

SOUTH SUDAN



Local Peace Agreements in South Sudan: Exploring Processes at the Margins

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Executive Summary

This report synthesises findings from five sites – Yei, Wau, Yambio, Aweil and Malakal – to assess the nature, function and influence of local peace agreements in South Sudan. These settings reflect a range of conflict drivers, governance configurations and peacebuilding efforts. Across these diverse contexts, seven cross-cutting insights emerge:

- 1. Local peace agreements are contextually specific but structurally patterned:** While the actors and issues vary, from return-related tensions in Yei to cattle raiding and youth mobilisation in Aweil, agreements often follow similar functional logics: defusing immediate violence, regulating movement and re-establishing social order.
- 2. Intermediary actors are essential to success:** Traditional authorities, church leaders, and local civil society groups consistently act as trusted brokers. Their capacity to convene conflicting parties, often across political or military divides, was critical, especially in Yambio, Yei and Malakal.
- 3. Local-to-national linkages exist, but remain weakly supported:** In several sites, local agreements shaped or were shaped by national frameworks like the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), signed in September 2018. For example, dialogues in Yei and Malakal fed into transitional security arrangements. However, these trans-scalar effects are fragile without sustained support and proper coordination.
- 4. Political will and follow-up determine agreement durability:** Agreements lacking government backing, enforcement mechanisms, or follow-up support tend to unravel. In Wau and Aweil, for example, fragile settlements were undermined by renewed political interference, insecurity and neglect.
- 5. Civil-military tensions are a recurring conflict driver:** Tensions between communities and security actors often triggered conflict, especially in Yei, Wau and Malakal. Many agreements included measures for regulating armed presence, demilitarising civilian areas and creating community-security dialogue platforms.

6. **Spatial dynamics matter – borderlands and return zones are hotspots:** In Yei and Malakal, displacement, return of groups and contested authority intersect in a cyclical way, making these areas particularly prone to recurring violent conflicts. Peace efforts in these areas must address spatially layered governance and mobility dynamics.
7. **Process is as important as outcome:** Even when formal agreements are not reached, dialogue processes such as those in Yambio and Aweil can contribute to lowering tensions, building trust and preparing the ground for future settlements. These 'pre-negotiations' are often undervalued, but essential.

Introduction

Long before independence, South(ern) Sudan developed a tradition of local peace processes alongside national-level initiatives. One prevalent and often-cited example of local peacemaking that had implications at the national level is the so-called Wunlit process in 1999. Wunlit was led by church and traditional authorities which helped to create the foundations for the reunification of the then split Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). The process was founded on a peacebuilding practice that adopts a traditional approach, providing an alternative to high-level talks that have typically been flawed and unable to extend to and engage with the grassroots.¹ Lessons learnt from the Wunlit experience highlighted that community-level initiatives 'require months and indeed years of mobilization and awareness-raising, working with chiefs, elders, and women'.²

Critical peace scholarship has increasingly emphasised the place and role of the local in contemporary peace theorisation. Roger Mac Ginty highlighted the way that the ideas and practices of 'so-called ordinary people' nurture and support peacebuilding within local, ordinary – everyday – arrangements.³ On local peace agreements specifically, Christine Bell and Laura Wise⁴ argue that these agreements are not simply auxiliary to national-level processes but rather function as meaningful political interventions in their own right. Their empirical investigation demonstrates that such agreements can serve a range of functions – such as pre-negotiation, framework-building, or implementation – and operate across diverse spatial contexts.

The report adopts the spatial definitions set out by Bell and Wise as, (i) territorially limited trans-scalar local spaces such as cities, towns and villages, (ii) borderlands and (iii) routes-of-passage, applying this typology to local processes in South Sudan. In doing so the report further examines the ways in which these local processes have remained effective in and across these spaces, at the site of intersection between national political dynamics and unfolding local peace efforts.

Such pluralistic understandings of local peace processes challenge linear models of peacebuilding and foregrounds the fragmented, multi-scalar nature of contemporary conflict and peacemaking. As such, studying local peace agreements in South Sudan offers an important lens through which to explore how political order is negotiated, often outside or alongside formal peace architectures.

