa Regional Teams, and the Global Affairs and Partnerships team for their support and guidance.

This report is issued by Search for Common Ground as part of a series highlighting policy insights from peacebuilding experts around the world, identified through our network of staff and partners. This report was made possible in part by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the author and do not represent the institutional position of the Carnegie Corporation or Search for Common Ground.

For further information on Search for Common Ground or this report, please visit our website, www.sfcg.org, or call the Communications Office at +1 202-265-4300.

© 2017 Search for Common Ground

This publication may be reproduced in whole or in part, and in any form, for educational or nonprofit purposes without special permission from Search for Common Ground, provided the reproduction includes this Copyright notice and the Disclaimer below. No use of this publication may be made for resale or for any other commercial purpose whatsoever without prior permission in writing from Search for Common Ground. This publication should be cited as follows: Smith, Katie. (2017). Building a "Constituency for Peace" in South Sudan, 1st ed. Washington DC: Search for Common Ground.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

6	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
8	INTRODUCTION
9	CURRENT CONFLICT DYNAMICS AND TRENDS IN SOUTH SUDAN
11	Armed Groups Are Fragmenting and Multiplying
12	Desperation and Social Breakdowns Are Driving Increases in Criminality including Cattle Raiding
14	Violence and Ethnic Discrimination Are Becoming Normalized
15	OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEACE AND LOCAL STABILIZATION
15	Empower Champions for Peace
16	Support Media and Community Engagement to Reduce Rumors
18	Use a Localized Approach to Build Stability and Foundations for Peace
19	RECOMMENDATIONS
22	REFERENCES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Landlocked between Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Central African Republic, South Sudan's 12.5 million people have been afflicted by decades of instability and violence, including a civil war for independence that lasted from 1955 to 2005. After a six-year interim period, in 2011, South Sudan separated from the Republic of Sudan to form the world's newest country. Independence exposed and intensified significant internal political and ethnic divisions, as groups that had previously been united for an independent South Sudan now found themselves jockeying for power in their new country. In 2013, an alleged coup attempt to overthrow President Salva Kiir prompted widespread fighting between the plurality Dinka and Nuer, the ethnic groups of President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar, respectively. Since 2013, over 50,000 people have been killed and nearly 4 million have been displaced within South Sudan and to neighboring countries due to recurring violence.¹

Despite some short reprieves from violence following the signing of the Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) in August 2015 and temporary ceasefires, intense fighting re-emerged in July 2016. Since then, communities that were previously removed from the national conflict, now face growing insecurity and increasing violence and little progress has been made on national accountability and reconciliation arrangements.² In this context, certain conflict trends have manifested. Violence is metastasizing and localized conflicts are undermining South Sudan's prospects for peace and stability. Armed groups are fragmenting, criminality is increasing, and violence is infiltrating normal spaces of everyday life.³ The national political elite has used inflammatory rhetoric to build constituencies based on pre-existing ethnic divisions, which has exacerbated local cycles of revenge and deepened community divisions. Cattle raiding and competition for natural resources – grazing land, access to water, oil extraction – remain major conflict issues; but, the most prevalent forms of conflict vary significantly by location.

In response to these conflict trends, Search for Common Ground has conducted household surveys, focus group discussions, and evaluations to better understand South Sudanese citizens' experiences with conflict and violence, as well as the opportunities to influence conflict dynamics and bridge divides at the local level. Search, along with external partners, collected three years of data to measure these perceptions, drawing specific correlations between self-perceived identity and community acceptance of ethnic-based violence, as well as between local peacebuilding activities and improved trust between groups. Key findings from this data are presented below:

- 1 "Fund Allocates \$28m to Humanitarian Assistance in South Sudan," OCHA Humanitarian Bulletin, South Sudan, no. 12 (July 28, 2017). http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/SS_170728_OCHA_SouthSudan_Humanitarian_Bulletin12.pdf
- 2 "Senior Political Official, Briefing Security Council, Urges Immediate Peace Talks, Compromise to Avert 'Impending Abyss' in South Sudan." *ReliefWeb*, UN Security Council, 24 Aug. 2017, reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/senior-political-official-briefing-security-council-urges-immediate-peace-talks.
- 3 Search for Common Ground, (2017) *Combined Final Evaluation for 'I Love My Country: Strategic Communication for Peacebuilding in South Sudan' and Baseline Evaluation for 'I Love My Country: Promoting Localized Understanding and Peaceful Coexistence in South Sudan'*. Search for Common Ground (2017), *Interview with Jonglei State Women's Association*. "Beyond ARCISS," (2017).

- Individuals that primarily identify with their ethnic identity are more likely to believe their community justifies violence against other ethnic groups.⁴ Those individuals that identify most strongly with national identity are less likely to believe that their communities justify violence against other ethnic groups.
- In areas where localized peacebuilding approaches have been active, there has been a 69% increase in the number of South Sudanese who identify most strongly with their national identity and a 78% increase in the number of people who say they trust members of another ethnic group since 2015.⁵
- Media, music, and sports can be important community-bridging mechanisms, enhancing feelings of a shared history and promoting inter-tribal interactions, tolerance, and understanding. Radio programming, where 70% of South Sudanese receive their information about conflict and peace, has shown early successes in shifting attitudes towards improved inter-ethnic trust.⁶

The history of nationally-negotiated ceasefires and peace agreements around the world shows that instability and violence will persist in the absence of buy-in and accountability at the local level. South Sudan is in the throes of a major economic decline, where power and violence are used to capture and control resources. The prevalence of small arms, widespread criminality, and intra-communal tensions breed insecurity and violence throughout Juba and rural communities, undermining national peace and fueling widespread conflict. The peacebuilding strategy for South Sudan must move beyond engagement of national political elite to build a "constituency for peace" focused on stabilizing communities and addressing conflict drivers and triggers at the local level.

