THE CENTER IS NOT HOLDING: ANALYZING SOUTH SUDAN'S SOCIAL COHESION ARCHITECTURE IN THE EVOLVING CONTEXT OF THE REVITALIZED AGREEMENT ON THE RESOLUTION OF THE CONFLICT IN THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH SUDAN (R-ARCSS)

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South Sudan is making major strides in peace consolidation and strengthening social cohesion since the signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) on 12 September 2018 in Addis Ababa. However, this paper argues that, despite these efforts, the center is not holding as inter-communal violence and a myriad of political and security dynamics are reversing many of these gains. As the conflict is protracted, peace-building remains a severe challenge while social cohesion remains weakened. The paper commences with a conceptual clarification of social cohesion before analyzing current evolving social cohesion dynamics and trends. This is followed by a discussion of the social cohesion programming challenges and consequently centers on Key Driving Factors (KDF) of conflict. Finally, the paper ends with an analysis of the drivers of conflict and peace and makes recommendations for strengthening social cohesion going forward.

Key Words: South Sudan, Inter-communal Violence, Conflict, Social Cohesion

The Context

South Sudan has made significant gains in peacebuilding since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Republic of Sudan and the then Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) in 2005. The CPA paved the way for the independence of South Sudan in 2011. Since 2005, South Sudan's peacebuilding focus was the restoration and extension of state authority and the expansion of service delivery such as education, health water

and sanitation until the eruption of conflict in 2013 reversed many of these gains. With the return to conflict, peacebuilding has remained a severe challenge. Although a peace agreement was signed in 2015, its implementation was stalled when another round of violence erupted in Juba in 2016. A Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) Peace Agreement (RPA) was signed in 2018 but implementation has moved at a snail's space. The trust deficit between conflict parties both at the macro and micro levels has thus far proven insurmountable. A UNDP-commissioned perception survey found that citizens' confidence in peace and security has fallen five percent (from 52.5 percent (2015) to 47.4 percent (2017)) due to increased political instability and sporadic attacks experienced across the country. Seven million people (60 percent of the total population) need humanitarian assistance, whilst 5.3 million (48 percent of the population) are estimated to be facing crisis and acute food insecurity.[1]
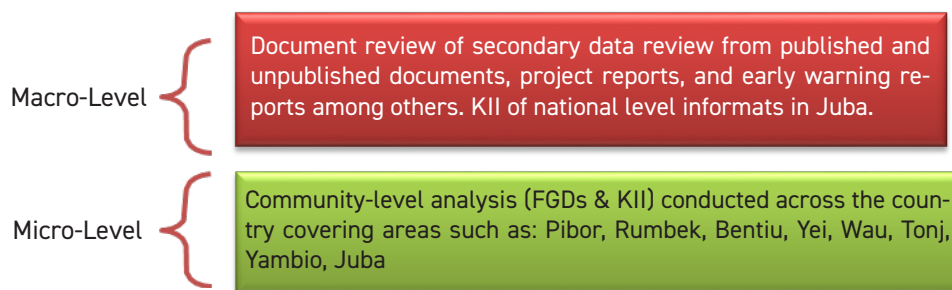
South Sudan remains one of the most fragile nations in the world.[2] Ethnic and inter-communal clashes account for much of the insecurity in the country. The key drivers of intercommunal conflict and violence include disputes over grazing lands and water, proliferation of arms, and different forms of weak governance. These take the forms of cattle raids/rustling and cycles of revenge killings and counterattacks. Across the country, major and minor conflicts have occurred and continue to prevail, posing a security threat to civilians. This is in addition to internal dynamics, cross-border threats, and attacks from communities in neighboring states, particularly in the disputed Abyei area bordering Sudan, which further heighten insecurity. These security concerns and violence at the community level also pose a risk to returning Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees who decided to resettle in their former homes and communities. In this context, violence at the community level has the potential to exacerbate the vulnerabilities of those returning, creating impediments to a safe return and the building of peaceful coexistence among communities.

In response to the violence, development partners, both local and international, have implemented interventions aimed at preventing, mitigating, and resolving inter-communal fighting to improve community security and protect civilians. Through the creation, strengthening, and operationalization of local peace infrastructures, it has been possible to foster dialogue and build confidence among communities as an effective mechanism to prevent further violence and create a conducive environment for reconciliation, stability, and durable peaceful coexistence at the community level.[3]

In all these initiatives, successes and setbacks have been registered in equal measure. The end result of most of these peace and social cohesion initiatives is often a pledge by all parties to live in peace to enhance the protection of civilians. The major setback is the frequent relapse into hostilities between previously reconciled parties or the ignition of new hostilities between previously peaceful communities or bordering states. This pattern has created an endless cycle of violence across the country. When old conflicts resurge, previous peace agreements count for nothing, resulting in severe loss of lives and properties as well as the reversal of many positive gains. For most partners, this has meant a continuous and repeated expending of resources to resolve the same conflicts or issues all over again. A typical example is the conflict between the Rup and Pakam in the Great Lakes region that is threatening to relapse despite having been resolved as recently as early 2019 after a protracted period of investment in the process by a wide range of partners. Recurrent cross-border tensions between Western Lakes and Eastern Lakes States over IDP settlements and cattle migration are other cases in point.