Further, where the formal architecture appears to have become a site of political impasse, the national framework becomes a vehicle for political manoeuvring and elite interests, in what Christine Bell and Jan Pospisil have described as a 'formalised political unsettlement'.⁵ As is now broadly accepted in the case of the R-ARCSS,⁶ where implementation of the national agreement has stalled, this report seeks to elucidate the ways in which progress can still happen in the local context, even if against the odds in relation to national political developments.

Growing attention to the 'local' in peace theory and practice has led to a marked interest in local peace processes and agreements, partly as a response to 'the difficulties and failures of national level peace processes'.⁷ An increased focus on the local also poses ideational, normative, and practical challenges, such as defining local peace and/or a local peace agreement, among others. As intrastate conflicts become increasingly frequent, complex and multi-faceted, these conceptual and definitional issues continue to attract the attention of scholars and practitioners across Africa and the world, making the notion of 'local' a fast-evolving and fascinating theme of interest to peace scholars, practitioners, and policy makers.

Given the centrality of the notion of 'local' in contemporary peace research and practice, investigation and documentation of local peace agreements in South Sudan can neither be timelier nor overemphasised. The Community Empowerment for Progress Organisation (CEPO), in collaboration with the National Ministry of Peacebuilding, Coventry University's Centre for Peace and Security (CPS) and the University of Edinburgh Law School, has been investigating and documenting peace agreements in South Sudan as part of the PeaceRep programme.⁸

Beyond mapping and documenting local peace accords, this project contributes towards the broader effort to enhance theorisation of the phenomenon of local peace in South Sudan. In doing so, this study aims to add to a dialectical engagement, extending beyond categorisation of local peace agreements, in order to further explore the composition of a local agreement in South Sudan and gain better understandings of the ways these agreements relate to the national and the global levels.

In the investigations and workshops conducted in 2024 and early 2025, the joint team of CEPO and the South Sudanese National Ministry of Peacebuilding identified and engaged with local processes, collecting peace agreements in the Central and Western Equatoria, Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile regions of South Sudan. This was done through workshops that were organised by CEPO and held in Yambio, Yei, Wau, Aweil and Malakal with members of local government, civil society organisations, representatives of people with disabilities, chiefs, women, youth, and inter-religious council members, including Christian and Muslim inter-faith representatives. During the workshops, the CEPO team consultatively engaged stakeholders and the conflicting parties through facilitation, guided dialogues, group work and presentations. This led to identifying and discussing the various local peace agreements that are discussed in this report.

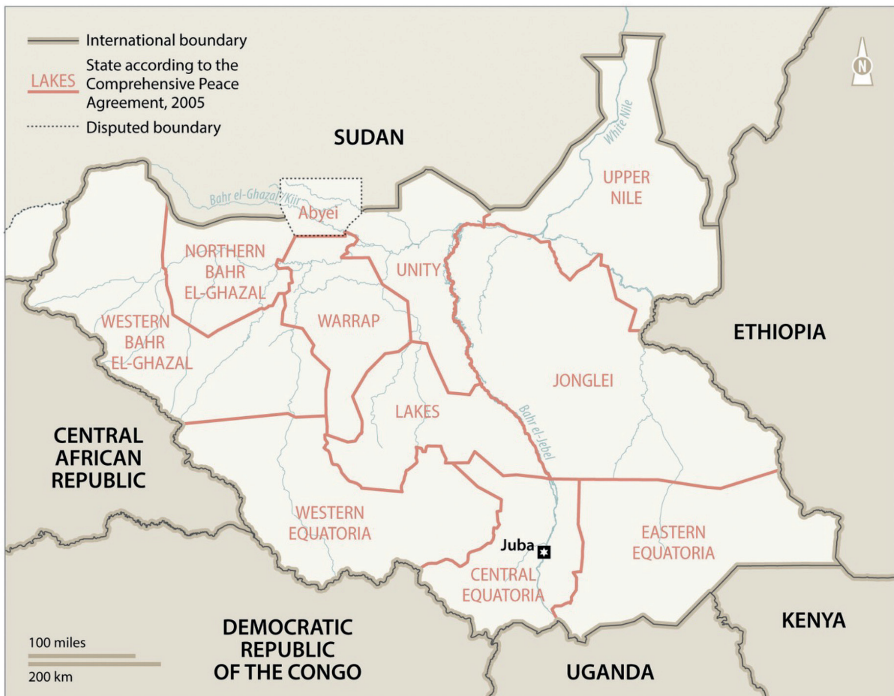
In recognising the value of documenting local peace initiatives, this report also engages critically with the conceptual diversity and varying formations of local agreements. As recent scholarship has argued, local agreements are not uniform instruments of grassroots consensus but vary widely in purpose, form, and spatial relevance.⁹ Some function to pre-empt violence or open humanitarian access, while others establish governance arrangements or implement national-level provisions at a local scale. Likewise, agreements operate across a range of geographies – from contested towns and borderlands to seasonal migration routes – each shaped by its own inter-group power dynamics and histories of violence.

