



THE SUDD INSTITUTE

RESEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL, JUST AND PROSPEROUS SOUTH SUDAN

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Peace and Reconciliation in South Sudan: A Conversation for Justice and Stability

The Sudd Institute

Summary

- South Sudan's long road to statehood was littered with many thorny internal confrontations that will need to be reckoned with through a peace and reconciliation exercise.
- There is recognition that liberation efforts wrecked relations among South Sudanese communities, and there is talk all around the country about the need for a national dialogue aimed at repairing these relations. But there has been very little analysis or open discussion about why it is needed, what it means in South Sudan's own context, how to conduct it, who participates, and who should lead it. Almost all the reconciliation initiatives by government and by various civil society entities have not spelled out these steps.
- There is widespread concern about whether the many reconciliation projects that have been talked about, including those recently championed by the president and the vice president, should come before or after the state has demonstrated its ability to end the current violence and insecurity. Should the many ongoing conflicts be ended first, preventing death and stabilizing the country, before discussing past problems? Or will the current conflicts not end until there has been reconciliation? Which comes first, security or peace and reconciliation? South Sudan's current conflicts are undoubtedly rooted in the historical incidents of violence that have not been addressed. But putting in place a security system that protects citizens first is a prerequisite to reconciliation over events of the past.
- The weakness of the justice system also lies at the root of many conflicts, and unless there are mechanisms for restitution, a forgive-and-forget approach to reconciliation will not satisfy too many communities. Ethnic conflict in South Sudan has been a chain of interconnected events, and many communities

have long felt that they have to take the law into their own hands. A just settlement of a fresh conflict depends on how previous conflicts that trigger current ones have been addressed.

- The top political leadership must put its moral weight behind, but not be in charge of, any state-led program of peace and reconciliation. The president cancelled the initiative that the vice president had championed and set up another initiative led by Christian leaders: Bishop Daniel Deng Bul of the Episcopal Church of Sudan and Bishop Emeritus Paride Taban of the Catholic Diocese of Torit. Whether placing the process entirely in the hands of religious leaders is the right approach has triggered a new and different debate.
- If a reconciliation process is delegated to private entities, it must start by identifying local leaders who are revered in their communities to lead it. They could, in turn, identify peace mobilizers to be recruited, trained, and deployed in various areas of the country to publicize the message of reconciliation. They would need to be equipped with such important tools as the mapping of all areas of conflict, substantive, and geographical.

Introduction

South Sudan's need for a process of reconciliation was recently underscored by political events that revealed the country's still thorny and sensitive situation regarding its liberation history, its ethnic diversity, and its desire to make itself into the viable, peaceful, prosperous, and inclusive country that generations of its citizens have yearned and fought for. The challenges to political unity the country faces appear especially at the top of the political class. On April 14 President Salva Kiir Mayardit, abruptly canceled a national reconciliation effort that the Vice President, Riek Machar Teny, had initiated in the last quarter of 2012. The reasons for the cancellation are still a mystery to the South Sudanese public and have been open to speculation.

Popular sentiment in South Sudan appears to favor a reconciliation process, but questions remain regarding what issues such a process would tackle, how it might be conducted, and who should carry it out. This Sudd Institute special report addresses these concerns using information and opinions gathered from interviews with community leaders, youth, and women's activists who are members of various civil society associations. In addition, we interviewed ordinary citizens, government officials, prominent politicians, civic activists and religious leaders, people who were involved in previous localized peace and reconciliation efforts in different corners of the country before independence, and we reviewed documents that these initiatives produced. What these sources have revealed is the importance of building on these earlier initiatives and widening the consultations in order for the process to enjoy a

wider buy-in from the citizens. The sources and interviews have also shown some of the approaches to reconciliation that the citizens believe would be more productive. Many peace initiatives, large and small, have been started in South Sudan by various entities and individuals; they also spring from the widespread conversations that the people, burdened by continuous violence, have been having about how their country is going to move forward while weighed down by its past. Despite his April 14 cancellation of the vice president's process, the president is conscious of the country's dire need for reconciliation. He allowed the continuation of the training of the peace and reconciliation mobilizers who had been gathered in Juba for over a month under the auspices of the vice president, and he let government facilities remain at the disposal of the facilitators for the course.

