

# Between Challenges and Opportunities

*The Role of South Sudanese Civil Society Organisations in the Implementation of SDG16*



**CIVIL SOCIETY  
PLATFORM**  
FOR PEACEBUILDING  
AND STATEBUILDING



This report was created as part of a partnership between the International Research by Students Programme (IRSP) at the University of Groningen and the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS). The CSPPS is a global network of civil society organisations supporting prevention and peacebuilding efforts in fragile and conflict affected settings. Through this network, the IRSP team was able to directly engage with civil society actors to gather and compile findings that are relevant to the local contexts.

## Executive Summary

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are key players in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16 in South Sudan, with various components of the goal either implicitly or explicitly forming part of their agendas. As the world's youngest state and a post-conflict society, South Sudan presents a challenging socio-political and logistical context for the work of CSOs. Although conditions for their operations have improved over time, veritable obstacles remain in place. As South Sudan's Voluntary National Review approaches, it is critical to establish the primary difficulties faced by these organisations in mobilising civil society towards sustainable development, while identifying which strategies are in place to counter these challenges. This report addresses these issues, utilising the insights of local professionals to present a grounded and contextually specific series of recommendations on how CSOs can maximise their effectiveness in local and national communities. The findings of this report indicate that the principal obstacles faced by CSOs in their contributions towards SDG 16 consist of the following:

1. **Ethnic tensions within South Sudan:** Tribal violence and associated societal fragmentation have created an environment of inherent instability and volatility for organisations working in the country. These tensions have also propagated distrust, division, issues of accessibility for certain geographical regions as well as strategic staffing issues. Additionally, they contribute to a prevailing sense of disunity and lack of national identity, which hampers collective mobilisation.
2. **Presence of armed rebel groups:** Corruption and financial mismanagement has led to instability in the state's army and the emergence of "Rent-seeking rebellions". These often pose a security risk to the organisations' work and access limitations, due to violence against staff.
3. **State interference and bureaucratic barriers:** There is a lack of tolerance from the state towards CSO activity that has a heavier emphasis on advocacy. Interference with the practical implementation of programmes corrodes CSO-donor relations. Legal and monetary bureaucratic barriers drain organisations' resources.
4. **Lack of human capital:** A shortage of skilled labour combined with suboptimal education produces difficulties for CSOs in adhering to the 80% national labour stipulation of the 2016 NGO Act and for the general effectiveness and potential of their operations.

5. **Lack of funding:** As CSOs' work is heavily dependent on adequate funding, a persistent lack of donors, as well as detracted attention due to several global crises, has left South Sudanese CSOs without the financial means to carry out their aims. These funding issues can and have led to intermittent programme cancellations, which can cause provocations in the conflict-prone environment.

In order to facilitate and expand the work of CSOs, this report presents a series of recommendations tailored to various stakeholders engaged in the peacebuilding process in South Sudan. A condensed version is as follows:

1. **Civil Society Organisations:** The report's findings identified several gaps in the capacities of CSOs, which could be mitigated through the organisation of capacity-strengthening initiatives in collaboration with international actors. Given the evidence that enhanced coordination amongst CSOs increases their overall efficacy, this report also proposes further expansion and development of the National Forum of South Sudan (NSFS). To strengthen communication with the broader South Sudanese population, CSOs are encouraged to leverage radio broadcasting towers, a widely used and effective means of conveying ideas, especially to remote regions.
2. **International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs):** INGOs could play a supporting role in the enhancement of local CSO networks and contribute to capacity strengthening programmes. Furthermore, field personnel from INGOs could establish Internet access points, thereby facilitating communication and enabling CSOs to operate more effectively in remote parts of the country.
3. **United Nations Agencies:** UN agencies could further support the development of the NSFS and capacity strengthening within CSOs. Furthermore, the UNSC and UNGA could use their reach to foster international engagement and encourage the Government to advance the implementation of SDG 16. Finally, the UNMISS could intensify security for CSOs operating in conflict affected areas and contribute to improving logistics and communications.
4. **Government of South Sudan:** The Government could facilitate CSO operations by easing the existing administrative and financial load of registration as well as rationalising security clearance issuance.

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## Acronyms

- **CPA** Comprehensive Peace Agreement
- **CSO** Civil Society Organisation
- **CSPPS** Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding
- **EU** European Union
- **HLPF** High Level Political Forum
- **HRC** Human Rights Council
- **IDP** Internally Displaced Person
- **IDPS** International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding
- **INGO** International Non-Governmental Organisation
- **NFSF** NGO Forum of South Sudan
- **NGO** Non-Governmental Organisation
- **OLS** Operation Lifeline Sudan
- **OCHA** Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
- **R-ARCSS** Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan
- **SDG** Sustainable Development Goal
- **UN** United Nations
- **UNDP** United Nations Development Programme
- **UNGA** United Nations General Assembly
- **UNMISS** United Nations Mission in South Sudan
- **UNSC** United Nations Security Council
- **VNR** Voluntary National Review

## 1. Introduction

In September of 2023, South Sudan's Minister of Finance and Planning requested the implementation of the country's first Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Voluntary National Review (VNR) for the following year of 2024, stating that the country "attaches great importance to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and looks forward to sharing experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned"<sup>1</sup>. Considering this review and the scheduled elections for December 2024, 2024 will be a pivotal year for South Sudan, offering ample opportunities and incentives to explore their implementation of Sustainable Development Goals. However, as South Sudan is a country that faces post-conflictual grievances and weak institutions, the elections planned for 2024 could result in 'disastrous consequences' as peacekeeping Chief Jean-Pierre Lacroix warned earlier this year<sup>2</sup>.

The Sustainable Development Goal 16 focuses on the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. As civil society organisations (CSOs) are key players in these processes, the following report has a particular focus on the achievement of SDG 16 and the dynamics of civil society participation in the journey towards fulfilling this goal, as well as their part in the VNR process. To this end, the report aims to review the obstacles civil society organisations in South Sudan face in contributing to the SDG 16, and the strategies that have been developed to overcome them. The analysed data consists of semi-structured interviews with civil society actors in South Sudan as well as NGO reports.

The report begins with an outline of the historical and contemporary context in South Sudan and its civil society, in order to give a background on the importance of the implementation of SDG 16 and the VNR in South Sudan. The analytical part consists of an examination of Interviews conducted with civil society actors in the country as well as local CSO reports. The main issues discussed are The role of SDG 16 and the VNR process in South Sudanese civil society, the dynamics of civil society work in the country and the common challenges that CSOs face. Lastly, the report will use this analysis to formulate informed policy recommendations for multiple actors including the South Sudanese CSOs themselves, International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs), the United Nations, and the South Sudanese government.

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<sup>1</sup> Barnaba Chol, 'South Sudan's First SDG Voluntary National Review in 2024'.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, '9564th Meeting (AM), SC/15611'.



## 2. Context

### 2.1 Recent History of South Sudan

As the world's youngest country, South Sudan faces an array of institutional, political, ethnic, and economic challenges. After fighting an over 20 year long war with its northern neighbour and former governing authority, South Sudan secured peace with Sudan through the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, subsequently gaining its independence through a referendum in 2011<sup>3</sup>. However, both internal and external security have been jeopardised by the civil war that erupted in 2013, led by President Kiir of the Dinka tribe, the largest ethnic group in the country (~35.8% of the population), and his opposition Vice-President Machar of the Nuer tribe (~15.6% of the population)<sup>4</sup>. While this conflict was formally resolved by the signing of a ceasefire and the creation of a unity government between the two main belligerents in 2020, subnational violence continued at a more local level. The high level of ethnic fragmentation in the country is a factor that continues to be a key point of tension. While reported fatalities and sexual violence have generally decreased in South Sudan, the share of events and fatalities linked to ethnic militias has augmented<sup>5</sup>. In this regard, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) proved to be crucial in dispelling domestic violence, as they were able to reach geographically remote regions where rule-of-law, security and humanitarian efforts were absent or too dangerous to be conducted safely<sup>6</sup>. On the political level, South Sudan suffers from high levels of corruption, ranking 177 out of 180 on the Corruption Perception Index in 2023<sup>7</sup>. It also contends with weak institutions that undermine efforts towards a long-lasting peace process<sup>8</sup> and an unstable majoritarian democratic system which exacerbates the division between the Dinka and Nuer tribes.

### 2.2 Civil Society in South Sudan

Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, religious organisations in South Sudan can be seen as the first predecessors of organised civil society, providing humanitarian aid in the conflict-ridden parts of the country<sup>9</sup>. Further developments occurred in the 1990s when Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) was founded as a response to the wars and famines of the previous years, increasing the influence of NGO operations in Southern Sudan. In the following years, the challenges of insecurity and inaccessibility of

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<sup>3</sup> McNamee and Muyangwa, *The State of Peacebuilding in Africa*, 366–69.

<sup>4</sup> Berdal and Shearer, 'Hard Lessons from South Sudan', 69–70; Bortolouzzi Garcia, 'South Sudan Country Profile – Social | PKSOF'.

<sup>5</sup> Watson, 'Surface Tension'.

<sup>6</sup> Berdal and Shearer, 'Hard Lessons from South Sudan', 76–79.

<sup>7</sup> Transparency International, 'Corruption Perception Index – South Sudan'.

<sup>8</sup> Kuol, 'South Sudan', 72–76.

<sup>9</sup> Atim, 'Localization: View From South Sudan', 3.

aid, combined with a shift from relief to development policies significantly increased the influence and importance of CSOs and changed their means of operation<sup>10</sup>.

As Southern Sudan underwent the process of gaining independence, beginning with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and later culminating in full-fledged independence, the number of international NGOs rose from 47 in 2005 to 155 in 2010<sup>11</sup>. Shortly after gaining independence, South Sudan was one of the first pilot countries for implementing the “New Deal”, a reform programme which aimed to transition conflict-affected countries out of fragility<sup>12</sup>. Yet, after ongoing political tensions and the outbreak of civil war in 2013, the focus of many international donors shifted from civil society to purely humanitarian aid, further weakening local structures and organisations<sup>13</sup>. In response to these challenges, South Sudan saw a significant increase in the number of local organisations engaging in humanitarian work, growing from 40 in 2016 to 183 in 2023<sup>14</sup>.