Recommendations to the Government of South Sudan, local actors, and the international community to support long-term peace and stability in South Sudan:

- 1. Establish a short-term stabilization strategy that focuses on the national *and* local levels to prevent additional population displacement and create spaces for inter-ethnic engagement.**
- 2. Develop short-, medium-, and long-term peacebuilding strategies that focus on the national *and* local levels to advance people-to-people reconciliation and build inter-ethnic tolerance and collaboration.**
- 3. Ensure that international assistance does not do harm, including ensuring that humanitarian assistance is informed by rigorous, iterative "conflict scan" analysis.**
- 4. Develop and support a platform to connect international, national, and local peace actors to share knowledge across geographic contexts.**
- 5. Produce international and national policies that do not restrict the operational space for civil**

⁴ Search for Common Ground, (2016). "Communicating for Peace in South Sudan: A Social and Behavior Change Communication Initiative Final Evaluation."

⁵ Search for Common Ground, (2017).

⁶ Search for Common Ground, (2017).

society and institutions working to advance peace and accountability.

- 6. Nurture local-level access to customary and statutory judicial capacity to hold perpetrators accountable for human rights abuses and criminal activity, both at the local level and as a foundation for enforcing accountability measures nationally.**
- 7. Support security sector reform that prioritizes improved relationships between the military and citizens to share responsibility for community security.**
- 8. Incorporate lessons learned from the past six years of financial, diplomatic, and humanitarian engagement with South Sudan to better address the underlying drivers of conflict at all levels in the country and respond to emerging crises.**

INTRODUCTION

After more than five decades of civil war, South Sudan separated from the Republic of Sudan to form the world's newest country in 2011. Despite the air of excitement and hope following independence, South Sudan continued to face significant development, humanitarian, and political challenges as an independent country. National institutions remained weak, physical infrastructure was inadequate, and human capacity was limited. Home to over 60 different ethnic groups divided into separate tribes based on geographic locations, independence intensified the long history of conflict between them, previously stoked by colonial administrations and the interests of political elite in Khartoum, and now fostered by competing political interests along ethnic lines in the new capital, Juba.

The post-Independence honeymoon was short-lived, with violence erupting in 2013 after an alleged coup. Political and economic elites have utilized identity-based characteristics and allegiances, such as ethnicity, to divide communities and build constituencies to consolidate power. Other sources of localized violence, such as competition for resources, land ownership disputes, and cattle-based conflicts have led to cycles of revenge attacks and inter-communal violence. Massive inflation and economic decline as well as easy access to small arms have exacerbated the severity of the conflict and brought violence into everyday spaces of normal life. Gender-based violence is rampant across the country, reflecting the low status of women and limited skills for constructively handling conflict, even within families. These overlapping conflict drivers have mutually reinforced each other in an environment of impunity, inflammatory hate speech, and ethnic divisionism.

Despite numerous attempts to broker a negotiated peace agreement, violence has continued and spread. Armed groups have fragmented increasing violence along factional lines, especially after the resurgence of intense fighting in July 2016. This proliferation of armed groups across the nation further complicates any current effort to broker meaningful peace at the national level.

Although these overlapping and reinforcing cycles of violence at the national and local levels present a formidable challenge to peace and security, citizens across South Sudan can be mobilized to counter the current

climate of ethnic divisionism. Empowering local actors to seize on common interests within their communities can interrupt the vicious cycles of violence and build a foundation for peace. Search for Common Ground (Search) is a conflict transformation organization that seeks to transform the way people deal with conflict – away from adversarial responses and towards cooperative solutions. Search’s research and evaluations between 2014 and 2017 have shown it is possible to shift conflict dynamics in South Sudan by addressing underlying drivers of conflict.⁷

The goal of this report is to present a snapshot of current conflict dynamics in South Sudan and showcase the opportunities for peace that remain despite a seemingly bleak security and humanitarian situation. Based on Search’s programmatic experience and original research and evaluations, this analysis suggests that engagement and support at the local level can shift perceptions on violence and build constituencies for peace in South Sudan. This report draws on Search’s three-year comparative evaluation of South Sudanese citizens’ experience and perceptions of conflict to characterize the current dynamics and trends. The report closes with opportunities to shift local conflict dynamics and recommendations for how to constructively engage local actors for peace in South Sudan.

CURRENT CONFLICT DYNAMICS AND TRENDS IN SOUTH SUDAN

Decades of violence at the national and local levels challenge peace and security in South Sudan today. Between June 2014 and July 2017, Search conducted programs, surveys, focus group discussions, and evaluations with South Sudanese citizens on their perceptions, experiences, and participation in violence and conflict.⁸ This section provides an overview of the current conflict dynamics and trends, based on Search’s programmatic experience and the research findings.

Violence has continued at varying levels of intensity in most of South Sudan’s states, with conflict spreading to areas of the country, such as the Greater Equatoria Region, which had previously been relatively peaceful. Localized conflicts continue to cause civilian casualties, displace communities, and stoke ethnic divisions. Violence is metastasizing throughout communities and becoming a normal feature of everyday life in a way that it had not before, thriving in a culture of impunity. Inter-communal violence reached unprecedented levels between January and May 2017. There was a two-thirds increase in violence against civilians and nearly 1.5 times more communal ethnic conflict events compared to the corresponding period from 2016, the previous

7 Search for Common Ground (2017). “Combined Final Evaluation for ‘I Love My Country: Strategic Communication for Peacebuilding in South Sudan’ and Baseline Evaluation for ‘I Love My Country: Promoting Localized Understanding and Peaceful Coexistence in South Sudan.’” Search for Common Ground, (2016). “Communicating for Peace in South Sudan: A Social and Behavior Change Communication Initiative Final Evaluation.” Search for Common Ground, (2015). “Baseline Assessment Communicating for Peace in South Sudan: A Social and Behavior Change Communication Initiative.”