At the closing ceremony of what had been planned as the first phase of training, the vice president's wife, Angelina Teny, who is also the president of Initiatives of Change South Sudan, a new organization that was recently formed and quickly registered to champion this process, made a moving speech to the course's two hundred newly trained young men and women. She told them that their main task was to go back to their hometowns and villages convinced that they were individually responsible for making South Sudan into the country its liberation champions had envisioned. She referred to what Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior, the wife of the fallen hero John Garang de Mabior, had told them on an earlier occasion, that Garang and the founding members of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) had loved one another. These founding members included both the current president and his deputy, and referring to them in this context was a reminder that South Sudanese leaders, no matter what differences they may have, can and should put the interests of the country first. "None of us and none of our individual interests is bigger than South Sudan," she said to the cheering crowd. Madam Teny emphasized that South Sudan needs a reconciliation exercise, a dialogue on its history, if the country is to become a stable, peaceful, and prosperous place.

Madam Teny and her husband, the vice president, had started their process to get South Sudanese talking about their past, with the hope of coming to grips with the "traumatic" experience that South Sudan had gone through to become an independent country. They had enlisted the support of Initiatives of Change (IOC) International, a Swiss non-government organization (NGO) that has had links with many South Sudanese over the past fifty years, but never registered in the country as a local entity. Anticipating criticism for bringing in outsiders to conduct the exercise, the vice president and his wife quickly established a South Sudan IOC branch and enlisted the support of people with serious connections with IOC International, including several veteran South Sudanese politicians dating back many decades, such as Buth Diu and Joseph Lagu.

Some applauded the effort—called the Journey of Healing and Reconciliation—with some qualification regarding how it could have worked best. Some called it an exercise long overdue and considered the vice president the right person to lead it,

given his apparent humility, his own part in the South Sudanese struggle and his role in internal strife within South Sudan. However, others were suspicious of the circumstances of IOC South Sudan's establishment, despite the attempts to legitimize it. The vice president, his wife, and their aides were quickly criticized on two main counts, albeit with no clear evidence of either. First the vice president apparently had expressed interest in the chairmanship of the ruling SPLM at its March 5, 2013 Political Bureau meeting, leading to his accusation of trying to use the occasion to campaign for the presidency in the 2015 elections, as the SPLM constitution dictates that the chairman of the party becomes the automatic nominee for the presidency when elections take place. Second, IOC South Sudan's rapid creation gave the appearance that it was set up to seize the opportunity to take control of the budget that the government was planning to put up for the exercise, as well as the donor money that, it was hoped, would flow into the process.

There is, to date, no evidence connecting the vice president's political aspirations and his commitment to a reconciliation process. Whatever the truth may be, his critics raised legitimate concerns, but did not change the need for reconciliation, and of urging everyone to play a role in it. The vice president must be applauded for having taken the time to think about the future of the country, and for being willing to accept criticism of his project. He, his wife—who is a prominent political figure in her own right, a former state minister in Khartoum before independence, and all the persons they had enlisted for this exercise believed strongly in the need for a reconciliation process to start. No one disputed them on this point, except for the murky circumstances in which the president canceled his effort.

However, if a national exercise to rebuild the fabric of South Sudanese society after so many decades of war and destruction can be surrounded by such intense disagreement among the country's leaders, these leaders should know that disagreements could be worse at communal levels. As South Sudanese politics revolve around ethnic pride and identity and around the search for ethnic equity, some citizens may understand the events between the president's aides and his deputy as a sign of disrespect by one ethnic group toward others. The country's leaders must be responsible in how they speak of their disagreements, lest they inflame ethnic tensions and defeat the very purpose of reconciliation.

In any case, the president did not scrap entirely what the vice president had started—an obvious recognition of VP Machar's and his aides' good intentions and accomplishments—and he instructed everyone involved to find ways to connect the new process to everything that others had been doing. In addition, the president formed a National Reconciliation Committee, predominantly composed of religious leaders under the chairmanship of Archbishop Daniel Deng Bul of the Episcopal Church of Sudan (ECS), deputized by Bishop Emeritus, Paride Taban of the Catholic Diocese of Torit. The new committee has officially begun its work, building on what previous initiatives had done. It took over the process of a previous committee in a ceremony presided over by the vice president himself, dispelling rumors of acrimony between the two topmost leaders. The documents accumulated in the

previous exercise were handed over to the new committee. These included a concept paper detailing how the national reconciliation process was envisioned to take place, as well as the files of the recently trained two hundred peace mobilizers from South Sudan's ten states. The new committee is mandated to study conflicts in all the counties of the country, identifying their root causes, mapping in detail where they have occurred, and establishing their historical facts—for a true reconciliation has to be built on the truth about the civil war experiences of the communities of South Sudan. It must be based on establishing the truth about all the injustice that has occurred since the CPA, be it physical violence, structural violence or exclusion from services on the basis of ethnicity or political affiliation.

