Ways of Sustaining Durable Peace and Reconciliation After Conflict

The Case of South Sudan

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Background

Looking back at South Sudan's history, even before independence the country underwent many difficult times brought about by wars fought on her soil. These included the Anyanya wars (1955–1972) and the recent war that lasted for over two decades (1983–2005), also known as the First and Second Sudanese Civil Wars, respectively. Over two million people died in the second war and millions were displaced as IDPs and refugees into different parts of the continent and the world at large. The war has fragmented historical community relations. During this period of war, international and nationally based nongovernmental organizations and people of goodwill tirelessly offered humanitarian and emergency services to the people in IDP camps and refugee camps but worked little on peace building and reconciliation among different tribes. In 2005, the civil war ended with the signing of the peace agreement in Nairobi, Kenya, ushering in a transitional government of national unity, allowing Southerners self-rule from 2005–2010, and Southern Sudan to decide its future in a referendum. With independence in July 2011, the country set off on a new footpath as the youngest nation in the family of nations. People were full of hope and plans were underway to develop the country. However, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A)-led government failed to work on reconciling the communities that the last war had made into adversaries.

The post-independence conflict that began in December 2013 threatens to destroy almost all the small progress that was made during and after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The result of the ongoing conflict is that the country is now divided along both political and ethnic lines, with around 1.9 million people being internally displaced and some taking refuge in neighboring countries. As a result of this massive displacement, communities' lives have been disrupted and minimal developmental activities have taken place. The political turn of events in the country now challenges the democratic governance, transparency and accountability of the government to the people. In addition, the current attempt to fight for peace is now being put on attack by different personal interests from leaders.

It is a sad fact that conflict affects many countries, and that there is an irrefutable link between conflict, peace and development. South Sudan is no exception to this. It has been affected by wars and suffers from compounded forms of insecurity and tribalism, leading to poverty, malnutrition, socioeconomic underperformance and underdevelopment, and general instability.

Development achievements rely on good governance, the rule of law, justice and peace, and freedom of expression. Once these begin to be in place, they work as fundamental factors that encourage individuals and communities to be involved in peace building and development. A democratic and peaceful environment and reconciliation is an added value to the ingredients of development and sustainability. They create room for people's participation in shaping the future of a country through the decision-making processes. In the absence of the rule of law and democratic processes, impunity becomes the order of the day. As a citizen, my understanding is that these pillars for the growth and development of a country require organized civic education programs. There is dire need to incorporate them in development and peace building drivers at all the levels of administration of the state/nation.

The resurgence of violent conflict barely two years after independence is a sad experience and a drawback from the historical social cohesion that existed among the South Sudanese people and what was gained during the journey to independence. This occurrence challenges democratic and peacebuilding institutions/organizations, raising sharp questions such as; what went wrong? What was lacking, and was there anything we didn't emphasize during the years of our presence on the ground but was important and led to this outcome? The answers to these questions may somehow lead us to a new start and the reorganization of peacebuilding work that contributes to the sustainability of programs and community relationships.

While peacekeeping takes center stage in the arena of civil wars, little attention is given to other branches, such as peace building. Building relations, healing the wounds and not creating support mechanisms is one reason that causes unsustainability. There are no strong established conflict mitigating structures that respond early enough to conflict indicators whenever they are identified and that call for an early response, hence pre-empting the outbreak of violent confrontation.

As a citizen, there are so many pending questions to be answered by the authorities and all people inhabiting the country. These include, if we were fighting the first Anyanya and SPLA/M war just to gain our freedom from the oppression of Khartoum, then what are we thinking about our national

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aspirations for a peaceful South Sudan? How do we manifest the love for our country? How do we imagine a peaceful society that coexists in tolerance to ourselves? How do we forge unity in the midst of the social, political and economic divides created by the conflict. In answering these questions. I believe that there is a need to build and establish democratic systems and sustainable structures that support community-based initiatives. Such structures are essential and will contribute considerably to sustain investments directed to the community and to the nation as a whole. Peace and reconciliation are the way forward to remove and control conflict, and for any nation to coexist peacefully and develop all its citizens should collectively work for peace. Desmond Tutu, the Anglican Archbishop Emeritus of South Africa, was reported to have commented from within the situation of social revolution in South Africa that, "without reconciliation, there is no future".[1] This underscores the desire of any country for peace and conflict resolution. We must act to solve these fundamental issues because it is not in our best interest to allow our children to suffer the consequences of this conflict in the future.

