



SPECIAL REPORT

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Resisting Violence Growing a Culture of Nonviolent Action in South Sudan

ABOUT THE REPORT

This report focuses on the use of nonviolent collective action by civil society leaders, religious leaders, activists, and other South Sudanese to address the social, political, and economic grievances that have fueled the country's ongoing civil conflicts. Supported by the Center for Applied Conflict Transformation and the Middle East and Africa Center at USIP and based on extensive interviews, including with the leaders of prominent nonviolent movements, the report focuses on the formidable challenges to building large-scale and sustainable nonviolent civic campaigns in South Sudan.

Summary

- Although the use of nonviolent collective action in South Sudan is typically overshadowed by violence and armed struggle, there are many historical and contemporary examples of South Sudanese youth, women, religious leaders, and others using protests, vigils, sit-ins, and other nonviolent tactics to advance social, political, and economic change.
- South Sudanese civic leaders and activists view their most urgent priority as restoring peace and stability—through a permanent cease-fire, a revitalized peace agreement, and the restoration of law and order. Better governance and economic opportunities are important longer-term objectives.
- In line with South Sudan's history of nonviolent action, most activities in pursuit of achieving peace follow methods of protest and persuasion rather than noncooperation or direct intervention—methods that typically require high levels of organization and coordination.
- Civil society and religious groups are taking over roles and responsibilities traditionally carried out by government, such as providing public services and resolving disputes. Many South Sudanese view these activities as a means of nonviolently protesting the state's failure to serve the basic needs of the country.
- While instances of local self-organizing are helping to fill the void left by the state, they have not yet coalesced into a national movement for better governance. They are, however, fostering trust and cultivating relationships that can be the building blocks for future collective action and national identity.
- The South Sudan Council of Churches' National Women's Desk and the youth-led Anataban movement are two prominent movements attempting to connect bottom-up nonviolent collective action to South Sudan's formal peace processes in order to ensure that they are just and sustainable.

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- South Sudanese activists and civic leaders involved in nonviolent collective action face a number of challenges, including repression by security forces, limited knowledge and skills relating to strategic planning for nonviolent action and movement building, and overcoming the economic and social breakdown of the country's humanitarian crisis.

Introduction

Since 2013, South Sudan has been seized by brutal violent conflict that has created one of the worst humanitarian crises in modern times. Compounding the human tragedy and narrowing the prospects for its peaceful resolution, the government's military and security approach to the crisis has severely restricted space for civic engagement. According to Freedom House's 2018 rankings, South Sudan is one of the world's least-free countries, where "overdue national elections have yet to be held, and the incumbent leadership has presided over rampant corruption, economic collapse, and atrocities against civilians, journalists, and aid workers."¹ As a result, citizens' ability to constructively voice grievances related to the conflict and to pursue nonviolent solutions has been persistently challenged—and frequently attacked outright. Yet amid the constant threat of war-related violence and humanitarian disaster, examples of nonviolent action being used to successfully achieve certain limited goals can still be found in South Sudan. These examples—involving tactics such as vigils, marches, radio programming, public murals, and music—hold the promise for South Sudanese to build larger and more broad-based nonviolent movements and provide the citizens of the country with the means to reclaim the civic space necessary for asserting their demands.

Drawing on forty interviews conducted in late 2017 with South Sudanese civil society leaders, religious leaders, activists, and members of the diaspora, as well as separate discussions held during a February 2018 meeting with civic leaders, this report focuses on South Sudanese understanding of and experience with nonviolent action, highlights obstacles to organized nonviolent action to put an end to the violence and build a just peace, and discusses how to build upon prevailing applications of nonviolent action in South Sudan.² General knowledge of the definition and methods of nonviolent action and its relationship to peacebuilding is still fairly limited among South Sudanese, and what nonviolent action campaigns have been launched have lacked strategic focus. These are just a few of the formidable challenges to building large-scale nonviolent civic campaigns and movements to address the social, political, and economic grievances that have fueled South Sudan's civil conflicts.

Nonviolent Action and Peacebuilding

Nonviolent action refers to the application of unarmed civilian power using methods of protest, noncooperation, and intervention to address grievances and to shift power in conflict without using or threatening physical harm. Nonviolent action is often manifested in strikes, boycotts, marches, and demonstrations, among hundreds of other methods (see table 1). Other terms used to refer to nonviolent action include "people power," "civil resistance," or "nonviolent resistance" (though this term also encompasses unarmed civilian protection discussed later in this report).³ The Indian independence movement led by Mahatma Gandhi, the popular ouster of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile, and the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa are among the best-known examples of mass nonviolent resistance achieving major social and political change.

A global study of 323 major violent and nonviolent campaigns between 1900 and 2006 found that nonviolent campaigns were twice as successful as violent campaigns in achieving

Table 1. Methods of Nonviolent Action

Methods	Examples
Protest/appeal	March, flash mob, online petition, street theater, political education
Noncooperation/refraining	Boycott, strike, refusal to follow law or community taboo or system; halting or calling off a boycott, occupation, blockade
Intervention (including protection)	Blockades, sit-ins, occupations, stopping arms shipments, TPNI: Third Party Nonviolent Intervention—protection and accompaniment work
Constructive program: solutionary or creative intervention	Starting alternative institutions or governments; needle exchanges; building underground schools; delivering free AIDS medications; desegregating lunch counters with sit-ins; Indian Salt March; nonviolent peacebuilding

Source: Nadine Bloch and Lisa Schirch, *Synergizing Nonviolent Action and Peacebuilding (SNAP): An Action Guide* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2018).