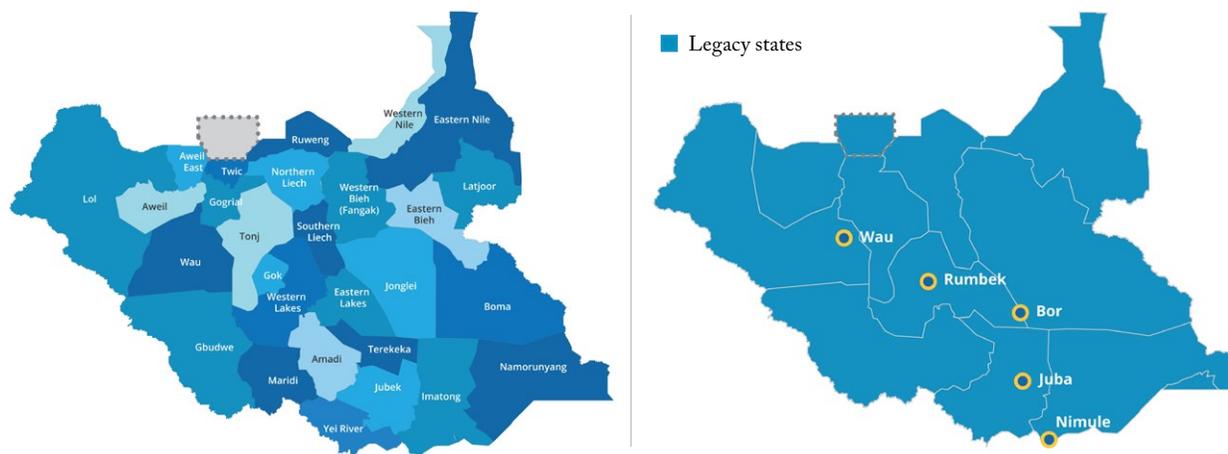
8 Search’s programming in South Sudan continues to date, but the research cited in this document was conducted through July 2017.

peak in violence in South Sudan's history.⁹ National events have exacerbated local cycles of grievance and revenge, resulting in explosive community divisions around ethnic cleavages –Dinka/Nuer, Madi/Acholi, etc. At the same time, tribes are becoming increasingly isolated, moving apart for security and protection. These new distances result in less interaction, which further fuels rumors and stereotypes. The separation and non-interaction is becoming entrenched – 45% of people in Bor and Juba had interacted fewer than three times per week with a member of a different tribe.¹⁰ As tribes continue to isolate themselves, they are less likely to trust members of other tribes and dispel negative stereotypes.



Tribal isolation is becoming more entrenched – 45% of people in Bor and Juba had interacted fewer than three times per week with a member of a different tribe.

Between May 2016 and May 2017, with the resumption of widespread violence, there has been a corresponding shift in public opinion that South Sudan is less peaceful – 41% more people now believe that South Sudan is at war.¹¹ The media plays a large part in this trend. In 2017, 69% of citizens report receiving their information on peace and conflict via the radio.¹² In many areas, derogatory and incendiary rhetoric on social media and traditional media outlets have fueled attitudes of fear, resentment, and revenge.¹³ Simultaneously, the media space is under threat – journalists and media outlets have been suppressed in South Sudan and the country is one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists, who have been killed, physically attacked, and accused of conspiring against the state and propagating “Western agendas.”¹⁴



Search's initial research was conducted and organized according to the 'legacy states' show in map above, we have continued with that geography for consistency and comparative purposes in subsequent years.

9 *Conflict Trends Report No. 59: Real-Time Analysis of African Political Violence, June 2017.* Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, June 2017, www.acledata.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ACLED_Conflict-Trends-Report_No.59-June-2017_pdf.pdf.

10 Search for Common Ground (2017).

11 Search for Common Ground, (2017).

12 Search for Common Ground, (2017).

13 "Social Media and Conflict in South Sudan: A Lexicon of Hate Speech Terms." *Peace Tech Lab*, static1.squarespace.com/static/54257189e4b0ac0d5fca1566/t/5851c214725e25c531901330/1481753114460/PeaceTech+Lab_+SouthSudanLexicon.pdf.

14 Arch Puddington and Tyler Royslance, "Anxious Dictators, Wavering Democracies: Global Freedom Under Pressure, Freedom in the World, 2016," *Freedom House*, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2016>.

Since the resurgence of violence in July 2016, nearly 300,000 more South Sudanese have been displaced from the violence, bringing the total to nearly 4 million.¹⁵ The ongoing displacement and insecurity has created serious disruptions to traditional planting seasons and agricultural activities across the country; preventing farmers from accessing their fields to plant and harvest crops. These agricultural disruptions, alongside forced changes in migratory patterns, have scattered cattle herds exacerbating food insecurity. The Equatorias and parts of Unity state have been particularly affected by famine and near-famine conditions. The human and humanitarian consequences of the conflict have been severe – nearly 6 million South Sudanese are severely food insecure and 100,000 are on the verge of starvation as of August 2017.¹⁶

South Sudan's current violence has increased ethnic-based motivation and general lawlessness is setting in. As armed groups continue to manipulate ethnic identities for political ends, there are three major conflict trends emerging: **the multiplication of armed groups, an increase in criminality, and the normalization of violence.** Details on each of these major trends are outlined below.

