Nobody came to ask us
South Sudanese refugee perceptions of the peace process

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Refugees are one of the most affected yet least consulted groups when it comes to issues of peace and conflict in South Sudan. This report attempts to address that gap by presenting findings of refugee interviews in Ethiopia and Uganda. Understanding and incorporating their views into the peace processes is crucial to ensuring that the needs of this substantial group are considered. This will also help deliver a more inclusive and durable peace process.

Key findings

▶ Refugee respondents expressed frustration with a number of issues, ranging from the current political leadership to the IGAD-led peace process and its emphasis on power sharing.

▶ Respondents' views differed in many areas, but there was a high degree of convergence in some key aspects. One related to the lack of information on the peace process, as nearly all respondents felt there was little accurate or trustworthy information.

▶ Respondents expressed the widest range of views on the number of states, a reflection of current tensions. Views were largely divided along regional lines, exposing the lack of a shared vision on the future of governance in South Sudan.

▶ All respondents expressed a strong desire to go back home. However, many were cautious about when that might be, and felt that years of evaluating the implementation of the peace agreements would be needed before it was safe to return.

▶ While the interviewed refugee populations appear to be more consumers than influencers of political dynamics in South Sudan, they still expressed strong sentiments regarding ongoing developments, showing a hunger for information and a desire to contribute to the peace process.

Recommendations

To IGAD and the signatories and stakeholders of the R-ARCSS:

▶ In line with section 1.4.3.1 of the R-ARCSS, accurate information on the agreement should be disseminated to the refugee community, both to prevent rumours from flourishing and to manage expectations of the process. IGAD could organise a series of non-politicised public forums in each major refugee camp or settlement area that refugees can attend and ask questions.

▶ The outcomes of such consultations and sessions must be disseminated in a similar manner, in order for refugee communities to understand that their input was valued and utilised, thereby sustaining participation.

To donors and host countries:

▶ Dedicated information streams should be maintained for each refugee community, to ensure accurate and up-to-date information

is transmitted. This could be a collaboration between the host countries, UNHCR, external donors and local news agencies.

▶ Peacebuilding activities in refugee communities could be increased, especially those focused on communal relations. Refugee settlements should be transformed into areas where relations between various communities thrive, rather than perpetuate divisions. Donors and NGOs operating programmes in the camps and settlements should consider taking on more inter-communal peacebuilding projects, such as activities that bring together camp residents divided by ethnicity, in accordance with host country regulations.

Introduction

This report examines the perceptions of South Sudanese refugees on the conflict and peace processes affecting their home country. Since the outbreak of civil war in December 2013, approximately 2 million refugees have fled South Sudan, in addition to 1.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs).[1] Refugees are thus a sizeable proportion of the population, and are one of the most affected yet least consulted groups.[2]

Getting a better understanding of their views and incorporating these into the implementation of peace processes is crucial to ensuring that developments consider the needs of this substantial group, and are therefore more inclusive and ultimately more durable.[3] This paper thus seeks to provide insights into the concerns and viewpoints of refugees primarily living in Gambella and Adjumani.

The resultant policy recommendations will help the relevant actors to ensure that refugee communities are informed and active participants in discussions on peace, conflict and the future of South Sudan.

> Establishing an environment conducive to refugee returns must be one of the key priorities

Furthermore, in the wake of the signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in early September 2018, establishing an environment conducive to refugee returns must be one of the key priorities for any transitional government in South Sudan. The willingness of refugees to return home can also be taken as an overall indicator of progress and stabilisation, and thus a deeper understanding of refugee perspectives may provide an insight into local confidence in the status of the ongoing implementation of the peace agreement.

Finally, as refugees are victims of the conflict itself, it is important to engage them in a manner that begins to address their concerns, to avoid engendering long-term divisions. Recent reporting has demonstrated that damaging hate speech has emerged from diaspora networks, raising concerns over the prospect of those outside the country perpetuating divisions within it.[4]

Ensuring refugee voices are heard now can help safeguard this community's potential to serve as a source of peace, rather than future conflict, in South Sudan.

Methodology

The Institute for Security Studies (ISS), with funding from the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), conducted field research in the Gambella region of Ethiopia and Adjumani district in Uganda to interview South Sudanese refugee populations on their perceptions of the conflict and peace processes. Ethiopia and Uganda are two of the four frontline states that have been hosting large numbers of South Sudanese refugees since the outbreak of conflict in 2013, and were targeted owing to their sizeable populations, diversity and overall accessibility.

In Ethiopia, Kule, Nguenyyiel and Tierkidi refugee camps were visited, while interviews were also conducted with refugees based in Gambella town. In Uganda, interviews took place in Nyumanzi and Pagrinya camps, alongside additional discussions with refugees in the urban settings of Adjumani, Gulu and Kampala.

A total of 106 refugees were consulted through a combination of 14 focus group discussions and 24 individual interviews in July 2018.[5] Both camp-based refugees and those living in urban settings were included in the study, while female respondents comprised over 40% of the total. A diverse ethnic make-up was considered through the selection of refugee camps that specifically host Nuer and Dinka ethnic groups, in addition to people from the Equatoria region.[6]

The majority of respondents became refugees during two main periods, in 2013–14 and again in 2016–17. Owing to the geographic location of the camps, those interviewed primarily hailed from Upper Nile, Jonglei and Eastern Equatoria, although other areas of South Sudan were represented as well.[7]

Youth comprised approximately one-third of the total respondents.[8] Given that youth make up a substantial proportion of the refugee population, their views are important. Generally, the youth interviewed expressed some of the most robust opinions regarding peace and conflict in South Sudan, but largely echoed ideas shared by the rest of the respondents, rather than representing new and distinct dynamics. The more significant areas

in which the youth demonstrated differentiation were in terms of accessing information and expressing less trust in both the South Sudanese leadership and the political process (see below).

Limitations

While the findings from the interviews shed light on some key areas of concern for South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia and Uganda, the study has certain limitations that demand caution when evaluating the results.

The timeframe of the fieldwork – July 2018 – influenced perspectives, given ongoing developments with regard to the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) peace process (see box on page 6). Additionally, owing to certain restrictions, only refugees in Uganda and Ethiopia were consulted, leaving the refugee populations in the other countries neighbouring South Sudan outside the frame of study.

Furthermore, while attempts were made to ensure a diverse sample set in terms of ethnic composition, areas of origin in South Sudan, and length of time as a refugee, it was not always possible to include the full range of backgrounds that make up South Sudan's diverse refugee population.

Figure 1: Distribution of South Sudanese refugees by country[10]
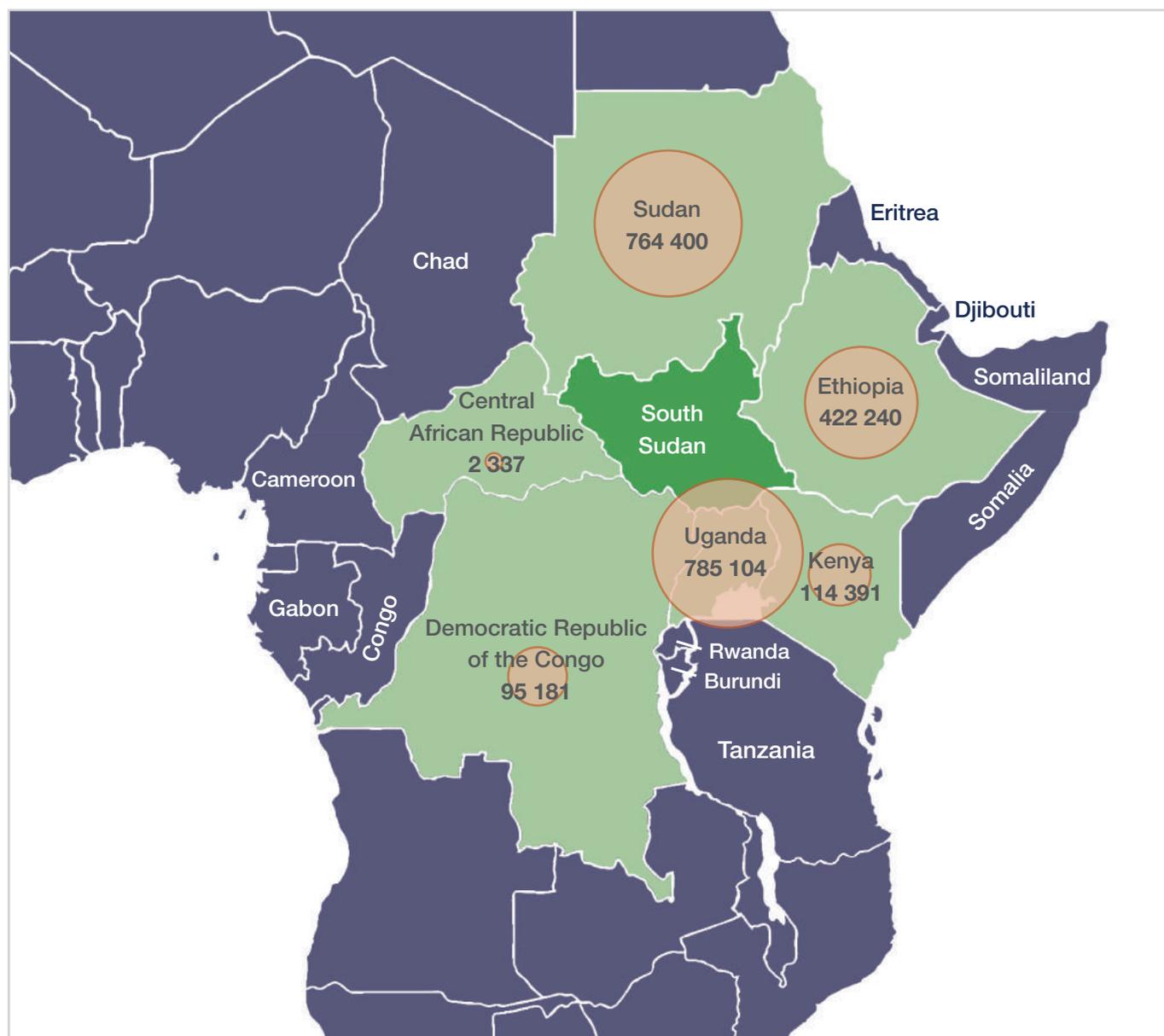
Much of the research was also conducted either in refugee camps and settlements, or in nearby urban locations. In such concentrated settings, information can be controlled and/or disseminated from a few key sources, informing wider opinions. Additionally, camp leaders may have core messages they wish to disseminate to the outside community, which can influence the composition of focus groups and/or the selection of individual participants more prepared to speak with external researchers.[9]

