

Conflict, Hunger and Resilience-Building in South Sudan

Wednesday, 24th November 2021

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

ABOUT US

The Network for Innovative Resilience-Building in South Sudan brings together researchers, humanitarian practitioners, peacebuilding specialists and policymakers with the aim of contributing to reduced humanitarian need, strengthened resilience and conditions for durable, inclusive peace in South Sudan. The objectives of the Network include to:

- **Facilitate exchange** of ideas and networking of experts across research, policy and practice, to bridge gaps and improve collaboration;
- **Promote stronger evidence-based programming and decision-making** in humanitarian response and policy by mapping evidence, documenting innovative approaches, and critically engaging with emerging practice and policy;
- **Communicate key findings and evidence** from innovative practice to key policy stakeholders.

The Network includes members from the **Institute for Security Studies, Dublin City University** and **Concern Worldwide**. It is supported by a New Foundations grant from the Irish Research Council and the Department of Foreign Affairs.

CONFLICT AND RESILIENCE

On the 24th of November, the Network for Innovative Resilience-Building in South Sudan hosted a learning event, organised against the backdrop of profound transformations in the political, economic and humanitarian context in South Sudan over the past 18 months. This learning event aimed to support a better understanding of recent changes in peace, conflict and humanitarian needs in the country. The event particularly focused on recent changes in the security context; the role of hunger and food crisis in ongoing conflict and peacebuilding initiatives; and implications for reducing humanitarian needs across humanitarian, policy and research actors.

The event sought to address the following questions

- What are the most significant changes in the political, security and humanitarian context in South Sudan over the past year?
- What specific role have hunger and food crisis played in these changes?
- What are the gendered dimensions of the conflict-hunger-peace nexus in South Sudan and the wider region?
- What are the gaps in our evidence, knowledge and learning in this context?

The event was held under Chatham House Rules, but this summary document synthesises key issues identified by participants in relation to the most significant changes, most significant impacts on the vulnerable, new challenges to reducing need, and remaining gaps in evidence, knowledge and learning.

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

NATIONAL & LOCAL PROSPECTS FOR PEACE

At a national level, **the discussion explored the dynamics of ongoing violence in South Sudan**, particularly in peripheral areas outside the capital, that continue to experience insecurity. The limited successes of Security Sector Reform (SSR) in the country can in part be traced to historical approaches to reform, under which a ‘Big Tent’ policy was pursued. This involved drawing different factions together and resulted in a bloated security sector, outsized wage bill, persistent lines of fragmentation and disunity in resulting institutions. Today, many conflict actors still hold a great deal of sway and command considerable loyalty. Having an armed wing loyal to a leader remains a strong political tool, limiting incentives for actors to engage in efforts to unite security forces under a strong central command.

Participants reflected on **the difficulty of creating incentives for disarmament** while insecurity persists at the different levels. In this context, militias continue to serve (at least partly) as protection units for communities, but these present a clear risk of greater and greater mobilisation.

Participants also reflected on **the increasing focus on local-level peacebuilding** in South Sudan and lessons for more effective practice in this area. Driven in part by the global health crisis, there has been an increasing focus by the international community and actors, including NGOs, on local-level peacebuilding in South Sudan. However, key challenges in building truly locally-led peacebuilding persist in several ways:

- **Politically**, in national-level peace discussions, grassroots community actors have largely been excluded. They engaged through relatively limited consultations where they were involved, with limited opportunities to shape conceptualisation of what a renewed peace might consist of, and the design of a resulting agreement has been more limited.
- **Financially**, peacebuilding as a sector has been relatively neglected in South Sudan, with participants highlighting it receives relatively limited funding compared to the size and scale of the conflict and associated war economies.
- Lastly, NGOs and **civil society initiatives** to support local-level peacebuilding have often been engaged primarily as implementation partners, rather than in leadership roles in their own peacebuilding initiatives.

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

CONFLICT, HUNGER & GENDER

Participants cited the growing numbers of people globally in **conflict-driven food crises**, and its particular significance in South Sudan, where seven million people are estimated to be in food crisis or worse (WFP, 2021). The discussion also considered the multifaceted ways in which conflict drives food crises, some of which are relatively well-documented: these include how measures adopted by the international community to prevent conflict and establish security can unintentionally, negatively impact the protection of civilians – including sanctions and counter-terrorism measures. Another under-explored aspect is the politicisation of humanitarian data on hunger, which has only recently begun to generate attention internationally. In South Sudan, there are ongoing issues with data collection and verification of estimates of people facing food insecurity or crisis, and these gaps and issues can generate doubt or lack of acceptance of resulting data.