Armed Groups Are Fragmenting and Multiplying

Ethnic exclusion within national-level negotiations and peace processes, such as the Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS), has left excluded groups to take up arms to play a political role in peace.¹⁷ Over 40 militia groups are active around the country. Some are allegiant to the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-In Government (SPLM/A-IG) or Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-In Opposition (SPLM/A-IO), and some act independently from the main factions today. Both types of militias influence local security, politics, and economies and challenge stability in communities. These groups sometimes serve as power bases for national elite, and their actions are often motivated by competing individual interests, power grabs, alliances, and local community dynamics.¹⁸ While identity politics have been used to attract militia support, there is a high level of awareness within South Sudan that the current conflict is largely political.¹⁹ Local militias often form to fill security vacuums and operate at the intersection of local conflict issues and national power dynamics. The widespread availability of guns has increased the lethality of attacks on civilians, for economic or political gain, which often trigger cycles of revenge killings based on ethnicity.²⁰

Youth are perceived to be active participants in conflict – both in instigating violence and in defending their

15 "South Sudanese Refugees in Uganda pass 1 million mark," OCHA Humanitarian Bulletin, South Sudan, no. 13 (August 17, 2017). http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/SS_170817_OCHA_SouthSudan_Humanitarian_Bulletin_13-2.pdf.

16 "Fund Allocates \$28m to Humanitarian Assistance in South Sudan," OCHA Humanitarian Bulletin, South Sudan, no. 12 (July 28, 2017). http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/SS_170728_OCHA_SouthSudan_Humanitarian_Bulletin12.pdf.

17 For instance, in Greater Equatoria under the ARCSS, the three former states of the Upper Nile region were to be managed under a power-sharing arrangement between the Government, the SPLM/A-IO, the SPLM-Former Detainees group, and a small allotment to other local political parties. For those ethnic and political groups who were not represented in this arrangement, the arrangement was perceived to be solidifying the power of the Dinka elite in those regions. Roque, Paula, and Remember Miamingi. "Beyond ARCISS: New Fault Lines in South Sudan." Institute for Security Studies East Africa Report, no. 9 (January 2017). <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/ear9.pdf>.

18 Roque and Miamingi, 2017.

19 Search for Common Ground (2015).

20 Search for Common Ground (2016).

homes and communities, increasing their likelihood to join armed militias. Youth under the age of 25 are the most likely to get angered by conflict and respond with violence.²¹ Moreover, in rural contexts like Bor and Mingkaman, youth are far less likely than their peers in Juba to respond to conflict non-violently.²² Within a context of rapidly switching allegiances, youth are particularly prone to solve conflicts with violence.

Some militias have formed to counter the Government in Juba, which they view as a hegemonic Dinka-force, imposing an agenda of marginalization and subordination.²³ Others developed to protect tribal or community interests – either against neighboring communities, the Government, or rebel militias – and seek to form alliances to further this agenda. The absence of government control outside of Juba and the power vacuum created by the split in leadership of the SPLM/A-IO between Riek Machar and current First Vice President Taban Deng Gai, have led to increased fragmentation of the country's multiple regional militia groups. This complicates the prospects for any future peace deal, as battles are being fought on multiple fronts and power arrangements fluctuate according to individual interests. In addition, as more and more actors become embroiled in the conflict, de-escalation becomes increasingly complicated.

Desperation and Social Breakdowns Are Driving Increases in Criminality including Cattle Raiding

South Sudan is experiencing a fundamental breakdown of law and order – as violence proliferates and the central government continues to lose control outside of Juba at the hands of militia groups, criminal activity has thrived. Out of necessity and in the context of general lawlessness, some South Sudanese are increasingly resorting to criminal activity. Crime is on the rise. Armed robbery, home invasions, carjacking, and cattle rustling are some of the most often reported crimes.²⁴ In communities such as Aweil, Bor, Rumbek, and Wau, inadequate educational and economic opportunities have led to high youth unemployment rates and large numbers of street children engaged in criminal activities.²⁵ Criminal activities are sometimes ethnically-motivated to target specific groups, but are often opportunistic and thrive in an environment lacking functioning accountability mechanisms.



86% of recent communal conflicts in Bor were related to cattle rustling

Cattle rustling is on the rise and remains a major issue in many locations in South Sudan. Cattle are a key source of livelihood for many South Sudanese and are the main commodity used for dowries. Although cattle rustling between tribes is extremely common throughout South Sudan's history, raiding has intensified con-

21 Search for Common Ground (2015).

22 Search for Common Ground (2017).

23 Roque and Miamingi, 2017.

24 "South Sudan 2017 Crime & Safety Report." *United States Department of State OSAC Bureau of Diplomatic Security*, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, 2017, www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=21796+.

25 Search for Common Ground (2015). "Baseline Assessment Communicating for Peace in South Sudan: A Social and Behavior Change Communication Initiative." Search for Common Ground interview with Jonglei State Women's Association.

flict because of the economic and political insecurity.²⁶ In Bor, for instance, 86% of recent communal conflicts were related to cattle rustling.²⁷ The cyclical cattle taking between the Dinka Bor and Murle youth has raised levels of violence in Jonglei since December of last year. The widespread availability of guns and light weaponry has increased the lethality of cattle raids, which in turn has triggered cycles of revenge violence.