Finally, given the considerable number of refugees, the 106 interviewed are an illustrative rather than representative look at South Sudan's refugee community. In this sense, the respondents provide a snapshot view of some prevailing thought patterns. Thus, while the findings provide useful insights into a population that is generally under-surveyed but crucially important, caution is required to avoid extrapolating the views of the interviewed to the wider refugee population. This report will summarise the findings around certain key themes that emerged during the fieldwork, while attempting to strike a balance with regard to the limited nature of the sample set in question.

Overview of refugee crisis

Since 2013 over 2 million South Sudanese citizens have fled to all six of the country's neighbours, seeking refuge from conflict, food insecurity and declining economic prospects. Outflows have been tied to major episodes of violence, such as the 2013–14 clashes in Juba and the Greater Upper Nile region and the July 2016 collapse of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS), but continued throughout this period.

Gambella

South Sudanese refugees now make up the largest refugee population in Ethiopia, most of whom are hosted in Gambella regional state. Gambella saw spikes of refugee arrivals (largely hailing from the Nuer ethnic group) as people fled the outbreak of violence in December 2013, as well as the July 2016 clashes in Juba.[11] Currently, there are seven refugee camps in Gambella, all but one of which was established after December 2013. Ethiopia hosts another South Sudanese refugee camp in neighbouring Benishangul-Gumuz state, while other refugees are based in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) state.[12]

Gambella has a long history of housing South Sudanese refugee populations, dating back to the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) struggle against Khartoum in the 1980s. For example, Pugnido refugee camp in Gambella has been operational since 1993, while Itang, which has since been closed, was the largest refugee camp in the world in the early 1990s.[13]

Gambella's close ties to the South Sudan conflict extend beyond the hosting of refugees, however – the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the armed wing of the SPLM, was formed in Gambella in the 1980s. The region also served as a safe haven and operational base for the SPLA under the Mengistu dictatorship in Ethiopia, which was engaged in a game of regional competition with Sudan.[14]

> Two million South Sudanese citizens have fled to all six of the country's neighbours

The influx of ethnic Nuer into Gambella has aggravated local tensions between Ethiopian Nuer and Anuak communities, with the latter seeing its dominant position undermined by both this development and the increasing migration of highland Ethiopians to Gambella in search of economic opportunities.[15] The presence of the Ethiopian Nuer community has also impacted the status of Nuer refugees in Gambella, allowing greater localised movement and interaction between the refugee and host community populations, given the common linkages.

Fifty-one refugees were interviewed in three refugee camps and Gambella town itself. All were ethnically Nuer and had fled from Jonglei or Upper Nile in South Sudan. Nearly half had arrived in Ethiopia in 2014, while another third had arrived from the end of 2016 onwards.[16] The Nuer background of the refugees interviewed is reflected in their perceptions, as respondents demonstrated a close association with Riek Machar and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO).

Adjumani

While northern Uganda had hosted South Sudanese refugees prior to the outbreak of conflict in Juba in July

2016, the spread of the conflict to the Equatoria region saw the country's refugee population triple.[17] Due to concerns regarding the validity of overall numbers, however, a verification exercise of refugees in Uganda was completed in late October 2018, in which 1.1 million refugees had their status verified.[18] Adjumani district, with 19 settlements, hosts the third-largest number of South Sudanese refugees in Uganda, after Yumbe and Arua districts.[19]

In this sense, Uganda's history with South Sudanese refugees is not as deep as that of Gambella, especially as the current influx is predominately recent in nature. Nonetheless, northern Uganda and South Sudan are closely connected regions, especially in terms of trade, with a high volume of South Sudan's imports coming from Uganda.[20]

The South Sudanese refugee population in Uganda is more diverse than that of Gambella, encompassing Nuer, Dinka and ethnic groups from the Greater Equatoria region. This results in less cohesion in terms of overall outlooks, ensuring a greater range of perspectives and opinions across interviewed respondents.

Uganda's history with South Sudanese refugees is not as deep as that of Gambella

Furthermore, many refugee respondents here expressed concerns over local security; more than those in Gambella. Such considerations of personal safety likely influenced respondents, especially in terms of their

IGAD's High-Level Revitalization Forum

The July 2016 clashes in South Sudan between the government, led by President Salva Kiir, and the SPLM-IO, headed by Machar, heralded the collapse of the 2015 ARCSS agreement. In July 2017 IGAD initiated the High-Level Revitalization Forum (HLRF) to revitalise the ARCSS as the main vehicle to resolve South Sudan's civil war. This process was led by IGAD Special Envoy for South Sudan Amb. Ismail Wais, and involved the South Sudanese government, the SPLM-IO, Former Detainees (FDs) and the South Sudan Opposition Alliance (SSOA), a grouping of nine political and armed actors, as the main signatories.

The HLRF underwent a few key phases, followed by discussions in the regional capitals of some IGAD member states:

- Phase I (18–22 December 2017, Addis Ababa) – Cessation of Hostilities (CoH) agreement signed

- Phase II (5–16 February 2018, Addis Ababa) – Governance and security discussions, but few concrete results

- Phase III (17–21 May 2018, Addis Ababa) – Continuation of discussions from phase II; agreement on the cantonment of armed forces

- Kiir and Machar, face-to-face meeting (20 June 2018, Addis Ababa)

- Kiir and Machar, face-to-face meeting (7 July 2018, Kampala)

- Discussions shift to Khartoum (late June–early September 2018)

  - 27 June – Khartoum Declaration on ceasefire

  - 5 July – Security Agreement

  - 5 August – Governance Agreement

  - 12 September – Signing of revitalised ARCSS agreement

At the time of the interviews in Gambella and Adjumani, the Khartoum round of negotiations was ongoing, with little clarity when (or if) the process would move to Nairobi, as originally scheduled. The Khartoum Declaration and Security Agreement had been signed, while discussions over outstanding governance issues and the finalisation of the revitalised ARCSS agreement remained in process. The ongoing discussions in Khartoum undoubtedly influenced the perceptions of interviewed refugees, who contextualised their responses in terms of the current proposals, reacting to recent developments. For more details on the HLRF process, see the accompanying ISS paper Compound Fractures: Politics, armed groups and mediation in South Sudan.

willingness to engage in open and frank discussion on issues of peace and security. Respondents cited a few recent unexplained incidents involving the abduction and/or death of South Sudanese nationals in Uganda as justification for their unease.[21]

Fifty-five refugees were interviewed in two refugee camps and three urban locations in Uganda.[22] Twenty-two of those refugees were ethnic Dinkas who had mostly arrived since 2013–14. More than half of those came from Bor and its surroundings in Jonglei state of South Sudan. The remaining 33 respondents hailed from areas in South Sudan's Central and Eastern Equatoria states not too far from the Uganda border, including locations such as Nimule, Kajo Keiji, Pageri and Torit. The majority had fled from 2016 onwards, as the conflict crept into their home areas.

CSO surveys

As part of the background research for this report, recent surveys in South Sudan on perceptions of peace and conflict were examined, in order to determine areas of convergence with and divergence from those who have fled. Unfortunately, likely owing to the resumption of violent conflict in 2016, few large-scale interviews had been conducted on related topics in recent years. The more comprehensive accounts date closer to the period after independence in 2011.[23]

> The outbreak of conflict in 2013 has likely altered public perceptions in a significant way

Nonetheless, a few recent surveys reflect some of the findings from this report. For example, a report by Search for Common Ground in 2017 found that tribal isolation was on the rise around Bor, while radio remained a primary source of information on peace and the conflict.[24] A joint South Sudan Law Society (SSLS), UPEACE and PAX report from 2016 also noted that respondents in major urban areas were generally aware that the 2015 ARCSS agreement had been signed, but were much less familiar with specific provisions.[25]

Similarly, a 2015 joint United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – SSLS report reported similar

dynamics, noting that out of more than 1 500 respondents across the country, 41% were not aware of the IGAD process. Of those who were, 70% expressed little confidence in it.[26] In this sense, the data suggests that civilians do not have detailed information on the peace agreements in South Sudan; a dynamic similar to that witnessed among interviewed refugee respondents (see below).

The outbreak of conflict in 2013 has also likely altered public perceptions in a significant way, compared to those held at independence. The results of a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) study on public opinion in April–May 2013 shows differences with current refugee perceptions in a number of areas. For example, only 12% of respondents in that report held an unfavourable view of Uganda, while 61% did of Sudan – perceptions that contrast with the views presented here.