While the number of local NGOs steadily rose during the domestic conflict, increasing from 74 in 2011 to 263 in 2019, the numbers have seen a slight decline to 243 since the country officially entered a state of peace<sup>15</sup>. Similarly, the number of international NGOs decreased from 155 in 2010 to 114 in 2024<sup>16</sup>.

The official recognition of local CSOs improved significantly with the signing of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in 2018. This agreement assigned civil society a key role in supporting systemic and institutional reforms, and specifically mentions its participation within these processes<sup>17</sup>. Several reports find that training provided by Civil Society Organisations lead to an expansion in knowledge and awareness regarding democratic principles and political processes<sup>18</sup>. Furthermore, CSOs work has led to increased political inclusion of women in local government, as well as higher awareness about gender-related issues<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Atim, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Felix da Costa, ‘Working in Challenging Environments: Risk Management and Aid Culture in South Sudan’, 3.

<sup>12</sup> The New Deal was initiated by the group of the g7+ countries at the 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in November 2011. See: South Sudan NGO Forum 2015: ‘The New Deal implementation in South Sudan. A South Sudanese civil society perspective paper’, ECDPM 2014: ‘Why did the New Deal Compact in South Sudan fail to get signed?’, Hafeez Wani, 04.12.2014.

<sup>13</sup> Atim, ‘Localization: View From South Sudan’, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, ‘South Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan 2024 | Humanitarian Action’.

<sup>15</sup> South Sudan NGO Forum, ‘UN Member State Virtual Briefing on the Humanitarian Situation in South Sudan’.

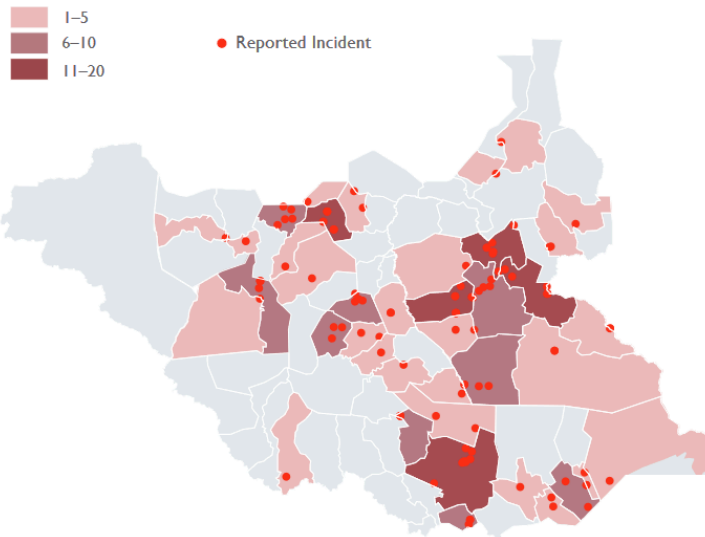
<sup>16</sup> South Sudan NGO Forum.

<sup>17</sup> Atim, ‘Localization: View From South Sudan’, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Sørbo, Schomerus, and Aalen, ‘Country Evaluation Brief’, 26–27.

<sup>19</sup> Sørbo, Schomerus, and Aalen, 26–27.

Reported Conflict Incidents, December 15th, 2023-March 15th 2024  
 Number of Reported Incidents by County



Source: ACLED, accessed March 15, 2024\*

\* Represents incidents categorized by ACLED as battles, explosions/remote violence, riots, or violence against civilians

*Fig. 1: Conflict related incidents from 15.12.2023 to 15.03.2024.*

*Source: South Sudan: USG Humanitarian Response to the Complex Emergency (03/26/24), USAID, 2024.*

Despite the positive developments in South Sudan, the humanitarian situation in the country remains unstable, posing challenges for civil society associated with the concept of ‘shrinking civic space’<sup>20</sup>. This concept refers to a discernible trend wherein the opportunities for civil society to express dissent against governmental institutions and freely organise and engage in civic activities are incrementally constricted or curtailed<sup>21</sup>. This may manifest itself in practices including, but not limited to, legal restrictions, regulatory obstacles, political coercion, and violence. The phenomenon is often associated with broader shifts in the political environment, such as the erosion of democratic norms. This in turn, hinders aid from reaching the 9 million people in need in the South Sudan<sup>22</sup>.

The relocation of donor funds, which began on the cusp of the civil war, set the stage for unreliable funding systems that tended to be short-term and affect CSOs’ abilities to attract and manage larger

<sup>20</sup> Ayvazyan, *The Shrinking Space of Civil Society*, 128:1; Unmüßig, ‘Civil Society under Pressure - Shrinking, Closing, No Space’, 2.

<sup>21</sup> Sørnbø, Schomerus, and Aalen, ‘Country Evaluation Brief’, 26–27.

<sup>22</sup> Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, ‘South Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan 2024 | Humanitarian Action’, 2.

donor funds<sup>23</sup>. This situation is aggravated by a general lack of funding<sup>24</sup>, fees and taxes on NGOs<sup>25</sup>, as well as restrictions on the import of medical resources in critical situations. Furthermore, there have been reports of unlawful detention, accusations, and harassment of CSO leaders and workers, which often lead to arrests, theft of aid supplies, or even killing of organisational staff<sup>26</sup>. Parts of these attacks and legal prosecutions are carried out by the state-funded National Security Service, which has been accused of human rights abuses and torture<sup>27</sup>.

Another dimension of challenges for CSOs are the ethnic disputes and tribal structures within the country. South Sudan's population is deeply fractured into different ethnic groups, leading to a long history of interethnic violence<sup>28</sup>, such as tribal clashes, road ambushes<sup>29</sup> and a loss of efficiency in civil society mobilisation and coordination<sup>30</sup>.

### **2.3 The Importance of SDG 16 and the VNR in South Sudan**

In pursuit of a global sustainable future, all representatives from the 193 UN member states unanimously adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York in September 2015<sup>31</sup>. The central element of this Agenda is the commitment to the fulfilment of 17 SDGs.

Given the violent conflict and numerous humanitarian crises in South Sudan, aiming to meet all 17 SDG targets by 2030 poses a big challenge. Therefore, a pragmatic approach that focuses on the SDGs with mandates that traverse multiple interdependent goals and targets could prove particularly beneficial, as it could catalyse positive knock-on effects. Viewing the SDGs as an interconnected web of objectives, it is important to recognise that an advancement or backsliding in one goal directly affects the other goals<sup>32</sup>. Thus, progress in one area of the SDGs can often have an influence on the outcomes of other goals. In this regard, SDG 16 has been identified as the most fundamental enabler in ensuring peace, preventing conflict, and being a prerequisite for progress in nearly all other SDG areas<sup>33</sup>. To achieve this

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<sup>23</sup> Atim, 'Localization: View From South Sudan', 5.

<sup>24</sup> South Sudan NGO Forum, 'UN Member State Virtual Briefing on the Humanitarian Situation in South Sudan'.

<sup>25</sup> Interaction, 'Humanitarian Aid: Captive to Bureaucracy', 5.

<sup>26</sup> Interaction, 'Humanitarian Aid: Captive to Bureaucracy'; South Sudan NGO Forum, 'UN Member State Virtual Briefing on the Humanitarian Situation in South Sudan'; Atim, 'Localization: View From South Sudan', 5.

<sup>27</sup> Nantulya, 'Will South Sudan Rein in Its Notorious National Security Service?'

<sup>28</sup> Atim, 'Localization: View From South Sudan', 2.

<sup>29</sup> Jdenaya, 'Annual Report For Financial Year 2020/2021'.

<sup>30</sup> Ginanjar, 'Civil Society and Peace', 41.

<sup>31</sup> 'UN Sustainable Development Summit'.

<sup>32</sup> Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, 'The Roadmap for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies'.

<sup>33</sup> High Level Political Forum, '2023 Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+', 3.

goal, the role of CSOs and NGOs is crucial in laying the groundwork for long-term development. Their work spans from providing life-saving assistance to advocating for inclusive policies and governance that addresses the needs and rights of all South Sudanese citizens. By promoting gender equality, supporting education, and facilitating access to basic services, these organisations embody the core purpose of the Sustainable Development Agenda. However, as of September 2023, South Sudan's path towards the achievement of the SDGs was greatly impeded by conflict, food insecurity, inflation, lack of basic services, and the climate crisis<sup>34</sup>. Due to these challenges, the country showed a worryingly low SDG score of 38.7, ranking 52nd out of 52 states in the African SDG Index 2023<sup>35</sup>.

## 2.4 Methodology

In the year 2024, the thematic review of SDG 16 in South Sudan is of particular relevance. In 2023, South Sudan requested to be added to the list of countries participating in the Voluntary National Review (VNR) for the first since the inception of the 2030 Agenda<sup>36</sup>. The VNR is a process established by the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and was designed for countries to evaluate and present their progress towards achieving the SDGs. The review animates states to engage in extensive reviews of their policies, strategies, and activities related to the SDGs. To ensure that such a report includes all perceptions on the progress towards realising the SDGs, this process of evaluation involves a variety of stakeholders, such as government bodies, civil society organisations, private sector participants, and more<sup>37</sup>.

As a state in the middle of post-conflict reconstruction and facing numerous developmental challenges, South Sudan could greatly benefit from the VNR. This process would enable South Sudan to articulate its improvements, unveil obstacles, and establish strategies for the achievement of the SDGs, while promoting transparency and accountability. Additionally, the VNR process is critical for civil society actors, providing them with an official platform to share insights, advocate for marginalised communities, and influence policymaking related to sustainable development.

This report aims to review the implementation of SDG 16 in South Sudan, particularly in relation to the VNR at the High-Level Political Forum in July 2024. To conduct this review, this report employed a bifocal methodological approach. Its analysis is based on an extensive literature review and on qualitative semi-structured interviews.

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<sup>34</sup> United Nations, 'South Sudan SDG Rescue Plan', 2–4.

<sup>35</sup> Sachs et al., 'Sustainable Development Report 2023: Implementing the SDG Stimulus'.

<sup>36</sup> Barnaba Chol, 'South Sudan's First SDG Voluntary National Review in 2024'.

<sup>37</sup> United Nations, 'Voluntary National Reviews ... Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform'.

In a first step, the existing literature on local strategies of CSOs in South Sudan was investigated. The literature review included academic articles, as well as NGO reports and policy briefs. The main purpose of this literature analysis was to illustrate the broader socio-political context in which South Sudanese CSOs work. Furthermore, it constituted a necessary step for developing the theoretical framework of this report, which served as the basis for our questionnaire. Finally, the literature evaluation also provided insights related to the main objective of this report, namely the analysis of obstacles in efforts towards securing sustainable peace, inclusive and transparent institutions in South Sudan, as well as progress and possible solutions in the achievement of SDG 16.