Criminality becomes even more problematic when it is coupled with a dysfunctional or non-existent justice system, blended with ethnically motivated tensions. The lack of consistent accountability structures and an environment of impunity drive revenge crimes and killings, perpetuate the idea that violence produces results, and exacerbate criminal behavior. Social disputes and competition for limited resources (including pasture and water for cattle) have triggered opportunistic violence, often based on ethnicity.²⁸ For instance, in the border town of Nimule, murder and targeted assassinations of community leaders by unidentified gunmen are increasing, fostering fear and suspicion among residents of different ethnic groups.²⁹ Many citizens do not believe in or trust the weak and under-resourced community police structures to prevent crime and are hesitant to report crimes for fear of retribution.

Many communities lack platforms for constructive engagement on crime and citizen security and citizens struggle to access justice. Most South Sudanese rely on the customary courts to address grievances and 90% of disputes are tried in customary courts, led by tribal leaders and civil society.³⁰ However, as community members are displaced into new communities and new groups interact, these structures often break down. Statutory judicial structures and grievance redress systems exist in many areas of the country, but they are undermined by lack of trust, prejudice, and low capacity. Ambiguous jurisdictions between customary and statutory courts, depleted judicial capacities, and rampant corruption mean that the responsibility for providing justice often falls into the hands of security actors or does not happen at all.

26 Search for Common Ground (2017).

27 Search for Common Ground (2017).

28 Search for Common Ground (2015).

29 Search for Common Ground (2016). "Nimule Conflict and Leadership Mapping Report: Together We Can."

30 Mertenskoetter, P., and Dong Luak. (2012) "An Overview of the Legal System in the Republic of SS." GlobalLex. NYU School of Law.; United Nations Development Programme (2013). ACCESS TO JUSTICE PERCEPTION SURVEY.



Figure 1: Protection of Civilians Site in Bor, Jonglei

Violence and Ethnic Discrimination Are Becoming Normalized

Violence is becoming normalized in South Sudan, a country whose citizens have experienced consistent, widespread conflict for over five decades. Since the resumption of violence in July 2016, citizens in Bor and Juba are much more likely to describe South Sudan and their communities as being ‘at war.’³¹ South Sudanese are also experiencing conflicts more often in their everyday lives – since 2015, there has been a 10% increase in the number of people that report experiencing conflict within the past six months.³² Not only are South Sudanese, and youth in particular, at risk of becoming desensitized to persistent violence, but they also risk seeing violence as a justified and effective tool to rectify grievances. As violence persists at the community and national levels, it also is encroaching into intra-personal disputes. South Sudanese are using violence more often to respond to aggravations than in 2015 and fewer people are going to the police to resolve disputes.³³ At the same time, violence is becoming common within the domestic space. Between 2016 and 2017, nearly a quarter of reported conflicts in Juba and Bor were incidents of domestic violence, and 72% of women report having been affected by physical or sexual violence since 2013.³⁴



Between 2015–2017, there was a 14% increase in the number of South Sudanese who believe that their community approves the use of violence against another tribe.

31 Search for Common Ground (2017).

32 Search for Common Ground (2017), Search for Common Ground (2015).

33 Search for Common Ground (2016).

34 Search for Common Ground (2017). “A/HRC/34/63: Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan.” United Nations OHCHR. 6 Mar 2017. p8-9.

Political elites continue to manipulate ethnic and tribal identities to consolidate their own power and undermine the support of their opponents. Identity preferences vary across the country, but overall, the South Sudanese sense of national identity remains weak and tribalism is strong in many communities - nearly half of South Sudanese associate most strongly with their tribal or clan identity.³⁵ Violence against other ethnic groups is becoming more acceptable and is associated with strong tribal identities. **Between 2015 and 2017, there was a 14% increase in the number of South Sudanese who believe that their community approves the use of violence against another tribe.**³⁶ This reflects the strong "constituency for violence" that perpetuates cycles of conflict and there remains a need to build a "constituency for peace" that forges a unified national identity that lessens the severity of perceived inter-tribal differences.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEACE AND LOCAL STABILIZATION

Empower Champions for Peace

Though violence is pervasive and expanding in South Sudan, many individuals, communities, and groups are mobilizing to pursue peace. Since July 2016, communities are increasingly looking outside the Government for mechanisms to resolve conflict.³⁷ There are models of peaceful inter-tribal coexistence and respect for human rights championed by non-traditional community peacemakers. **While youth are often considered to be instigators of violence, 67.7% of surveyed youth said they prefer dialogue or non-response to deal with conflicts. They were also found to be the most optimistic age group about peace in South Sudan.**³⁸

In Bor, women's groups have been key actors. For instance, the Jonglei State Women's Association works with leadership within the Nuer 'Protection of Civilians' (POC) site to help protect women and children as they leave the POC site for economic and social opportunities.³⁹ These women are particularly well-situated to cross dividing lines as they share common burdens and are responsible for certain activities, like rearing children and fetching water and firewood. Shared activities provide opportunities to build lasting relationships, encourage shared interests, and increase trust through virtuous cycles of interaction.



In Magwi county in Eastern Equatoria, local leaders from different tribal factions are coming together across dividing lines to fill the Government void and seek local solutions to common challenges. In the Pageri and Magwi payams, institutionalized attempts to separate the Madi and Acholi tribes were instituted to counter land ownership disputes, which had been increasing since independence. Instead of easing tensions, the separation

35 Search for Common Ground (2017).

36 Search for Common Ground (2017).

37 Search for Common Ground (2017).

38 Search for Common Ground (2016).

39 Protection of Civilian sites are long-term camps for internally displaced persons in South Sudan that are situated entirely within UN mission bases.