Other findings from the USAID study were a worrying harbinger of future dynamics. Respondents were split in terms of believing that a political party represented them, and 52% felt South Sudan was headed in the wrong direction. Many cited continued insecurity, food shortages and poverty as the main reasons for this viewpoint.[27] These dynamics are reflected in this study, with frustration with leadership a key underlying theme.

Main findings

Respondents were asked to share their perceptions of the conflict and peace processes through a series of semi-structured questionnaires. Topics ranged from overall considerations regarding the root causes of conflict in South Sudan, to the role of IGAD and its member states in the ongoing peace process, to how refugees accessed information and their plans to return home. A number of key themes emerged during the course of the interviews, some of which showed differentiation based on respondent background or experience.

Information access

Interviewed refugees had differing levels of understanding of the IGAD peace process, with refugees located in urban settings predictably demonstrating greater awareness. Nonetheless, common narratives persisted in each location, an indication that information is being shared and distributed, albeit likely from a concentration of sources.

The most common ways of accessing information were the Internet (mostly via smart phones) and word-of-mouth. Obtaining information through television was reported as being rare in Gambella, while radio was more common but still problematic. Both forms of communication were more common but still challenging in Adjumani. In many camps, refugees noted that the few televisions available were used more for entertainment purposes than for accessing news, while others complained about the prohibitive cost of radios. Nonetheless, television and radio still served as important sources of information, and contributed to word-of-mouth transmission as well.

Table 1: Most commonly mentioned sources of information about the South Sudan peace process

Radio	Television	Internet	Word-of-mouth
• South Sudan in Focus (Voice of America) • Focus on Africa (BBC) • Radio Tamazuj (in Arabic)	• SSBC (Uganda only) • NTV (Uganda only)	• *Sudan Tribune* • Nyamilepedia • Al Jazeera • Facebook • Other social media	• Intellectuals • Community leaders • Youth • Those who have travelled • Those with access to smart phones • Phone calls back home (Uganda only)

Nearly all respondents complained about a lack of information, however. Many also expressed concerns regarding the trustworthiness of the information they received, especially that coming from social media. This was frequently seen as an inherently biased and untrustworthy medium, as it was difficult to distinguish fact from opinion. In terms of news broadcasts, those by international agencies or agencies with reporters present at the IGAD peace talks were considered to be the most reliable.

> We are not fully getting the information that is going on in the peace process because we lack sources. If we can get those sources of information, then we will be happy because it is very important for our life. (Female, Nguenyyiel)
>
> The information we get is only second hand, and not enough for us. People mix it with their own interests for their own reasons. If there would be some mediums to communicate with us on a daily basis, then we could hear exactly what has happened. (Male, Nguenyyiel)
>
> Social media is not to be trusted. Someone may have his or her own issue and just post it there. (Female, Gulu)

THE MOST COMMON WAYS OF ACCESSING INFORMATION WERE THE INTERNET AND WORD-OF-MOUTH

In some ways, youth were the most informed demographic, owing to their greater familiarity with and access to technology. This resulted in greater Internet connectivity, primarily via smart phones, and in their travelling to nearby towns to use Internet cafes. In addition, other key camp members, occasionally referred as 'intellectuals', served as a means of information distribution. This group might include former government officials or others who maintain some sort of informal connection to those involved in the peace process. They are generally known in the camps, and act as a resource for those seeking more information.[28]

Some of us haven't heard [about the peace process] because we don't have access to radio, television or Internet as the young people do. (Female, Pagrinya)

Only those who can go to Gambella town can go to Internet cafes. They get information about [the] peace process, and then tell their colleagues about it. We also go and ask those with radios and smart phones what is going on. (Male, Tierkidi).

Word-of-mouth, however, has its limitations. Many noted that they often chose not to share the information they received, either because it was not positive or out of concern that their reputation would be at stake if it turned out to be false later on.

Even if you get information, you do not disseminate because of fear that the last peace deal was signed and collapsed. So you just keep it to yourself. If it doesn't come to be, people will say you are a liar. (Female, Nguenyyiel)

If we get information, then we share the good information. If the proposal is signed, you call your brothers to come listen and everyone will be happy. But if it is bad information, about fighting or other things, you keep quiet. (Male, Kule)

Both Uganda and Ethiopia place restrictions on formal political activities conducted by refugees. This is ostensibly to insulate refugee populations from the divisive politics of their home nations, preserve a degree of harmony among the diverse refugee populations, and/or ensure positive relations between the host and origin countries.[29]

In practice, this appeared to be a stricter provision in Ethiopia than Uganda, but one that nevertheless hinders the flow of information in both locations. For example, camp leaders in Ethiopia explained that they avoided holding official meetings to discuss developments in the IGAD peace process or disseminate new information, rather relying on more informal word-of-mouth channels.[30]

One key area of difference between respondents in Gambella and Adjumani is the ability to obtain information from back home. In Gambella, a handful of interviewees acknowledged that refugees crossed the border on occasion; often to see less able family members they had left behind.[31] Others familiar with the refugee camps also noted that this practice occurred.[32]

Most of the refugees interviewed in Gambella denied this, however, and maintained that they had little ability to obtain information from South Sudan unless they asked a new arrival. Refugee respondents also noted that the disruption of cellular networks in areas of South Sudan controlled by the SPLM-IO hindered cross-border communication.[33]

In Adjumani, the flow of people across the border is less restrictive, and interviewees frequently noted their ability to make calls to people still living in South Sudan, as cellular networks in those areas did not face a similar level of disruption. In addition, respondents were more open to receiving information from South Sudanese government sources, such as the South Sudan Broadcasting Corporation (SSBC), even while some claimed it was biased.

In short, the various efforts used to obtain information highlight both the desire of the interviewed refugees for greater access to current news of the conflict in South Sudan and the peace process, and the lack of trust in current methods, which, according to respondents, could be either biased or generally lacking.

In this sense, one major gap with regard to refugees and the peace talks appeared to be the inadequate communication of developments to refugee populations. This led to complaints of a lack of information on issues that affect their prospective return, while the vacuum left by the absence of official communication is filled by media reporting and social media commentary, at times perceived to be biased.

Root causes of the conflict

Many interviewed refugees complained that the IGAD-led peace process ignored the root causes of South Sudan's civil war. Yet when asked what those root causes were, respondents oscillated between a focus on politics, tribalism and other accompanying factors.

The intersection of tribalism and politics

Refugees interviewed in Gambella primarily viewed the conflict through the prism of a binary struggle between the Dinka and Nuer communities. While this has taken on tribal overtones, most pointed to the political dispute between Kiir and Machar as the instigating factor. Respondents explained how the conflict devolved along tribal lines once Nuer were targeted in Juba in the aftermath of the December 2013 violence.

The political roots of the conflict – over the leadership of the country – became conflated with a tribal outlook as matters worsened. Many interviewed Gambella refugees blamed Kiir rather than the Dinka at large, an indication of a greater emphasis on political rather than tribal roots. Nonetheless, explaining the conflict in terms of ethnic differences remained the prevailing narrative.

> The cause of fighting is Kiir, as he does not want to change. We initially accepted him as president, but the Constitution said that after a few years, he would have to step down and an election held, but Kiir rejected this. We are the ones who voted him for president, so we are the ones that can say it's time to step down. But he rejected this and started killing. (Male, Tierkidi)
>
> Tribal conflict is the problem because Kiir doesn't want Nuer to be involved in the government. The constitution called for a change in 2015, but Kiir began fighting before then. He planned to kill all the Nuer. (Male, Tierkidi)

While the binary analysis of South Sudan's conflict prevalent among interviewed Gambella respondents is predicated on personal experience, it must also be contrasted with wider patterns of conflict across South Sudan since 2013, in which a range of ethnic groups have been subjected to violence.[34] In Adjumani, some agreed that the conflict had initially taken on tribal overtones as a struggle between the Dinka and Nuer, but had since expanded beyond this narrow dynamic.

> The war [in 2013] was between ethnic groups, especially the Dinka and Nuer. Someone would come to you with a gun and ask your tribe. If you didn't know your mother tongue and spoke in Arabic, they would shoot you. For us who are tall, we were at the highest risk. (Female, Gulu)

Leadership frustration

Among interviewed refugees in northern Uganda, frustration with leadership was an overarching theme in explanations of the root causes of the conflict, also denoting a political element.[35] Many respondents – ethnic Dinka and those from the Greater Equatoria region alike – blamed the leadership on all sides for the state of affairs.

Machar and Kiir were particular objects of criticism, but most decried the South Sudanese leadership in general as being only concerned with personal rather than national interests, thereby becoming a root cause of the violence. In this sense, a strong undercurrent of thought advocated for new leadership as the only viable solution. This sentiment transcended ethnic boundaries.