To investigate how local actors perceive the current obstacles and strategies in implementing SDG 16, semi-structured interviews with CSO representatives working in South Sudan were conducted throughout March 2024. To contact potential interview partners, CSPPS served as a fruitful starting point and provided contacts of local CSO partners. In a next step, other South Sudanese organisations were also approached using unsolicited interview requests via email. Ultimately, seven leading CSO representatives agreed to participate in online video interviews.

Prior to conducting the interviews, an interview guide was developed<sup>38</sup>, consisting of seven sections derived from the literature review. However, this did not serve as a closed questionnaire, but rather as a guide for structuring an open conversation. Thus, the interviews applied the concept of “qualified naïveté” and were open to new and unexpected answers<sup>39</sup>.

Subsequently, to analyse the interviews, this paper made use of qualitative content analysis and used coding techniques to systematise the large body of texts<sup>40</sup>. All transcripts were coded according to a codebook derived from the questionnaire, focusing on central elements in civil society engagement in South Sudan, such as “government interactions” or “engagement with local communities”. Furthermore, subcodes were used to specify the mentioned challenges and strategies in the interviews. For example, under the code “engagement with local communities” subcodes used were “civic education” and “advocacy”. Finally, all of the data was integrated into one coherent analysis to critically review existing challenges in and strategies for implementing SDG 16. Based on the findings, policy recommendations for enhancing local peace and statebuilding efforts in South Sudan are suggested.

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<sup>38</sup> Can be found in the Annex.

<sup>39</sup> Brinkmann and Kvale, *Doing Interviews*, 16.

<sup>40</sup> Mayring, *Qualitative Content Analysis – Theoretical Foundation, Basic Procedures and Software Solution*, 39.

### 3. The Role of SDG 16 and the VNR Process in Civil Society

Before examining obstacles that hinder achieving SDG 16, the first part of this analysis will set the grounds on how civil society representatives and their organisations in South Sudan actually relate to the objectives of SDG 16. This section investigates the CSOs' knowledge about SDG 16, its implementation, as well as projects that are aligned with the objectives. Following this, the awareness of the VNR process and strategies to enhance the involvement of CSOs are discussed.

#### 3.1 Commitment to SDG 16

##### 3.1 a) Awareness

The interviews showed that CSO representatives in general were familiar with SDG 16. All CSOs were in favour of the overarching principles of SDG 16, such as peacebuilding, rule of law, and strengthening local institutions. The interviews also revealed that the CSOs agendas generally align closely with SDG 16 and are an integral part in most projects' objectives (infra 3.1.2). This alignment seems to come from a partly conscious and partly unconscious effort to integrate the SDG objectives into the CSOs priorities and activities. Thus, the representatives and their organisations view the SDGs and their general values as integral components of their work, guiding their initiatives and providing a framework to measure progress and impact. Some CSO work is closely aligned with the SDGs, as they incorporate specific resolutions, such as the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325<sup>41</sup> and 2025<sup>42</sup> into their agenda and programming. Furthermore, interviewees highlighted the need to take all parts of SDG 16 into consideration, acknowledging the connections and dynamics between multiple SDGs, such as the interdependence of security, economic reform, and peacebuilding<sup>43</sup>. Other interviewees mentioned the interconnectedness between SDG 16 and SDG 5 - which focuses on achieving gender equality<sup>44</sup> - on fostering an inclusive peace process through working towards gender equality<sup>45</sup>. This highlights the previously mentioned assumption that SDGs should not be seen as individual, separated aims, but rather influence and shape one another constantly.

##### 3.1 b) SDG 16 in Action

In terms of implementation, the interviews demonstrate a multiplicity of examples of CSOs following the objectives of the SDGs within their projects. The findings shed light on the broader implications of the

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<sup>41</sup> Interview n° 6, 00:12:20.

<sup>42</sup> Interview n° 1, 00:11:36.

<sup>43</sup> Interview n° 1, 00:08:29.

<sup>44</sup> United Nations, 'United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs'.

<sup>45</sup> Interview n° 6, 00:12:20 & 00:15:41.

SDGs for societal transformation in South Sudan, meaning that the CSOs not only contribute to the immediate objectives of the SDGs but also to the foundations for long-term peace, stability, and sustainable development in the country. This is particularly evident in the efforts to the realisation of SDG 16 and, by extension, all other SDGs.

Several interviewed representatives discussed their involvement in peacebuilding projects that align with SDG 16. An example of such work is the enhancement of women's representation in decision-making across all levels of institutions in South Sudan through capacity strengthening workshops for female leaders, mobilising women's groups and advocating for gender-responsive reforms<sup>46</sup>. Another project focused on facilitating dialogue and reconciliation between conflicting communities together to discuss and reconcile differences. This initiative aimed to foster peace among communities that had been in conflict for several years through sustainable dialogue between local authorities, counties and state level authorities<sup>47</sup>. Another example includes the promotion of sustainable peaceful coexistence and handling conflict constructively by engaging traditional leaders and forming community action groups, emphasising cultural diversity and social cohesion<sup>48</sup>. The aforementioned interconnected nature with which SDGs can be achieved can be also seen in the establishment of a radio station, which used solar power (SDG 7) to broadcast content focused on peacebuilding (SDG 16), basic hygiene (SDG 3), and religious messages<sup>49</sup>. Other projects brought children from diverse tribal backgrounds together in an educational setting and supported girls in accessing education, fostering understanding and unity among different ethnic groups. This also promotes social integration from a young age and is inherently aligned with SDG 4's aim of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education, as well as SDG 16's goal to promote peaceful and inclusive societies<sup>50</sup>. The importance of working with various partners was also highlighted when talking about CSOs' partnerships with government and international organisations. Such partnerships were aimed at ensuring a level of quality assurance in education and to address gender disparities, which shows a multifaceted approach to advancing SDGs 4 and 5<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> Interview n° 6, 00:15:41.

<sup>47</sup> Interview n° 2, 00:03:14.

<sup>48</sup> Interview n° 3, 00:03:55 & 00:05:18.

<sup>49</sup> Interview n° 5, 00:07:39.

<sup>50</sup> Interview n° 5, 00:11:40.

<sup>51</sup> Interview n° 1, 00:11:36.



## 3.2 CSOs and the Voluntary National Review

While these projects showcase that the SDGs play a role in many facets of South Sudanese civil society, the awareness amongst the interviewees of the VNR was not as comprehensive. Due to this lower level of awareness, the involvement of organisations in the VNR varies drastically, with some showing active engagement and others having minimal to no direct involvement. Interestingly, the degree of involvement seems to be influenced by certain factors such as the extent to which organisations are integrated into broader networks of civil society and the active efforts of the organisations themselves to participate in the review process.

Generally, the analysis of the interviews showcased three variations of responses about the VNR, ranging from limited awareness about the process in some organisations to CSOs which are actively engaged and informed. It is, however, important to note that the distribution of responses cannot be seen as representative of all CSOs in South Sudan, since only seven selected CSOs were interviewed.

### 3.2 a) Limited Awareness

While civil society organisations are actively working on projects aligned with the SDGs, there might be less involvement or familiarity with the broader mechanisms that are used to track and report progress on these goals at the national and international level. One interviewee explicitly mentioned not having heard about the VNR when asked directly<sup>52</sup>. Adding to this, there has been some scepticism towards the actual impact of the VNR process in South Sudan, with one interviewee stating the following: “(...) these kinds of initiatives are great to put into forums for discussion. But it doesn’t really change the fact that on the ground, people need to look at the other tribe and get in their shoes and understand why they are doing what they’re doing so that they can now begin to find some commonality. (...)”<sup>53</sup>. This raises questions about the effect that review processes by the international community, such as the VNR, have on the progress in South Sudan. The interviewee seems to view the international community as detached from the situation on the ground, viewing their approaches as rather fruitless in advancing South Sudanese development that can be felt within the communities. Moreover, they point out that: “(...) Quite frankly, those review processes probably don’t help anybody. Because, you know, right now, one of the reasons why the election is going to get kicked off, two more years is because they can’t even agree on what progress they’ve had. And if they’ve had any progress. One group says there’s been no

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<sup>52</sup> Interview n° 5, 01:03:55.

<sup>53</sup> Interview n° 5, 01:03:55.

progress. One group says, yes, we progress here, but we still have more to do. (...)”<sup>54</sup>. The interviewee seems to see the government as the primary actor that would be able to advance South Sudanese development, if it could fix its internal problems in areas such as decision-making. It is important to further note that this pessimistic view also extends towards the elections, doubting that they will happen due to the government’s indecisiveness.

### 3.2 b) Informed, yet Excluded

Another representative portrayed awareness of South Sudan’s commitment to participate in the VNR 2024 but noted that it had not directly impacted their work as their organisation had not been contacted to contribute to the process. They were also not aware of any other CSOs or NGOs being involved<sup>55</sup>. This suggests that there is a level of awareness of the VNR amongst some CSOs but also highlights potential challenges in communication or involvement opportunities between the government and civil society in the process. There is a gap between government mechanisms coordinating the VNR and the broader civil society, including NGOs and CSOs. Hereby, there is a need for more inclusive approaches by national coordinating bodies to engage a wider range of stakeholders.

### 3.2 c) Engaged and Informed

Other interviewees not only demonstrated awareness of the VNR but also detailed involvement in the preparatory activities for South Sudan’s participation, such as active participation in developing and coordinating efforts and contributions to the VNR, for example workshops coordinated by the CSPPS<sup>56</sup>. This level of awareness and involvement suggests that some organisations are deeply engaged in the VNR process, working closely with CSO networks and coordinating bodies to ensure that civil society’s perspectives, contributions and on-the-ground expertise are included in the national review. This highlights that CSO networks and national CSO platforms play an important role in collecting insights from CSOs, so that they can at least contribute indirectly to the VNR even when they are not directly engaged by the government. It is important to note that all of the engaged and informed interviewees were indirectly involved in the VNR through the CSPPS<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> Interview n° 5, 01:04:21.

<sup>55</sup> Interview n° 3, response via Email.

<sup>56</sup> Interview n° 6, 00:50:19; Interview n° 7, 00:08:07.