Much as Madam Teny had done in the closing ceremony of the canceled reconciliation initiative, the vice president made touching appeals at the opening ceremony of the one that replaced it. He reminded the new committee that reconciling communities whose relationships with one another had been shattered by war is not a simple task. All the interrelated factors behind conflicts have to be sifted through, requiring hard work, patience, and strong commitment in the face of frustration. All who spoke at the ceremony, the previous and the new committees, spoke unequivocally about the challenges the country faces in carrying out reconciliation—the long histories of conflict, the poor facilities and finances, and the logistics of organizing such a gigantic task in a country the size of France without a road network—and in bringing South Sudan's communities to a state of peaceful coexistence and tolerance.

There is no overstating the need for national reconciliation, whatever it might be called. More than three decades of conflict between South Sudan and Sudan and ethnic strife within South Sudan have disrupted the economic and social fabric of rural communities and have left serious ethnic-based political disunity in urban centers. It is natural that there has been so much talk about the need for truth and reconciliation to repair these relations, create an atmosphere of peace, security, and coexistence across the young state, and build a culture of peace.

Processes that became known as people-to-people peace initiatives have been convened numerous times and in different places since 1998. The churches have been working for many years to mobilize communities for peace and reconciliation. Bishop Paride Taban has recently won a United Nations peace prize for his efforts, particularly in Eastern Equatoria, to mediate between ethnicities that have been warring among themselves and for his work with a concept known as peace villages. Various politicians, government officials, and traditional authorities also have conducted their own reconciliation efforts, trying to end specific recurrent incidents of violence in their own areas. Prominent politicians from Tonj East as well as government authorities in Jonglei, Eastern Equatoria, Lakes, Warrap, and Unity states have all tried their hand at community dialogue, conflict mitigation, and peacebuilding. Above all, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended the north-south war in 2005 had called for such a process at the national level to be embarked upon right away.

Such efforts have demonstrated the huge interest among South Sudanese in reconciliation, though they have yielded only limited and localized results in reducing ethnic violence. South Sudan remains almost hostage to this type of conflict, much of which is rooted in the history of the lengthy liberation wars. New developments since the CPA in 2005 and independence in 2011 have also fanned strife, such as disputes over land, cattle rustling, and the return of displaced persons. Calls for a more coordinated effort for a nationwide reconciliation process, instead of isolated local initiatives, thus have become louder and are coming from all corners of society.

As South Sudan continues to be engulfed by ethnic conflict, the need for a reconciliation process to build on indigenous systems of reconciliation, in addition to the experiences of other countries, cannot be overemphasized. To this end, the government of South Sudan through the Council of Ministers has at various times endorsed the formation of a commission to carry out an exercise to mobilize for peace, conduct conferences, find measures for restitution, and build systems of justice-based reconciliation and ethnic coexistence from the bottom up.

Reconciliation: A Nationwide Conversation

While South Sudan can potentially benefit from the experiences of other countries, there undoubtedly will be a need for South Sudanese to find unique ways to carry out their own reconciliation process. Embarking on reconciliation will require identifying the people to lead it, beyond the committees that the government sets up from time to time. It also will need to specify which historical events need reconciling over and who is to reconcile with whom, from military officers and government officials to communities and individuals.

There have been theoretical debates and academic studies on whether reconciliation processes actually restore peace, social cohesion, and stability after a society has experienced protracted wars and violence. It is also debatable whether a truth and reconciliation process works better than, say, holding the perpetrators of violence accountable. Should the process be punitive, involving tribunals to establish guilt and provide recompense? Or should it be entirely about truth telling and forgiveness?

South Sudan's long journey to independent statehood has been extremely taxing, in the loss of human lives, the destruction of livelihoods and property, and the reconfiguration of the social fabric of the country's communities. There is no overstating the need for an honest reckoning with the aftermath of liberation—that is, for all of South Sudan's communities to agree to confront their history before everyone can begin to look to the future without the burden of the past. Done poorly, however, a project of reconciliation could potentially backfire, creating doubts about anyone's ability to carry it out and making it difficult to trust a future initiative.