In terms of methodology, the paper follows a qualitative study approach and is premised on an interpretivist epistemology, largely dependent on both primary and secondary datasets.[4] Primary data was collected through field surveys in the months of September and October 2018, July 2019, and February 2020. The methodology followed a two-pronged approach as follows:

Figure 1: Methodology Approach

Macro-Level — Document review of secondary data review from published and unpublished documents, project reports, and early warning reports among others. KII of national level informats in Juba.

Micro-Level — Community-level analysis (FGDs & KII) conducted across the country covering areas such as: Pibor, Rumbek, Bentiu, Yei, Wau, Tonj, Yambio, Juba

Data from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) was analyzed and synthesized with data obtained from secondary sources such as academic books, journal papers, national newspapers, and policy papers published by research institutions to strengthen the paper's thematic areas.

Conceptualizing Social Cohesion

The concept of social cohesion is relative and has proved contentious in its definition. It is a concept whose exact meaning varies from one scholar to another.[5] Several scholars have proffered a myriad of definitions, but the main puzzle with most of these has been that they are based on the individual scholar's orientation or ideology. Wilkinson, Green, Janmaat, and Han[6] state that contemporary scholars of social cohesion have defined a way of treating the concept as a phenomenon with a multi-dimensional feature or as a as a kind of potentially constructed concept structured around many varying indices.[7] Green further argues that "the definitions have brought some challenges that has thrown up a number of conceptualizations or adoption of social cohesion that are believed to be contributory factors to a society that can be said to be cohesive." Another dilemma that confronts scholars and policymakers when defining the concept of social cohesion is that of its multi-level and multi-dimensional nature. While some scholars or researchers understand the concept as being synonymous with trust, solidarity, and peace, many others believe that the concept can incorporate such terms as inclusiveness, poverty, and social capital. Sociologists, however, have associated or aligned the concept to ideas that include social integration and systemic integration. The term "social cohesion" has been vaguely used to denote the existence of or presence of social ties that unite the society and help to foster an integrated and stable community. It is therefore implied that social cohesion constitutes or encourages a noble cause that is a worthy goal. Social cohesion has garnered widespread acceptance, but at the same time been seriously abused[8] among many scholars that have explored its current utilization and have come to accept this much. They have, however, found more subtle terms to describe it as a "multi-dimensional" "quasi-construct" that, regardless of its contemptuous disregard of the scientific principles, has encouraged policy utilization and has seemingly perfect it as an "acceptable term."[9]

The Search for Common Ground (2017)[10] expands the foregoing conceptualization by defining social cohesion as the glue that binds society together; the four key components of the glue are: 1) social relationships, 2) connectedness, 3) orientation towards the common good, and 4) equality. SFCG further explains that social cohesion is not an ideal but rather an attainable objective requiring good governance, respect for human rights, and individual responsibility. Overall, academics and policymakers have unanimously arrived at a consensus that social cohesion as a concept is enjoying ever-increasing popularity. They also agree that in broader terms, it means fostering inter-communal relations by repairing the social fabric of society at track one, two. and three levels. Such an approach

does not usually focus on the cessation of violence which is *negative peace* but on the *peace writ large*, which is positive peace. It is on this understanding of social cohesion that this paper is anchored.

Dynamics and Trends

Current dynamics in South Sudan indicate that despite the R-ARCSS and formation of the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGONU), national and social cohesion remain weak. Armed conflict continues to weaken social cohesion and negatively impact traditional conflict prevention, mediation, and resolution structures, as well as the ability of institutions to withstand political and security shocks. The absence of strong political leadership at the state/local level and weak rule of law institutions translate into impunity of perpetrators of violence, vigilantism, and human rights violations. Discriminatory social norms and unequal gender relationships have entrenched the vulnerabilities of women during the crisis. There is also a large section of the population who are either internally displaced or refugees and have started returning to South Sudan, though others are moving to other villages and payams that are safer instead of their places of origin. Respondents reported that IDPs along the borders of Apuk and Aguok in the Greater Lakes region are still living in fear of going to their places of origin, a situation that leaves them without proper access to land to engage in agriculture production during the planning season. This assertion by respondents is backed by Nonviolent Peaceforce data from 2019 which projects a steady but cautious return of displaced people due to insecurity fears. Women, the elderly, and children are increasingly becoming vulnerable due to the displacement caused by the violence. These reports have been consistent with findings during women's Focus Group Discussions in all research sites.

South Sudan's institutions of governance are weak because of complex and multifaceted factors. At the heart of this challenge is a governance crisis that has failed to regulate and manage elite competition over access to and control of the state and the mechanisms of resource accumulation and redistribution. The shock to formal and informal systems of patronage caused by the oil stoppage can be considered the proximate causes of the civil war in 2013. Furthermore, weakened institutions at the state level contribute to protracted conflict and the lack of domestic accountability. For example, in sites visited around the country, institutions such as the judiciary, security, and rule of law sector are weak and highly politicized, while conflict early warning mechanisms remain weak. This compounds the weakening of social cohesion amidst the evolution of the revitalized peace agreement.

Weak community relationships have undermined community interdependence systems that traditionally helped nurture a culture of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. There is a deep culture of violence and revenge in some South Sudanese societies, which has been exacerbated by conflict, politicization of ethnicity, and a general lack of justice, law, and order services due to the absence of state authority at county, payam, and boma levels. This culture of violence and revenge is further entrenched by trauma. To leave the trauma unaddressed is to invite a virulent repeat of cycles of violence, which has marked the painful history of South Sudan. Many respondents attributed disruptions of crop and livestock farming and the collapse of markets for agriculture produce to violent conflict. This finding from respondents is backed by FAO 2018 and FAO/WFP 2019 data which indicate that food and income-generating activities—crop, livestock, and fisheries—for at least 85 percent of the South Sudanese population has been affected by the current conflict.[11] Findings from field surveys inform of challenges by IDP returnees to access land for production. This often leads to land disputes between the returnees and squatters which are often not properly resolved due to limited capacity by local peace mechanisms. The respondents also explained that the situation is exacerbated by the lack of a clear resettlement plan for the returnees by the local government and the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC).