<sup>57</sup> Interview n° 3, response via Email; Interview n° 6, 00:54:59.

## 4. Dynamics of Civil Society Work in South Sudan

While the strategic possibilities of an active engagement in the VNR could improve the ability of South Sudanese CSOs to increase the implementation of SDGs, these processes are inherently dependent on the contextual foundation of CSO work in South Sudan. The next section will therefore investigate how local CSO representatives understand their relationship with the South Sudanese society, how civil society involvement can help to advance the Sustainable Development Goals, and which challenges have arisen from current peacebuilding efforts. Further, the importance of advocacy and civic education is reflected upon, especially in relation to the upcoming elections in December 2024.

### 4.1 Working “Bottom-Up” at the Grassroots Level

In South Sudan, various CSOs develop programmes operating on the ground, or the “grassroots” level. The organisations of our interview partners vary in their thematic focus and range from basic supply and educational programmes to advocacy and civic participation in legislation. Despite these differences, all CSOs share the same broader purpose of engaging with local communities. A key entry point identified for this are the community chiefs. To successfully implement a programme, CSO actors cooperate with local chiefs to approve access to their local community. This is expressed as an important element, as NGOs operate in a context with various cultures and tribes, thus needing CSOs to be culturally sensitive. Community leaders are aware of such cultural dynamics and know the needs of their community<sup>58</sup>. Importantly, community leaders are generally not politicians, but rather religious, tribal, or traditional leaders. The dialogue with traditional leaders ensures that the projects are “citizen centred”, meaning that local society can both be the beneficiary and take the lead<sup>59</sup>.

Due to logistical obstacles<sup>60</sup>, it may not always be possible for an organisation to be physically present in a community. To counter this, CSOs have implemented complaint and feedback mechanisms by using local post boxes, as well as interactive social media platforms<sup>61</sup>. This has proven to be effective in meeting the community’s needs. More generally, non-governmental representatives constantly engage with community members to assess the impact of their projects. These feedback dialogues have turned out to be helpful strategies in the implementation of community-based projects. Communities have

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<sup>58</sup> Interview n° 3, 00:18:27.

<sup>59</sup> Interview n° 1, 00:31:11.

<sup>60</sup> Interview n° 2, 00:24:39.

<sup>61</sup> Interview n° 6, 00:29:37.

shown appreciation for openness in their working relationships with CSOs<sup>62</sup>. Moreover, previous research has proven that the majority of South Sudanese society is in favour of such measures<sup>63</sup>.

## 4.2 Advocacy in the Political Arena

While it is certainly important for project managers to listen to communities when gathering feedback, there is another purpose of such civic dialogues. With regard to SDG 16, many NGOs centred their agendas around the inclusion of civil society in policy-making processes. Thus, CSOs not only help on a local level but also try to give South Sudanese citizens a voice in national politics. The need for such advocacy programmes is twofold. Firstly, CSOs play an important role in incorporating the citizens' interests in legislation. Secondly, they are able to influence the implementation of policies at the community level<sup>64</sup>. As previously stated, organisations employ multiple channels for engaging with civil society. One helpful tool has been the "Civil Society Forum on Natural Resources", through which citizens can articulate their wishes. Using this, CSOs have been able to empower communities by incorporating their interests in policy formulations, for instance regarding land or gender policies. Furthermore, CSOs facilitated the amendment of existing laws by holding them to standards of democratic principles and human rights<sup>65</sup>.

For the implementation of SDG 16, the CSO representatives consider advocacy a pivotal concept. CSOs have teamed up with international NGOs such as Oxfam to establish forums of interaction between civil society and the government to advocate for citizen's rights<sup>66</sup>. Such projects helped establish a "social contract" and encourage the government to fulfil their responsibilities and respect the rights of their citizens<sup>67</sup>. As democratic governance and the prosecution of laws are not consistently enforced by national authorities in South Sudan<sup>68</sup>. These forums become especially important to increase advocacy. As a result, local CSOs enjoy trust and claims to legitimacy in the communities they operate in. Citizens understand that they can hold the government accountable and speak out on issues that can be improved<sup>69</sup>. Another important consideration entangled with advocacy is the issue of inclusivity. Local CSOs understand the inclusion of women as crucial for ensuring sustainable peacebuilding<sup>70</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> Interview n° 4, 00:24:16.

<sup>63</sup> Hakin, Maroko, and Ongeta, 'Influence of Civil Society Organizations in Promoting Democratic Governance', 118. The authors conducted a study analysing 302 questionnaires answered by residents in Juba, South Sudan.

<sup>64</sup> Interview n° 1, 01:00:40.

<sup>65</sup> Interview n° 7, 00:05:24.

<sup>66</sup> Interview n° 1, 00:39:59; Interview n° 2, 00:03:14.

<sup>67</sup> Oxfam, 'Building a Social Contract in South Sudan', 2.

<sup>68</sup> Mayaj, 'Assessing Anti-Corruption, Accountability, and Transparency Measures in South Sudan', 9.

<sup>69</sup> Interview n° 4, 00:34:44.

<sup>70</sup> Interview n° 5, 00:11:40.

Establishing dialogue between “local authorities, the counties, the state level authorities”<sup>71</sup> through forums of interaction, CSOs ensure the inclusion of women in decision-making and political offices. To support gender inclusivity, CSOs mobilise local women’s groups and inform them of their rights. In addition, there have been successful programmes aimed at preventing gender-based violence and implementing equal rights in legislation<sup>72</sup>.

While these initiatives appear promising in advancing the implementation of the SDG and fostering political civic participation and inclusion, they also hint at the multitude of challenges CSOs in South Sudan face on a daily basis. To better understand these issues and formulate strategies to overcome them, the following section will delve into common challenges for CSOs in South Sudan.

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<sup>71</sup> Interview n° 2, 00:03:14.

<sup>72</sup> Interview n° 6, 00:12:20.

## 5. Challenges for Civil Society Organisations in South Sudan

Due to a complex history of conflict and violence, civil society in South Sudan is facing a plethora of issues induced by ethnic tension, weak institutions, governmental restrictions, and a constant scarcity of resources and capacities. While these issues constitute obstacles for CSOs' work in their own specific ways, they are inherently interlinked and constantly influence each other. Consequently, interviews with CSO representatives in South Sudan revealed a general trend of depicting a highly dynamic and unpredictable context in which remnants of the recent conflicts shape every decision made by CSOs.

### 5.1 Challenges Related to Violence

#### 5.1 a) Obstacles in Community Engagement and Ethnic Tensions

One of the main concerns regarding community engagement can be found in the issue of expectation management. Due to economic and military turmoil, communities tend to have high, and at times unrealistic, expectations for CSOs, which are difficult to meet<sup>73</sup>. Regarding basic supply programmes (such as water and food security or planting projects), citizens have high hopes for immediate improvements. The findings suggest that if communities fight for the provision of basic goods, they inherently do not partake in activities concerning more abstract concepts, such as political participation or democratic governance<sup>74</sup>. Therefore, the struggle for essential commodities directly impacts the implementation of educational projects. However, precisely in those communities, there is a need for further education to increase political participation. This is where CSOs can make a difference - by demonstrating how economic developments are related to transparent and accountable governance.

Although the issue of expectation management provides an example for the possibilities provided by a functioning and fruitful civil society, these processes are often hindered by a long-lasting history of ethnic grievances within South Sudan. While the international focus often lies on the Dinka and the Nuer tribes, the countries' division into more than 60 major

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<sup>73</sup> Interview n° 7, 00:05:24.

<sup>74</sup> Interview n° 6, 00:32:31.

ethnic groups makes it one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse states in Africa<sup>75</sup>. These tensions played a vital role in many accounts from civil society actors, who describe ethnic dynamics as crucially shaping their work, impacting aspects from social life and communal relations<sup>76</sup> to politics and interactions with the government<sup>77</sup>.

One of the main restrictions in this regard is the inability to access certain locations due to ethnic grievances in the region<sup>78</sup>. Combined with the economic hardship in South Sudan, these difficulties create high tensions within rural regions, meaning that small communal disputes, such as the theft of cattle, can quickly escalate into larger acts of violence<sup>79</sup>. Additionally, collaboration with communities across various states is hindered by lingering distrust stemming from memories of former inter-communal conflicts.

Therefore, it is hard for CSO staff with different ethnicities, often easily distinguished by attributes such as their last names<sup>80</sup>, to enter certain areas<sup>81</sup>. These processes of separation severely impede the effectiveness of CSOs, often hindering the employment of qualified staff from entering certain areas, due to their ethnic background<sup>82</sup>.

In short, the ethnic tensions in South Sudanese society make operations in certain regions close to impossible. This creates an inherently unstable environment and increases the probability of violence erupting quickly and unpredictably.

CSOs could circumvent this inaccessibility by strategically employing staff with ethnic backgrounds in territories in which they are accepted. However, this severely restricts their efficiency, since specifically trained experts could be denied access, based on their ethnicity<sup>83</sup>. The high reliance on interpersonal contact and connectivity that issues of

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<sup>75</sup> Bortolouzzi Garcia, 'South Sudan Country Profile – Social | PKSOI'.

<sup>76</sup> Interview n° 1, 00:46:30; Interview n° 2, 00:24:39.

<sup>77</sup> Interview n° 1, 00:41:24; Interview n° 3, 00:46:06.

<sup>78</sup> Interview n° 1, 00:36:29; Interview n° 2, 00:24:39; Interview n° 3, 00:20:58; Interview n° 4, 00:26:21; Interview n° 5, 00:18:00.

<sup>79</sup> Interview n° 1, 00:46:30; Interview n° 2, 00:24:39.

<sup>80</sup> Interview n° 4, 00:26:21.

<sup>81</sup> Interview n° 1, 00:36:00; Interview n° 2, 00:24:39; Interview n° 4, 00:26:30; Interview n° 5, 00:36:29.

<sup>82</sup> Interview n° 1, 00:36:29.

<sup>83</sup> Interview n° 1, 00:36:29.

ethnicity entail has led several CSOs to establish themselves in as many regions as possible<sup>84</sup>, thereby engaging with a diverse array of tribal leaders in order to increase social cohesion<sup>85</sup>.

Although this approach adapts to the existing structures of ethnic division, some CSOs propose another approach to address the challenges, which encompass advocating the promotion of a unified South Sudanese identity<sup>86</sup>. A key factor to achieve this notion of re-unification under a shared national identity lies in coordinated cooperation within civil society. This is highlighted by interviewee 3 who mentions the importance of the South Sudan NGO Forum as a platform for organisations to come together to share cultural challenges and formulate solutions<sup>87</sup>.