*eroded social interactions and sharpened ethnic divisions. For instance, some Madis were afraid to use the main road to pass through Magwi to the market in Torit for fear of attack from Acholis; conversely, some Acholis changed their names to attend schools in Madi communities for fear of attack.⁴⁰ In response to rising hostilities, leaders from the Madis and Acholis met through Search-facilitated intercommunity peace dialogues to build relationships and confidence between members of the previously isolated groups and discuss shared livelihood activities with economic benefits for both sides. The dialogues started to ease tensions between the two groups, showing that interaction was possible without violence. After a year of such dialogues, in 2016, **there was a 25% increase in the number of people who had ten or more weekly non-violent interactions with a member of another ethnic group.***

Support Media and Community Engagement to Reduce Rumors

While Southern Sudanese were historically united by their quest for independence and their opposition to Khartoum's rule, post-independence South Sudan struggles to promote strong unifiers with which to forge national cohesion. The perpetuation of conflict, underlying fragility, and politicized ethnic divisions have undermined nation-building. Individuals who identify most strongly with ethnic identity are more likely to believe their community accepts violence against another ethnic group compared to those who identify most strongly with national identity. **In areas with local peacebuilding activities there has been a 69% increase in individuals reporting national identity as having the greatest salience to them since 2015.⁴¹**



Communities where people identify most strongly with their ethnic identity above national identity are strongly correlated with a higher acceptance of violence against another ethnic group. Since 2015, in areas where Search works, there has been a 69% increase in individuals identifying most strongly with their national identity.

The shift towards national identity indicates the potential to enhance feelings of national unity by focusing on shared traditions. Media, music, and sports can be important community-bridging mechanisms, enhancing feelings of a shared history and promoting inter-ethnic tolerance. In addition, strategies that emphasize the economic advantages of economic interdependence and livelihoods, as well as the common concerns, such as children's health and education, can foster reliance and mutual trust for shared interests. Media, in particular, has shown some early success in shifting attitudes towards inter-ethnic trust. In recent Search surveys in Bor and Juba, the majority of respondents believe that the media promotes peace.⁴²

40 Search for Common Ground (2016). UNDP Pilot Project: "Together We Can"

41 Search for Common Ground (2017).

42 Search for Common Ground (2015).



Media outlets like the Catholic Radio Network (CRN), which links seven radio stations in major town centers in the country, play a key role in this pursuit. CRN and Search have been partnering on the production of a weekly radio call-in show, *Hiwar al Shabab*. This program provides a platform for youth to discuss drivers of conflict and advance potential unifiers across ethnic and religious lines. The radio show breaks down social, religious, and geographic barriers to engage listeners and participants in dialogue. The radio program engaged over 1,392 listeners to share their stories and opinions on peace and conflict. **After one year of programming, listeners were 78% more likely to say that they trusted people from other tribes than non-listeners at the baseline.**⁴³ CRN also broadcasts Search's radio drama series *Sergeant Esther*, which traces the life of a fictional policewoman trying to be a positive community role model. The program follows her and her family as she works to address local conflict issues peacefully and presents dramatized problem-solving and decision-making. The show challenges prevailing stereotypes on gender roles, ethnic divisions, power dynamics, and the potential of youth and women to be leading champions for peace.

Use a Localized Approach to Build Stability and Foundations for Peace

Location is the single most important determinant of a South Sudanese person's experience with, reaction to, and perception of conflict. For instance, 49% of the most recent conflicts in Tonj East were regarding access to resources (e.g. water), versus in Malakal where land disputes were the most prevalent form of conflict (42%).⁴⁴ People in Juba were more likely to respond to conflict constructively than their counterparts in Bor.⁴⁵ Ultimately, a localized approach to conflict resolution can effectively contextualize response and assistance to fit the needs of a specific community.

In various places, the South Sudan Council of Churches, Catholic Relief Services, Search for Common Ground, and others are successfully supporting hyper-localized stabilization and seeing results. For example, at the center of some of the most intense fighting, Bor is particularly prone to conflict and negative inter-tribal attitudes. Tribal identities are highly valued, interaction between tribes is limited, and violence against other tribes is generally accepted.⁴⁶ To begin countering some of these proclivities, Search and others are working with religious leaders, local government, traditional leaders, and women to stabilize the community. After one year, Bor residents were nearly 10% more likely to seek constructive solutions to their conflicts, and 70% believed that their community had become more peaceful.⁴⁷ Inter-tribal interactions increased by 18% and identity significantly shifted towards the national level.⁴⁸

To break the cycles of violence, communities outside the capital need to start building their own constituencies for peace to compliment, legitimize, and feed into political processes focused in Juba. Juba-declared ceasefires and peace agreements have been unsustainable in the capital and in local communities. While national diplomatic and political measures and agreements are necessary, these processes alone are not sufficient and must be matched by local level buy-in and peace processes. The process of constituency building includes providing accountability for criminal activity, building trust between divided groups, and investing in shared economic initiatives. Local leaders involved in bottom-up peace processes have been integral in peace negotiations before, including after the first civil war and the negotiation process for the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Again, they can work to build local demand and buy-in for peace and provide a platform for a larger peace process to take root.

44 Search for Common Ground (2015).

45 Search for Common Ground (2017).

46 Search for Common Ground. "Baseline Assessment Communicating for Peace in South Sudan: A Social and Behavior Change Communication Initiative." April 2015.