By drawing on recent analytical frameworks that categorise local agreements by both function and spatial setting, this report not only catalogues peace practices but contributes to a deeper understanding of how fragmented conflict systems operate in South Sudan and how localised initiatives interact with or diverge from the broader peace architecture.

The report will firstly set out reflections and analysis on the workshop findings and local processes from each of the five states; Western Equatoria, Central Equatoria, Western Bahr el Ghazal, Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile. This commentary is combined with a historical and political analysis considering the nexus between the national conflict trajectory and the shifting local process landscape, particularly in relation to key national political moments, such as the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement and South Sudan's 2011 independence.

The reflections from these five locations are then used for developing a cross-contextual assessment of how local approaches to peacebuilding have evolved over time, using this as a framing to suggest some possible broader local peacebuilding patterns developing across South Sudan. Namely this section will examine how local communities and peacebuilding actors have developed self-managed models and iterative community-led approaches to implementation in relation to how the ARCSS and latterly the R-ARCSS processes have unfolded. The report concludes by setting out the key recommendations drawn from workshop findings and making a final set of recommendations.

Figure 1: Map of South Sudan showing the ten states as re-delineated in February 2020 ¹⁰



Western Equatoria – Yambio

Western Equatoria is one of three Equatorian states in South Sudan; neighbouring Central Equatoria where the national capital Juba is located. With an area of 79,343 square kilometres, the capital Yambio has increasingly become the focal point of state politicians and, consequently, the opposing Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) government forces and Sudan People's Liberation Army-In Opposition (SPLA-IO) forces.¹¹

As the 'birthplace of southern Sudan's independence movement',¹² the wider Equatorian state had historically challenged the central rule of Khartoum through armed resistance throughout the late 1950s, prior to and also following Sudan's independence from British colonial rule in 1956. In 1972, as part of ending the first Sudanese civil war and in order to end the largely Equatorian-led Anyanya insurgency, the Sudanese government signed a peace agreement granting Southern Sudan semi-autonomy.¹³ By 1976, Equatoria province was divided into Central, Eastern and Western provinces and in 2015, Western Equatoria was divided into Amadi, Maridi, and Gbudwe states, with Gbudwe state being split into Gbudwe and Tambura in 2017.¹⁴

The population of Western Equatoria is predominantly agrarian, and cyclical prolonged dry spells affect the area regularly, delaying the growing season and negatively impacting food production. The region is equally known for its rich natural resources while the state capital of Yambio is an important market hub.¹⁵

Western Equatoria has perennially experienced waves of violence since around the time of the [2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement \(CPA\)](#).¹⁶ Prior to South Sudan's independence in 2011, attacks from Ugandan-based Lords' Resistance Army (LRA) led to the emergence of the community defence groups known as 'Arrow Boys' which eventually became a major armed actor in the region.¹⁷ The strong ethnic identities within Western Equatoria have contributed to this response, with the group largely being comprised of people from the Azande community. By 2011, as the LRA were posing less of a threat, the 'Arrow Boys' then had to counter encroachment into Azande land by Dinka and Fulani cattle keepers.¹⁸

Discontent with the national government had been growing among the Western Equatorian population between 2005 and 2011, as they felt marginalised by the Bahr el Ghazal Dinka, who they viewed as dominating state institutions.¹⁹ This sentiment stems from the history of the first Sudanese Civil war and the power-sharing arrangements of the 1972 agreement imposed by Sudan, in which the Sudanese president appointed a Bor Dinka as vice president of the new semi-autonomous unified South.