While these approaches showcase the possible improvements in questions of South Sudanese identity, initiatives from international organisations, such as the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) provide more practical “hands-on” solutions. When talking about an outbreak of ethnic violence in June 2021, which displaced over 80,000 people from the region of Tambura<sup>88</sup> one of the interviewees described how the UNMISS helped assess the situation and reintegrate civil society into the conflict zone<sup>89</sup>.

Furthermore, a programme monitored by Oxfam started to implement peacebuilding activities, bringing conflicted communities together with local authorities. While such projects advance the implementation of SDG 16 and can be seen as positive steps in uniting South Sudanese communities, the long history of division and strong identification along ethnic lines poses the question of whether a unified national identity does provide a satisfactory solution for the local population. Nevertheless, the latent ramifications of inter-ethnic conflicts in South Sudanese everyday life showcase that it is vital to continue working on building dialogue and connectivity in order to ensure peaceful and inclusive communities in which CSOs can operate effectively.

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<sup>84</sup> Interview n° 2, 00:34:00.

<sup>85</sup> Interview n° 3, 00:03:55 & 00:05:18.

<sup>86</sup> Interview n° 3, 00:05:18; Interview n° 4, 00:29:54.

<sup>87</sup> Interview n° 4, 00:33:21.

<sup>88</sup> Baato Rogers, ‘South Sudan: Tambura Conflict’.

<sup>89</sup> Interview n° 3, 00:20:58.



## 5.1 b) Problems with Armed Rebel Groups

As one of the countries impacted most by prevalent corruption<sup>90</sup>, mismanagement of private and state funding are core issues of the South Sudanese Government. Combined with the country's weak public budget, the high level of corruption has made the state's army severely unstable. As a result, many military commanders have led their troops into committing what has been coined "rent-seeking rebellion"<sup>91</sup>. These armed groups, which are often underpaid and mostly held together by ethnic allegiance towards their general<sup>92</sup>, enjoy a steady supply of desperate young individuals who lack a stable income and economic prospects<sup>93</sup>. However, the promises made by these armed groups often turn out to be false, revealing a world of similar economic hardship. Therefore, these groups often rely on the extortion of civilians and international aid workers who are stopped at arbitrarily erected roadblocks and forced to pay in order to advance<sup>94</sup>. Next to the monetary repercussions this has for CSO actors, who are generally seen as wealthy and therefore often the target of criminal activities<sup>95</sup>, it also feeds into the aforementioned problem of inaccessibility, as CSOs tend to avoid rebel-controlled areas<sup>96</sup>. Similarly to the solutions to overcome ethnic tensions, a frequent CSO strategy regarding the engagement with armed groups is the establishment of a high presence in as many states as possible in order to minimise the number of roadblocks encountered when travelling between regions<sup>97</sup>.

When analysing the challenges associated with ethnic tensions and armed rebel groups within South Sudan, it becomes apparent that they exert both

<sup>90</sup> Transparency International, 'Corruption Perception Index - South Sudan'.

<sup>91</sup> de Waal, 'When Kleptocracy Becomes Insolvent', 361.

<sup>92</sup> de Waal, 361.

<sup>93</sup> Interview n° 1, 00:46:30.

<sup>94</sup> Interview n° 1, 00:48:00.

<sup>95</sup> Interview n° 1, 00:47:11.

<sup>96</sup> Interview n° 2, 00:19:00; Interview n° 6, 00:32:30.

<sup>97</sup> Interview n° 2, 00:33:15.

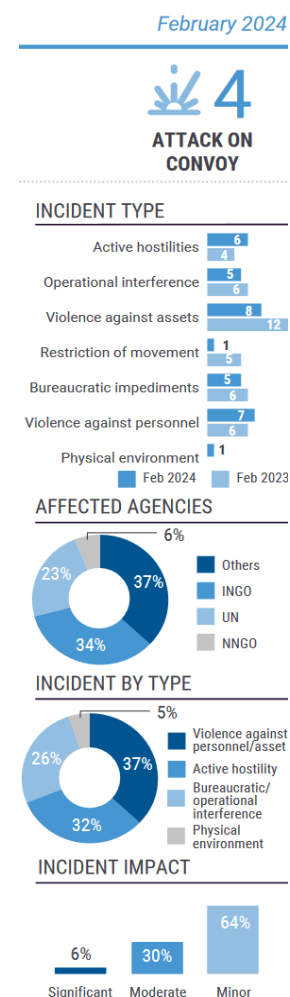


Fig. 2: Infographic on violent events in February 2024

Source: Humanitarian Access Snapshot – February 2024, OCHA, 2024.

direct and indirect influences on the work of CSOs. While the direct influences consist of the loss of organisational staff due to ethnic conflicts, as well as the depletion of CSO funds from the constant extortion by armed groups, the indirect influences can be seen in the fact that these issues lead to high levels of inaccessibility, creating blind-spots on the operational maps of CSOs. Furthermore, these challenges highlight the multiplicity of actors that CSOs have to consider when conducting their operations. Due to its direct influence and legal power over the workings of civil society, the following section examines the challenges CSOs face in interactions with the South Sudanese Government.

## 5.2 State interference

As the communal effectiveness of CSOs is inextricably linked to the political, social, and judicial frameworks in which they operate, any restriction within these realms will automatically complicate CSO work<sup>98</sup>. Global data shows that in the last 20 years, a rising number of governments have increased restrictive measures against CSOs, significantly shrinking civic space<sup>99</sup>.

Looking at South Sudan, the data collected in this investigation revealed a number of similar trends in the areas of sustainable capacity strengthening, financing obstacles, collaborative programme implementation, and issues of autonomy and bureaucratic restrictions, thus hinting at processes of shrinking space within civil society. However, some of the state implemented policies have been welcomed by actors of civil society. Therefore, the relationship between the South Sudanese Government and local CSOs is complex and multi-layered, involving simultaneously empowerment and restrictions regarding efforts of implementing SDG 16.

### 5.2 a) Sustainable Capacity-Strengthening

The South Sudanese 2016 NGO Act contains a stipulation in Article 18 that 80% of employees in such organisations should be nationals of South Sudan. The findings of this report suggest a

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<sup>98</sup> Dupuy and Prakash, 'Why Restrictive NGO Foreign Funding Laws Reduce Voter Turnout in Africa's National Elections', 171.

<sup>99</sup> Ayvazyan, *The Shrinking Space of Civil Society*, 128:6; Brechenmacher and Carothers, 'Defending Civic Space: Is the International Community Stuck?', 1; Unmüßig, 'Civil Society under Pressure – Shrinking, Closing, No Space', 2.

consensus among the interviewees that building the skill set and capacity of professionals from South Sudan is of critical importance to anchor human capital within the nation's borders and mitigate the effects of sporadic brain drain. There were, however, differences in their perceptions of whether or not this 80% quota is the most effective approach to this problem. For certain interviewees, the stipulation embodies an example of shrinking civic space imposed by the government. For others, it serves as a necessary codification of the importance of localising competences in development work. Several interviewees expressed doubt about whether the measure counters its own aim, viewing the intentions behind the 2016 Act as sensible in general, while highlighting that there are issues in their implementation<sup>100</sup>. This can be seen in the limitation of employment of international experts. This limitation was criticised by one of the interviewees, who argued that the outsourcing of experts often serves as a tool utilised to train and upskill local employees, who can then rise into managerial roles following periods of guidance from non-nationals<sup>101</sup>.

Some simply saw the stipulation as an impossible requirement to meet, due to a limited pool of nationals with the required expertise. The issues of poor education and illiteracy were raised several times in relation to this. Various interviewees openly admitted that this regulation was simply not adhered to by the CSO Network, highlighting the recurring tension between law and order and efficacy in development work in South Sudan.

Seemingly, the state is attempting to use “negative incentivisation” through restrictive and legalistic measures to foster sustainable capacity strengthening rather than “positive incentivisation” methods such as practical supportive measures that expand human capital in the country. From the perspectives gathered, it can be concluded that the CSO Network requires measures that move beyond restrictions on foreign employees and towards working with the latent workforce that exists on the ground in order to upskill them in the areas of programme management, implementation, and design.

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<sup>100</sup> Interview n° 5, 00:49:14.

<sup>101</sup> Interview n° 4, 00:37:34.

## 5.2 b) Shrinking Civil Space

While some of the stipulations from the 2016 NGO Act are up for debate among the interviewed CSO representatives, the high level of restrictions coming from the South Sudanese state is often seen as a limiting factor for the formation of a fruitful civic space in the country<sup>102</sup>. These processes manifest themselves through aspects such as indirect state surveillance in the form of governmental staff attending CSO workshops<sup>103</sup>, censorship of certain topics and activities<sup>104</sup> and the dependency on governmental approvals in order to enter restricted areas<sup>105</sup>.

The investigation conducted revealed an air of caution and self-censorship when it came to advocacy that may be interpreted as government criticism. Representatives feared that a move towards being more outspoken in this regard would inhibit their ability to conduct activities as normal or work alongside the government to the same extent.

Restrictions, such as those related to workshop or activity suppression, were often implemented as security measures or directly related to the distribution or refusal of security clearances. The research conducted for this report also revealed a tension between attempts from the state to have a level of control over the implementation of certain operations and communications with donors. One interviewee provided the example of a proposal being submitted to potential donors that contained clear specifications about how the project would be carried out. Thereafter, the government interfered with details of the execution, and the CSO, who is reliant on the external donor, faced confusion and frustration from the donor when the project seemed like it would not be implemented as outlined in the agreed upon proposal<sup>106</sup>. The ramifications of such situations are exacerbated by CSOs' reliance on foreign donations. Interviewees commented that this reliance is also already precarious due to the emergence of new crises such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Israeli invasion of Gaza

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<sup>102</sup> Freedom House, 'South Sudan'.

<sup>103</sup> Interview n° 1, 00:41:42.

<sup>104</sup> Interview n° 6, 00:24:49; Interview n° 7, 00:20:15.

<sup>105</sup> Interview n° 7, 00:27:13.

<sup>106</sup> Interview n° 3, 00:31:55.

and the continuous repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, all of which detract a degree of attention from the needs of South Sudan.