One approach to a successful national reconciliation process is to mandate that it reaches all corners of the country, and not be another conference at a hotel in Juba, where the leaders meet, give speeches, kiss, and go home; such has been characteristic of other national efforts in the past that have ended in failure. Another approach is to carefully study and diligently chronicle the violence that has occurred in and between communities. Honing in on these episodes would give communities and individuals the chance to tell the rest of the country what they have gone through, create memorials on or near the locations of massacres and battle sites, and build confidence in their relations with the rest of society. Survivors of violence could tell their stories through performing arts events and songs that are given a national stage through the national museum, cultural centers, and television. School children, artists, women's associations, farmers, soldiers, political leaders, trade unions, and professional associations could all be convened, collectively or separately, within or between communities, and asked to review the histories and stories of conflict as well as tell how they have experienced the war in their own unique ways. In short, a successful process will find ways to give every citizen a chance to feel included.

War has come to define South Sudan, overshadowing the positive developments the country has seen. Everywhere one looks, there is no mistaking the role of violence, especially in rural areas, from the interethnic wars between Murle, Nuer, Dinka, Dedinga, Toposa, Jie, Bari, or Mandari to the sectarian fights within each of these ethnic groups. Security forces and individuals are quick to fight over issues that could be easily settled through dialogue, including violence by and against young children. The situations in Jonglei, Lakes, Unity, and Warrap, between communities across state borders, in towns, and within families all point toward South Sudan facing a serious challenge, much of it rooted in the country's history of liberation. How did it get to be this bad?

Looking at the South Sudanese conflict over the past three decades, it is easy to identify specific events and issues as the driving forces behind the violence that has wreaked so much havoc across the country. A reconciliation process should study these episodes and many more across the country that the liberation struggle left unsettled. Once chronicled and analyzed, they can form the foundation and subject matter of reconciliation.

The SPLA Split

The SPLA suffered a destructive split in August 1991, when, in the town of Nasir in Upper Nile State, a group of senior members of the SPLA high command, protesting what they saw as an undemocratic system in their organization, attempted to stage a coup against John Garang, then commander in chief and chairman of the SPLM, the SPLA's political wing. Failing to take over the movement, they set up their own wing, SPLA-Nasir, to fight against Garang's SPLA-Mainstream. Though the coup started and operated on grounds of ideological disagreements between the leaders, the fight quickly degenerated into an ethnic confrontation, with Riek Machar Teny, the chairman of the Nasir faction and a Nuer, and Garang, a Dinka, drawing their

respective ethnic groups into the conflict, escalating the situation into an all out Dinka-Nuer fight (Johnson, 2003).

The consequences of militarizing ethnic identities were absolutely horrendous. Huge numbers of Dinka from the Bor section of Jonglei were killed throughout the province in what became known as the Bor massacre. The conflict expanded to all areas where Nuer and Dinka shared a border and persisted until a peace and reconciliation conference was held in 1998 in Wunlit village, in what is now Warrap state (Jok and Hutchinson, 1999). To the amazement of all, the peace pact held, and remains the most frequently referenced as an example of a successful people-to-people peace initiative. Despite this, much about the SPLA split remains unsettled. Riek Machar Teny has gone on record more than once to apologize for his role in the massacres, underscoring the importance of a nationwide effort to express such remorse and humility in the interest of having a future free of ethnic grudges.

Displaced Peoples

The Bor killings led to the mass displacement of Bor Dinka, a cattle-herding people, out of their indigenous homeland and into Equatoria, especially the Tambura area in Western Equatoria state, the town of Yei in Central Equatoria, and Nimule in Eastern Equatoria. The arrival of the Dinka to some of these areas with their cattle soured relations with those communities, which largely engaged in farming. What at first looked like a question of cattle destroying farms gradually became much more about ethnic grudges. Isolated fights between a Dinka person and a member of another ethnic group within Equatoria grew to become frequent incidents of ethnic clashes, sometimes involving SPLA soldiers; this occurred in so many communities throughout Equatoria that some local Equatorians believed that the SPLA was not there to liberate them from Khartoum, but to take over their territory.

Whether the stories of the Dinka-Nuer conflict and its consequences are based in fact or perception, if they are not revisited and brought out for discussion, it is hard to see how the various communities in South Sudan can continue to coexist. Throughout the war, it was thought that much wartime wrangling was a function of South Sudanese being squeezed by liberation efforts and machinations from Khartoum. Since the CPA and independence, however, tensions have worsened, fueled by confrontations over land. In Juba, Nimule, Yei, and many other towns, local communities are calling for the Dinka and Nuer to repatriate to greater Bahr el-Ghazal and Greater Upper Nile—a call echoed by the entire leadership from the three states of Greater Equatoria at this year’s Equatoria conference. But the Dinka and Nuer are claiming that these towns are now South Sudanese towns, and as citizens of their country, they are entitled to live in any corner of it. These are not claims that the communities entangled in these disputes should be left to sort out for themselves; they require a mediated national effort that looks at historical injustices and charts a way forward in a manner that allows grudges to be soothed through a just process of resource-sharing, repatriation if need be, identification of wrongdoers, settlement of land disputes in Juba, and compensation for property lost during the war.