Peace Building and Reconciliation Through Justice

Talking about the sustainability of this agreement is like another hot cup of tea, when one looks at the commitment of the main parties who are the signatories to the peace agreement and when the path to justice for the victims of the conflict is at stake. We know that peace without justice is like serving tea without sugar. The Agreement on Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan contains clear provisions of justice, which are stated in chapter V (Transitional Justice, Accountability, Reconciliation and Healing), that the Transitional Government of National Unity shall initiate legislation for the establishment of transitional justice institutions that would allow victims of conflict access to justice and reconciliation.

Knowing that reconciliation is a process that aims to put an end to persistent conflict among different parties (like the South Sudanese case), then all parties should champion it so that the current hostility among the tribes is brought to an

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1 R.K. Wüstenberg, Bonhoeffer and Beyond: Promoting a Dialogue between Religion and Politics, Revised ed., Volume 2 of *International Bonhoeffer Interpretations* (Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang, 2008), 89.

end and it opens up the potential for healing, rehabilitation and the recovery of victims. To do this feat, it would require a partial third-party intervention that would design strategies to correctly manage conflict issues amongst different tribes and restore back the fractured social relationship between communities, victims and perpetrators.

In a country where impunity has taken over or replaces principles of democracy and rule of law, where equal access to justice has become dysfunctional, then victims go without justice and perpetrators and the powerful go unpunished. If South Sudan's legal frameworks fail, it is because impunity has become the manifestation of the absence of institutions that promote equality, impartiality, accountability and fairness. As we continue a search for a democratic system of governance, we should always provide a safe space for victim of injustices to obtain justice and think of concrete formula for our unity and establishing the rule of law in strong institutions that may promote our equal aspirations for a peaceful society. Generating peace and reconciliation through the provision of justice would help create a space for peaceful social and political contestation, providing the basis for a vibrant dialogue on how to end any emergent conflict and impunity.

Strategies for Sustainable Peace and Reconciliation

One strategy is to enhance community participation and decision making in the peace building and reconciliation processes in the country. The purposes of the proposed citizen participation are to elicit total and sustainable behavioral change in societies and government and to build a sense of ownership. Sustainability is challenged when people feel left out of or ignored within any peace programs, if their ideas or opinions are not sought prior to initiating and implementing a peace agreement. This approach encourages the community to view the peace process as owned by them, not the government and development partners, hence, reassuring sustainability. Establishing peace committees will bring aboard the committees' members and create a sense of the ownership that may speed up the reconciliation and healing process, a feeling that, "This is ours." Community participation offers an opportunity to prioritize and decide the projects that are to be established in their areas based on the needs on the ground, thus removing information asymmetry.

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Capacity building through awareness raising of the signed peace agreement: Implementation of the peace requires capacity building for the stakeholders and partners on the ground. They need to undertake training in the areas of peace building and sustainability, coupled with livelihood, democracy and good governance, the role of peace committees, and early warning – early response (monitoring conflict trends) to enable them to establish and properly manage the proposed recommendations for peace and reconciliation.

Sustainability: Once the community has been made part and parcel of the program, they will ensure that things works well and maintain relations amongst different communities. The monitoring of possible huddles to the peace agreement and reconciliation is important as early response to any disputes arising and engaging with right body/institution to correct it has a greater chance of success. When the situation becomes the responsibility of the community; a sense of ownership is built. Inclusivity needs to be promoted by the implementers: When one has become part of an activity, s/he is motivated to walk an extra mile to ensure that the objectives are met. I sum it up by stating that experience has shown that most peace agreements between the warring parties and community-based peace fail because the members feel they are outsiders to the processes – hence become observers even when things are going wrong. Allowing conflicting communities in South Sudan to reconcile through an inclusive peace and reconciliation conference is an important phase in building a long-lasting peace. In that inclusive conference, all conflict affected communities will have an opportunity to come together and share the painful stories and suffering they have inflicted on one another in the five years of civil war.