their stated goals and were ten times as likely as violent struggles to consolidate democracy five years after the conflict had ended.⁴ In the face of regime repression, nonviolent campaigns were six times more likely to be successful than violent campaigns, and twelve times more likely to attain concessions.⁵ Nonviolent civil resistance campaigns are most often successful when they build and sustain a large, diverse participation; use a variety of nonviolent methods; elicit loyalty shifts among the groups supporting the opponent; and maintain nonviolent discipline even in the face of escalating repression. These factors often cause violent repression to backfire and become unsustainable. Furthermore, there have been many cases in which violent struggles have switched strategies to become nonviolent—and found greater success.⁶

Across the African continent, there have been many examples of successful nonviolent action, even in the most repressive environments. During colonization, traditional African chiefs throughout the continent refused to pay certain taxes and engaged in economic noncooperation through strikes and boycotts. During the independence struggles, leaders in Tanzania, Zambia, South Africa, and Ghana cited Gandhi as an inspiration. Since independence, strategic nonviolent action has been credited with preventing or ending violent conflict in Nigeria, Liberia, Burundi, Senegal, and Zimbabwe. Movements in these contexts were successful in that they embraced strategic planning, coordinated well across disparate groups, had strong movement cohesion, and practiced clear communication and messaging.⁷

Young people and female activists have been central to many successful nonviolent movements in Africa in recent years, such as resistance to Yahya Jammeh's effort to hold on to power after losing Gambia's presidential election in 2016, the Balai Citoyen anti-corruption protests in Burkina Faso in 2014, and the #ThisFlag and Tajamuka/Sesjikile movements in Zimbabwe that added to the pressure that ultimately forced the resignation of President Robert Mugabe, who had been in power and manipulated elections since the country's independence in 1980. One common characteristic among these movements is that they were not spontaneous. Movement leaders devoted time to strategic planning and the tactical sequencing of their actions to capitalize on key moments in the political calendar. The ability of these movements to maintain nonviolent discipline in the face of repression helped attract popular support and contributed to loyalty shifts—and even defections—within the governments and security forces.

Nonviolent action can play an important role in creating favorable conditions for peacebuilding. Peacebuilding refers to actions undertaken by government or civil society to address conflict through participatory practices such as dialogue, principled negotiation, mediation, and collective problem solving. Peacebuilding is advantageous in that it utilizes inclusive processes to satisfy the interests of all parties to the conflict.⁸ However, power imbalances among the parties to a conflict may prevent peacebuilding from producing fair agreements because the powerful side lacks incentives to make concessions. For example, certain national

dialogue processes can reinforce unequal power dynamics and allow repressive regimes to consolidate their power.⁹ To this end, nonviolent action that relies on organized pressure from the grass roots and peacebuilding strategies like locally driven dialogue, negotiation, and mediation are complementary and often mutually reinforcing.¹⁰ The use of protests, strikes, boycotts, and other forms of strategic nonviolent action can give negotiators leverage and work to ripen conflict conditions for meaningful dialogue.¹¹ Put simply, negotiations backed by nonviolent force can shift power dynamics and pave the way to conflict resolution.

The women-led movement in Liberia that advanced the peace process and helped bring an end to the country's civil war in 2003 provides important insights in how to sequence nonviolent action and peacebuilding activities. The leaders of the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace movement strategically chose and sequenced their tactics based on shifts in the balance of power. In the beginning, when power was concentrated with the government and rebel groups, the movement carried out low-risk but effective acts such as removing jewelry and makeup and wearing only white clothes—measures designed to show unity by concealing differences in class and religion. As the balance of power began to shift, the women engaged in direct action such as sit-ins and barricading the doors of the conference room where peace negotiations were being held, refusing to allow negotiators to leave until they had reached a settlement. When the war ended, they took to the streets to register people to vote, leading to the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, one of the movement's leaders, as Liberia's first female president.¹²

A Young Nation in Crisis

South Sudan has been in violent conflict for much of the last sixty years. As the southern region in the former Sudan, it endured two civil wars against the North from 1955 to 1972 and from 1983 to 2005. The second civil war ended with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which paved the way for a referendum for independence in 2011.

After South Sudan gained independence, preexisting political and ethnic rivalries quickly deepened between President Salva Kiir and Riek Machar, his former vice president turned political rival. Efforts to force a unity government in which the two leaders shared power were unsuccessful. In December 2013, Kiir accused Machar of planning a coup, which quickly led to large-scale violence that predominantly broke along ethnic lines. Although the violence subsided after the signing of the Agreement of the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) in August 2015, clashes in Juba in July 2016 reignited, deepened, and broadened the civil war. A task force charged with assessing progress of the ARCSS found that as of August 2017 not a single significant provision of the peace agreement had been implemented.¹³ Civilians have been targeted, villages and food stores burned, livestock raided, and mass rapes carried out by men in uniform. In 2017 and 2018, the Fund for Peace's Fragile States Index rated South Sudan as the world's most vulnerable country to state collapse.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, over 4.3 million South Sudanese are displaced as of mid-2018. The World Food Programme reports that at the same time approximately 6.1 million people—about half the country's population—are at risk of severe food insecurity. Firearms are employed in intercommunal conflicts, cattle raiding, and revenge killing. Armed groups are still committing violence, criminality is prevalent, and ethnic discrimination and violence is becoming normalized.¹⁴ In September 2018, the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine estimated that, between December 2013 and April 2018, the civil war was responsible for nearly 383,000 "excess deaths"—those that would not have occurred in the absence of conflict.¹⁵ Citizen-led initiatives such as the "Remembering the Ones We Lost" project are also making efforts to count the deceased.¹⁶