As CSOs constitute a critical part of the balance of power apparatus of a state, they contribute to fostering a socio-political climate where mutual accountability underpins the social contract. Therefore, it is crucial that CSOs can conduct their activities in a manner that is uncensored and uninfluenced by state interests. Our interviewees offered insights into how the South Sudanese government impedes the environment of accountability and transparency, thus causing the aforementioned shrinking of civic space for civil society.

To improve the exchange with state officials, local CSOs have tried partnering with international organisations to mediate so-called memorandums of understanding. More generally, a strategy to overcome such challenges has been to map processes of work in partnerships. Through civil society conferences, organisations drafted roadmaps and benchmarks, especially with regards to the upcoming elections. Such memorandums were drawn up to achieve mutual understanding between the government and non-governmental organisations.

Furthermore, the interviews highlighted that all of the questioned CSOs implemented some sort of financial accountability policy which was adopted to properly manage their funding and address financial accountability to beneficiaries, partners, and donors. In relation to this, most interviewees also mentioned that they regularly submit audited financial reports<sup>107</sup>.

These processes show that there is clearly a fertile ground for deeper cooperation and a less asymmetrical power relationship between the government and grassroots organisations. The offerings of transparency, and overall contribution to the state's development by CSOs requires more compromise from the government when it comes to their advocacy-based work.

Ultimately, the relationship between CSOs and the South Sudanese state can be described as ambivalent and often strained. Despite some positive aspects, the findings highlighted

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<sup>107</sup> Interview n° 3, 00:12:03; Interview n° 5, 00:27:02; Interview n° 6, 00:22:50; Interview n° 7, 00:11:59.

significant governmental restrictions and an increasingly shrinking space for civil society. However, issues such as financial transparency and monetary affairs reveal that the obstacles CSOs face when communicating with the government are aggravated by a general lack of capacities within civil society. Therefore, the following section will examine general shortcomings that CSOs in South Sudan have to deal with on a daily basis, including a lack of civic education, funding, and skilled labour.

### **5.3 Lack of Capacities**

#### 5.3 a) Lack of Civic Education and the Upcoming National Election

In South Sudan, education plays a fundamental role in advancing sustainable peace and statebuilding. Well-informed citizens are better equipped to understand and exercise their civic rights. Until now, elements of citizen's cooperation and whistleblowing have been absent. South Sudanese society has little understanding of its political rights and low expectations of their government. To counteract this, there have been projects that proved to be effective in helping citizens to know and understand their political rights and responsibilities. Surveyed community members affirmed that CSO projects enhanced awareness of their own rights and freedoms. This is particularly important in the context of South Sudan, as in December 2024, the first South Sudanese national election is scheduled. Non-state actors understand this election as an opportunity to establish a democratic process. Citizens are, however, most often unaware of their right to vote. To ensure a successful election and the implementation of SDG 16, projects that promote civic education on the grassroots level are required. Efficient strategies include workshops in the field, which educate communities about democratic principles and their rights. However, as many geographical areas have not yet been accessed, more large-scale education programmes are necessary.

#### 5.3 b) Lack of Funding

Funding, or lack thereof, dictates the activities that CSOs can engage in and outcomes of CSO programmes are generally contingent on adequate funding. Several interviewed CSOs mentioned restricted funding and economic hardships as one of the main challenges that they face. In one specific case, operating within several opposing tribal zones allowed a CSO

to produce positive results. However, due to insufficient funding, tensions escalated with one group as activities in their specific region had to be scaled back<sup>108</sup>. Once again, this example shows the interconnection of issues that CSOs have to face. While these interconnections are more inherently visible at the local level, they also exist on a global scale. In this regard, South Sudanese CSOs often suffer from the international context in which they find themselves. International crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia-Ukraine War, or the wider tensions linked to the War in Gaza have all had an adverse effect on funding<sup>109</sup>. While the specific mechanism leading to atrophied funding were not explained by the interviewees, such a phenomenon is consistent with a vulnerable national economy suffering disproportionately from increased shipping, energy, and subsistence costs.

Regarding the sources of CSO funding, the analysis of the interviews showed that these sources are quite diverse and derive from the EU, individual EU countries such as Germany and the Netherlands,<sup>110</sup> and UN programmes such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)<sup>111</sup>. Two interviewees mentioned the INGOs Oxfam and Cordaid as additional funding sources<sup>112</sup>. One CSO stated that most of their funding comes from individual donors in the United States (US), as the Chairman of the organisation is based in the US and active in fundraising<sup>113</sup>. Finally, local donors were rarely named, and government funding was not reported<sup>114</sup>. From this overview, it is evident that funding is a key issue in the limitations of CSOs' work, whether leading to the cancellation of activities or logistical shortages. Therefore, it is a constant factor that is influenced by world events, economic circumstances, governmental restrictions such as the 2016 NGO Act, and the number of donors investing in CSO work.

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<sup>108</sup> Interview n° 2, 00:35:40.

<sup>109</sup> Interview n° 2, 00:21:21; Interview n° 3, 00:07:34 & 00:57:04; Interview n° 4, 00:27:42.

<sup>110</sup> Interview n° 3, 00:07:55; Interview n° 6, 00:21:42; Interview n° 7, 00:10:59.

<sup>111</sup> Interview n° 1, 00:22:31; Interview n° 4, 00:13:24; Interview n° 6, 00:21:42.

<sup>112</sup> Interview n° 1, 00:39:59 & 00:18:47; Interview n° 2, 00:03:14.

<sup>113</sup> Interview n° 5, 00:22:15.

<sup>114</sup> Interview n° 3, 00:07:55 & 00:41:39.

### 5.3 c) Lack of Skilled Labour

Several interviewees mentioned the importance of capacity strengthening and organisational development<sup>115</sup>. Lack of skilled personnel was mentioned as an issue by two interviewees<sup>116</sup>. Both interviewees explained that some capacities are simply not present in South Sudan, ultimately creating a tension between outsourcing skills and educating locals. The former has the advantage of expediency and quality but does not grow local capacity. However, employing local labour can lead to situations where competences are lacking for certain tasks, such as education or mechanical work, and the programmes aimed at developing those skills are inherently costly.

Despite this tentative balance, there is a preference to use foreigners to educate local staff. One organisation mentioned using Kenyan teachers to lead the work of their South Sudanese colleagues, with a goal of elevating the skills of local staff to a sufficient level. In sum, homegrown capacity requires an imported labour force.

### 5.3 d) Diversity

In general, all interviewed CSOs proclaimed both gender and ethnic diversity as being beneficial and necessary for successful programme implementation, highlighting their constant pursuit of equal opportunities for all.

While all CSOs stated that gender diversity constitutes a key element of their organisations' internal structures, most of them provided different answers as to how this concept becomes graspable within their organisations. Although almost all interviewed CSOs mentioned that they had significant female leadership<sup>117</sup>, one even describing itself as predominantly female<sup>118</sup>, all seven interviewed actors of civil society for this report identified as male.

The topic of ethnic diversity unveiled similar issues. While this concept was also mentioned as crucial for operating in South Sudan, recruitment processes often seemed to be dictated by the risks created by tribalism. Therefore, several CSOs mentioned that they mostly tried to

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<sup>115</sup> Interview n° 3, 00:23:24; Interview n° 6, 00:15:41.

<sup>116</sup> Interview n° 4, 00:11:51; Interview n° 5, 00:15:17.

<sup>117</sup> Interview n° 1, 00:13:51; Interview n° 3, 00:08:23; Interview n° 6, 00:12:20 & 00:19:20.

<sup>118</sup> Interview n° 2, 00:07:15.



recruit staff locally in their area of operations as this would enable them to reach the target population more easily<sup>119</sup>. Ultimately, this feeds into the previously examined notion that ignoring tribal borders can often lead to staff endangerment, including risk of fatalities.

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<sup>119</sup> Interview n° 2, 00:26:32; Interview n° 3, 00:03:55; Interview n° 5, 00:15:17.

## **6. Recommendations**

As previously discussed, work undertaken by CSOs can reach the most economically depressed, closed-off and remote communities, thanks to local workers with knowledge of the people, culture and social institutions in place. However, CSOs are met by substantial challenges, be it violence, lack of capacity or state-related processes. Derived from the previous analysis, this final part aims to present several recommendations to support the civil society of South Sudan in organising and operating for the common good of the country. The recommendations will address four groups of actors that are the key motors for change in South Sudan. These actors are CSOs, INGOs, UN agencies, and State bodies of South Sudan.

Finally, the following recommendations are solely born out of the research conducted for the purpose of this report. While the importance of other reports written by UN agencies is recognised, their conclusions will not be repeated here. This decision has been taken to keep the report factual, readable and concise.

### **6.1 South Sudanese Civil Society Organisations**

#### 6.1 a) Radio Broadcasting

Communication between CSOs and the wider population is a key issue, which is best illustrated by the exclusion of certain organisations and people from the VNR process (supra 3.2) and a general lack of civic education (supra 5.3.a). This issue is further compounded by the 70% illiteracy rate of South Sudan, complicating access to information and communication in general. A way to address those challenges has been through workshops organised for local communities. However, those require proper advertisement, personnel travelling long distances and limitations on the number of attendants for any given event.

To overcome this issue, radio broadcasting by CSOs can be a valuable tool. As previously mentioned (supra 3.1.b), a solar-powered radio station has been used to broadcast hygiene, peacebuilding and religious content. Similar initiatives could also broadcast civic education programmes, advertise workshops and coordinate the VNR process. Furthermore, those radio stations could also broadcast SDG 16-related content and help in educating South Sudanese

citizens about their civic rights and freedoms. The use of solar energy could lower cost and guarantee long-term sustainability. Finally, radio broadcasting implemented in a decentralised manner could include local communities and a variety of languages, thereby furthering ethnic inclusivity. Ultimately, radio broadcasting could leverage the local knowledge that CSOs already have, bridge the current communication gap, and offset the size and poor infrastructures of South Sudan.

### 6.1 b) Capacity-Strengthening

As previously mentioned (supra 5.3.2), specific skills are sometimes lacking in South Sudanese CSOs. This issue is further compounded by the 2016 NGO Act that requires 80% of the staff to be South Sudanese. Therefore, developing local capacity and skills for CSO workers is a key need.