This power-sharing arrangement shaped the ethnopolitical dividing lines between Equatorians and Dinka in Southern Sudan moving into the 1980s and when Sudan eventually split the South into Equatoria, Bahr el Ghazal, and Upper Nile, southern armed opposition groups formed the SPLM/A, under a Dinka leadership, with few Equatorians joining. In turn, 'Equatorians remained broadly marginalized in the SPLM/A power structure that took control of the South in 2005' and by extension from the post-independence government after 2011.²⁰

The larger Equatoria region, of which Western Equatoria is a part, was mostly spared from large scale violence during the first phase of South Sudan's civil war that broke out in December 2013. In 2015, however, these dynamics began to change and by 2016 Equatoria emerged as one of the epicentres of the civil war leading to a dire humanitarian crisis in the region.²¹ Furthermore, the conflict dynamics in Western Equatoria, as with other parts of South Sudan, are equally interlinked with national conflict profiles and political dynamics. The ambiguous inclusion or exclusion of armed groups in the national peace process remains both a conflict-inducing and escalating factor in Western Equatoria.²²

Tambura, an area of Western Equatoria that had largely remained unaffected by the conflicts of 2013 and 2016, was drawn into violence around the time of the 2018 R-ARCSS. As a site where both the Azande–Balanda conflict and elite political manoeuvring intersect, it provides an important case for understanding how national peace processes shape local dynamics. Political decisions surrounding the design of the R-ARCSS deepened ethnic divisions between the Azande and Balanda, yet subsequent local peace efforts emerged in response. Reports from 2022 indicate that the violence was further fuelled by national political figures, including individuals linked to the National Security Service (NSS) and the government.²³ The report elaborates on these developments and their connection to the R-ARCSS in later sections.

In view of the context set out so far, Western Equatoria, apart from the national peace process, has experienced low profile local peacebuilding efforts. Whilst there has not been a systematic documentation of these agreements yet, some of them have been documented by some community leaders for reference purposes. During a workshop held in Yambio between 23–25 May 2023, the CEPO team identified and documented various peace agreements in Western Equatoria. These agreements can be found in the annexes of this report,* in a table with descriptions of the circumstances under which these local agreements were signed in Western Equatoria State. The following section presents these peace efforts and analyses their conditions, outcomes, and contributions to the broader peace landscape in Yambio.

Local Peace Agreements in Yambio

Western Equatoria has seen a diverse array of local peace agreements over the past two decades, reflecting the complex entanglement of communal, political, and military dynamics in the region. These agreements range from early (pre-independence) inter-ethnic settlements following episodes of localised violence – such as the 2005 accords between Azande and Dinka communities in Yambio and between farmers and pastoralists in Mundri – to more politically consequential processes like the [2016 SSNLM-Government agreement](#)²⁴ (also available in Annex i) that emerged from the transformation of the 'Arrow Boys' into a formal armed actor, the South Sudan National Liberation Movement (SSNLM). While varying in scope and outcome, these agreements all speak to the ways in which local actors have actively sought to negotiate coexistence amid broader national instability.

Applying Bell and Wise's framing around the role of local agreements, in this context these accords can be understood in both functional and spatial terms. Functionally, many of the agreements, as listed in the Annex, served as pre-negotiation settlements intended to reduce violence and restore mobility. Others, such as the SSNLM-Government, accord took on the role of framework agreements, establishing local interim governance arrangements and in some instances, provided for the integration of local armed groups into national structures.

* Annex i) – List and Description of Peace Agreements – Yambio

Another set includes Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) that emerged from intercommunal tensions in Tambura,²⁵ which had experienced high levels of intercommunal violence and displacement both before and after 2018. These agreements can be understood as local efforts to promote stability by drawing on principles similar to those in R-ARCSS, while adapting them to the specific needs and circumstances of the local context.