> We've seen Kiir spend so many years in power, and Riek has been vice-president for so long. There is no leader in South Sudan who can lead us – it is better to stay without a leader. (Male, Nyumanzi)
>
> The only thing is to remove both [Kiir and Machar] and bring someone to run the country until elections. Then the people of South Sudan will choose their president. (Female, Gulu)
>
> We were born in war, grew up in war, gave birth to our children in war, became old in war, and shall die in war. What are our leaders thinking? (Female, Adjumani)

Linked to perceptions of poor leadership were considerations of the fact that many politicians had been military leaders during the liberation struggle, and thus operated with a different mentality than what is typically

required in a civilian administration. Others complained about a political system where the only way to get recognition was through armed rebellion. Both of these dynamics point to South Sudan's failure to transition from a liberation struggle to multi-party politics.[36] Many interviewed refugees used David Yau Yau's rebellion in Jonglei as a key example of this dynamic, criticising a system that rewarded those who used violence in the pursuit of political objectives.[37]

> Remember, these people were rebels. That is where everything was established from – they have never been in Parliament or the presidency before. Their mind is still that of a rebel. All states [in South Sudan] were created by someone who did something evil to the community, and they were rewarded. (Male, Nyumanzi)
>
> If you don't fight, you will not be considered by the government. That was what happened with David Yau Yau. He was just a student, left Kakuma as a refugee, and became a payam leader. Then he contested the government but was defeated, so he decided to rebel. That is why so many people are fighting, because they want to be heard. If you keep quiet, you get nothing. (Male, Nyumanzi)

Other contributing factors

Respondents in both locations also listed other factors to explain the outbreak of conflict. Chief among these were the lack of a unified national army, a high degree of corruption, and low levels of education. Respondents noted that this combination allowed South Sudan's leaders to manipulate people into joining the fight, often along tribal lines.

> The problem is we have a private tribal army – not a national army. It was this army that looted and killed civilians. (Male, Kule)
>
> Look at their [politicians'] bank accounts – you would think they have worked for 100 years! But they just got the country recently; they were bankrupt when we were in the bush. (Male, Nyumanzi)

> Lack of education is one of the root causes of the conflict. The majority of the general public lacks education, and due to this, policy is focused on the tribe. (Male, Gambella)
>
> At independence, there was no issue about tribes because all of us worked together to achieve that. It was the government that planted this idea [of tribalism]. We didn't understand immediately when the war started, as during this time we didn't see tribal issues in our community. We have 64 tribes in South Sudan and every single one voted for independence. No one saw other tribes as the enemy, but the government surprised by killing us. (Female, Gulu)

At its core, the intersection of tribalism with politics was viewed as the root cause of South Sudan's conflict. According to the interviewees, this was compounded by the prevailing military mindset of the political leadership and a lack of development in the country. Apart from the refugees in Gambella, who expressed continued support for Machar (see below), frustration with leadership was a key dynamic, to the point where respondents viewed fresh leadership as a viable solution to the current conflict, even if few could say where this should come from or how it should be achieved.

This carries implications regarding support for the revitalisation of the 2015 ARCSS agreement, which has focused on reinstating the same leaders who have overseen much of the recent violence. Rather, respondents appeared to be advocating for new faces, with elections as the primary route to obtaining them – an aspect which some civil society organisations have also recommended.[38]

> These leaders are fighting for their own plate; no one cares about the people of South Sudan. The only solution is concrete democracy, so we can vote for the leaders we like. (Male, Nyumanzi)

Representation and support

Respondents answered questions regarding the HLRF talks and the degree to which they felt represented,

in addition to the movements they supported. The responses are closely linked to perspectives on the root causes of the conflict, as those in Gambella said the SPLM-IO represented them in the binary struggle against the government, while many in Adjumani were more cautious in terms of expressing political support.

Proliferation of armed groups

One major theme associated with the evolution of the South Sudanese conflict has been the proliferation of groups opposed to the government. This is evident in the R-ARCSS. In 2015 the main signatories to the ARCSS were the government of South Sudan, the SPLM-IO, FDs and a grouping of other political parties.

> Respondents appeared to be advocating for new faces, with elections as the primary route

In 2018 those same actors were party to the R-ARCSS, in addition to the South Sudan Opposition Alliance, a collection of nine mostly armed groups that largely emerged over the course of the past three years. Other armed actors, such as those led by Paul Malong, Kiir's chief of defence from 2014–17, have also defected from either the government or the opposition, and remain outside the agreement.[39]

Respondents expressed varied opinions on the reasons for this development. Some saw it as an indictment of the Kiir-led government, in that so many groups had emerged to challenge its leadership. Others criticised the inability of the opposition to unite around a single figure, expressing additional frustration with the political leadership for continued divisions and personal ambitions.[40]

> Everyone wants to be the leader when the leader is not capable. They all don't want Kiir. If there were a capable leader, some would go and do other things. (Male, Gambella)

In Gambella, some interviewed respondents also equated the SPLM-IO with the opposition as a whole, a continuation of a predominant binary view of the struggle. In this line of thinking, opposition groups that had emerged since the collapse of the ARCSS were not always viewed as being on equal footing, since the SPLM-IO was still considered the main opposition movement through which negotiations should be channelled. In this sense, consolidation around the SPLM-IO was extremely high among surveyed respondents in Gambella, despite the proliferation of other opposition groups.

> These groups [the SSOA] were not there before; it was just the SPLM that divided itself. IO is the head, and then they [the SSOA] are under. Like in government, there are parties under the government. It should be the same way. (Male, Tierkidi)[41]
>
> If you defect from one [the government or the SPLM-IO], you are supposed to go to the other. (Male, Gambella)
>
> The connection to IO of these [other groups] is not clear, but they have the same objective – to have peace. Those who say they have an army, you cannot see it. What makes them different is their top leadership. Everyone wants to be number one. But if SPLM-IO refuses a proposal, they do too. (Male, Gambella).

Political representation in Gambella and Adjumani

In Gambella there was a paradox in refugees' views of political representation. While most complained about their lack of a voice in the IGAD process (see below), at the same time respondents steadfastly affirmed that the SPLM-IO represented their interests.

More than any other interviewed group, the Gambella refugee population demonstrated a close allegiance with one of the HLRF parties, and a belief that their concerns were addressed through this association, even if they did not have a voice themselves. In this sense, the refugees equated Machar's involvement with the overall needs of the Nuer community, and felt that the SPLM-IO in essence spoke for them.[42]

> Those who are in the mediation from IO are our brothers. We are the same family. We don't raise our concerns here as there is no medium. But what

> they are mediating in Addis Ababa and Khartoum is on our behalf. We are from the same family, we had the same suffering, and they know refugees here are suffering in the same way. (Female, Tierkidi)

> I feel represented [by the SPLM-IO] because they are my brothers and sisters. What they are doing I can accept. They know my situation; they were here during the fighting. Even with no contact, they are representing us. (Male, Tierkidi)

Perspectives differed in Adjumani. A significant proportion of refugees were frustrated by the entire process, and felt no one represented them. This was linked to expressions of poor leadership being a root cause of the crisis, and one that had not been resolved.

> I don't think any of the parties in Khartoum represent our interest as refugees, since the most important [thing] to them are their positions and power sharing among themselves. (Male, Pagrinya)

Among those who expressed support for some of the HLRF parties, perceptions were more varied, a reflection of the diverse environment. Frustration with both Kiir and Machar was high, while some expressed cautious support for Equatoria-based groups, such as the National Salvation Front (NAS) led by Thomas Cirillio.

> Thomas Cirillio is representing our interests. He went to the bush because of what he was seeing in the city. The government was taking the land of the indigenous, and he saw his people were suffering. (Female, Adjumani)

Kiir and Machar

Many interviewed respondents in Adjumani who hailed from Dinka communities blamed Machar for the conflict, even if they did not express full support for Kiir. Nonetheless, some pragmatically still saw Machar as a crucial actor who had to be engaged so a lasting peace could be made with the Nuer community.

Others blamed the international community for insisting that Machar remain part of the process, a sharp contrast to the complaints from Gambella respondents over the international community's bias against Machar (see below). Feelings about Machar were one of the most distinct contrasts between the settlements interviewed, and demonstrate his status as an important but divisive political actor.

> People have fought three times since 1991. The same person has caused all the problems. [It was] Machar in 1991. Then again in 2013, Machar maybe caused a coup. In 2015 he was reinstated as vice-president, but again [fighting erupted]. When people heard he was going to be the vice-president, they ran away to Uganda. That's why this camp is full – why is the world imposing this person on us every year? (Male, Nyumanzi)

> Riek needs to be reinstated because he has support among the Nuer. If he is not, then they will not stop rebelling and killing people. (Male, Nyumanzi)

Perceptions of Kiir varied in Adjumani, even in the Dinka communities interviewed – an indication that, despite common narratives, the refugee settlements are far from monolithic entities. Few believed Kiir and Machar would be able to work together. Some respondents instead talked positively about the FDs as an alternative (referred to as the G10 in conversation), especially if they were able to come to some sort of political accommodation with the current government.

> The two of them [Kiir and Machar] will never work together, as we saw last time. It was just a small meeting and a war broke out. I don't believe the day will come when they will trust each other and be together. (Female, Gulu)

> These people [FDs] are highly educated and know how to run politics. If they didn't join Machar in the fight against Kiir, we would've elected one of them. Even then, we can still vote for one if they come home and make peace. (Male, Nyumanzi)

As a whole, the perspectives within the interviewed refugee communities in both Gambella and Adjumani

largely reflected the wider political divisions within South Sudan, much of which has recently been based, but not exclusively reliant, on identity politics. This shows the diversity of the refugee community. It is also a reminder that, notwithstanding the shared experience of flight from their home country, the South Sudanese refugee community is as varied as the political actors contesting the leadership of the country.

IGAD and the HLRF

Given that the interviews occurred in July 2018, after the Khartoum round of discussions had begun but prior to the signing of the R-ARCSS, refugee discussions centred on the possibility of a peace agreement and the shifting location of the discussions.[43] Respondents were generally aware that IGAD was conducting negotiations with the warring parties, but largely expressed pessimism about the likelihood of a positive outcome, given the collapse of the previous agreement and the perceived bias and/or interests of IGAD member states.