After six months of peace talks at the High-Level Revitalization Forum (HLRF) facilitated by the East African Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and additional rounds of negotiations facilitated by Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir in Khartoum, South Sudan's warring parties agreed to a revitalized ARCSS agreement on September 12, 2018. This latest peace deal is similar to the 2015 agreement, with updated power-sharing arrangements at both the local and national level, a revised timeline for the implementation of reforms outlined in the 2015 deal, and a new commission to address boundary disputes. Although it opposed the August 2015 agreement, the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) party was motivated to sign this new deal—in part, if not primarily, because it allows the SPLM to remain in power, without the threat of elections, for at least a few more years.¹⁷

Despite initial relief and optimism among South Sudanese who are hoping this agreement is a small step toward peace, many international analysts viewed the deal with skepticism for several reasons, including its overreliance on power sharing (a strategy that failed in the previous deal), questions about reintegration of fighters, and insufficient mechanisms to ensure security in South Sudanese towns where the fighting was most severe.¹⁸ Additionally, the agreement does not address local violence unrelated to national political matters, lacks provisions for some belligerent groups (which could promote further violence), has lackluster accountability for those who committed atrocities, contains weak enforcement mechanisms, does not create a detailed road map to elections, and fails to lay out a plan for the government to finance itself.¹⁹ Furthermore, Kiir and Machar were heavily influenced to sign the agreement by the governments of Uganda and Sudan, which are looking to benefit from a post-conflict South Sudanese economy.²⁰

Notwithstanding these hurdles, South Sudanese civil society has remained active in monitoring the development of the agreement and its subsequent implementation. For example, a group of activists from the South Sudan Women Coalition for Peace and Development attended the third round of the HLRF wearing white T-shirts emblazoned with the hashtag #SouthSudanIsWatching and demanded at least 35 percent of the seats in future peace talks be allocated to women.²¹ Now, South Sudanese are grappling with how to ensure that an arguably flawed deal can lead to sustained peace.

Nonviolent Action in South Sudan

South Sudan is no newcomer to the use of nonviolent action. In the unified Sudan, the popular October Revolution of 1964 and the uprising of April 1985 are hallmark examples of the successful use of civilian-based nonviolent action to bring change. The October Revolution and the April uprising brought down the dictatorships of presidents Ibrahim Abboud and Gaffar Nimeiry, respectively, using strikes, boycotts, and organized noncooperation.²² However, the role played by South Sudanese in unseating Abboud and Nimeiry—who were opposed in part for imposing Islamic sharia law on the majority Christian population in southern Sudan—is not well documented, primarily because of a lack of firsthand accounts before, during, and after the events.

In 1999, ecumenical church delegations from the South traveled internationally to spur boycotts of oil companies working closely with the Khartoum administration.²³ “We traveled all over the world and campaigned against oil companies fueling war in Sudan,” recalled Bishop Taban, the emeritus bishop of the Roman Catholic Church in South Sudan and founder of the Kuron Peace Village. “We told the world that buying oil from Sudan kills people.”

Nonviolent activism, mainly in the form of protests and mass demonstrations, played a consequential role in southern Sudan's pursuit of independence. On December 7, 2009, thousands of civilians and opposition parties demonstrated peacefully on the streets of

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Table 2. Contemporary Examples of Nonviolent Action to End Violence

In December 2012, more than a thousand angry citizens peacefully demonstrated on the streets of Wau in protest of the relocation of the seat of Wau County to Bagare, outside the state capital.

In 2013, more than two thousand people marched across Juba with two dead bodies, symbolizing the catastrophic effects of gun violence.

In January 2014, women in South Sudan's Northern Bahr el Ghazal State staged a protest with youth groups and civil society organizations to urge the government and rebel factions to implement a previously signed cease-fire agreement.

In 2015, leaders of the South Sudan Council of Churches issued a statement calling the civil war "senseless" and appealing for an immediate cease-fire. The bishops and clerics called for leaders and citizens to renounce "wickedness" and violence and announced their Action Plan for Peace.

On October 9, 2017, the Juba Technical Secondary School hosted International Day of Nonviolence celebrations. Numerous peace clubs from other schools performed songs, dances, and dramas advocating an end to war. Children of Eloi Primary School sang, "We are children of South Sudan / We are really suffering / We don't want another war / Unite us together."

In December 2017, hundreds of women marched in Juba with tape over their mouths and carrying signs with slogans such as, "Bring back our peace now!"; "Save my future, stop the war"; and "Enough of the bloodshed!"

A retired Archbishop of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan has recently organized a peace march "moving from state to state using torch lights [flashlights] saying 'we want to see where the peace is hiding.'"

Women in the town of Rumbek in Lakes State recently went on a sex strike in an effort to force political and military leaders to stop the war. They also threatened to stop getting pregnant, given that so many of their children are dying on the battlefield.

Source: Contemporaneous news accounts and other reports.

Khartoum demanding a peaceful transition to democracy and full implementation of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Six days later, Sudan's national parliament approved bills allowing for a referendum on the succession of Southern Sudan and the Abyei area.²⁴ The nonviolent demonstrations were supported by the international community, which increased pressure on the government in Khartoum to allow the referendum to proceed.

In February 2010, after then secretary-general Ban-ki Moon said in an interview that the United Nations would "work hard to avoid a possible succession," people in the South marched at the UN Mission in Sudan base in Bor, in Jonglei State, to demonstrate their disagreement.²⁵ Later, people in the Kiir Adem region, in the northwest of the country near the border with present-day Sudan, successfully marched (against the orders of police in Juba) in support of their region's inclusion in the newly formed nation of South Sudan in 2011.