Khartoum Counterinsurgency

Among the most pointed moments in the history of South Sudan's quest for nationhood are the results of Khartoum's counterinsurgency tactics, which advanced an old practice by Arab slavers called "kill a slave with a slave." This practice aimed to pit South Sudanese against one another by recruiting from some ethnic groups and deploying them against the others. Successive Khartoum governments elevated the practice to a new level in the 1980s and 1990s, causing total mayhem in Wau between the Fertit and the Dinka, in Juba between the Dinka and Mandari, and Kapoeta between the Toposa and SPLA, to mention a few.

The episodes must be discussed in hope of establishing the correct history and allowing opportunity for apologies to be made, grievances expressed, injustices corrected, and agreements made about how to collectively bury the past. Sweeping them under the rug in the hope that they will be forgotten has only meant continued outbreaks of communal violence in revenge. The 1980s and 1990s remain as peoples' memories of destruction, injury, death, and humiliation. The violence in Wau around Christmas 2012 is a testament to this reality.

Nationalism

Some liberation slogans—particularly the SPLM emphasis on militarism—have driven a wedge between self-proclaimed liberators, combatants, and their civilian leaders and those they perceive to have not contributed much to the war effort because they did not fight. For their part, those in the latter group insist that they did their share in many other ways. Some provided financial contributions or livestock to feed the fighters. Women cooked or were forced to be porters for moving armies. Above all, every community lost loved ones who died in combat or from the war's consequences.

Since the CPA and the setup of the government of South Sudan, the divide has grown into a contest over nationalism. Those claiming to have been more nationalistic have a sense of entitlement to public office, government services, independence dividends, and reward commensurate with the assumed weight of their contributions. The claims of those who fought in uniform often translate into a perceived right to abuse other citizens, especially when ex-combatants feel that civilians have disrespected them.

Such attitudes are common in the way the state deals with citizens, while the political leadership looks on. National leaders should address these issues in their speeches to set the record straight about the liberation struggle. To let a disgruntled minority distort the history of the war on the basis of a slippery concept like nationalism means a continued misunderstanding of a basic constitutional principle: that South Sudan belongs to all who live in it, liberator or not.

Refugees

The wars drove many South Sudanese into refuge in neighboring countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Sudan, and other continents like North America, Australia, and Europe. With their return, many of these people, especially those displaced to Sudan, have suffered humiliation, aggression, and exclusion that at times surpasses the ordeal experienced by those in SPLA-controlled areas.

Displaced people were victims in South Sudan's liberation effort, just like those who fought in the field. They campaigned for international recognition of South Sudan's cause and for humanitarian interventions, and they reported to a global audience the horrendous human rights violations Khartoum committed. Some of them struggled and gained opportunities that have prepared them to be a resource for the new nation upon return. When the war ended and South Sudan voted overwhelmingly for independence, the South Sudanese diaspora played a large role as well. Unfortunately, they now speak of being taunted or accused of returning just in time to reap the fruits of other peoples' labors, or of importing foreign values. They are sometimes excluded from the rewards of independence based on the perception that they ran away from the struggle.

Further, refugees returning from the Republic of Sudan stand accused of having lived with the enemy. They did not flee soon enough to avoid the wrath of Khartoum upon separation and were rendered practically stateless. They remain stranded by the thousands in settlement camps across South Sudan, on the border with Sudan, and on the streets of some big towns, having nowhere to return to and no government programs to welcome them. Their camps on the outskirts of big towns, abandoned by the political leadership, are a disgrace to South Sudan when its liberation philosophy revolved around restoring dignity to South Sudanese. They live near other South Sudanese but are not a part of them; they weigh on the nation's conscience, yet are seemingly unworthy of support to reintegrate. How long will they be shunned and ignored before their children, who have no access to any services at the moment, become a liability to society in reduced future productivity, violence, crime, and instability?