47 Search for Common Ground (2017).

48 Search for Common Ground (2016), Search for Common Ground (2017)

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the history of nationally-negotiated ceasefires and peace agreements dictates, in the absence of buy-in and accountability at the local level, instability and violence will persist. In South Sudan, violence is metasizing, armed groups are fragmenting, criminality is increasing, and violence and ethnic discrimination are normalizing. At the same time, local peacebuilding initiatives have shown early success at shifting local conflict dynamics and perspectives towards peace. The engagement strategy for South Sudan must go beyond the political standoff in Juba to address conflict drivers and triggers at the local level.

Recommendations to the Government of South Sudan, local actors, and the international community to support long-term peace and stability in South Sudan:

- 1. Establish a short-term stabilization strategy that focuses on the national *and* local levels to prevent additional population displacement and create spaces for inter-ethnic engagement.** Violence is becoming a normal escalation to conflicts that are unrelated to the overarching conflict dynamics of the civil war. Criminality and sexual and gender based violence are increasing, resource disputes and cattle rustling trigger cycles of revenge violence, and there is a significant portion of society that supports the use of violence. The international community needs to look beyond Juba to support community stabilization efforts in communities outside the capital to build a constituency for peace and limit the influence of the political elite to manipulate ordinary conflicts. In the short term, increased stability helps stem the flow of displacement and facilitates improved humanitarian access and mobility. In the long-term, this builds stable communities and buy-in to implement any nationally negotiated political settlement.
- 2. Develop short-, medium-, and long-term peacebuilding strategies that focus on the national *and* local levels to advance people-to-people reconciliation and build inter-ethnic tolerance and collaboration.** An inclusively negotiated and holistically implemented political peace agreement in Juba is necessary, but not sufficient. Citizens across South Sudan can be engaged in community-level processes, reinforcing the underlying values of the ARCSS and developing locally bred and cultivated peace. There needs to be simultaneous engagement at the local level to break the cycles of retributive violence fueling the conflict. The formal peace negotiation efforts should be accompanied by national and local community-centered peacebuilding and reconciliation interventions. Lessons taken from the Wunlit Peace process in 1998-99 demonstrate the importance and success of building a peace process starting at the community level, in order to establish the basis for a truly participatory national framework that is not confined to the political elites. Hyper-localized stabilization efforts work, especially to address local conflict dynamics. These efforts should engage the media, religious communities, and civil society to showcase the possibilities for tribes to live together peacefully to stem the current climate of ethnic division and hate speech and build a sense of national identity.

3. **Ensure that international assistance does not do harm, including ensuring that humanitarian assistance is informed by rigorous, iterative "conflict scan" analysis.** South Sudan offers examples of how humanitarian aid can be manipulated to further military objectives. International assistance should ensure that humanitarian, peacebuilding, development, rule-of-law, and accountability efforts are protected and that international engagement does not inadvertently hurt the South Sudanese people. International and national initiatives should include strong conflict-sensitivity components that respond and adapt to local conflict dynamics. Conflict scans are one tool to identify both potential challenges and conflict dynamics, but also entry points for peacebuilding and mutually beneficial economic/social engagement.
4. **Develop and support a platform to connect international, national, and local peace actors to share knowledge across geographic contexts.** The international community should look to improve their coordination with legitimate peace actors - e.g. NGOs, media, and civil society - to share perspectives on conflict drivers and identify gaps in service. Such a platform can help communicate changing contextual realities, coordinate response, and share knowledge on initiatives that address conflict drivers that vary from state to state and region to region.
5. **Produce international and national policies that do not restrict the operational space for civil society and institutions working to advance peace and accountability.** International assistance provided by the United States, United Nations, and other donors should support the emergence and strengthening of new and influential leaders who can reach out to communities across dividing lines. Any assistance – humanitarian, development, peacebuilding, or otherwise – should be discreetly and adeptly aligned behind existing institutions and local leaders. The international community must also insist that the Government of South Sudan allow assistance organizations to reach affected communities and operate without constraint. Any diplomatic or operational restrictions with the Government of South Sudan should distinguish between central and local government actors and protect engagement with champions for peace within the system. At the same time, the international community should champion second- and third-tier leaders outside Juba and engage new champions for peace. Youth and women are strong potential unifying forces. Although youth are often seen as being the source of conflict, they are the most likely group to identify as South Sudanese – an identity that crosses tribal divisions.⁴⁹
6. **Nurture local-level access to customary and statutory judicial capacity to hold perpetrators accountable for human rights abuses and criminal activity, both at the local level and as a foundation for enforcing accountability measures nationally.** The national level peace processes are not generally considered to be credible and at best have been half-heartedly implemented. It is unlikely that international and national diplomatic efforts will be effective soon. Even if they were to be implemented, South Sudan would still be incredibly unstable. Ceasefires are not peace agreements and peace agreements are not peace. Eighty seven percent of South Sudanese trust the customary courts

49 Search for Common Ground (2017).

and over half of people would choose to consult community leaders or elders to resolve intra- and inter-communal conflicts.⁵⁰ There needs to be support to develop a transparent, equitable, and functioning accountability system that provides consistent structural redress for crimes against citizens and organizations, including traditional and informal justice and dispute resolution mechanisms. International donors should support local resources for mediation and conflict resolution to handle community-level disputes through informal mechanisms to ease the burden on statutory courts and to provide more direct restitution for community-level grievances. These systems not only help mitigate one of the prime conflict drivers supporting violence and loss of life through cyclical revenge killings and persistent criminality, but also create local buy-in for the Hybrid Court, security sector reform, or political accountability measures.