Refugee participation in the HLRF

Phases II and III of the HLRF in Addis Ababa included refugee representatives, who travelled from Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya and Sudan to provide a refugee perspective at the discussions.[44] While they acted as observers rather than direct participants, they attended the sessions and spoke on behalf of the refugee community.

Despite this positive overture, few of the interviewed refugees had heard about this development, while of those who had, only a handful considered it to be genuine representation. Some complained about a lack of transparency in the selection process and the absence of feedback.[45] In this sense, despite this overture, all interviewed refugees complained about lacking a voice in the peace process, given the absence of viable mediums through which they could engage – one of the key areas of agreement across the interviewed populations.

> As a refugee, we don't know whether our voice is being considered, because nobody came to ask us. (Male, Kule)

Female interviewees also complained about a lack of gender focus, and felt the talks and process overall could have benefited from greater gender inclusivity. It should be noted that of the nine refugee representatives during Phase III of the HLRF, four were female, while there are also provisions in the R-ARCSS for women's participation.[46] Nonetheless, the majority of the discussants were male, a dynamic about which interviewed female refugees complained.

> The peace process in Addis is just men. They don't feel the pain of women. It is just rich people with fat stomachs, who don't think about anything but their stomachs. I wish the plane that takes people to Addis would take people with empty stomachs to tell their pain. (Female, Adjumani)
>
> I wish IGAD could take many South Sudanese women to sit together with Kiir and Machar, to talk to them with no other men around. We will ask them why they are fighting and what exactly they want. They should tell us mothers what exactly is the problem. We will shed tears and tell them the truth – that the women are dying and suffering, not the men. (Female, Gulu)

Frustrations

Refugees of all demographics and places of origin accused IGAD member states of putting their interests in South Sudan ahead of peace, leading to tensions within the IGAD approach.[47] Many viewed this as a major reason for the past failings of the peace process – combined with IGAD's perceived unwillingness or inability to take punitive measures against spoilers.

> We don't want IGAD anymore to lead this process because it needs action and implementation. IGAD does not take much action – that is why the peace breaks down. (Male, Tierkidi)
>
> We don't want IGAD because we don't want this peace to be like the last one. (Male, Nyumanzi)
>
> We trust the IGAD process, but as refugees we see the different interests of IGAD countries. It makes it seem like there is some competition within IGAD. (Male, Gambella)

Many respondents in Gambella also viewed IGAD as biased against Machar. They cited as evidence the lack of outcry during the July 2016 fighting in Juba, and Machar's subsequent regional isolation in South Africa.

> Why was Riek not allowed in the region? They said he can be there if he is non-violent, but who started the war? Then he was replaced with the person who was making alliances with those who started the war – IGAD did not condemn this. (Male, Gambella)
>
> Machar's guns were limited when he travelled back to Juba [in 2016], then when the fighting broke out there was no intervention from IGAD. When Machar was on his way to the DRC [Democratic Republic of Congo], some helicopters were used to drop bombs on him. IGAD was supposed to take responsibility, but did nothing. (Male, Gambella)

Others in both Gambella and Adjumani expressed frustration with the collapse of the ARCSS and the lengthy discussions, calling for the process to be handed over to another entity. Some questioned whether IGAD and its member states were truly prepared to advocate for peace. It is unclear if the signing of the R-ARCSS will sway opinions regarding IGAD's effectiveness as a mediator, but it is clear that any future failures in terms of implementation will paint IGAD's role in a deeply negative light.

> I don't want IGAD because they make peace as a business. They keep extending and don't want to complete it. They must hand over to another organisation or the international community. (Male, Nguenyyiel)
>
> In our culture, a man can marry many wives. If your first marriage ends in divorce, and you get a second and divorce again, then no one in the community will marry you as they know your wives get divorced. We cannot allow the mediator to let peace collapse again, because then it will be like the husbands whose wives get divorced. (Female, Tierkidi)

A handful of respondents, especially those in Adjumani, went so far as to question the basis of the IGAD discussions itself, criticising the narrow focus on power-sharing agreements at the expense of addressing the root causes of the war. Such sentiments appear linked to the overarching theme of leadership frustration, and thus consternation with the HLRF's focus on those very same leaders.

> IGAD only considers the two principals; the root cause [of the war] is not addressed. They need to go to the grassroots to find out what the problem is – that is why this peace is always failing. They need to ensure citizens participate – these two warring parties are not everything. (Male, Nyumanzi)
>
> Those people sharing power – whose power are they sharing anyway? We are out of the country. They have become leaders only for themselves. (Male, Nyumanzi)

Perceptions of regional interests

At its heart, IGAD is an intergovernmental organisation beholden to the views of its member states. Many of South Sudan's neighbours have been involved in the conflict in one way or another, and respondents pointed out the hypocrisy of having those same nations serve as conflict mediators, especially as the HLRF moved from Addis Ababa to regional capitals.[48]

In particular, Uganda's role in deploying troops to South Sudan was viewed negatively, including by those respondents based there. In this sense, interviewed respondents contrasted the perceived interests of some IGAD member states in South Sudan's conflict with the political will to bring peace.

> Uganda was one of the warring parties and there is no accountability. They interfered in internal affairs, but then were invited to be a mediator. (Male, Gambella)
>
> Uganda is interested in exploiting the resources of South Sudan, like land along the border. They also benefit financially from the refugees. (Male, Pagrinya)

Some from Gambella also viewed Kenya negatively, citing the deportation of former SPLM-IO spokesperson James Gadet in November 2016, among others.[49] This episode resonated strongly with interviewed refugees supportive of the SPLM-IO, and served as another example of perceived bias in the region.

> You had Gadet of IO taken to Juba by Kenyan authorities. That is why we know even Kenya is involved in South Sudan. (Male, Nguenyyiel)

In contrast, many respondents had a positive view of Sudan. While some in Adjumani pointed out that Sudan's main interest in South Sudan was oil, others viewed Khartoum in a more positive light. Such sentiments relied on Sudan's acceptance of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which paved the way for South Sudan's independence. Many also fell back on the familiarity factor, saying that Sudan's intimidate knowledge of South Sudan's leadership can also produce a positive outcome for peace. This reasoning was strongest in Gambella, but also apparent in Adjumani.

> Bashir knows us. His message to Kiir was that he gave him a country in 2005 in peace, not war, and that he worked with Garang when he didn't want to. He will tell Kiir you need to do the same now. (Male, Gambella)
>
> Sudan is like our father. In Addis there were many peace deals signed, but three days later broken. Maybe in Khartoum it will change, as we were one country and they know us. (Female, Tierkidi)
>
> I trust that Bashir can bring peace, because if you look at 2005, he voluntarily accepted for South Sudan to have independence. (Male, Adjumani)

The contrast between the positive assessment of Sudan's role on the one hand and the decades of tension prior to and even after independence is striking, and in some ways represents the desperation of the interviewed refugees to find an actor they truly believed could bring peace.[50] As the process had shifted to Khartoum at the time of the discussions, Sudan's taking a leading role was viewed by respondents as one of the few cautiously encouraging features, amid considerable distrust of other regional actors.

Specific peace proposals

Respondents generally were aware of the basic contours of the proposals contained in the HLRF process, and discussions largely centred on two contentious aspects of the governance agreement – the number of vice-presidents in the power-sharing format, and the number of states in South Sudan. While there was near-universal criticism of the former, the latter evoked a diversity of responses.

Refugee respondents from all demographics derided the need for five vice-presidents – a central compromise in the power-sharing format. Many questioned the rationale behind this, asking what other country in the world had a similar governance structure. A number also questioned how the vice-presidents could work together, remarking that in the past they had just one vice-president but still experienced conflict.

> Four vice-presidents? Where on earth does one country have four vice-presidents? How will that help solve the problem? (Female, Adjumani)[51]
>
> It will be a problem because when the president changes vice-president, that tribe will ask why their representative is not there. Machar was replaced, and then the Nuer asked why their people aren't there. This will increase tribalism and prolong the war. (Female, Gulu)
>
> We are resuscitating the 2015 peace deal – we did not have four vice-presidents then. There were only two parties fighting then. So there is no space for someone like Taban, who is now IG [in government]. There is no way we can have this many VPs. (Male, Tierkidi)

Opposition to the increase in vice-presidents relates to previous frustrations with the South Sudanese political leadership, and the focus of those involved in the HLRF on securing positions rather than addressing the conflict's root causes, a central critique of the power-sharing approach.

The number of states in South Sudan proved to be a much more contentious element. The debate ties into the future of governance and particularly federalism in South Sudan, a system viewed as essential by many respondents from the Equatoria region.[52] At the time of independence, South Sudan had 10 states. Kiir controversially expanded this to 28 and then 32 by presidential decree, which the opposition claimed was a violation of the ARCSS.[53] The redrawing of administrative boundaries carries significant implications for resource control, inflaming competition between various ethnic communities.

In this sense, respondent answers encompassed the whole gamut, from those advocating for federalism based on three main regions to those in support of the original 10 states in place during South Sudan's independence, to those backing the 21 states delineated during the British colonial period, to those pushing for the 32 states decreed by Kiir in 2017.[54]

> Twenty-one states are what we had during the British colonial period – neither Machar nor any person created it. It has been demarcated and the borders are clear. But 32 states divide the community, just so some leaders can get oil. (Male, Tierkidi)
>
> If we say South Sudan is 64 tribes, and we fight as tribes, then everyone needs a state. Then we would have more than 60 states. (Male, Nyumanzi)

These differences largely ran along regional lines, an indication of the contentious nature of this debate, and its potential to be a key flashpoint going forward.[55] In this sense, respondents from the Equatoria region strongly felt their rights could only be protected in a South Sudan based on a three-region federal model, while those in Gambella oscillated between various proposals other than the 32-state solution.[56] The only support for Kiir's 32-state plan came from Dinka respondents in Adjumani, although this was by no means a universal position.