Killing of Young Recruits

After the establishment of the SPLA in 1983, thousands of youth from Bahr el-Ghazal journeyed through Upper Nile on their way to join the movement for training in Ethiopia. This brought South Sudanese, especially the Dinka and Nuer, into contact with each other in massive numbers, such as had never been experienced in the past. Early liberation efforts were marred by disagreements between Anya Nya II leaders and the new movement. This, mixed with feelings of uncertainty among the Nuer about the motives of the huge numbers of Dinka recruits passing through their country, created a climate that fomented antagonistic ethnic sentiments. Many new young recruits were killed in Upper Nile before they ever got to Ethiopia, a fact that has left many people reeling with anger. To this day, many young men who survived the journey and the wars continue to wonder why they and the thousands who

perished on the way to training camps were subjected to such misery by people they believed to be their own brethren.

As the Dinka and Nuer have each held suspicions about the other for generations, due to sporadic resource conflicts, it was more or less inevitable that such encounters would occur between them, as the leadership of the new liberation movements had not had much time to sensitize South Sudanese citizens about the war they had declared against Khartoum; the events that led to the declaration of war happened too fast to allow preparation for it. Ordinary citizens in South Sudan thus had to try to make sense of the confusion through the only lens available to them: the familiar one of interethnic relations. But no matter what the causes of the killings on the route to Ethiopia may have been, they created an antagonism so bitter that some soldiers, once trained and deployed back in South Sudan, held near lasting grudges against the communities they believed to have hurt them. Can the many soldiers in the national army who harbor these sentiments be expected to view all citizens as worthy of respect?

SPLA versus Anya Nya II

The era of Anya Nya II and the confrontations with the SPLA in Greater Upper Nile brought such destruction and pain to the region that people used to wonder whether the war was not so much a secessionist conflict with the north as a civil war in the south. The grudges that developed from this history and many similar situations across the country have never been studied or made available for all to understand, and they have continued to manifest themselves in the violence witnessed everywhere since independence. Some of the current security issues, the rise of rebel movements, and the failure of the justice system in many parts of Greater Upper Nile are sometimes attributed to that history (Johnson, 2003).

The grudges between the Dinka, the Nuer, the Murle, the Anyuak, and within some of these ethnic groups are said to be manifestations of the past, and cannot really be stamped out until people know what happened to their loved ones during the war and who was involved. Our investigations suggest that people from the whole of Upper Nile region feel that they must be assisted in coming to some closure. Without that, it is hard for people to move on.

Social Violence

Anyone who pays attention to how South Sudanese interact with one another and respond to foreigners in urban centers will have noticed how quickly people seem to take to violence. Traffic police in Juba stop and slap motorists on the streets. There are sudden outbreaks of fights between young boys and men on the streets of Wau, Aweil, Rumbek, and Bentiu, some of the towns with the highest concentration of children living on streets. The situation is unprecedented in the history of ethnic relations and warfare in South Sudan, suggesting that something about the social organization of communities is broken and cannot be expected to repair itself without a concerted effort involving government, civil society, churches, and traditional authorities.

Many studies show that rampant domestic violence, alcohol-related violence within the security forces, drunk driving, and gender-based violence are all related to the levels of violence experienced during the war, which continue to manifest themselves and get reproduced within communities and families (Jok 2012). This has done immense damage to the social fabric and to livelihoods throughout the country (Kircher 2013).

Social Imbalance

Opinion polls and our own interviews reveal a widespread feeling that there are too many social imbalances in South Sudan: inequities in power and political representation as well as access to opportunities, resources, and wealth. There is a sense that the government favors certain regions and ethnic groups in providing jobs and services. Whether these are facts or perceptions, they have created real animosities between ethnic groups and between certain regions and the state. These must be discussed if South Sudanese are to develop a sense of collective belonging, rather than understanding South Sudan from the ethnic perspective they believe to be practiced by more of the politically and militarily dominant ethnic groups.

These imbalances also spill into the area of justice, which, despite its supposed equity for everyone, regardless of ethnicity or class, has left millions of citizens without access to justice. Many studies have suggested that rural people live in legal limbo, as the customary justice system has been stripped of its capacity to hear criminal cases, while the statutory law, which is supposed to replace it is out of reach for those residing in the counties and villages. Many criminal cases, including murder, remain unheard all across the country, leaving victims and their families without avenues for restitution, and at times pushing people into revenge as the only way to get justice. Women too are for the most part unable to benefit from the available just system due to gender ideas about the woman's place in the society, that accords her a submissive position, and consequently influencing the attitude of the police, the medical personnel and the judges towards women.