Yet while these applications of nonviolent action did help move South Sudan towards independence, the South Sudanese government's practice of integrating armed rebel groups into the government and the ruling party has not only rewarded violence, it has demonstrated that violence can be the means to advance political and economic objectives. This practice has arguably contributed to the proliferation of armed groups and violence that helped plunge the country into civil war just two years after independence.²⁶

Action to End the Violence

Most South Sudanese interviewed for this report emphasized that stopping the violence that broke out in 2016 after the original ARCSS failed—through a permanent cease-fire, an effective revitalized peace agreement, and the restoration of law and order—is an immediate strategic goal of the country's activists, one they prioritize ahead of other social, political, or economic advances. In line with South Sudan's history of nonviolent action, most activities in pursuit of this goal follow methods of protest and persuasion rather than noncooperation or direct intervention (the latter typically requires high levels of organization and coordination). Table 2 lists several recent instances of nonviolent action being used to demand an end to violent conflict in South Sudan.

Table 3. Contemporary Examples of Nonviolent Action for Better Governance

In 2012, South Sudanese civil society organizations marched against seventy-five corrupt political leaders accused by President Kiir of stealing \$4 billion from the nation's coffers.

In 2015, youth marched to the parliament to protest high youth unemployment and lack of opportunities.

The University of Juba Staff Association has been organizing strikes in academia over the past two decades, including one in 2016 that eventually led to salary increases for university faculty and primary and secondary schoolteachers.

In October 2017, a group of thirty-two civil society organizations petitioned parliament to revoke what they referred to as an unconstitutional ministerial order to cancel all vehicle license plates issued by South Sudan states. This law would have made many car owners subject to harsh penalties. The petition prompted the national parliament to study the order, which allowed sufficient time for South Sudanese to change their license plates.

The independent press and media advocacy organizations who are or have been suppressed since 2013 by the government have formed umbrella pressure groups and are developing means of disseminating the news even when state crackdowns abound.

In May 2017, judges and magistrates went on strike, demanding pay increases, working condition improvements, and the removal of the chief justice from the bench, for his partiality and mismanagement of judicial affairs.

In May 2017, students marched from the University of Juba campus to the national parliament to call upon the government to address the deepening economic crisis and the high cost of living.

Source: Contemporaneous news accounts and other reports.

Demanding Social and Economic Rights and Better Governance

While ending generalized violence—including political violence, sexual and gender-based violence, and cattle raiding—is the top priority for South Sudanese activists, they understand that in order for sustainable peace and development to take root, the country will require responsive and accountable governance that addresses the long-term economic and social needs of South Sudanese. Participants in a workshop discussion with civic leaders conducted for this report said they envisioned a South Sudan that is free of corruption and that provides opportunities to make a decent living, educational and job-training opportunities for their children, a social welfare safety net, and economic equity. The participants agreed that in order for this vision to be realized, nonviolent collective action emanating from the grass roots will be needed to hold government leaders accountable. Participants noted several recent but isolated examples of noncooperation, in addition to protests and persuasion tactics, being used to advance governance goals (see table 3).

Self-Organizing to Build a Constructive Program

With the ruling SPLM party controlling every sector of government, South Sudan's state structure does not resemble a well-functioning, democratic state. Interviewed for this report, the South Sudanese political analyst Fareed Musa Fataki noted that "there is no clear distinction between politics and military. In other words, the politics is militarized and the military is politicized." In the absence of a functioning government capable of providing public services and resolving disputes, civil society and religious groups are taking over the roles and responsibilities traditionally carried out by government, such as addressing food insecurity, supporting primary education, facilitating town halls, and disseminating credible news. Many South Sudanese view these activities as a means of nonviolently protesting the state's failure to serve the basic needs of the country.

For example, in 2017, a series of community meetings took place in Wau State to resolve local armed conflicts between cattle herders and farmers as well as to provide community education on issues such as gender-based violence and domestic conflict management.²⁷ Held twice a month, the meetings were attended by two hundred local leaders who represented

twenty thousand constituents. Similar initiatives are taking place in many other communities across the country—efforts that, in many ways, resemble what Gandhi referred to as a “constructive program” of building parallel structures and institutions outside of formal ones.²⁸

While these instances of local self-organizing are helping to fill voids left by the state, they have not yet coalesced into a national movement for better governance. They are, however, fostering trust and cultivating relationships that can be the building blocks for future collective action and national identity creation as occurred in the United States, Poland, Burma, Algeria, and Egypt.²⁹

An Awakening Diaspora

Diasporas are powerful external allies to nonviolent movements because they often share the same identities and values of actors in country while also serving as a bridge to other external actors.³⁰ With over four million South Sudanese displaced domestically and internationally, protection of civilian sites in South Sudan and refugee camps in neighboring countries are full of young people looking to promote positive change in their country. The leaders of four interethnic peacebuilding programs based in refugee camps all stated in interviews for this report that the increasing unity of young South Sudanese—to repair the country’s social fabric and bring about peace between tribal and ethnic groups—overpowered the divisive sentiments of older generations in the camps. This building of unity and solidarity among refugee youth from different ethnic groups could help strengthen the foundation for collective action to advance the peace process.

In May 2018, the South Sudan Women Coalition for Peace and Development convened a virtual summit called Sawa South Sudan (Together South Sudan) to raise awareness not only among South Sudanese living abroad but also to build international awareness and support. The summit—which drew the participation of prominent world leaders such as Moussa Faki, the chairman of the African Union Commission; former Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf; and former Irish president Mary Robinson—streamed the voices and ideas of South Sudanese women leaders to an international audience. At the conclusion of the event, several organizers drafted a communiqué demanding that the peace process prioritize the needs of ordinary South Sudanese over the ambitions of political leaders, that the leaders of political parties and armed groups “show love for their country,” that women play a central role in the peace process, that the region’s leaders stop the flow of arms into South Sudan, that the perpetrators of violence in South Sudan be held accountable, and that all African heads of state actively help to resolve the crisis and press for the establishment of a hybrid court.³¹

Connecting Nonviolent Action to Formal Peace Processes

While not (yet) amounting to a national movement, there are three promising examples of grassroots mobilization that are focused on ending the civil war and promoting national unity in South Sudan. The South Sudan Council of Churches’ National Women’s Desk, the youth-led Anataban movement, and the New Tribe are attempting to connect bottom-up nonviolent collective action to South Sudan’s high-level peace processes.