> We need a federal system of governance, so Equatoria can be there. I have no interest in this country otherwise! (Female, Gulu)

Those supporting the 32-state solution and those opposed made contrasting arguments regarding the

initiative. This largely centred on the prospect of conflict, with those in support arguing that the division into multiple states has reduced conflict, as various groups have a territory of their own to administer without interference from others. Those opposed to the 32-state dynamic argued the exact opposite – that the implementation has accentuated conflict in South Sudan, given the increased divisions caused by the redrawing of political boundaries.

> I support the creation of new states. What brought it about was that many were fighting for the rights of their people. Kiir said, 'Enough is enough, I will give you each your area and we can see what you are going to do.' The 32-states idea has reduced conflict. (Male, Nyumanzi)
>
> All civilians disagree [on the 32 states]. It has taken land from the Nuer and given it to the Dinka. This will bring conflict. (Male, Nguenyyiel)

Many disagreed with the introduction of new states for pragmatic reasons, relating to the manner in which the proposal was unveiled, combined with the dire state of the South Sudanese economy and the lack of qualified leadership, which many felt would prevent the new states from developing fully.

> If South Sudanese were first consulted and it came out as their decision for the creation of the 32 states, then it wouldn't face a lot of challenges. (Male, Pagrinya)
>
> In most of these new states, you just find the commissioner [of the state] sitting under a tree. He pressures you to do the business fast, so he can go back to his cattle. A cattle keeper is considered the commissioner! (Female, Gulu)
>
> We need 10 states, because otherwise some [of the states] will get nothing. If they have nothing, then they will fight. (Male, Tierkidi)

In many ways, the states issue represents a key debate in the future of South Sudan, while the other power-sharing issues (the expansion and sharing of government positions) are more short-term measures aimed at getting

the warring parties to work together. This raises the stakes considerably, as this topic evoked the widest and most diverse disagreements on any discussed subject among interviewed respondents.

This is also a reflection of the diversity of opinions and unresolved nature of the states issue in the political leadership of the country, with the perceptions of interviewed refugees largely adhering to the wider positions associated with the regions from which they hail. In this sense, the diverse refugee perceptions on this issue are analogous to the fact that a decision on the number of states remains an unresolved outcome of the HLRF.

Other peace processes

Aside from the IGAD-led discussions, respondents were aware of other processes aimed at bringing peace to South Sudan. This centred primarily on the government-run National Dialogue, which has made attempts to reach refugees in the camps. To a much lesser extent, a minority of respondents also brought up the SPLM reunification process.[57]

The National Dialogue was another area where respondents were largely split along ethnic lines. Non-Dinka interviewees generally criticised the National Dialogue process. Despite misgivings, those from the Equatoria region still participated when National Dialogue representatives came to visit northern Uganda, but Gambella respondents described an incident in which they chased away National Dialogue representatives, whom they considered government agents and thus not welcome.

Gambella respondents were unanimous in their condemnation of the National Dialogue, denouncing the process as one-sided and poorly timed. In this sense, their actions and views closely coincided with those of Machar and the SPLM-IO leadership.[58] Some considered the concept a positive idea in theory, but decried the manner in which it was being undertaken, which was sometimes seen as a delaying or distraction tactic.

> Riek did not participate, so we did not. They said all the tribes came to talk, but they only discussed with tribes supporting them. When war broke out

> it was just between Kiir and Riek, not other groups. So for a good dialogue, Riek needs to be involved. (Female, Tierkidi)

> This is not the time for national dialogue. It needs to be done after peace has been signed, then we can make reconciliation between the two sides. (Male, Kule)

> National Dialogue must be between the conflict parties, it cannot be between your friends. (Male, Gambella)

> The process is not genuine because it is not inclusive. Kiir is just doing this as a means to exclude other parties. (Male, Pagrinya)

Yet for those refugees in Adjumani district who expressed support for the National Dialogue, a key element was its consultative element. National Dialogue representatives visited Adjumani in November 2017, and while the day-long meeting did not satisfy everyone's expectations, it still fostered a sense of participation.

In contrast, the elite-level IGAD negotiations were viewed as a removed and closed process, one in which the refugees had little hope of participating. Nonetheless, the National Dialogue itself was still seen through the wider lens of support for Kiir's administration, which renders it a highly divisive activity.

> We like the process and platform, as refugees were able to participate. We don't have access to other processes. We prefer this style, but it should've taken place immediately after independence. (Male, Nymanzi)

While still a highly contentious issue, the National Dialogue may hold lessons on the merits of a consultative process, which fostered positive perceptions among some interviewed refugees in northern Uganda. Such sentiments further reflect the strong desire of refugee respondents to be included in discussions on peace and conflict that affect their home country.

Some also complained that, despite their participating in the National Dialogue, the conflict had dragged

on, engendering perceptions that their views had not been taken into account. Another lesson is to allow for some sort of feedback or dissemination of results in order to manage expectations, and ensure participants understand the utility of their participation.

Returning home

All interviewed refugees expressed a desire to return to South Sudan when feasible. Respondents cited the increased opportunities and rights in their home country as a major impetus, in contrast to the restrictions encountered when living as a refugee.[59] Nonetheless, many could only foresee a return once certain conditions related to peace were met, and estimates of when that might occur varied significantly. Implementation of the signed peace deal, such as measures concerning security and the cantonment of military forces, was frequently mentioned as a key condition.[60]

Of those interviewed in Gambella, many said they would not return as long as Kiir remained president. When pressed on the issue, however, the majority stated they would accept this if Machar signed a peace deal and returned to Juba. Despite concerns of a repeat of the events of 2016, Machar's prospective return was viewed as a strong enough indication that the peace process was on the right track, especially if coupled with the promise of future elections. But unease over Kiir's retaining the presidency remained a strong undercurrent.

We will never be reunited with that government. If Kiir is president, we will never go back. We will stay here in a neighbouring country for three to four years and [wait for] elections. (Male, Nguenyyiel)

Even though there would be peace [if a deal were signed], if Kiir is president we will not accept it. We will not go back. It will be like the peace in 2016, when fighting occurred again. (Male, Nguenyyiel)

If we hear Machar goes back to Juba, we will go immediately. Even on foot! (Female, Kule)

If Machar signs and says no problem, we can go back and accept power sharing. (Male, Nguenyyiel)

Refugees in all locations gave different estimates of how long they might wait before returning, which depended on the level of confidence with which they viewed the peace process. Some said they would go back the moment a deal was signed, others insisted more cautiously that they might wait years to gauge its implementation.[61] A number were also aware of the risks of returning, but were prepared to accept these in order to go back home.

I cannot wait for UNHCR [to repatriate refugees], how long will that take? When there is peace, I will go back and see what to do. If we stay here, who will develop our country? (Female, Nyumanzi)

Because of my suffering, I will go back. But internally, I still have fear that these people will not stay in peace. We have the interest to go back, but still fear at the same time. (Female, Adjumani)

In this sense, some were preparing to remain in their host locations for the long term, regardless of what happened with the peace process. A few cited fresh elections as a key turning point at which they could envision returning.

After peace is signed, we cannot go back immediately. They can sign, but what happened in 2016 could happen again. We will stay some two to three years, and wait and see. (Female, Gulu)

We are traumatised by war; we don't want children to be suffering again. It could take up to four or five years. (Male, Tierkidi)

I won't go back to South Sudan until such a time that I confirm for myself that these guys are now peacefully settled and there is no more war. That shall be in five or 10 years, when elections have been done. (Male, Pagrinya)

While responses varied considerably, many respondents were understandably weary given the recent history of collapsed and broken agreements. In this sense, South Sudan's neighbours should be prepared for a cautious rate of returnees, even after the signing of the R-ARCSS.

Long-term impact

Respondents were also asked about the long-term impact of the conflict, especially with regard to relations

between ethnic communities. While perceptions varied, the majority thought that the problem primarily lied with the government rather than between different ethnic groups, thus blaming the leadership for the conflict instead of an inherent inability to cooperate with other ethnic groups.

Many admitted it would be difficult, but if there were changes in leadership, they would be able to accept living among other groups. Yet some interviewed refugees also noted the extensive targeting of civilians along ethnic lines in this war compared to past conflicts, which introduced a noxious new element that further complicated eventual reconciliation.