Spatially, these agreements span all three categories identified by Bell and Wise, including towns, borderlands and routes-of-passage, each of them corresponding to distinct conflict dynamics and governance challenges. Urban centres like Yambio and Tambura exemplify what Bell and Wise describe as territorially bounded but trans-scalar spaces, where national and local contestations are deeply intertwined. In Tambura, for instance, local intercommunal violence has both shaped and been shaped by national-level developments, including shifts in military alignment, elite fragmentation, and the uneven implementation of the R-ARCSS. These overlapping arenas of authority illustrate how national peace processes inform local political and security settlements and, conversely, how local conflict dynamics can expose the limitations or distortions of national frameworks.

By contrast, agreements forged along migration corridors or in peripheral zones tend to operate in more fluid and contested spatial environments. They respond to the needs of mobile populations and shifting patterns of violence that challenge fixed notions of territorial governance. Some of these agreements emerge in borderland mediation areas, such as those between ethnic groups like the Azande and Balanda or the Azande and Jurbel, while others address tensions between pastoralists and farmers, where issues of customary land access and mobility are central. Agreements regulating seasonal cattle migration reflect routes-of-passage arrangements, managing not only physical movement but also intercommunal tensions along strategic corridors. Across these categories, religious actors, most notably interfaith groups, have consistently played a pivotal mediating role, highlighting the importance of civic intermediaries in hybrid peacemaking spaces.

What emerges is a landscape of peace practice that is fragmented but deeply adaptive. Rather than supporting a singular, linear national peace process, these agreements exist within a layered conflict system in which local actors respond to shifting threats and opportunities. The Western Equatoria experience underscores that local agreements are not marginal but form part of a distributed peace infrastructure. Recognising both the diversity in the typology of these agreements and the way they are spatially embedded is essential to understanding the real contours of peacemaking in South Sudan.

A sustainable local peace infrastructure in Western Equatoria requires a systematic and inclusive approach. This includes conducting comprehensive research to ensure that local peace agreements are identified and documented from the state level down to Bomas.* Capacity-building in mediation and negotiation should be expanded, particularly targeting community leaders, women, and youth. Crucially, to prevent the recurrence of violence, signed agreements should be followed up with structured monitoring and engagement.

The selection criteria for future peace documentation initiatives should be broadened to include a wider range of local stakeholders. Community awareness campaigns are perceived as strongly needed to address underlying drivers of conflict such as tribalism, nepotism, and political exclusion, as well as to raise public understanding of the national-level electoral roadmap. Legal reforms should ensure that the national constitution provides enforceable provisions for holding accountable those who deliberately violate local and national-level peace agreements. The establishment of Peace Committees at the grassroots level and a dedicated state-level team for the documentation of local agreements would enhance coordination of implementation and institutional memory.

* As part of local governance in South Sudan, Bomas are the lowest division of administrative decision making.

Central Equatoria – Yei

Yei River County, located in Central Equatoria State, shares borders with Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, making it a strategically significant frontier with deep-rooted cross-border ties. The town of Yei, once dubbed 'small London' for its cosmopolitan character but also its cool and wet weather, has historically served as a commercial and administrative hub, owing to its location along key trade routes. Its fertile soils and favourable climate have supported a predominantly agrarian economy, while its diverse population consisting of Kakwa Pojulu, Mundari, and others has traditionally maintained a strong sense of community cohesion and cultural integration.

Yei's recent history has been shaped by cycles of militarisation, displacement, and fragmentation. During the Second Sudanese Civil War, control of Yei fluctuated between government and SPLA forces, and although the [2005 CPA](#) brought initial stability, violence returned following South Sudan's independence. While Yei was shielded by Ugandan troops during the first phase of the civil war, it became a major front during the second phase in 2016, witnessing heavy clashes between the SPLA, SPLA-IO and other emerging armed actors.

Among the most prominent of these was the National Salvation Front (NAS), a predominantly Equatorian armed group led by General Thomas Cirillo. NAS rejected the 2018 R-ARCSS and maintained a strong presence in Yei and across Central Equatoria, sustaining low-intensity guerrilla warfare against government positions and ambushing roads, which significantly undermined civilian access, mobility, and trust in state security forces.