South Sudan Council of Churches’ National Women’s Desk

Enjoying broad legitimacy among South Sudanese, the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) is the most active religious organization in South Sudan. In 2015, the SSCC launched an Action Plan for Peace that consisted of three main pillars: advocacy for policies that help resolve the conflict peacefully, neutral forums where representatives can discuss and resolve the root causes of the conflict, and reconciliation between warring parties. While the leadership of

the SSCC works with local churches to implement the Action Plan, the South Sudan Council of Churches' National Women's Desk (SSCC-NWD) has taken the lead in organizing some of the most notable acts of nonviolent action for peace in the country. The SSCC-NWD, which includes representatives of South Sudan's sixty-four ethnic groups and coordinates its efforts from offices in Juba and Wau, has taken the lead in organizing street marches and demonstrations.

Beginning on January 25, 2014, the SSCC-NWD organized a prayer gathering to denounce the outbreak of the civil war. The group plans to continue holding these ecumenical prayers and marches at rotating locations on the first Saturday of each month. Over time, the women's nonviolent campaign against the war has gained visibility and momentum. Billboards displaying the group's message, "STOP WAR—Women Strive for Peace," can be seen throughout Juba. The group's movement-building efforts helped bring together approximately forty South Sudanese women's organizations for a large demonstration in Juba in December 2017.³² Men who joined the demonstration carried placards with messages like "We are ALL women when it comes to marching to STOP war in South Sudan." The demonstrators were lauded by women parliamentarians in the South Sudanese government.

The SSCC-NWD is not the only women's group nonviolently pushing for peace. Coalitions and organizations such as the EVE Organization for Women Development, Crown the Woman—South Sudan, and the South Sudan Women Coalition for Peace and Development have also engaged in pleas for peace through nonviolent direct action.

Research shows that mass participation increases the effectiveness and longevity of nonviolent political struggles, particularly when women are involved.³³ By creating linkages between women's organizations and leveraging tactics such as prayer vigils and mass demonstrations, the SSCC-NWD is taking important steps in mobilizing citizens and raising awareness of the South Sudanese yearning for peace—critical ingredients for building a national movement. However, successful movements must move beyond prayer vigils and protests. For example, the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace movement brought together Muslim and Christian women and used diverse tactics such as vigils, sit-ins, blockades, a sex boycott, and other acts of solidarity to pressure the government of Charles Taylor to make peace with rebel groups in 2003. The Liberian women were successful because they were able to strategically sequence tactics and forge alliances across society to achieve their objectives.

While there is no single formula for how a women's movement might achieve peace, demonstrations like the monthly prayers and marches in Juba, combined with other forms of collective action that are coordinated across civic groups, could help push South Sudan's warring parties to agree to end hostilities and achieve a political transition. For example, coordinated lobbying efforts, antiwar campaigns, effective monitoring of the implementation of the revitalized ARCSS by civil society groups and academia to expose violations and recommend punitive measures, and statements by influential faith-based leaders—all could help influence political decisions to facilitate sustained peace.

Anataban

Launched in 2016 by a network of young musicians, actors, comedians, and visual artists in Juba, the Anataban campaign—popularized by the social media hashtag #anataban—is perhaps South Sudan's best-known peace movement. The name of the movement—which means "I am tired" in Arabic—reflects how young South Sudanese, who have never experienced a peaceful South Sudan, are fed up with violence and are turning to artistic methods of expression to illustrate the ills of war.

The movement promotes unity among different ethnic groups for ending the war and addressing the root causes of conflict in South Sudan through community mobile theater, public rallies, music videos, and other arts-based endeavors.³⁴ In 2017 and 2018, the group

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staged a music and arts festival in Juba, the Hagana Festival, to advocate for the ending of mass killings, sustainable natural resource management, dialogue and reconciliation among adversarial tribes, and humanitarian relief. The movement has a significant online presence, with several thousand followers on Twitter and Facebook, and the group's music videos have received more than a hundred thousand views on YouTube. In December 2017, the movement partnered with the South Sudan Civil Society Forum to launch the #SouthSudanIsWatching campaign, an effort to put pressure on the HLRF to produce a viable peace deal. South Sudanese show their solidarity with the campaign by wearing sunglasses—with the South Sudanese flag superimposed on the lenses—in their Facebook and Twitter profile pictures.

Anataban has remained active since the signing of the September 2018 peace deal. On September 21, 2018, the International Day of Peace, it launched the #BelednaAwel campaign (Arabic for “our country first”) in Juba, six other states, and in the Rhino refugee camp in Uganda. During this campaign, members of each community stood together to form the shape of South Sudan. Participants also staged a march through the streets of Juba with a brigade of motorcyclists and ended the day with a concert. On October 2, the International Day of Nonviolence, Anataban hosted radio programming on the revitalized ARCSS and encouraging the translation of agreement into tribal languages and disseminating it to rural communities.

Anataban is succeeding in bringing hope, inspiration, a sense of accountability, and a feeling that ordinary citizens can—despite harsh repression—voice their pleas for a peaceful South Sudan. Given that 90 percent of South Sudanese are under the age of forty-five, Anataban's work is especially relevant to the country's youth.