Poverty

Many of the historical events listed above are connected by the important shared realities of poverty, youth unemployment, and absence of basic services. Citizens' disappointment in the state's slow provision of goods and services, combined with negative perceptions of the government regarding corruption, a weak justice system, and many other signs of bad governance, could signal the need for a reconciliation between citizens and the state. This could take the form of dissemination of development plans to manage expectations and promise, in a meaningful way, the delivery of specific goods by a specified time.

Current Efforts at Reconciliation

Past efforts to reconcile the population of South Sudan and the public debate about how to do so were, for a time, energized by the government's announcement that it

would take it up and drive the process. Both the president and vice president were expected to be the moral powers behind the exercise. However, while there was near unanimity about the need for the endeavor, there was also a lot of suspicion about motives, fears that a state-driven, top-down process was bound to fail, and much disagreement on just what the best way was to go about it. The government's involvement is suspended for the time being, perhaps because of political disagreements over power, but that does not erase the reasons the nation felt that it needed the process in the first place.

The first problem, expressed quite loudly, is that the government's initiative has ignored everything that everyone else has been doing since before the CPA, from the efforts of churches, communities, and civil society to initiatives by individual political and community leaders. Communities affected by conflict have not even been asked if national reconciliation is their preferred approach to ending strife. Critics also cite the ambiguities in the government's approach, especially regarding its depth and reach and the questions being asked. They mention that the government formed its initiative without wider public consultations about what the real situation has been like for those living with conflict, about who should be involved in the exercise, and at what level.

Another issue raised about the vice president's initiative was the involvement of a foreign NGO and some political figures' consultations with foreign leaders to attend the launch conference to share their own experiences. Meanwhile, there has been no exhaustive effort to find South Sudan's own indigenous wisdom about reconciliation. Critics argue that South Sudan's leaders are quick to favor the foreign, even when they can find local expertise if they just take the time to look.

The president's recent order to form a church-led process was cautiously applauded. The neutrality of Bishop Daniel Deng Bul is in question. He is a controversial personality; he is also a Dinka, and choosing a Dinka to head a program of reconciliation when the Dinka nation might be seen as party to South Sudan's problems may not be entirely wise. Ethnic origin should not matter in national policy matters, but the truth is that it does, and the bishop's appointment might prematurely prejudice people against the process. How the committee structures its programs and how quickly it can establish an appearance of neutrality will determine the bishop's success. As one commentator said, "the problems facing our country cannot be prayed away." The bishops will need to be more practical in their in-depth analysis of the sources of conflict and not count on their prayers alone. Many of our respondents have even suggested that if religious figures are seen as the right people to do this, the president's committee should have been lead by Bishop Paride Taban, as he is a man with greater credibility, neutrality and experience in peace-building. Bishops in South Sudan are all men. If the inner circle of this new peace and reconciliation committee is going to be made up of bishops only, then women are not going to get the chance to get their voices heard in the top leadership of the committee.

Furthermore, there has been no clarity regarding the connections among the government initiatives, the work of the national peace and reconciliation commission, and the actual conflicts in various communities, at least beyond what has been announced in the media. It is also unclear what the role of political leaders in the process will be, and how truly independent of political influence the church-led process can be. None of the initiatives has clearly spelled out what type of reconciliation they envision. Is South Sudan going to follow a South African model of truth and reconciliation, where victims and perpetrators of the apartheid system faced each other? Or will it turn to a Rwandan *gachacha* style of communal courts, a more punitive system like the post-World War II Nuremberg trials, where some people will be made to account for their actions, with an attendant system of reparations and compensations? Or will South Sudan invent its own reconciliation process?

Conclusion

A reconciliation committee will have to do more recording and analysis of the historical grievances that still affect South Sudan, covering as much of the country as possible. The political and ideological disagreements between national leaders that form the backdrop to the push for reconciliation could potentially threaten the effectiveness of the exercise. Reconciliation is a sensitive matter, and if leaders are truly interested in its success, they must carefully weigh their speech and actions, lest a reconciliation effort only further inflames the situation.

If reconciliation is to be meaningful, and not just another attempt to buy time before justice is accorded, it has to begin by identifying and clearly describing what needs reconciling over. The liberation wars, strained ethnic relations, increased ethnic violence, actions of security forces, lack of justice for victims, inequity in access and distribution of resources, and citizen-state relations all need to be subjected to honest discussions. The bitter communal confrontations and violence born of South Sudan's long liberation struggle all need to be carefully studied and the results published, with a view to demonstrating that all—from the political class to communities to individuals—are serious about owning up to their actions. The most horrific abuses, from massacres to tortures, detentions to land grabs and political marginalization, will all need to be meticulously sifted through to establish the truth. South Sudan's post-independence drive for unity and the growth of a sense of a collective national identity can succeed only if this history is confronted head on.