Official and verified statistics on South Sudan are hard to come by. However, it is clear from field findings that the economy is not performing well, as many respondents complained about a lack of employment opportunities and upward mobility for youths. South Sudan's economy is dependent on oil revenues which account for about 60 percent of the budget and the rest is mostly covered by external support from international financial institutions and bilateral partners. Both the central and state levels of government have not been able to sufficiently generate their own revenue due to conflict. Prolonged conflict has also affected potential Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs), which could boost businesses, trade, employment opportunities. The poor state of infrastructure such as roads continues to adversely affect access to most parts of the country, which particularly impacts service delivery. This situation is compounded by non-functional government institutions and ministries, especially at the local and state levels. This was observed in all field locations, where some government officials arrived late to work and others never returned to the office after lunch. Furthermore, there has been no clear national development plan since 2016 and one cannot tell for certain that this is the top of the agenda of the R-TGONU. Following independence in 2011, the government of South Sudan formulated the South Sudan Development Plan (SSDP) between 2011 and 2013, later extended

to 2016, as the country's guiding framework for development to improve human development and security, socio-economic progress, and conflict prevention in the country. Moreover, these National Development Plans were hardly synchronized with locallevel development objectives. Without a clear national development agenda, it is difficult to see how social cohesion will be strengthened.

Data from FDGs and KIIs further indicate that many households in South Sudan are prone to high risks and vulnerability from external economic and security shocks. The extremely poor socio-economic conditions are on an upward trajectory due to protracted conflict, weak governance systems, and a non-performing economy which affects people's resilience. These external economic and security shocks disproportionately affect children, orphans, women, youth, the elderly, and the disabled, who are already living precariously without social safety net support mechanisms. The cycle of vulnerability in the research sites as a result of conflict has led to a high prevalence of extremely poor households with high food insecurity levels. The conceptual model of extreme poverty is adapted below to provide a good summary of the narrative above:

Figure 2: The Cycle of Vulnerability Resulting From Conflict
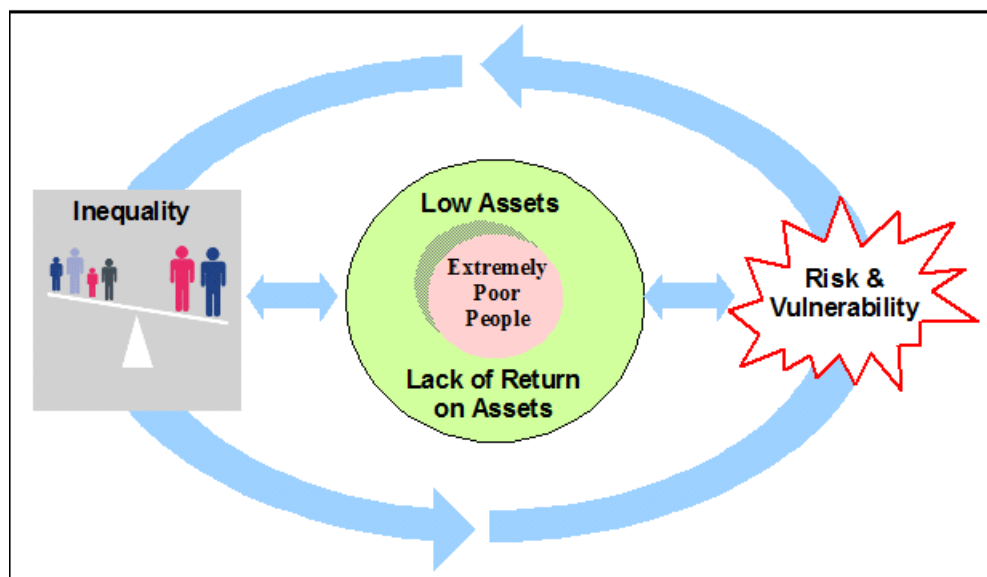
Source: Author's conceptualization

Inequalities largely driven by conflict and insecurity have led to low productive assets, inadequate of return on productive assets, high risk, and vulnerability in South Sudan.[12] A three-dimension paradigm of this vulnerability resulting from protracted conflict is presented below.

Table 1: The Cycle of Vulnerability Resulting From Conflict

Few assets & low returns on those assets:	Inequalities:
· Low return from agriculture · Low return from markets (labor/product/ input) · Poor (and lack of it) access to savings & credit · High prevalence of diseases · High levels of malnutrition · Lack of quality education	· Male dominant society · Low skill set & education · Poor access to extension services · Lack of representation & 'voice' · Social, economic & political exclusion · Access to land by IDPs, returnees, youth and women
	Risk & vulnerability: · High prevalence of intra and inter-communal conflict · Low resilience to shocks · Displacement · Drought

Issues of inequality abound in the communities visited. Many of the issues faced by the community revolve around access to education, water sanitation, hygiene (WASH) facilities, healthcare, livelihood sources such as agriculture/livestock farming, and markets as has been highlighted above. As inter-communal conflict continues despite the RPA holding, the humanitarian crisis has continued to intensify and expand on a costly trajectory for the communities of South Sudan, severely impacting their agricultural productivity to bolster food security and sustain decent livelihoods. The cumulative effects of years of inter-communal conflict and interrelated crises grow ever more debilitating. The compounding effects of widespread violence and sustained economic decline have further diminished the capacity of people to face threats to their health, safety, and agriculture, resulting in shocks such as the collapse of markets and livelihood sources.