7. **Support security sector reform that prioritizes improved relationships between the military and citizens to share responsibility for community security.** As the number of armed groups proliferates and the presence of the army and its soldiers remains vast, there needs to be an explicit focus on security sector reform and attention towards demobilization. As a core tenet of this strategy, the international community should focus on improving relationships between the military and the communities to institute a community-security approach towards handling local conflicts. Leaders such as the SPLA Chaplains' Corp and traditional and religious leaders could be important bridges to shifting norms and actions between the military and the civilian populations.
8. **Incorporate lessons learned from the past six years of financial, diplomatic, and humanitarian engagement with South Sudan to better address the underlying drivers of conflict at all levels in the country and respond to emerging crises.** Since independence, the U.S. alone has spent over \$11.5 billion and the European Union has spent over EUR 1.1 billion in humanitarian and development assistance to South Sudan.⁵¹ Given the extent of this investment and the continuation of violence and fragility, the donors and international partners should commission learning reports to review what worked, what did not, and what was learned from the investment and engagement so far. Future investments by international partners should draw on these findings and resource flexible mechanisms, which allow assistance to target underlying drivers of conflict, such as the Complex Crises Fund in the United States. The European Union has been constrained in their engagement since South Sudan has not signed the Cotonou Agreement. The EU should find an appropriate framework for engagement and assistance that targets drivers of conflict outside of the Cotonou Agreement, and resource the peace and security priorities under the EU Africa Trust Fund, the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), and the EIDHR. Such an exercise should inform the continued diplomatic, fiscal, and security engagement of international partners in-country to help prevent South Sudan from becoming the next protracted and cyclical civil war and guide the diplomatic and financial engagement of the international community in future crises.

50 Search for Common Ground (2015).

51 "U.S. Foreign Aid by Country." *FAE: Dashboard*, USAID, 2017, explorer.usaid.gov/cd/SSD?fiscal_year=2016&implementing_agency_id=1&measure=Obligations.

REFERENCES

- "A/HRC/34/63: Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan." United Nations OHCHR. 6 Mar 2017. p8-9
- Arch Puddington and Tyler Roylance, "Anxious Dictators, Wavering Democracies: Global Freedom Under Pressure, Freedom in the World, 2016," *Freedom House*, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2016>.
- Conflict Trends Report No. 59: Real-Time Analysis of African Political Violence, June 2017*. Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, June 2017, www.acledata.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ACLED_Conflict-Trends-Report_No.59-June-2017.pdf.
- "Fund Allocates \$28m to Humanitarian Assistance in South Sudan," OCHA Humanitarian Bulletin, South Sudan, no. 12 (July 28, 2017). http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/SS_170728_OCHA_SouthSudan_Humanitarian_Bulletin12.pdf
- Mertenskoetter, P., and Dong Luak. (2012) "An Overview of the Legal System in the Republic of SS." GlobalLex. NYU School of Law.; United Nations Development Programme (2013). ACCESS TO JUSTICE PERCEPTION SURVEY.
- "Populations at Risk Current Crisis." *South Sudan: Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect*, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 15 Aug. 2017, www.globalr2p.org/regions/south_sudan.
- Rolandsen, Oystein, and Nicki Kindersley. "Briefing: Prospects for Peace and the UN Regional Protection Force in South Sudan." *African Affairs*, October 2016. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Nicki_Kindersley/publication/309134268_Briefing_Prospects_for_peace_and_the_UN_regional_protection_force_in_South_Sudan/links/580e34c408ae475352479dbf.pdf.
- Roque, Paula, and Remember Miamingi. "Beyond ARCISS: New Fault Lines in South Sudan." Institute for Security Studies East Africa Report, no. 9 (January 2017). <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/ear9.pdf>.
- Search for Common Ground. "Baseline Assessment Communicating for Peace in South Sudan: A Social and Behavior Change Communication Initiative." April 2015.
- Search for Common Ground. *Combined Final Evaluation for 'I Love My Country: Strategic Communication for Peacebuilding in South Sudan' and Baseline Evaluation for 'I Love My Country: Promoting Localized Understanding and Peaceful Coexistence in South Sudan.'* 2017
- Search for Common Ground. "Communicating for Peace in South Sudan: A Social and Behavior Change Communication Initiative Final Evaluation." 2016
- Search for Common Ground. *Interview with Jonglei State Women's Association.* 2017
- Search for Common Ground. "Nimule Conflict and Leadership Mapping Report: Together We Can." 2016
- "Senior Political Official, Briefing Security Council, Urges Immediate Peace Talks, Compromise to Avert 'Impending Abyss' in South Sudan." *ReliefWeb*, UN Security Council, 24 Aug. 2017, reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/senior-political-official-briefing-security-council-urges-immediate-peace-talks.
- "Social Media and Conflict in South Sudan: A Lexicon of Hate Speech Terms." *Peace Tech Lab*, static1.squarespace.com/static/54257189e4b0ac0d5fca1566/t/5851c214725e25c531901330/1481753114460/PeaceTech+Lab_+SouthSudanLexicon.pdf.
- "South Sudan 2017 Crime & Safety Report." *United States Department of State OSAC Bureau of Diplomatic Security*, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, 2017, www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=21796+.
- "South Sudan President Salva Kiir Signs Peace Deal - BBC News," August 26, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34066511>.
- "South Sudan Situation Map," United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. OCHA, accessed on March 8, 2015, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Crisis%20Situation%20map%2015%20Nov%202014.pdf>
- "South Sudanese Refugees in Uganda pass 1 million mark," OCHA Humanitarian Bulletin, South Sudan, no. 13 (August 17, 2017). http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/SS_170817_OCHA_SouthSudan_Humanitarian_Bulletin_13-2.pdf.
- "UN News - Thousands Flee to Uganda to Escape Renewed Violence in South Sudan - UN Refugee Agency." UN News Service Section. 19 Jul 2016. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story>.