New Tribe

As the SSCC-NWD, Anataban, and civil society groups across South Sudan grapple with how to ensure that the revitalized ARCSS is implemented, a coalition of more than fifty civil society, religious, and faith-based organizations has come together to bridge tribal divisions in pursuit of a just and equitable peace in South Sudan. Comprised of representatives of South Sudan's sixty-four tribes, the New Tribe is actively engaged in training both civil society and grassroots community groups on strategic nonviolent action principles and practices and how to use them in conjunction with peacebuilding skills like negotiation and dialogue.

Furthermore, the New Tribe is bridging and synergizing methods of nonviolent direct action and peacebuilding. For example, they are going to rural communities to translate and share details on the revitalized ARCSS, petitioning and engaging in dialogue with members of parliament regarding unlawfully held prisoners, holding demonstrations calling for an increase in government salaries and an end to child marriages, and working with local chiefs to reduce localized violence.³⁵ These actions are not merely ad hoc attempts to act on a random set of goals. Rather, they are using strategically selected and sequenced tactics to leverage the power of everyday South Sudanese to pursue a vision of the country that includes not just an absence of violence but good governance, equitable economic development, reconciliatory justice, and an informed and engaged populace.

Research indicates that the level and diversity of participation is a critical element in determining the success of nonviolent action.³⁶ As such, the New Tribe's inclusion of both Christian and Muslim councils, women's organizations, youth groups, civil society organizations, and traditional leaders is an important and promising show of people power to create a just peace in South Sudan.

Entry Points for Constructive Nonviolent Engagement

In April 2018, before the third round of the HLRF, IGAD engaged with representatives of the South Sudanese Civil Society Forum on several issues related to security sector reform

and the structure and make-up of the transitional government.³⁷ South Sudanese civil society leaders interviewed for this report highlighted these consultations as just one example of the many potential entry points for South Sudanese nonviolent action groups to constructively influence the formal peace processes.

Participants also highlighted chapter 5 of the revitalized ARCSS as an entry point for nonviolent action campaigns focused on the rule of law, transitional justice, and reconciliation. Chapter 5 calls for the creation of a truth, reconciliation, and healing commission; an independent judicial body to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide; and a compensation and reparation authority. The need for these entities was underscored by a recent survey of more than 1,500 South Sudanese that found that most South Sudanese feel that reconciliation is not possible without prosecuting perpetrators or compensating victims.³⁸ As of mid-2018, however, none of these bodies had been constituted. Until that happens, activists can engage with the United Nations Development Programme's transitional justice working group, which was established in part to coordinate civil society support for the entities outlined in chapter 5 of the ARCSS.³⁹

Both the SSCC-NWD and the Anataban movement have carried out activities to bring grassroots pressure to bear on the national-level peace process. When, on December 14, 2016, President Kiir called for a national dialogue that would “end violent conflicts in South Sudan, reconstitute national consensus, and save the country from disintegration and usher in a new era of peace, stability and prosperity,” many South Sudanese were deeply skeptical, viewing the dialogue as, at best, a distraction from ongoing violence and, at worst, a way for Kiir to consolidate power. Due in part to nonviolent collective action at the hands of civil society groups, Kiir relinquished his leadership role in the national dialogue in June 2017.⁴⁰ With the national dialogue now being led by its two co-chairs, new opportunities now exist for nonviolent campaigns to play a more influential role in shaping not just the processes but the outcomes of the national dialogue and the implementation of the revitalized ARCSS. For example, movements can make public statements, carry out demonstrative funerals, give mock awards, disseminate provocative art and music, and employ other tactics to ensure that the national dialogue accurately records the human rights violations that have occurred during the war. They can supplement these more “symbolic” actions with strikes, sit-ins, and boycotts to ensure adherence to the tenets of the accord. Ultimately, however, movement leaders will need to engage in strategic planning in order to craft an overarching vision for what they hope to achieve and how they plan to achieve it, and how they will overcome the various challenges to nonviolent action in South Sudan.

Challenges to Nonviolent Action and Movement Building

South Sudanese activists and civic leaders involved in nonviolent collective action face a number of challenges, including repression at the hands of security forces, limited knowledge and skills relating to strategic planning for nonviolent action and movement building, and the economic and social breakdown caused by the country's humanitarian crisis.

Mobilizing amid Severe Repression

Although South Sudan's constitution recognizes the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of association, protesters have often been assaulted, injured, or killed by government security forces.⁴¹ A 2018 UN report documented that more than one hundred activists and journalists have been killed, arrested, or shot at since mid-2016. In addition, the report noted that the South Sudanese government's crackdown on speech is having a “chilling effect” on

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freedom of expression and is “shrinking the space for debate and dissent.”⁴² Civil society groups must notify the National Security Service (NSS) before holding public assemblies or meetings, and many such gatherings are infiltrated by the NSS. Furthermore, the NGO Act of 2016 requires all civil society and nongovernmental organizations to register with the government, which has made it easier for the NSS to monitor them.

While South Sudanese are not the first to face regime violence and repression in response to their nonviolent activities (almost 90 percent of nonviolent campaigns throughout history have faced repression), they have faced a particularly harsh reaction from the government in South Sudan. As one SSCC activist said, “Our challenge is that the government uses live bullets. They don’t seem to have rubber bullets or tear gas as are often used on protesters.”