To facilitate local processes of capacity-strengthening, INGOs and relevant UN agencies should be encouraged to further cooperate with South Sudanese CSOs and provide them with specialised training in the relevant fields<sup>120</sup>. While external actors would be responsible for providing training programmes, South Sudanese CSOs are best positioned to state their specific training needs and relay them to INGOs and UN agencies. Some of the gaps mentioned in the interviews were training for peacebuilding, elementary education (forming teachers) and agricultural tractor maintenance.

Furthermore, several CSOs have stressed the importance of organisational development and financial accountability in their relationship with their donors. Consequently, accounting and management skills appear as important assets to attract new donors and safeguard relationships with current ones.

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<sup>120</sup> CSPPS is a network partner of the “Just Future Alliance”, a program which focuses on local capacity-strengthening in order to promote accountability and inclusivity. The alliance was established in 2021 and aims to contribute to more inclusive governance in six different countries, among them South Sudan. As the analysis has shown, many initiatives already seek to strengthen local capacities of South Sudanese CSOs – yet such efforts should be further intensified and encouraged by collaborating with International Organisations.

### 6.1 c) National CSO Network

Several interviewees have stressed the need for CSOs to operate as a network<sup>121</sup>. This strengthens CSOs' leverages, allowing experience sharing and resources mobilisation for specific tasks. One of the arenas mentioned in the interviews is the NGO Forum of South Sudan (NFSF)<sup>122</sup>.

The NFSF could become a national digital platform for CSOs, offering a forum for discussion, a resource library and a directory of CSOs and their areas of expertise. For dissemination of needs or job offers, a monthly email newsletter could be set up, where CSOs could address their needs to a central organisation, which would then get published for all subscribing email accounts monthly. Such a platform could also serve as a mechanism to consolidate and coordinate the inputs and feedback from various CSOs, facilitate collaboration, resource sharing, participation in the VNR process and communication across the country. The network could serve as a central hub for the organisation of meetings, publishing needs, sharing best practices and coordinating advocacy efforts. In other words, the NFSF could be expanded in scope, role and capacity through CSO engagement and foreign assistance.

## 6.2 International Non-Governmental Organisations

### 6.2 a) Strengthening of the National CSO Network

While fostering an expanded NFSF is a CSO prerogative, INGOs could also play a role in facilitating its development. Support could take the form of funding, technical support, network development and maintenance, as well as needed organisational development. Furthermore, INGOs could also offer capacity-strengthening workshops on network management, digital communication and strategic planning for CSOs involved in the network. Moreover, INGOs could also contribute through sharing resources, expertise, and best practices among the network members by organising thematic groups within the networks as well as facilitating access to global networks and platforms to promote an exchange of skills.

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<sup>121</sup> Interview n° 2, 00:21:21; Interview n° 3, 00:23:24; Interview n° 4, 00:33:21; Interview n° 6, 00:35:39.

<sup>122</sup> Interview n° 1, 00:04:22 & 00:33:08; Interview n° 4, 00:33:21; Interview n° 7, 00:19:06.

Finally, INGOs could use this as an access-point to reach participants for capacity workshops as well as developing individual skills of their staff and volunteers. This would entail the implementation of training programmes tailored to the needs of CSOs and cover areas such as project management, financial accountability, advocacy strategies and digital literacy.

#### 6.2 b) Internet Access Points

Communication in remote regions has been identified as a challenge both for local communities and for the integration of CSO activities<sup>123</sup>, as limited internet access has led to difficulties in organising interviews. This communication insulation can be addressed through the creation of internet access points set up by INGOs and UN entities using Starlink terminals. The recent war in Ukraine has highlighted the usefulness of the system, allowing communities close to the frontline to maintain communication and better coordinate humanitarian activities. Setting up such access points would allow for better coordination between CSO offices and their workers in the field, allow local populations to gain access to the internet and facilitate dialogue in regions where communication is difficult or impossible.

#### 6.2 c) Supporting CSO Capacity-Strengthening

INGOs can play an active role as provider of training for CSO in the context of their capacity strengthening as previously presented (supra 6.1.b).

### 6.3 United Nations

The UN has played a crucial role in South Sudan and its presence has been instrumental on the ground. Various UN agencies and initiatives, such as the UNMISS, UNDP and OCHA have been involved in peacekeeping, development and humanitarian aid delivery. Despite the complex political, social and economic situation that the UN has faced, it has been successful in stabilising regions, promoting dialogue and aiding the country's development in general. Given the essential role of CSOs and INGOs in the development and peacebuilding of South Sudan, the UN could advance its support in several ways, which are outlined in the following sections.

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<sup>123</sup> Interview n° 4, 00:41:39.

### 6.3 a) Fostering International Engagement

The UN can take a facilitating and supporting role in INGOs and CSOs initiatives aimed at reaching the wider world and making known the achievements of the South Sudanese people.

### 6.3 b) Supporting the National CSO Network

The UN could promote, facilitate and guarantee the implementation of a national network for CSOs. While this initiative needs to be born from the grassroots level, the UN can still offer legitimacy, organisational and logistical support to its realisation.

### 6.3 c) Supporting CSO Capacity-Strengthening

UN agencies, especially UNDP and OCHA, can play an active role as provider of training for CSO in the context of their capacity-strengthening as previously discussed (supra 6.1.b).

### 6.3 d) Internet Access Points

Similarly to INGOs, UN installations can also contribute to providing internet access to remote areas by setting up internet access points. Furthermore, UNMISS outposts could incorporate such technologies and provide safe and free access to local populations.

### 6.3 e) Providing Security for CSOs and INGOs

Racketeering, arbitrary checkpoints and general inter-ethnic violence make certain zones in the country extremely difficult to access. Furthermore, certain communities are too isolated to be accessed, even by the most conciliatory CSO worker. This furthers feelings of isolation and prevents the emergence of dialogue between conflicted tribes and is not conducive to peacebuilding.

As such, UNMISS could provide security and assist CSOs in accessing hostile areas, thereby allowing needed help and dialogue to reach conflict-affected communities without endangering the lives of CSO workers. This would also allow a neutral presence to safeguard the implementation of peacebuilding initiatives.

### 6.3 f) Encouraging the Government to implement SDG 16

As previously mentioned (supra 5.2.b), the Government of the Republic of South Sudan has sought to monitor, control and sometimes interfere in the work of respondent CSOs, leading to adverse effects. Demonstrable and concrete examples are also supported by a report from the Human's Rights Council<sup>124</sup>. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and the UNSC could both hold the Government accountable to their democratic responsibilities and commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals, in order to discourage it from engaging in activities that are contrary to the principles of SDG 16 and can have deleterious long-term effects on the country's stability.

### 6.3 d) Transportation Infrastructure

Several interviewees mentioned difficulties in reaching remote areas due to poor road infrastructure ( see Fig. 3 below). These issues are compounded by some regions becoming completely inaccessible during the rain seasons, as the roads turn to mud. Further issues arise from limited transportation including risk of conflict, difficulty in developing economic activities, isolation and alienation of certain communities and insulation from political processes taking place around Juba. Using UN resources, such as UNMISS engineering units, to build roads is an expansive, yet decisive way of improving economic prospects for local population, communication, transportation and peacebuilding activities. It would also improve the efficiency of State institutions, aided by a more cost-effective way of accessing remote areas throughout the year.

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<sup>124</sup> Human Rights Council, 'Entrenched Repression: Systematic Curtailment of the Democratic and Civic Space in South Sudan', 34.

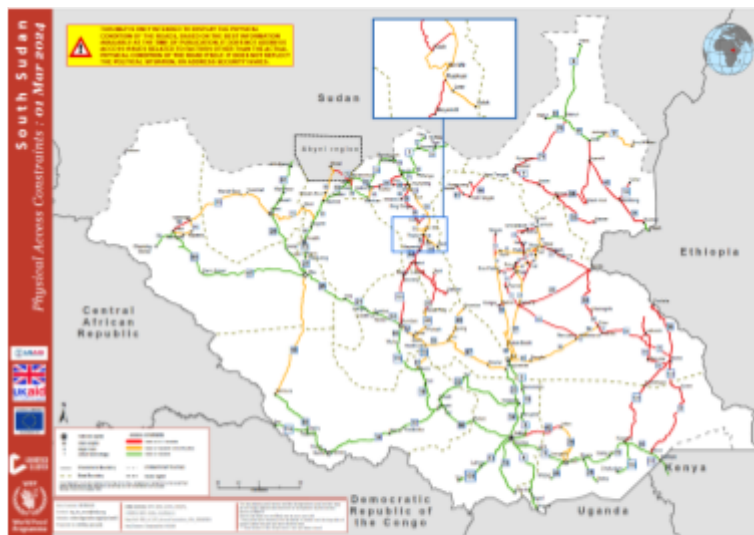


Fig. 3: Access road map of South Sudan. Red roads are impassable, while Orange are passable with difficulties.

Source: South Sudan – Physical Access Constraints: 01 Mar 2024, Logistics Cluster & WFP, 2024

## 6.4 State bodies

As previously mentioned, interviewees revealed an ambivalent relation with the State, affected by not only restrictions on advocacy work, security checks and monetary impositions but also a willingness to cooperate and frequent collaboration in the field. The following recommendations present actions the State could take that would benefit civil society in South Sudan.

### 6.4 a) Rationalising Security Clearance Issuance

Security clearances are necessary for CSO workers operating in conflict affected areas and their value is well-established. However, delays in their issuance and the plurality of actors authorised to produce them have created a system where important projects will be undermined by drawn-out waiting times and bureaucratic procedures. As such, the State of South Sudan and its local governments can contribute to CSOs' work by rationalising and accelerating the rate at which security clearances are obtained, thereby facilitating the vital work being conducted in those areas without jeopardising security.

### 6.4 b) Providing Security for CSOs and INGOs

As mentioned under the UN recommendations, the State can contribute to CSOs' work by providing security details when they are operating in non-secure regions.



#### 6.4 c) Lessening of Constraints on CSOs

UN reports<sup>125</sup> and this research have pointed out that the government has taken measures aimed at monitoring, controlling, influencing and/or preventing CSOs from operating freely. These actions are often done with an intent to centralise activities, prevent the spread of dissent and punish activities that are not sanctioned by the government. All of these actions have an adverse effect on the implementation of SDG 16, the development of South Sudanese Civil Society and on the peacebuilding process where CSOs have proved to be important actors. Therefore, the State must ensure that CSOs can operate without threats to the well-being of their workers or to the continuation of their operations. This includes both refraining from interfering in civil society activities and offering protection to CSOs in all circumstances.