> We are not saying we don't want Dinka with us. In Upper Nile, we have some Dinka. But if Kiir is leader, South Sudan will not be a country. (Male, Nguenyyiel)
>
> Relations might still be bad unless there is a change in president. Without that, perceptions will not change. (Male, Gambella)
>
> Before the war we saw the government as our government, but now only a few still do. But different communities still see each other as brother and sister – they won't attack you unless they see a government agent. (Male, Gambella)
>
> As citizens of South Sudan, we have no problems among ourselves. The major problem is the leaders. (Male, Nyumanzi)

Nonetheless, a strong undercurrent expressed more pronounced concerns regarding the long-term impact on community relations. This is an indication of the hard work that will have to occur to ensure communities do not perpetuate a cycle of ethnic-based revenge. A few pointed to the need for reconciliation and justice measures in order to address these issues – aspects that were included in the original ARCSS agreement but which have had little implementation.[62]

> We are staying in the camp here and we are isolated from each other, we cannot interact among ourselves. It becomes difficult for you to know each other. During the time of war, we used to interact and we used to be free. (Male, Nyumanzi)

> I don't think we [those from Equatoria] shall stay with Dinkas and Nuer anymore, we just want peace to come to South Sudan, so that everyone can go to their state. (Female, Pagrinya)
>
> Equatorians and Dinka can stay together and Equatorians and Nuer can stay together, but the Dinka and Nuer cannot stay together as they hate each other. (Female, Gulu)
>
> It is visible from people's movement in the market that tribal relations are not good. Dinka can go to the market, but must leave by sunset and so on. Nothing is being done in the camps to reconcile this. (Male, Adjumani)

Conclusion

South Sudanese refugee respondents in Gambella and Adjumani areas differed on a number of key issues, but all groups expressed a high degree of frustration with their current situation. While such sentiments are natural for people who were forced to flee their homes, there was also frustration with the South Sudanese political class, with the IGAD-led peace process and the role of its member states, and with the lack of information on pertinent developments that impact their ability to return home.

While small glimmers of hope exist, most respondents just before the signing of the R-ARCSS remained pessimistic over the future of their nation and prospects of a speedy return to a peaceful South Sudan. Addressing refugee concerns is a complex process intimately tied to political developments. Nevertheless, a greater degree of consultation with refugee populations and inclusion of their concerns could help address some of their frustration, and provide hope for a more positive future.

Recommendations

To IGAD and the signatories of and stakeholders in the R-ARCSS:

- There is a need for greater refugee consultation on the revitalised ARCSS and the IGAD-led peace process.
  - The selection of refugee representatives to peace processes like the HLRF should be made more

transparent. More time spent consulting local communities to determine acceptable candidates ahead of forums will help increase transparency. Additionally, disseminating the outcomes via both radio and public forums in the settlements will generate further buy-in.

- In line with section 1.4.3.1 of the R-ARCSS, accurate information regarding the agreement should be disseminated to the refugee community, both to prevent rumours from flourishing and to manage expectations of the process. IGAD could organise a series of non-politicised public forums in each major refugee camp or settlement area in which refugees can ask questions.

- The outcomes of such consultations and sessions must be disseminated in a similar manner, in order for refugee communities to understand that their input was valued and used, thereby sustaining participation.

- Additionally, select representatives from each refugee community could be designated to receive additional in-depth training on the R-ARCSS's provisions, and thus serve as official information gatekeepers on this process.

- The signatories of and stakeholders in the R-ARCSS should visit refugee communities, in order for an understanding of the plight and concerns of refugees to be shared.

- As certain refugee concerns will not be fully addressed through the R-ARCSS, dialogue on issues such as power sharing and the number of states should continue. The organisation of consultative forums on these issues within the communities themselves could allow refugee voices to be heard. Public debates on the various positions in communities could also ensure a variety of opinions are discussed, rather than perpetuating narrow-minded thinking on unresolved proposals.

- The reconciliation and transitional justice elements of the R-ARCSS should begin without delay. Refugee communities should be incorporated into the future construction of these mechanisms.

To donors and host countries:

- Host countries such as Ethiopia and Uganda could consider relaxing prohibitions on political activities, to allow refugee forums to discuss and debate the R-ARCSS.

- Dedicated information streams should be maintained in each refugee community, to ensure accurate and up-to-date information is transmitted. This could be a collaborative effort by the host countries, the UNHCR, external donors and local news agencies.

- Peacebuilding activities in refugee communities should be increased, especially those focused on communal relations. Refugee settlements should be transformed into areas where relations between various communities thrive rather than where divisions are perpetuated. Donors and NGOs operating programmes in the camps and settlements should consider taking on increased inter-communal peacebuilding aspects, such as activities that bring together residents currently separated along ethnic divisions, in accordance with host country regulations.

- Provisions for refugee returns should be made, while carefully avoiding the prospect of forced returns. Some communities may be enthusiastic to return after the signing of the R-ARCSS, but others will take much longer to evaluate its implementation. The only viable means to assure mass refugee returns in the long run is to ensure the full implementation of the R-ARCSS and increase security in South Sudan.

Notes

1   South Sudan's population at the time of independence in 2011 was estimated at around 10 million; additionally, about 350 000 South Sudanese were living in Sudan at the time of independence and are often counted in the total number of refugees. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), South Sudan Regional Refugee Response Plan, January–December 2018, reliefweb, 31 December 2017, https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-regional-refugee-response-plan-january-december-2018

2   The second and third phases of the High-Level Revitalization Process (HLRF) led by IGAD in Addis Ababa did allow for refugee participation. Nonetheless, this was not sustained during other parts of the process. See UNHCR/Kisut Gebre Egziabher, Refugees say 'peace now' as South Sudan peace talks resume in Ethiopia, 22 May 2018, http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2018/5/5b0414284/refugees-say-peace-now-as-south-sudan-peace-talks-resume-in-ethiopia.html; e-mail correspondence with a humanitarian worker, 20 September 2018.

3   For a discussion of the impact of inclusivity on the durability of peace agreements, see C Rausch and T Luu, Inclusive peace processes are key to ending violent conflict, United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Peace Brief 222, May 2017, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/pb222-inclusive-peace-processes-are-key-to-ending-violent-conflict.pdf

4   For more on the linkages between the South Sudanese diaspora and hate speech, see the work of organisations such as Peace Tech Lab and Defy Hate Now; L Clifford, Words matter: hate speech and South Sudan, IRIN, 5 September 2017, http://www.irinnews.org/analysis/2017/09/05/words-matter-hate-speech-and-south-sudan

5   In Gambella, eight focus group discussions (three female, five male) involved 39 total respondents, in addition to 12 individual interviews. In Uganda, six focus group discussions (three female, three male) involved 41 respondents, in addition to 14 individual interviews.

6   Many refugee camps in both locations are segregated according to ethnicity.

7   This report will largely refer to the origins of the refugees based on the 10 states in place at the time of South Sudan's independence in 2011, given that this lexicon was the most frequently used by the refugee themselves, many of whom had fled prior to the introduction of additional states.

8   Four specific youth focus group discussions were held, two in Uganda (one male and one female) and two in Ethiopia (also one male and one female).

9   Similarly, it is important to note that refugees are not always passive participants in the events in their home country but also demonstrate a degree of active engagement; interview with researcher, Addis Ababa, 6 September 2018.

10   Map based on data from Operational Portal, Refugee Situations, South Sudan, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/southsudan

11   There are also pockets of Anuak and Murle refugees in Gambella.

12   The Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) is mandated to manage the situation of refugees in Ethiopia. The high number of refugees in Gambella has led to the development of the Beninshangul-Gumuz camp, while in SNNPR a non-camp approach is used. Nonetheless, given the distance from the main centre of activity in Gambella, it is difficult to convince refugees to populate areas further away; UNHCR, Ethiopia country refugee response plan: the integrated response plan for refugees from Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia, January–December 2018, https://data2.unhcr.org/ar/documents/download/62986; interview with researcher, Addis Ababa, 06 September 2018.

13   UNHRC, Pugnido 1 Refugee Camp: profile, December 2017, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/62672

14   Danish Refugee Council, Gambella 2016 crisis in context, Danish Refugee Council, 2016

15   Ibid. For more on the impact of South Sudanese refugees in Gambella and local developments, see M Tadesse, Gambella: the impact of local conflict on regional security, Institute for Security Studies, May 2007, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/123907/2007_05_01_Gambella.pdf; D Feyissa, The spillover effect of South Sudan on Gambella, Horn of Africa Bulletin, 25 October 2014.

16   The remaining either did not indicate their date of arrival or came from 2015 to early 2016, between the two major episodes of violence.

17   UN Central Emergency Response Fund (UN CERF), Underfunded emergencies (UFE): 2018 first allocation round: Uganda, 16 February 2018, https://cerf.un.org/news/infographic/underfunded-emergencies-ufe-2018-first-allocation-round-uganda. Refugee affairs in Uganda are handled by the Office of the Prime Minister.

18   This was 75% of the estimated refugee population from March 2018, S Okiror, 'They exaggerated figures': Ugandan aid officials suspended over alleged fraud, The Guardian, 8 February 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/feb/08/they-exaggerated-figures-uganda-aid-officials-suspended-over-alleged-fraud; Eye Radio, Biometric verification of refugees in Uganda may take longer – UNHCR, 4 September 2018, http://www.eyeradio.org/biometric-verification-refugees-uganda-longer-unhcr/; Joint Press Release, Office of the Prime Minister, 30 October 2018, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/66545.pdf

19   Interview with camp official, Adjumani, 26 July 2018; UNHCR, Uganda refugee response: South Sudan situation, 8 June 2018, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/64492

20   Sudan Tribune, $4m earmarked to improve Uganda, South Sudan trade, 3 June 2018, http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article65556

21   For example, respondents in Adjumani town refused to meet at one of the hotels, citing a prior incident in which two South Sudanese had been abducted from the premises. For an earlier example of these dynamics, see Radio Tamazuj, Opposition leader Peter Sule assassinated, 24 August 2015, https://radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/breaking-opposition-leader-peter-sule-assassinated

22   Besides Kampala, all except Gulu are located in Adjumani district.

23   The focus here is on publicly available data; there may be additional sources of information in the 'grey literature' or studies used by NGOs for programmatic purposes that have not been incorporated.