Nearly half of those interviewed for this report expressed that South Sudan’s government should procure and use less lethal means of confronting protesters.⁴³ For example, on October 31, 2012, eyewitnesses reported that South Sudanese police fired live ammunition at students protesting the suspected land grab of the Juba Day Secondary School property by a private investor. At least one student and a teacher were injured. The police denied shooting at students or teachers but alleged they had fired into the air to control the protesters, who they said had burned building materials and thrown rocks at police.⁴⁴ Additionally, in December 2012 more than twenty-five people were fatally shot by South Sudanese troops for demonstrating against a plan to move the seat of Wau County to Baggari, a small community located several miles away from the area’s center of population.⁴⁵

To illustrate the pervasiveness of repression, the December 2017 women’s nonviolent protest and prayer was met by troops who confiscated posters and signs that proclaimed messages such as “Enough of the bloodshed,” “Save my future, stop the war,” and “Bring back our peace now!” In order to justify their acts, the troops claimed that the women were inciting unrest. While the repressive environment has mainly emanated from the government’s security forces, violence at the hands of rebel groups has also limited space for nonviolent action. Religious leaders have borne the brunt of violence committed by both sides. Acknowledging this kind of violence against activists in an interview, Father John Ochaya of the Catholic Archdiocese of Juba warned that “if you march on the streets against government plans or interests, you are killed. You die with your problem.” According to an investigation by Radio Tamazuj, at least forty church leaders were killed by government soldiers or rebel fighters from 2013 to 2017.⁴⁶ Vice News has reported that some rebels will turn on any individuals or groups believed to be sympathetic towards adversaries.⁴⁷

While repression—including forms of extreme repression such as violence and mass killings—has been directed against nonviolent campaigns, recent research has found that “dissidents might be safer” by pursuing “strategies that internalize nonviolent discipline. . . . Uprisings that remain steadfastly nonviolent experience a likelihood of mass atrocities that is three times lower than violent resistance.”⁴⁸ For example, during the civil rights movement in the United States, before participating in the well-known lunch counter sit-ins, students endured simulated physical and verbal harassment in a training environment so they would not react violently when conducting the actual sit-in.

The success of nonviolent discipline is evident in another active nonviolent method and peacekeeping tool being implemented in South Sudan called unarmed civilian protection. Unarmed civilian protection refers to a set of nonviolent strategies that unarmed civilians can use to reduce violence and protect civilians during violent conflict. These include establishing proactive engagement and protective accompaniment with communities affected by violence, building relationships with violent actors, monitoring adherence to cease-fires and reports of violence, and developing local capacity on specific unarmed civilian protection skills. Since 2010, Nonviolent Peaceforce, an international nongovernmental organization, has strategically implemented unarmed civilian protection with impressive results. During the civil war,

the agency saved the lives of dozens of civilians during violent attacks, drastically reduced the incidence of sexual violence in some communities, and built the capacity of women's peacekeeping and mobile protection teams to protect tens of thousands of South Sudanese.⁴⁹

Overcoming the Knowledge and Skills Deficit

South Sudanese activists are sometimes hampered by a weak understanding of the strategic dynamics of nonviolent action and how nonviolent action can shift power and advance goals even in the most repressive environments.⁵⁰ Many South Sudanese interviewed for this report thought of "nonviolence" simply as the absence of violence. The idea that power flows from the consent and obedience of ordinary people who can choose to withhold or deny that obedience in order to obtain a just and positive peace is not well understood in South Sudan. Similarly, the notion that nonviolent action can employ a wide variety of tactics to pressure power holders and incentivize changes in their behavior is not well known. "The demand for education on nonviolent action is high," said Dr. George Louis Tokporo, chairperson of South Sudan's Organisation for Nonviolence and Development (ONAD). Those respondents who were familiar with some of the methods and strategic uses of nonviolent action had learned them from trainings and other resources, or they had been inspired by prominent historical figures associated with nonviolence, such as Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Jesus of Nazareth. Bishop Paride Taban, whose early childhood was spent among people of various tribes and religions, said, "I visited an Israel-Palestine peace village and realized I needed to make something like this." He later established the Kuron Peace Village, a community of diverse peoples residing together peacefully, even though surrounded by warring parties.⁵¹

None of the interviewees, however, mentioned receiving inspiration from local or national activists. In addition, most of the existing curricula, books, and resources on nonviolent action originate from North America or Europe, where the political contexts for nonviolent action are often vastly different and where more political space is traditionally afforded to dissenting voices.

A second gap in the strategies of South Sudanese activists is their limited selection of tactics, which are primarily drawn from the set of actions the political scientist Gene Sharp categorized as methods of nonviolent protest and persuasion (as opposed to methods of noncooperation and nonviolent intervention).⁵² Interviewees conveyed that petitions, press releases, traditional lobbying, prayers, marches, dialogues, community education, position papers, dramas, and legal support are among the most common methods of nonviolent action used by South Sudanese. On their own, these methods have not been able to change the political dynamics in the country; and many of them carry high risk, eliciting violent repression that in turn discourages other South Sudanese from participating. On the other hand, lower-risk tactics such as protests centered around art, music, theatre, and acts of solidarity have proven effective at educating the public about the uses of nonviolent action and mobilizing it to engage in other acts of nonviolence and noncooperation, such as boycotts, strikes, marches, and other acts of civil disobedience. As ONAD's civic education officer Paul Genrio Solomon said,

The South Sudan context is highly militarized with most [political] leaders doubling [in the] military ranks. Relevant and contextual selection and use of nonviolent strategies are needed. Not just any method used in Sweden or elsewhere in Europe can be the ones used here. We must be creative, to employ different nonviolent tactics. Of Gene Sharp's 198 methods, I probably haven't implemented more than ten.