#### 6.4 d) Reducing Administrative Fees on CSOs

Several CSO representatives mentioned that fees impose an additional burden on their finances (supra 2.2 and 5.3.2), further straining their limited resources. While administrative fees for registration are to be expected, the ones applied by the government are presenting an obstacle for CSOs and they appear to exceed the mere cost of procedures. Therefore, making these fees more affordable would alleviate a significant financial burden for CSOs.

#### 6.4 e) Transportation Infrastructure

As mentioned under the UN recommendations, road building is a significant investment, yet an invaluable one, as it would facilitate most activities of the State and CSOs and further link different populations to the rest of the country.

#### 6.4 f) SDG16 Implementation at Large

While CSOs have contributed substantially to the implementation of SDG 16, most reports used to contextualise this report present the government's effort as being too little and too late. Because the 2030 agenda has been agreed upon by member states of the UN, the government can surely be seen in the leading role with regards to the agenda's

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<sup>125</sup> Human Rights Council, 34.

implementation. Yet, governments should avail of services and contributions of other actors, as in this case local civil society actors. After investigating this interplay of government and civil society, it can be concluded that the government could have a growing positive impact on the implementation of SDG 16 by refraining from controlling and interfering in CSO work, as this has evidently shown to have detrimental effects on CSOs, public debate and the wider work on SDG 16. Furthermore, the government can foster the positive cooperation that already exists in certain projects, as those actions facilitate implementation.

## 7. Conclusion

South Sudan currently finds itself in a challenging situation, but consistent efforts by numerous actors have kept hope that the situation can evolve positively. South Sudanese civil society has been instrumental in this process, with its members undertaking complex tasks in arduous conditions, whilst bringing an essential “bottom-up” approach to a deeply context-specific situation. The interviews conducted with CSO representatives revealed their approach to community involvement, the projects they are implementing and the means by which CSOs take part in progressing the SDG 16. The interviews have also shown the most pressing challenges, namely the lack of capacity and funding, ongoing ethnic violence, poor infrastructure and government intervention. Nonetheless, alleviating those challenges is possible through concerted action by INGOs, UN agencies, the State of South Sudan and CSOs themselves, and recommendations to that effect have been identified.

Despite the complexity of South Sudan’s current political, economic and social situation, civil society has proven to be resilient, adaptable and capable of tackling some of the country’s most pressing issues. Despite limited funding and capacities, CSOs have nevertheless produced successful results. While offering a comprehensive plan on how to fully tackle the situation in South Sudan is beyond this report’s scope, with great confidence it can be said that CSOs have proven to be extremely valuable stakeholders and merit the funding and political support that is needed to bring a long-lasting peace to South Sudan.

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## Annex

### Questionnaire for the Interviews with CSO Members in South Sudan

<b>Introduction</b>	
<p>Thank you very much for taking your time to talk to us.</p> <p>We are XXX and XXX, from a student research group affiliated with the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS) and the University of Groningen.</p> <p>The aim of our study is to explore the impact of Civil Society Organisations in the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS). Here, we focus on the implementation of the SDG16 in South Sudan. For the purpose of conducting our study, we would like to ask for your consent to record the interview. Is it okay with you for this conversation to be recorded? Secondly, we would like to ask if you consent to your name and position being included in the published report based on this interview. If not, we will refer to you as an anonymous representative of a South Sudanese CSO.</p> <p>Do you have any questions for us before we begin?</p> <p>Beginning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Could you tell me a bit about yourself and your role in the organisation you represent?<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. What is the name of the Civil Society Organisation that you represent?</li></ol></li><li>2. How would you describe the organisation's work?</li><li>3. Where does the CSO operate geographically?<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Do activities ever move outside of this area?</li><li>b. Why/ why not?</li></ol></li></ol>	
<b>Research interest (what do we want to find out?)</b>	<b>Follow-up questions/Additional inquiries (what is of further interest?)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Initiate the interview situation</li><li>• Lead the conversation partner to the subject</li><li>• Motivating the conversation partner to speak</li><li>• Gaining a better understanding of the local context</li></ul>	



**Section A: CSOs and the SDG16**

1. Are the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals part of your organisation’s agenda?
2. (If yes): Have there been any projects or initiatives undertaken that focus particularly on the aims of SDG16?
3. (If yes): Would you describe these projects as having had a successful impact?
  - a. (If yes): What actions or strategies contributed to the success?
  - a. (If no): What do you think went wrong?

<b>Research interest (what do we want to find out?)</b>	<b>Follow-up questions/Additional inquiries (what is of further interest?)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do CSOs with actual presence in South Sudan understand and relate to the SDG16?</li> <li>• How does SDG16 matter in the CSO landscape in South Sudan?</li> <li>• What kinds of projects are being undertaken that have a relationship with SDG16?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you evaluate the impact? (Of said successful project)</li> </ul> <p><b>(Optional)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you think that CSOs in South Sudan generally incorporate the ideas of the Sustainable Development Goals into their work?</li> </ul>

**Section B: The internal structure of CSOs**

1. How is ethnic diversity reflected within your organisation?
2. How is gender diversity reflected within your organisation?
3. Can you describe your stakeholders? (donors)
4. How does your organisation approach financial transparency and accountability?

<b>Research interest (what do we want to find out?)</b>	<b>Follow-up questions/Additional inquiries (what is of further interest?)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is the internal structure within a CSO constituted?</li> <li>• Are there flaws that may limit CSOs effectiveness?</li> </ul>	

**Section C1: The relationship of CSOs and the South Sudanese state**

1. What is your relationship to the South Sudanese government?	
<b>Research interest (what do we want to find out?)</b>	<b>Follow-up questions/Additional inquiries (what is of further interest?)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do CSOs relate to/interact with the government in South Sudan?</li> <li>• Are there flaws that may limit CSOs effectiveness?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How much autonomy does your organisation have from the South Sudanese government?</li> <li>• What kind of access does your organisation have to the South Sudanese government?</li> </ul>

<b>Section C2: The relationship of CSOs and the South Sudanese society</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To what extent would you say that the CSO engages with citizens in order to incorporate their interests?</li> <li>2. What are the main difficulties involved with citizen engagement?</li> </ol>	
<b>Research interest (what do we want to find out?)</b>	<b>Follow-up questions/Additional inquiries (what is of further interest?)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do CSOs relate to/interact with citizens in South Sudan?</li> <li>• Are there flaws that may limit CSOs effectiveness?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is working well in the engagement with citizens?</li> <li>• What are the main obstacles faced in citizen engagement?</li> <li>• Are there any groups in society that are harder to access?</li> </ul>

<b>Section D: Working in South Sudan</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do you engage or work with other CSOs, International Organisations or groups? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Can you describe this engagement?</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. What are the particular challenges involved in operating in a post-conflict society?</li> <li>3. Are there any other particular aspects of South Sudanese society that you think either hinder or help the work that your CSO does?</li> </ol>	
<b>Research interest (what do we want to find out?)</b>	<b>Follow-up questions/Additional inquiries (what is of further interest?)</b>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gathering a holistic understanding of specific challenges encountered in South Sudan</li> <li>• Gaining the foundation for assessing CSO's effectiveness and formulating policy recommendations</li> <li>• Motivating the interviewee to reflect on further experienced obstacles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there specific strategies employed to overcome those obstacles?</li> <li>• How would you rate the effectiveness of such strategies?</li> </ul>
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<b>Section E: Formal restrictions</b>	
<p>1. What impact has the 2016 'Non-Governmental Organisations Act' had on the operations of the CSO? (First Generally, then for more detail: )</p> <p>a. What impact did the quota that stipulates that 80 percent of employees have to be South Sudanese have on the CSO?</p> <p>b. What impact did the stipulation that a 'country agreement' must be signed have on the CSO?</p> <p>c. What impact did the financial stipulations have on the CSO? (I.e the requirement for organisations to use a South Sudanese bank account for their operations)</p> <p>2. Are there any other obstacles to your work coming from the Government or other organisations?</p> <p>3. What strategies have been employed to overcome any of the restrictions you have mentioned?</p>	
<b>Research interest (what do we want to find out?)</b>	<b>Follow-up questions/Additional inquiries (what is of further interest?)</b>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What legal/institutional obstacles do CSOs face?</li> <li>• Gathering a holistic understanding of how formal restrictions limit the effectiveness of a CSO's work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there any laws or policies that pose challenges to your work?</li> <li>• Are there any monetary or funding restrictions that pose challenges to your work?</li> <li>• Are there any defamatory practices that pose challenges to your work?</li> </ul>
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<b>Debriefing</b>	
<p>To finalise this conversation, are there any things you want to add? Are there any issues that have not been touched by our questions and you want to mention?</p> <p>Thank you very much for participating in this interview and answering all of our questions!</p> <p>Your contributions will be very valuable to our study, and we believe that your input will greatly enrich our understanding of the challenges and opportunities encountered by Civil Society Actors.</p>	
<b>Research interest (what do we want to find out?)</b>	<b>Follow-up questions/Additional inquiries (what is of further interest?)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fade out the interview situation</li> <li>• How was the experience of the interview for the conversation partner?</li> <li>• Opportunity for the interviewee to give his final remarks (free of guided questions)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How was/ did you like the experience of the interview?</li> <li>• Is there anything more to say?</li> <li>• Maybe mention shortly: What did <i>we</i> interviewers learn in the conversation?</li> </ul>

**Follow-Up Questions via Email**  
 After feedback from CSPPS, we decided to send out follow-up emails to some of the interview participants.

1. Is your organisation aware of the South Sudanese commitment to participating in the Voluntary National Review 2024?  
If yes: Did it affect your work as a CSO?
2. Have you been contacted by officials with regards to contributing to the VNR?  
If yes: Could you describe your involvement in the review process?
3. Do you know of other organisations that have been contacted by officials?

Additionally, we analysed your comments regarding obstacles that may hinder your work as an organisation.

Here we would be interested in the following:

0. Which kind of support from the government would help in improving your work?

<b>Research interest (what do we want to find out?)</b>	<b>Follow-up questions/Additional inquiries (what is of further interest?)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gathering information about the incorporation of civil society stakeholders in the VNR process.</li> <li>• Gathering information about their awareness and engagement in the process.</li> <li>• Gathering some additional informations that would help to formulate recommendations.</li> </ul>	