Social Cohesion Programming Challenges

As a result of the dynamics mentioned above and the field findings from all research sites visited, it is evident that South Sudan continues to face many social cohesion programming challenges. These challenges include the war economy, which has unleashed a devastating effect on the lives and livelihood of South Sudanese victims, and the crises and chaos, which have created new incentives and opportunities for rent-seeking and corruption amongst the political and military elites.[13] Moreover, against the backdrop of poverty, lack of job opportunities, high levels of illiteracy, inadequate life skills, drug addiction, and rampant crime, violence has become a viable enterprise and opportunity to sustain a living, especially for the youth. This has been exacerbated by the fact that, in several parts of the country, enrolling into armed groups is not only a well-regarded activity associated with warrior traditions, but sometimes the only viable livelihood option for many young men that have few viable alternatives. This has been capitalized by some elites in conflict, thus feeding back into the cycle of the war economy.

About 75 percent of respondents reported the existence of various local peacebuilding efforts in South Sudan such as Peace Committees, Technical Committees, the Peace Conferences, the Inter-Church (Faith) Committees, peace education, community radio, and various activities for social cohesion which are predominant in promoting and facilitating peacebuilding. These findings show that all these mechanisms have had a positive impact on the peacebuilding process in communities where they are used. However, despite the existence of many local mechanisms for strengthening social cohesion and peace consolidation, weak national and local leadership has meant that social cohesion activities are redundant and could be duplicated in communities where multiple actors intervene. Current social cohesion activities are driven from the national level and implemented rather haphazardly in the country due to a lack of effective coordination and an unclear longer-term strategy. Take, for example, the National Dialogue (ND) process initiated by the president in 2017. The ND produced several documents with recommendations that were not implemented until the process came to a halt due to financial challenges and political developments in Juba. Furthermore, mechanisms at the community level have only a limited impact on the national social cohesion process. The links between national and local social cohesion initiatives are not optimized. Effective collaboration within the peace and social cohesion architecture does not exist in a systematic manner. In addition, existing community conflict early warning mechanisms are weak. Most interventions are reactive rather than proactive, as they largely focus on conflict

resolution instead of prevention aspects; a number of peace mechanisms also only exist at the national and state level and are not decentralized to payam and boma levels. This deprives the mechanisms of the opportunity to have closer proximity to conflict situations that require an urgent response.

The approach of international partners toward communal conflict in South Sudan also poses challenges to the impact of social cohesion mechanisms at the community level. First, partners must understand that some issues of communal conflict are deeply embedded in the culture. An intervention of one year might not suffice for resolving the root causes of conflict in complex environments. Second, despite a large amount of knowledge and analyses collected by a number of different peace and social cohesion actors, such knowledge is not shared, and each actor tends to intervene independently with a competitive mentality. Thus, no momentum for joint programming and efficient use of resources have been created. This is exacerbated by the generally short-term programming and planning, associated with the emergency mentality underpinning interventions and project funding. Third, the lack of coordination and weak networking of peacebuilding actors hampers efficient and effective intervention in the resolution of communal conflict. Fourth, the resources of many international donors have been scattered across the country without any coordination or consistent prioritization of geographic regions. Instead, they tend to respond to more contingent circumstances in a short-term way. Fifth, trauma from the long-lasting wars and the economic needs for poor community members are not properly addressed. Sixth, the international donors must recognize the influence of key stakeholders at each community, including government structures, to lead and mobilize people to facilitate dialogue, and, in case of conflict, collaboration with them should be sought as soon as possible. Finally, the international donors should consider prioritizing a more conflict preventive approach than a conflict management approach, which is likely to be costly for communities and donors alike.

Analysis of the Key Driving Factors (KDF) of Conflict

The continued conflict in South Sudan is driven by a number of factors. Most of these factors are structural in nature and include underlying conditions, structures, and systems that have existed for many years. They are mostly static or change slowly over time, thereby forming the basis for long-term risk assessment.[14] Structural factors tend to be rooted in historical, cultural, religious, and institutional contexts, such as unequal integration in the global political economy, multi-ethnic or sectarian conflicts, political and economic marginalization,

long-standing border disputes, and poverty, among others. They create the fertile conditions that make a country or region prone to conflict. This paper argues that in South Sudan, the structural factors are instrumentalized or interlinked by dynamic/trigger factors, leading to an escalation of violent conflict. Overall, a majority of the respondents during KII and FGDs (54 percent) of the field surveys informed the researcher that resource competition over water and grazing land for cattle is the main driver of conflict in South Sudan. 32 percent reported that marginalization or economic exclusion is the main factor driving conflict, while 10 percent cited ethnicity and cultural factors, such as high bride price. The remaining are political factors which accounted for only 4 percent. The responses from the field are summarized below:

Figure 3: Root Causes of Conflict
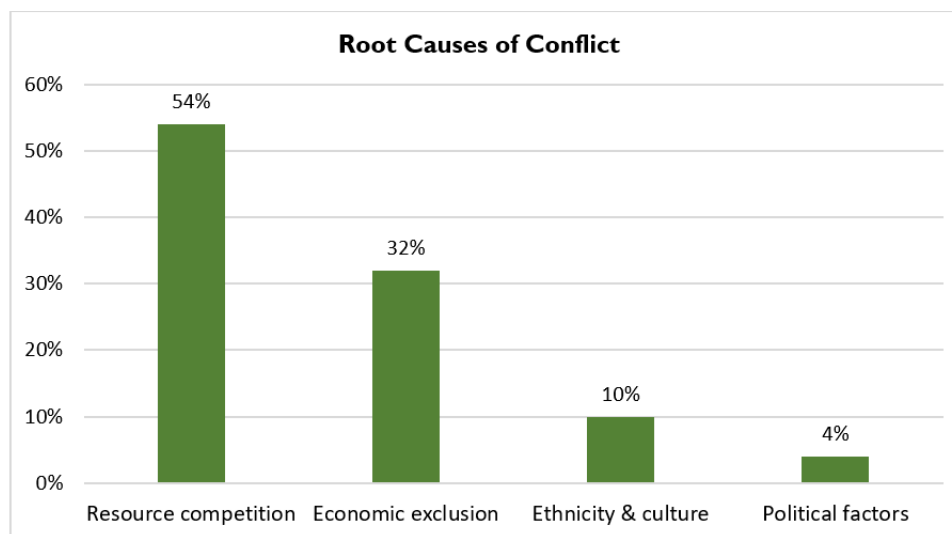
Source: Author's conceptualization

I now proceed to discuss some of the key driving factors of conflict in detail as follows:

   a) Resource Competition: Deep mistrust and tension, the absence of rule of law, economic and environmental change, and population migrations have increased pressure on land and competition over access to resources, which has sparked violent conflicts. For example, in the Jonglei, Lakes, and Warrap regions, cattle raiding is a manifestation of inter-tribal and inter-clan rivalry and retaliation, as well as economic gain. Conflict over resources also continues to manifest between IDPs, returnees, and host communities. The situation is exacerbated by a lack of clear reintegration plans for IDPs and

refugees at the state level, which has a negative impact on sustainable return, access to land for production by returnees, and, in some cases, peace in the region. Oil and gold mining has become a driver of political contestations at the state level.

b) **Political and Economic Exclusion**: Studies in comparative sociology have shown overwhelming evidence that poverty and inequality are profoundly linked to violence and crime.[15] Indeed, the social deprivation theory that is popularly used in the field of sociology and criminology regards poverty and inequality as major triggers of violent conflict. The underlying assumption is that the frustration and anger brought about by prolonged conditions of poverty and inequality is manifested through violence or crime.[16] The above assertions closely mirror the findings from KII and FGDs who point to the marginalization of the periphery by the center through political and exclusion as a driver of conflict in South Sudan. Communities have often blamed Juba-based politicians as the reason for their conflicts,

c) **Ethnic Power Politics**: The concept of ethnicity remains ubiquitous in peace and conflict studies. The common definition of ethnicity offered by different scholars tend to converge around some key elements that included language, history or ancestry, religion, shared cultural practice such as style of dress or adornment, and common boundaries, among other factors.[17] Grievances and the politicization of ethnicity have continued. Real and perceived grievances have been systematically "*ethnicized*" and used for political gain. This has eroded social cohesion, leading to a general climate of fear, distrust, resentment, revenge attacks, and killings between communities. Deep mistrust and tension, the absence of the rule of law, economic and environmental change, and population migrations have increased pressure on land and competition over access to resources, which have t sparked off violent conflicts. For example, in the Jonglei, Lakes, and Warrap regions, cattle raiding is a manifestation of inter-ethnic and inter-clan rivalry and retaliation as well as economic gain, while in other areas similar cattle-related violent dynamics have closer ties to the national conflict, broader inter-tribal rivalries, and struggles over political influence and territory. As the conflict is protracted, especially at the communal level, peacebuilding remains a severe challenge and South Sudan remains one of the most fragile nations in the world.[18]

d) **Political factors:** While findings show that the intensity of politico-military conflict between armed groups and government forces is low largely

due to the Revitalized Peace Agreement and that there are pockets of relative stability and security, respondents reported that the number of people killed in local/inter-communal violence in 2019 continued to be very high. Across all field sites, about 70 percent of respondents claimed that, at the local level, communal conflicts continue to be triggered, driven, and sustained by interlocking interests and actors that sometimes cut across administrative boundaries, hence creating conflict clusters where inter-communal conflict is still on an upward trajectory. Thus, conflict systems/dynamics are not confined to administrative boundaries but are cross-border in nature. The above scenario highlights the importance of prioritizing the cluster/conflict system approach. Rather than being implemented everywhere, high-impact areas should be prioritized. Thus, implementation should be designed around conflict systems/dynamics, not administrative boundaries. The target groups and stakeholders should be selected based on conflict clusters that look at the interconnectedness of the conflict actors, causes, and issues in the respective cluster to prevent conflict and strengthen weak social cohesion. However, one of the main challenges is that there is a constrained civic space for supporting peacebuilding work due to the South Sudan National Security Service Act (2014), the South Sudan Media Authority Act (2013), and the NGO act.

Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic has severely impeded the R-TGoNU from completing the implementation of the key provisions of the peace agreement. The failure to fully implement security measures outlined in the peace agreement drives conflict and poses a serious danger to peace consolidation because the peace process is at a very fragile stage. The delayed appointment of state and county-level officials is creating uncertainty and has led to a political and security vacuum, allowing for opportunistic conflict behavior that is driving inter-communal violence in places such as the Yei and Lainya counties of Central Equatoria. Inter-communal violence has also surged in many other places around the country, including Jonglei, Unity, Warrap, Lakes, Western Bahr el Gazal, and Western Equatoria states. While aid workers from several aid agencies who were interviewed opted to remain anonymous for security reasons, they reported incidences of humanitarian workers being denied access to most areas around the country. This negatively impacts the delivery of life-saving assistance and support to initiatives aimed at resolving inter-communal violence and fostering reconciliation.

Furthermore, the prevalence of Small and Light Weapons (SALWs) in civilians' hands is heightening insecurity and fuelling conflicts, as these weapons are often

used in revenge attacks, cattle raiding, and armed robberies. There is a lack of systematic and comprehensive disarmament to curb the proliferation of SALWs. Not all guns have been silenced. This finding from respondents is backed by a UN Report which indicates that South Sudan has an estimated 720,000 to 3 million guns. The estimated rate of private gun ownership (both licit and illicit) is 28.23 firearms per 100 people. In this regard, 55.3 percent of deaths in South Sudan have been attributed to firearms.[19]

Even though research findings indicate that the key drivers of conflict are structural in nature forming the basis for entrenched vulnerabilities in the communities, they are interlinked with several dynamic factors or triggers. Dynamic factors are accelerators that exacerbate the underlying conditions, driving up tensions to trigger a violent incident or conflict. These proximate causes and manifestations are analyzed in relation to the structural causes identified above to create sufficient conditions for protracted conflict across the country. Below is a summary of how these structural/root causes manifest in various forms across the three research sites visited.

Table 2: Summary Table: Overview of Conflicts Across South Sudan

MAPPING THE CAUSES		
Root Causes	**Proximate Causes**	**Manifestation**
Marginalization & Economic Exclusion	• Exclusion of certain ethnic groups from political and economic processes • Exclusion of vulnerable groups such as women and youths from economic processes and opportunities	• Proxy inter-communal conflicts supported by powerful national level politicians and generals
Resource Competition	• Scarcity of water points • Competition for and access to pastures during the dry period	• Cattle raiding • Revenge attacks and killings

MAPPING THE CAUSES		
Root Causes	**Proximate Causes**	**Manifestation**
Culture & Negative Ethnicity	• Girl elopement • High illiteracy levels • Early marriages • Rites of passage especially male circumcision periods	• Revenge killings • Cattle raids • High prevalence of SGBV
Political Factors	• Militarization of politics • Politicization of the military • Weak institutions of governance	• Armed struggle • Poor leadership • No established system of governance. • Impunity and lack of rule of law • Poor civil-military relations • High prevalence of SGBV • Militarization of cattle raids • Politicization and militarization of conflicts

Source: Author's conceptualization

Analyzing the Key Drivers of Peace

Despite a long history of protracted and complex conflict in South Sudan, evidence from field findings suggests that the region is finally moving towards stabilization and that it is indeed an emerging zone of peace. There are several actionable opportunities and entry points for programming in terms of consolidating peace and social cohesion as presented below:

1. **Existence of Initiatives that Strengthen Local Governance:** Although the conflict in South Sudan is protracted and complex, society is rife with initiatives, organizations, and institutions that foster social cohesion. A wide

range of partners that include the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) through its Civil Affairs Division and Human Rights Section are supporting interventions that expand the role of the judiciary, prisons, police, and CSOs at state levels to strengthen domestic accountability, the rule of law, and conflict early warning mechanisms. For example, the Civil Affairs Department of UNIMISS in collaboration with Oxfam, Safer World, and local NGOs have been supporting the Local Authorities in Rumbek (Great Lakes region) and Yambio (Equatoria region) to train the Interfaith Groups, CSOs, and High State Peace Committees in conflict prevention and mediation as part of efforts to resolve inter-communal conflicts and increase social cohesion. The UNMISS Human Rights Department in these states has also been training state and county level police, judiciary, and prisons departments in strengthening the rule of law, judicial reforms, and human rights monitoring.

2. Institutionalized Local Infrastructures for Peace: South Sudan is blossoming with the use of innovative methods for consolidating peace and strengthening social cohesion such as Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP). UCP is an innovative, evidence-based methodology with a demonstrated track record of reducing violence against civilians all over the world. It entails a mix of strategies to prevent violence, enhance the safety and security of civilians, and strengthen or build local peace infrastructures. It has grown in practice and recognition in the last few decades, with over 50 civil society organizations applying UCP methods in 35 conflict areas since 1990.[20] UCP is a flexible methodology that is community and context-driven, which cuts across various stages of peacekeeping, peace-making, and peacebuilding that normally overlap in the field. Some of the UCP approaches that are driving peace in South Sudan include:

• Facilitation of community dialogues and peace agreements to promote social cohesion, better livelihoods, and increased food security
• Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms to support the resolution of inter-communal conflicts and to monitor the implementation of local peace agreements
• Capacity building of local actors, including women and youth, for conflict management and mediation through community workshops
• Support locally initiated political engagement and reconciliation initiatives between communities to decrease inter-communal conflict, cattle raiding, revenge killings
• Support establishment of cross-border migration frameworks such as Joint Border Peace Committees and Joint Border Courts.