Dr. Ayak Chol, a member of Anataban and a facilitator at the University of Juba's National Transformational Leadership Institute, put it this way: "What matters is not the nonviolent tactics you employ, but rather how you use them. The costs for employing nonviolent actions [in South Sudan] are not the same as in other countries." The choice of tactics should thus be

determined by the goals of the particular campaign or movement, the target audience, and the desired effects. Off-the-streets actions such as education campaigns, coalition building, and demonstrations of solidarity can be particularly useful in highly repressive contexts like South Sudan. (However, it is impossible to overemphasize that the selection of nonviolent tactics be based on an assessment of the risks involved and specific ways to mitigate those risks.)

Overcoming Economic and Social Collapse

Another major challenge for nonviolent activists is the trauma caused by South Sudan's ongoing humanitarian crisis. As of mid-2018, more than two million South Sudanese have sought refuge in other countries while nearly two million others have been displaced inside South Sudan. Roughly half of the population is living in severe food insecurity. Sexual and gender-based violence is widespread (1,324 cases were reported in the first half of 2017 alone, though the vast majority of cases go undocumented).⁵³ The economic crisis is deepening, with conflict-related disruptions to oil production, declining agricultural output, and runaway inflation contributing to a prolonged contraction of the economy. These factors compound and intensify the trauma that South Sudanese have experienced from years of civil war. This degree of trauma and everyday livelihood concerns related to food, money, and physical safety leaves little time and energy for many South Sudanese to worry about meaningful civic engagement.

Yet while the humanitarian crisis understandably represents a major impediment for many South Sudanese to engage in nonviolent action, others view the difficult circumstances as inspiration to become more involved. Vicky Amal, a youth peacebuilder and researcher at the Catholic University of South Sudan, said that she decided to use nonviolent actions as a way of life after seeing dead bodies in the street following the outbreak of civil war in December 2013. "I felt bad seeing bloodshed and decided someone has to stand for nonviolence instead," she explained. "I chose to be that someone. I joined the peace movement to unyoke the pain and suffering."

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Conclusion and Recommendations

South Sudanese who have endured years of civil war and violent conflict are beginning to recognize the power of nonviolent alternatives to achieve peace with justice in their country. There are numerous examples of nonviolent action occurring in South Sudan, as well as nascent movement groups that are attempting to strengthen bottom-up pressure for peace. The ability of these groups to articulate an alternative vision for South Sudan, and to organize participatory, diverse campaigns and movements, could help the country break free from violent conflict and bring about a just peace.

To strengthen nonviolent action in South Sudan, and to promote stronger linkages between bottom-up activities and the formal peace processes, this report offers several recommendations for South Sudanese activists and peacebuilders, as well as the external actors seeking to support them:

- **Integrate strategic nonviolent action into program planning for existing initiatives.** Fledgling groups should build on their existing programming related to peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and nonviolence to integrate strategic nonviolent action and movement building, and they should invest in training and skills building in "people power" that integrates local and regional case studies. The SSCC's Action Plan for Peace, USIP's Generation Change, and Unlearning Violence programs; the Unyoke Reflective Practice Retreats for Peacebuilders; arts-based initiatives like Anataban; and organizations like ONAD, EVE Organization for Women Development, the South Sudan Civil Society Forum, the South Sudan Young Leaders Forum, Sustainable Peace and Development

Initiative, Nuba Youth, Peace Palette, and Facts-based Consulting all have important skills, resources, and creativity to support these efforts.

- **Explore ways to strategically link nonviolent action and peacebuilding.** External actors and South Sudanese civil society groups should support planning and capacity building on how to use nonviolent collective action and peacebuilding approaches and tactics synergistically (bearing in mind the very real security concerns) to shift power; exert pressure on belligerent actors; and address the social, political, and economic issues underlying the conflict. Such strategic planning and training processes may include creating a vision, mission, and statement of principles; conducting a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis; developing SMARTT (smart, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound, theory of change) goals; analyzing the conflict and key stakeholders; practicing negotiation and dialogue; and selecting and sequencing nonviolent action tactics. Answering questions such as who, what, why, when, where, and how through these strategic analysis tools can identify key entry points for activists and peacebuilders to affect policy change. Additionally, peacebuilding actors should support the strengthening of networks and coalitions involving youth, women, religious and tribal leaders, and others—from Juba, the states, and the diaspora—and their ability to engage in organizing and collective action.
- **Forge linkages between grassroots activities and the formal peace process.** Grassroots initiatives, campaigns, and movements, including the Anataban campaign and the SSCC-NWD, should seek to mobilize around top-down peace initiatives such as chapter 5 of the September 2018 peace agreement and the national dialogue process. For example, civil society and grassroots groups may also be well positioned to hold community meetings to share knowledge on the national-level peace process and to listen to and report on the continuing concerns of local communities. They may also host radio programs to discuss top-down arrangements and offer ideas to maximize success. Accountability groups should ensure the active participation of civil society in shaping the agendas and implementation of formal and informal dialogues and peace processes by strategically implementing nonviolent action tactics relevant to their goal.
- **Support an enabling environment for nonviolent action.** External actors should support South Sudanese human rights defenders and human rights organizations to document and expose violent repression against citizens who employ nonviolent action while advocating for peace and basic services. They could also fund civilian protection initiatives, such as the Nonviolent Peaceforce’s unarmed peacekeeping and protective accompaniment activities, to open up space for nonviolent collective action. Furthermore, they could support US legislation and diplomatic pressure on the South Sudanese government and rebel groups that target unarmed civilian activists with violence and repression.

Notes

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3. Nonviolent action should not be confused with “nonviolence.” Nonviolence often refers to the rejection of the use or support of violence based on moral, ethical, or religious beliefs. Nonviolent action is not premised on a particular belief system; rather it is grounded in the notion that restraint from the use of violence and the strategic use of nonviolent collective action provides an advantage to groups challenging injustices.

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