A second area of focus in the discussion centred on **the intersection between conflict, hunger, gender and peacebuilding**. Research undertaken by Network members identified a gap in existing research and evidence on when, how and with what impact provisions relating to hunger, starvation, food rights and their gendered dimensions have been integrated in peacebuilding either locally or nationally. Beyond its general inclusion, participants highlighted particular gaps in the consideration of the gendered dimensions of food rights and hunger in peacebuilding and peace agreements, despite widespread evidence that both conflict-driven hunger, and peace processes, are profoundly gendered. Participants presented examples, such as Colombia's 2016 peace agreement, where provisions addressing the right to food were integrated explicitly in the peace agreement, and noted the lack of attention to this issue in South Sudan, despite the ongoing and deep food crisis affecting the country.

“Research undertaken by Network members identified a gap in existing research and evidence on when, how and with what impact provisions relating to hunger, starvation and food rights have been integrated in peacebuilding locally or nationally, particularly in considering the gendered dimensions of conflict-driven hunger.”

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

KEY GAPS IN POLICY, PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

Participants highlighted a number of key gaps in policy, practice and research for further discussion and exploration.

Participants highlighted **ongoing barriers for organisations working to address resilience and longer-term peace** when funding restrictions and timelines often limit activities to a single year and to the meeting immediate needs alone. Calls for more flexible, multi-year humanitarian funding to support adaptive approaches that can integrate longer-term activities are well-documented, and many donors have made commitments to expand funding in this area. As such, the question of what bottlenecks and barriers prevent more substantial moves towards flexible, multi-year funding was raised as a gap and potential focus area for further discussion. In the absence of this, some actors reported being very limited in how engaged they can engage in peacebuilding activities.

To date, Network members noted that **very limited research has been undertaken on the intersection of gender, hunger and food rights in peacebuilding**, and to our knowledge, no comparative mapping of these provisions has been completed. Given the profound gendered dimensions of both conflict-driven hunger and peacebuilding alike, Network members concluded that research could usefully illuminate: a) where peace agreements and peacebuilding practices have sought to integrate considerations of hunger, food rights and gender; b) learning from the successes and challenges of designing, integrating and implementing these provisions; and c) implications for norm diffusion or divergence within and across national- and local-level policies which variously consider gender dimensions, gendered priorities (including addressing hunger and livelihoods), and the right to food.

The **role of the private sector** and how private sector actors – who are increasingly active in fragile and conflict-affected contexts – can contribute to building peace and addressing humanitarian needs without exacerbating conflict was identified as a gap in the context of South Sudan.

Lastly, the discussion highlighted **the value in joint analysis, exchange and discussion across silos**. Bringing together researchers, policy analysts and humanitarian actors each working on discrete dimensions of the crisis illustrated the value of creating spaces where dialogue across these sectors, and integrating diverse viewpoints, can take place.

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FURTHER READING

Asige Liaga, Emmaculate (2021) South Sudan's Transitional Government: Realities, Challenges and Opportunities, ISS Africa, [link](#).

Asige Liaga, Emmaculate (2021) Towards Local Approaches and Inclusive Peacebuilding in South Sudan, RESOLVE Network Policy Note, Oct 2021, [link](#).

Concern Worldwide (2018) Knowledge Matters – Improving Resilience in South Sudan, [link](#).

Dowd, Caitriona (2018) Conflict and Hunger: The Lived Experience of Conflict and Food Insecurity in South Sudan, Concern Worldwide, [link](#).

Kilroy, Walt (2021) Ten Years Since Independence, South Sudan goes from State-Building to State Capture, DCU Institute for International Conflict Resolution and Reconstruction (IICRR), Jul 2021, [link](#).

Kolok, Jame David, Mahdi, Maram and Allan Ngari (2021) Land and Reparative Justice in South Sudan, ISS Africa, [link](#).

Kumalo, Liezelle and Cassie Roddy-Mullineaux (2019) Sustaining Peace: Harnessing the Power of South Sudanese Women, ISS Africa, [link](#).

Kumalo, Liezelle and Tsion Tadesse Abebe (2020) Is Africa Equal and Enabled Enough to Empower Women? ISS Today, [link](#).

Mutangadura, Chido (2021) The Deadly Cost of South Sudan's Delayed Security Reforms, ISS Africa, [link](#).