· Pre, mid, and post-pastoral migration support to the government and communities for peaceful cross-border migration through meetings, missions, and programmatic interventions
· Advancing peace and community interdependencies, particularly supporting communal managed services (e.g., common market, water points, grazing lands, and joint development programs) through community service projects.
· Encouraging the government through RRC, in collaboration with partners, to support return and reintegration of IDPs and refugees including the facilitation of the resolution of land disputes arising from the return process.
· Trust-building measures between the citizenry and the security sector
· Dissemination of the Revitalized 2018 Peace agreement to the rural areas through the media and stakeholders to rebuild trust as directed by the government supported by partners such as the UN and other NGOs

3. The Revitalized Agreement of the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) signed in 2018 will place South Sudan in a trajectory of stability and development if implemented to the letter, culminating in a Permanent Constitution for South Sudan. The agreement document calls for the establishment and strengthening of critical institutions of governance which will prevent a relapse to conflict. Community grievances, the sense of marginalization, and economic and political exclusion will be addressed through strong institutions of Parliament, Peace Ministry, and Judiciary. Most critically transitional justice and security issues favorable to the citizens will be enshrined in the permanent constitution

4. The Troika and IGAD as guarantors of the peace process continue to support and monitor the implementation of the South Sudanese peace process. The UN and other humanitarian partners continue to assist South Sudanese communities that are most affected by the war. Such support has fostered stability and peaceful coexistence in certain communities.

5. The citizenry is experiencing war fatigue. This is also shared by some politicians and military figures, particularly those at the state and local level most affected by the conflict. War fatigue can be exploited by peacemakers to enable social cohesion.

6. Conflict-Sensitivity Programming: Working in an environment with fast-evolving conflict dynamics such as South Sudan poses a big challenge in

terms of sustaining social cohesion initiatives. Through the donor-supported initiative called the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF), South Sudan is pioneering a unique initiative to mainstream and strengthen conflict sensitivity programming across many development actors at track one, two, and three levels. As a result of the robust capacity-building programs offered by CSRF to a wide range of implementing partners inside South Sudan, organizations are now able to better understand the context they are working in and fully appreciate the interaction between their interventions and that of the context. Organizations such as Nonviolent Peaceforce, the Civil Affairs Department of UNMISS in Rumbek Field Office, and local NGOs like CEPO and UNIDOR reported that the capacity building from CSRF allows them to effectively act upon that understanding to avoid or mitigate actions that feed into the cycle of conflict and maximize their potential contribution to social cohesion and peace.

Recommendations

Based on data collected in research sites across South Sudan, the short to medium-term programmatic success in the country will entail strengthening social cohesion to build the resilience of communities. Operationally, this can be achieved through a set of recommendations covering the two focus areas as follows:

**I.	The community security and resilience strategy:** Focus on supporting communities to identify and address the drivers and causes of conflicts. This will be done through forging productive relationships between local actors and support structures, developing their capacity, and enhancing their role as active actors in service provision and recovery.
**II.	The social cohesion strategy:** Focus on strengthening the social fabric of communities by engaging them to identify cultural, social, and economic connectors—also called interdependencies—which reconcile communities, increase trust, and foster cooperation over conflict.

Community Security and Resilience: Priority Actions

1.	Field studies highlighted the non-uniform, ad hoc existence of most peace committees scattered across the country. Partners should build upon these existing committees, especially when they are mandated by peace agreements, and seek to support a regular meeting schedule. It is their active

presence and not their establishment that should be the focus. Operationally this entails:

· Building capacities of local peace committees, women, youth, and traditional leaders to resolve conflicts peacefully

· Contributing toward strengthening community early warning and early response systems through (1) continued frequent engagements and information sharing with state, county, and payam-level authorities, community leaders, and other key stakeholders in all areas of operation; (2) field missions for mapping of risks and threats to civilian populations and conflict situational awareness, including at the IDP sites and amongst South Sudanese refugees in neighboring countries.

2. Competition over grazing and farming lands has been a key part of the conflict in South Sudan. Development agencies should consider reviewing, mapping, and analyzing livestock routes and using the peace committees to authenticate existing maps. It is clear that rights over land and grazing, as asserted through historic and current patterns of migration, are disputed and often politicized. Supporting a bottom-up mapping of grazing rights and routes has the potential to make competition over these routes less politicized and less susceptible to manipulation aimed at inciting violence. This will be especially effective if these mappings are able to highlight the complex and changing patterns of grazing routes over time and the shifting nature of rights claimed through these migrations. This could provide a resource for local communities to push back against those who try to incite conflict through new, alien notions of rights over land that they try to map on to alternative histories. However, as these routes have been disputed and politicized, there will need to be great sensitivity around the discussion and recording of migratory routes. Organizations should be continuously reflexive and honest about the politics and challenges surrounding the mapping of these grazing routes. To mitigate this sensitivity, development partners should:

· Collaborate with other partners and support the implementation of existing cross border mechanisms and migration frameworks such as Joint Border Peace Committees, Joint Border Courts, and inter-state peace conferences and migration conferences

· Offer training on conflict resolution and migration route mapping to cattle camp leaders and support close networking of these leaders from different cattle camps to facilitate their participation in migration conferences.

