

“Rediscovery, Revitalization and Utilization of Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms (TCRMs) in South Sudan”

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**“Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and the role of
UN peacekeeping missions”**

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Background to the Background

- 1) I am a social anthropologist who started fieldwork in the Southern Sudan in 1978 among the Pari people of Eastern Equatoria, and has maintained associations with Pari and other South Sudanese friends who became SPLA fighters and refugees throughout the war, and up to the present. Many of my friends who had survived became ministers, MPs, and generals after 2005. I have also engaged with local peace and reconciliation projects with various capacities.
- 2) We need to admit that peacebuilding programs that were implemented during the CPA period (2005-2011) in the Southern Sudan proved to be a total failure, regardless of the massive resources poured in, when we look at what has happened after December 2013. We need a thorough examination of what went wrong.
- 3) As the new Government of National Unity is going to be established soon, we shall start peacebuilding programs all over again. Where we stand now is much worse than that of 2005. What do we learn from the past and how do we start?

Background

1) Deep divisions and grave hostilities among the people since 1983

Not only between ethnic groups, but also among sub-divisions of an ethnic group, village communities and even within a village community. Shifting identifications and alliances, and a variety of complex and cross-cutting dividing lines.

2) Persistent statelessness and distrust of state/government: a historical pattern

From the people's point of view, state or government is essentially evil at most, or it is better to keep away from it at least.

3) People's remarkable ability of survival and resilience of communities

Means of livelihood is multiple subsistence economy: agriculture, pastoralism, fishing, hunting and gathering. Autonomous and self-reliant. Survival in the bush. Free movements and sharing of natural resources are essential for the realization of survival strategy and resilience.

4) Rural insecurity and instability

It makes the people's means of livelihood very difficult. Restoration of rural security and stability is indispensable for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of local communities and also for the repatriation of refugees and IDPs.

What are TCRMs? (1)

- Indigenous systems of peacemaking and reconciliation. Restorative, not retributive, justice. Consensual, based on negotiations between the parties to the conflict. Reconciliation is achieved by ritual acts of purification and reunification, and sacrifice of domestic animals, followed by a communal feast, and the payment of compensation, mostly in the form of cattle.
- Indigenous peace and reconciliation mediators are different from place to place and time to time. They are: “prophets” (in particular in the case of Nuer and Dinka), hereditary chiefs, “rain-makers,” clan elders, *monyomiji* (ruling age grade, in the case of East Bank Equatoria), etc. The home of prophets and chiefs are considered sanctuary or *asyi* where violence is prohibited and assailants can seek asylum.

What are TCRMs? (2)

- They can be effective, but not almighty. They are constantly being revised and modified to meet the changing need of people and to cope with the new situation. So, it is not easy to identify what a TCRM is in a locality.
- They need to be participated by all stakeholders, including women and youth, and repetitive until a final agreement is reached.

Shortcomings and failures of Peacebuilding and Reconstruction during the CPA Period (2005-2011)

- Too much emphasis on state-building at the expense of nation-building
- Concentration at the center, i.e. Juba, abandoned rural areas. Failure to establish an effective and democratic system of local administration
- Monopoly of power and wealth by a small circle of ruling elite, widespread nepotism, tribalism and corruption
- Decline and neglect of “People to people peace” or “Peace from below”

Bridging the Gap between Peace from Below and Peace from Above

- In order to rehabilitate and reconstruct deeply divided and seriously hostile communities in South Sudan, there is a sheer necessity to harmonize the two approaches, Peace from below and Peace from above. There should be a comprehensive and integrated program both at the national and local levels. If it were done, it would strengthen the means of livelihood and subsistence economy, facilitate the repatriation of refugees and IDPs, and ultimately to build up a peaceful, stable and prosperous nation.