Looking back at the history, you'll realized that faith-based organizations remain strong actors in promoting peace and reconciliation among different conflict affected communities. To take an example from Kenya, which was devastated by ethnic violence following the 2008 presidential election: Throughout the violence, Bishop Cornelius Korir, from the Diocese of Eldoret, recognized that his position as a spiritual leader respected by the groups in conflict could be used to help stop the violence and foster constructive dialogue. He organized dialogues between members of affected communities and helped to improve peacebuilding capacity at the local level. It became a popular project with ever-growing levels of participation. Ultimately, under the bishop's guidance, the participants created a community peace committee to

help organize and facilitate interethnic dialogues. The Kenya model of using spiritual leaders to brokered peace and reconciliation was sustainable: This could be replicated in South Sudan, even though it should be noted our faith-based leaders were very instrumental in the last processes of achieving peace in the country. This time, the faith-based leaders need to be given the continued brokering as a full task, as there is a reduction now in the scale of violence.

As we're aware, the fading relationship and lack of trust between President Kiir and his partner, Dr. Riak Machar, defines and move the conflict in the country. It's a power struggle and a lack of trust that has led to the South Sudanese finding themselves in a cycle of violence. Always in this violence, tribalism is weapon to fight the war and the only tool used to mobilize the communities to wage wars.

In my own opinion about the currently signed revitalized ARCSS, I would say it is just a period of recuperation before they lock horns again. Power sharing has always been the central part of any agreement in South Sudan. The question of who should take what position or which region and tribe should take a different high position keeps popping up and sometimes cripples the agreement or makes it dysfunctional. Different regional and international negotiators have come up with diverse forms of power sharing arrangement, but these have failed to work. To suggest a solution for this, I would make one suggestion if the current peace fails. South Sudan is a multi-ethnic or heterogeneous society that heavily believes in and relies on communities and tribal sections. To share power in such kind of ethnically-polarized society, we can adopt, adapt and try the system used by the Dayton Peace Accords[2] to settle the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which today remains as a complicated system of government. Under this system, there are dual entities within the country that have high degrees of autonomy and independence from each other, and a tripartite rotating Presidency from the different nations, which is in charge of foreign, diplomatic and military affairs, and the budget of state-level institutions. The three presidency members are from the three constituent nations of Bosniak, Serb and Croat. In comparison, there are three main tribal regions in South Sudan the

Upper Nile, Equatoria and Bahr el Ghazal which is accurately equivalent to the Bosnia and Herzegovina case.

In conclusion, South Sudan has always been known to be an unstable nation before and after her independence in the region. The country has suffered from an ongoing high intensity of internal conflict, mainly associated with competition over resources such as water, pasture, livestock, or from cattle raiding among pastoralist communities, child abductions and land-grabbing. The SPLM party political disagreement in December 2013 has led the country into devastating war. To restore security, the government should shoulder the responsibility and devise strategies for a new inclusive dialogue to negotiate peace across the divide. However, the big problem with peace agreements in South Sudan is that they are negotiated at the high political level of government and rebels, which excludes the participation of civil communities at grassroots. Indeed, most of the agreements are centered at strengthening power sharing, and other governance and security issues, but fail to look at community issues – unlike other peace dialogue processes in the rest of world that are made as community processes.

Lastly, to suggest some measures for peace building and reconciliation among the communities that would effectively work, these may include; the formation and strengthening of border courts; the establishment of joint police to protect against encroachment on another's grazing land without permission; the formation of a community-coordinating council to deal with: (1) the implementation of agreed principles, (2) coordination with different actors and politicians, and (3) to review performance, organize meetings and maintain contacts. Furthermore, other measures include the promotion of intermarriages, the return of abducted children and women, the formation of abductee identification teams and the promotion of peace through justice by providing justice to victims before integrating them to the communities. To establish a free, just South Sudan that is built on the foundations of peace, justice and unity, there is need to reboot the current system and leadership from the government and opposition.

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2 The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, also known as the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), or Dayton Accords was a peace agreement reached in 1995 at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio, by the presidents of Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia, effectively ended the 3 1⁄2-year-long Bosnian War.