3.   Supporting a resource-sharing plan that will include territorial arrangements is crucial. Organizations working in South Sudan are right to recognize resources and territory as a key cause of conflict. However, they should be cognizant that rights to resources have often not been territorialized in the manner imagined in much contemporary legislation and policy. Hence, it is important to also be aware that the political appetite for resources and territory will mean that this resource-sharing plan could easily be captured by political interests. As this activity is so sensitive, it would be useful to do further research and assessments to better understand the likely implications of such activities.

4.   The literature and collected data highlight the importance of traditional leaders and chiefs in resolving conflict and restoring social cohesion. Therefore, organizations should continue to use these "traditional authorities" in project activities to build their overall authority:
   · Support existing local and traditional mechanisms in addressing inter-communal conflicts through training in basic conflict resolution skills, facilitating them to operationalize community dialogues and the dissemination and monitoring of local agreements
   · Support efforts aimed at strengthening traditional mechanisms to operate and respond to conflict at the community level vis-à-vis boma and payam levels
   · Facilitate the resolution of land conflicts through traditional dispute resolution mechanisms and advocacy with state authorities and other peace partners such as host communities and IDPs/refugees.

5.   Development organizations in South Sudan should seek to explicitly leverage relationships they have built over the years with youths and armed groups to scale up social cohesion activities such as:
   · Support peace education activities in cattle camps to raise awareness among youth and cattle keepers on the importance of peaceful existence
   · Facilitate youths in cattle camps to hold sports and creative arts activities

Social Cohesion: Priority Actions

1.   Provide support through awareness campaigns and advocacy to state authorities and partners to ensure displaced and returnee populations—women in particular—are not victims of discrimination in relation to access to land

2. Livelihood interventions such as social cash transfer schemes, livestock pass-on initiatives, and market access programs are strongly recommended, especially by women, to stabilize households.

3. Support to the government in the reintegration of returnees from the IDP and refugee camps through the development of clear reintegration strategies and provisions that include early maturity seeds, tools for cultivation, and fishing equipment, among others.

4. Materials and social support for IDPs should be equitably extended to the host communities to prevent them from withholding material access to the IDPs, such as land, grass, water, grazing/farmland, and general services. In doing so, it encourages joint participation between host communities and IDPs in conflict-sensitive recovery and development plans that motivate and sustain mutual co-existence.

5. Organizations should consider supporting the training of agricultural extension officers to strengthen agricultural and livestock extension services. This can be done in collaboration with State Ministries of Local Government and Agriculture. Operationally, it would also entail training of local farmers in crop diversification and other forms of agriculture such as fish farming to enhance food security and resilience of households. A good example of such initiatives includes initiatives by FAO in the Bahr-naam cattle camps in the Greater Lakes Region.

6. Development organizations should support building the capacity of traditional land dispute resolution mechanisms through training and sharing of best practices from other contexts.

7. Building resilience through supporting climate-related early warning systems, preparedness planning (with associated capacity building of key institutions such as the County Peace Response Mechanism) and ensuring an effective emergency response in collaboration with the community, state, county, and payam-level structures.

8. Provide training and support packages to community radio stations to produce and deliver environment and climate change programs. This has the potential to create an awareness and appreciation by the communities on the importance of the environment, climate change, and how this has a bearing on migration, conflict, and livelihood sources. Such an approach

would not only give wider coverage in terms of dissemination, but also contributes to good visibility to partners' interventions in the communities.

Conclusions

Thus, in their approach, development actors in South Sudan should continue to abide by these set of principal enablers of success:

1.   All actions and activities should adopt a conflict-sensitive approach to do no harm and seek to reduce existing or potential tensions among communities in targeted intervention areas. This should include periodic updating of the context analysis to ensure close monitoring of the interaction between the context of the operational environment and interventions. In addition, actions should ensure the continued consultation of the beneficiaries in the identification and implementation of interventions to ensure community ownership.

2.   Inclusive program planning and implementation through modalities that should be rooted in extensive consultations with the local government authorities.

3.   South Sudan itself has been historically marginalized and underdeveloped vis-à-vis the rest of the country. The youth in most rural areas have suffered from years of conflict, poverty, and inequality. Many of them have spent their adolescence fighting or running from war. Many of the young men end up joining armed groups. Working with these "hard-to-reach" youth will advance deradicalization and reduce their role as spoilers in localized civil peace initiatives.

4.   Continue embracing the New Ways of Working (NWOW) which falls within the Agenda 2030 commitment to "leave no one behind." The objective is to enable activities that meet people's immediate humanitarian needs while at the same time reducing risk and vulnerability by working together towards collective outcomes over multiple-year periods based on comparative advantage in each context

5.   Coherence and coordination in the implementation of future activities are necessary to provide and ensure a platform for synergy among all stakeholders. Activities should also complement existing peacebuilding efforts

6.   Implementation should draw on the successes and learn from the failures of existing programs.

7.   There should be a clear sustainability strategy when projects come to an end or when field offices are to leave operational locations due to insecurity. One such way of ensuring this is to continue strengthening the capacity of state-level institutions and community groups. This builds the resilience of communities and ensures the sustainability of projects in the long term.

8.   Gender equality and the empowerment of youths and women to become constructively engaged in livelihood activities for peacebuilding should continue to be central to the mandates of organizations and their programming approach. More critically, the empowerment of the youths who represent almost 70% of the population is necessary to prevent them from being divided along ethnic lines, which is detrimental to state and nation-building. Women should also benefit from an affirmative action of 35 percent representation in decision-making positions in government. Partners and NGOs can work with women-led organizations to lobby and advocate for the realization of the 35 percent women representation in all structures of government.

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