From what has been said since 2005 about South Sudan's need for dialogue over its past, the government, the church, civil society groups, the communities living with violence, individual leaders, and ordinary citizens all seem convinced that national reconciliation is an idea whose time has come, but the problem lies in the details about who performs which part. Our interviews suggest that no single entity can conduct the reconciliation alone. A national dialogue aimed at healing historical wounds needs to build on what has already been done, by individuals, church

leaders, communities, and government institutions such as the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC). The creation of this body along with the rest of South Sudan's government immediately after the CPA was in itself recognition, on the part of political leadership, that the nation needs reconciliation and peace building.

The NPRC was intended to assist in the implementation of one of the CPA clauses about reconciliation. It was elevated to the level of a ministry after the 2010 national elections to coordinate CPA implementation with authorities in Khartoum, and was again reduced to a commission once South Sudan became independent in 2011. But it has not demonstrated its role in reconciliation and its functions remain unclear. The nation has yet to see what the commission actually does, as it has never held any discussions on peace and reconciliation or published any reports, even as it was tasked as a commission with more responsibilities for creating a climate of peace, reconciliation, ethnic coexistence, and stability.

The work of the NPRC should be tested by asking it to share whatever research it may have done with the new national reconciliation committee. The formation of another committee beside an existing agency might be considered an indictment of the latter institution; both should take advantage of the situation by jointly participating in current reconciliation efforts to demonstrate their usefulness, avoid competition, and commit themselves to the purpose for which they were set up. Any information in NPRC's custody would assist the new reconciliation committee in not reinventing the wheel and instead hit the ground running. The national government should perhaps instruct the NPRC to share or even turn over its material to the new initiative, and mandate that the two bodies cooperate and strengthen one another, so that at the end of the reconciliation exercise, the NPRC will have become a strong institution that continues to monitor the situation across the country. Alternatively, the two bodies could be merged into one. The multiplicity of agencies working on the same issues has been a source of confusion, unnecessary expenditure, and unhealthy competition.

With regards to the substance and the geographical specificity of the reconciliation process, the new initiative needs to carry out a study that identifies exactly what happened, where, when and with what consequences for the local communities. Some examples of such incidents, issues and locations are provided in this report and could be built on, in order to expand the research to all areas of the country. The process.

The studies of South Sudan's historical grievances will need to be inclusive, extensive, and intensive in its discussions and deliberations. Poorly conducted, it they could lead to creating further public skepticism about the government's ability to assert security and reconcile the country's citizens. Such skepticism is already widespread; and it must not be further strengthened by yet another failed or poorly executed peace-building endeavor. The personalities that are involved will have to pledge to work with honesty, tolerance of different opinions, and foresightedness, as

the process should be about the future of the country, not about individual status or to the favor of the fortunes of a certain community.

The current church-led initiative, if it is to prove more successful than previous efforts, has to develop a concept note that explains the vision of the exercise, elucidates what type of reconciliation will be pursued, defines benchmarks for its evaluation, and produces a map of the country that shows historical conflicts, current ethnic feuds, the causes of the conflicts, and what is planned as the best way to get the communities involved to engage in honest dialogues. Reversing the order of the leadership of this committee, to put its chairmanship in the hands of Bishop Taban, might be worth considering, in view of the sensitivities of the country's ethnic make up. The exercise also has to have an end goal. It is not enough to state that the process seeks to end conflict, reconcile communities, and build peace. It is important to be realistic, create phases and timelines for specific actions, and state the anticipated results of each phase. This will take a long time, but making small successful steps will be more beneficial than rushing the process and risking immediate collapse.

The violence that South Sudan continues to suffer raises a question, half philosophical and half practical, about current levels of insecurity. The conflicts have historical roots that reconciliation must address. But the communities that are living with violence at the moment will be more interested in ending that violence and saving lives immediately before they can sit down for a reconciliation dialogue. This presents an obvious link between the reconciliation exercise and the government's general plan for security and stabilization. If there is no capacity to explore this connection with honesty, a reconciliation effort will be yet another exercise in futility.

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The Sudd Institute is an independent research organization that conducts and facilitates policy relevant research and training to inform public policy and practice, to create opportunities for discussion and debate, and to improve analytical capacity in South Sudan. The Sudd Institute's intention is to significantly improve the quality, impact, and accountability of local, national, and international policy- and decision-making in South Sudan in order to promote a more peaceful, just and prosperous society.