24   K Smith, Building a constituency for peace in South Sudan, Search for Common Ground, November 2017, https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Building-a-Constituency-for-Peace-in-South-Sudan.pdf

25   R Willems and DK Deng, Perceptions of transitional justice in South Sudan: intersections of truth, justice and reconciliation in South Sudan, South Sudan Law Society (SSLS), UPEACE Centre and PAX, September 2016, http://www.upeace.nl/cp/uploads/hipe_content/Perceptions-of-Transitional-Justice-in-South-Sudan---Final-Report.pdf

26   DK Deng et al., Search for a new beginning: perceptions of truth, justice, reconciliation and healing in South Sudan, UNDP and SSLS, June 2015, http://www.ss.undp.org/content/dam/southsudan/library/Rule%20of%20Law/Perception%20Survey%20Report%20Transitional%20Justice%20Reconciliation%20and%20Healing%20-.pdf

27   A total of 41% believed no political party represented them, while another 41% responded in the affirmative. International Republican Institute (IRI), ORB International and US Agency for International Development (USAID), Survey of South Sudan public opinion, April 24 to May 22, 2013, https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2013%20July%2019%20Survey%20of%20South%20Sudan%20Public%20Opinion,%20April%2024-May%2022,%202013.pdf

28   A few respondents also mentioned that information could be obtained from those who had travelled to Addis Ababa, either for the peace talks or otherwise. Yet this was not a widespread comment.

29   T Zakarayan and L Antara, Political participation of refugees: the case of South Sudanese and Congolese refugees in Uganda, Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), 18 April 2018, 60, https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/political-participation-refugees-case-south-sudanese-and-congolese-refugees; R Mandal, Political rights of refugees, UNHCR, November 2003, iv, http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/3fe820794.pdf

30   To hold any such meetings, camp leaders explained they would have to get ARRA approval first; interviews in Gambella, 18-21 July 2018.

31   Interview with refugee in Tierkidi, 19 July 2018.

32   Other reasons included tending cattle (especially for the purposes of fulfilling marriage obligations) or other assets left behind; interview with researcher, Addis Ababa, 06 September 2018. Some described the process of returning to SPLM-IO held territories in detail, noting that there were back-and-forth movements across the Ethiopia–South Sudan border on a daily basis, although this may not involve the average refugee; interview with a civil society member, Addis Ababa, 22 October 2018.

33   Interviews with refugees in Tierkidi, 19 July 2018.

34 African Union (AU), Final Report of the African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan, 15 October 2014, http://www.peaceau.org/en/article/final-report-of-the-african-union-commission-of-inquiry-on-south-sudan

35 This should be contrasted with perceptions in Gambella, which expressed strong support for Riek Machar.

36 For more on South Sudan's failure to transition from a liberation struggle to an inclusive system of governance, see the work of Alex de Waal and his concept of a political marketplace. A brief explanation of the failure of Kiir's 'big tent' strategy is available at A de Waal, What went wrong, *The Cipher Brief*, 3 August 2016, https://www.thecipherbrief.com/what-went-wrong

37 David Yau Yau, an ethnic Murle, led a rebellion from 2012–14 through the Cobra faction of the South Sudan Democratic Movement (SSDM), demanding a leadership position in the Pibor area.

38 Centre for Peace and Justice, Civil society options paper on the IGAD High-Level Revitalization Forum, September 2017, http://www.centrepeacejustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CSO-OPTIONS-PAPER-ON-REVITALIZATIOIN.pdf

39 Additionally, the signing of the R-ARCSS split a number of parties within the SSOA. For a deeper discussion of this phenomenon, see the accompanying ISS paper: Compound Fractures: Politics, armed groups and mediation in South Sudan

40 For more on the opposition movements and their unity, or lack thereof, see D Deng, Compound Fractures: Politics, armed groups and mediation in South Sudan, Institute for Security Studies (ISS), December 2018

41 Respondents frequently referred to the SPLM-IO as just IO during discussions.

42 Many refugees in Gambella could not name another Nuer leader who they felt could represent their interests better than Machar, an indication of the consolidation around him. It should be noted, however, that the political unity of the Nuer community within South Sudan itself should not be overstated, despite the cohesion among interviewed refugees in Gambella. For example, some Nuer, like Vice-President Taban Deng, are associated with the government, while other divisions also exist. See D Deng, Compound Fractures: Politics, armed groups and mediation in South Sudan, Institute for Security Studies (ISS), December 2018, for a discussion of how the breakdown between the SPLM, SPLM-IO and other opposition parties extends beyond ethnic lines.

43 Discussions related to the HLRF have taken place in Addis Ababa, Kampala and Khartoum. Provisions had been made to include Nairobi as well, but this did not transpire.

44 IGAD agreed to refugee involvement, but the UNHCR appeared to be the driving force behind it, which explains the lack of sustained participation during other phases of the HLRF. Nonetheless, Phase II and III included refugee representatives, while 15 were also brought to Khartoum after the initialising of the draft revised text for a meeting with some of the signatories; e-mail correspondence with humanitarian worker, 20 September 2018.

45 UNHCR representatives selected the refugee representatives, but little clarity was provided on the selection process in each country. Logistical considerations surrounding the transport of refugees to the talks also limited participation, as those from the DRC and Central African Republic (CAR) did not attend. In addition, those from Ethiopia did not come from Gambella, but were already based in Addis Ababa; e-mail correspondence with humanitarian worker, 20 September 2018. In Adjumani, a common refrain was that the chosen representatives were not actually South Sudanese citizens. While this was a false perception, it clearly demonstrates the challenges associated with the process.

46 For example, one of the five vice-presidents (from the FD faction) and one of the deputy speakers of the Transitional National Legislative Assembly (from the government) are to be women, while one of the stakeholder signatories to the R-ARCSS was the Women's Bloc. In addition, provisions governing the composition of the executive in the R-ARCSS operate under the principle of 35% women's participation.

47 For more on the specific regional interests of South Sudan's neighbours, see D Deng, Compound Fractures: Politics, armed groups and mediation in South Sudan, Institute for Security Studies (ISS), December 2018

48 Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda have been the IGAD countries most engaged in South Sudan since its 2013 crisis. Among them, Ethiopia

49 In February 2018 a court in South Sudan sentenced Gadet to death on treason and incitement charges. He was released on 31 October 2018 as a goodwill gesture during celebrations of the signing of the R-ARCSS in Juba, which Machar himself also attended. *Sudan Tribune*, South Sudanese leader orders release of SPLM-IO's James Dak, 1 November 2018, http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article66527

50 For example, even after the separation from Sudan, fighting between the two nations flared up in 2012 in the oil-rich area of Heglig.

51 By the time the interviews took place in northern Uganda most respondents were aware the discussion had shifted to five vice-presidents, but some confusion over the total number remained, an indication of the difficulty interviewed refugees faced in keeping up with the details of the shifting proposals.

52 Two of the main factions representing the Equatoria region in the SSOA, the PDM and NAS, have expressed reservations regarding the R-ARCSS, primarily owing to the lack of provisions for federalism.

53 Initially, Kiir expanded the number of states to 28 in a presidential decree in January 2015, with a subsequent expansion to 32 in January 2017. *Sudan Tribune*, South Sudan president expands states to 28 as opposition accuses him of deal violation, 3 October 2015, http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article56581

54 The SPLM-IO had proposed expanding the number of states to 21 based on colonial administrative boundaries during peace discussions in 2014 ahead of Kiir's decree. *Radio Tamazui*, SPLM-IO proposes breaking apart existing South Sudan states, 17 July 2014, https://radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/splm-io-proposes-breaking-apart-existing-south-sudan-states

55 At the time of writing, the final number of states had yet to be resolved. Provisions in the Governance Agreement regarding this aspect were one of the more contentious issues, with the SSOA refusing to sign until a last-minute amendment. As per the R-ARCSS, an Independent Boundaries Commission (IBC) will be established by IGAD, which will consider the number and boundaries of states and present a report within 90 days. If this fails to happen, a referendum will be held before the end of the eight-month pre-Transitional Period.

56 The three regions would be Greater Upper Nile, Greater Bahr el Ghazal and Greater Equatoria, which would largely break down into areas of ethnic cohesion for Dinka, Nuer and Equatorian communities.

57 For more in the National Dialogue and SPLM reunification, see D Deng, Compound Fractures: Politics, armed groups and mediation in South Sudan, Institute for Security Studies (ISS), December 2018

58 *Radio Tamazuj*, Machar snubs national dialogue team again in South Africa, 13 October 2017, https://radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/machar-snubs-national-dialogue-team-again-in-south-africa

59 It is important to note, however, that both Ethiopia and Uganda have taken progressive stances with regard to the refugee presence on their soil; TT Abebe, As doors close to refugees, Ethiopia's stay open, *ISS Today*, 20 June 2017, https://issafrica.org/iss-today/as-doors-close-to-refugees-ethiopias-stay-open; *BBC News*, How South Sudan refugees are boosting Uganda's economy, 7 November 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-41887429

60 For example, one civil society member asserted that refugee returns from Gambella would only occur once government forces had been specifically removed from outposts at Pagak and Naisr; interview with civil society member, Addis Ababa, 22 October 2018.

61 Nonetheless, in the aftermath of the signing of the R-ARCSS, large-scale refugee returns were not noticed.

62 Chapter V of both the ARCSS and R-ARCSS covers transitional justice, accountability, reconciliation and healing. It envisions the establishment of a Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing (CTRH), a Hybrid Court for South Sudan (HCSS) and a Compensation and Reparation Authority (CRA). Little progress has been made since 2015, however, in implementing these provisions. Human Rights Watch, Stop delays on hybrid court, 14 December 2017, https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/14/south-sudan-stop-delays-hybrid-court

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