The presence of NAS further complicated the security and political landscape in Yei, reinforcing local perceptions of marginalisation and deepening divisions within Equatorian communities over armed resistance versus political engagement. NAS's rejection of the peace process positioned it outside of formal negotiation tracks, creating ambiguity over its inclusion in future settlement frameworks and weakening efforts to consolidate peace. Meanwhile, the region continued to experience episodes of conflict-related crimes and human rights violations, including extortion, arbitrary detention, and forced displacement. At the same time, Yei's borderland status ensured the continued movement of people and goods (licit as well as illicit) between South Sudan and its neighbours, entangling local insecurity with transnational dynamics.

In this complex environment, local peace initiatives have become essential tools for stabilisation. Civilian actors such as religious leaders, traditional chiefs, youth representatives, and women's groups have increasingly stepped in to mediate disputes, rebuild trust, and improve civil-military relations. Several agreements have sought to address everyday drivers of violence, from land disputes and clan rivalries to military abuses and intercommunal tensions.

As part of the PeaceRep programme, CEPO, in collaboration with academic and policy partners, convened a workshop in Yei in February 2025 to collect, document, and reflect on a range of such local agreements. The following section presents these peace efforts and analyses their conditions, outcomes, and contributions to the broader peace landscape in Yei.

Local Peace Agreements in Yei

The Yei River area has witnessed a series of layered and diverse local peace processes in recent years, reflecting its status as a strategically significant, ethnically diverse, and militarily contested region. Between 2013 and 2024, at least eight notable local peace initiatives were documented, addressing issues ranging from inter-communal violence and military misconduct to the harmonisation of customary law and civil-military relations. These agreements illustrate the typological and spatial diversity of local peace arrangements and provide a rich case study for understanding the complex ways in which local actors negotiate security, coexistence, and governance in a fragmented post-conflict environment.

Functionally, the Yei agreements span across pre-negotiation, framework, and implementation agreements.* The 2018 grassroots peace initiative between Sudan People's Liberation Movement-In Government (SPLM-IG) and Sudan People's Liberation Movement-In Opposition (SPLM-IO) addressed internal dissatisfaction within the opposition camp over rank and power-sharing, helping to prevent potential fragmentation and defection, serving as a classic pre-negotiation initiative. Similarly, the 2021 Otogo Community Dialogue and the 2022 Host Community-Returnees-Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)-Military Dialogue focused on de-escalating mistrust and re-establishing communication between armed actors, civilians, and displaced populations.

* For a set of definitions laying out how we define local peace agreements and their various stages, the Peace Agreements Database Local Agreements glossary can be found here: https://www.peaceagreements.org/cms/documents/4199/Definitions_local_Pblq2Wa.pdf

Several agreements, such as the 2022 and 2024 civil-military dialogues,²⁶ can be read as implementation agreements, particularly in the sense of localising provisions of the R-ARCSS, especially around civilian protection and accountability for abuses. Others, including the 2024 Kakwa Customary Law Agreement and the 2024 Lasu Dialogue, reflect framework-building efforts, aiming to establish shared normative and governance structures, particularly around customary law and clan relations.

Spatially, these peace efforts span all three categories identified by Bell and Wise, but Yei Town is particularly illustrative of a territorially bounded trans-scalar space. As a densely populated, politically sensitive urban hub with significant civil-military friction, initiatives in Yei often serve as both localised conflict-resolution mechanisms and platforms for broader political signalling. For instance, the 2022 and 2024 civil-military dialogues held across multiple urban Bomas in Yei did more than respond to immediate civilian grievances. They also served as entry points into broader discussions on implementing key provisions of the R-ARCSS, particularly those related to military accountability and rebuilding civilian trust in security institutions.

According to workshop proceedings, outcomes from these dialogues were shared with state-level authorities in Juba and reportedly helped inform revisions to civil-military coordination protocols. While the influence was uneven and indirect, it nonetheless reflects an emergent, if imperfect, bottom-up ripple effect in which local peace processes shape wider governance practice. Similarly, lessons from Yei's intercommunal dialogues have informed programming by national NGOs and cross-border civic networks, such as the Ugandan supported Kakwa dialogues and regional interfaith peace forums.²⁷

The 2013 Kakwa Cross-Border Conference with Congolese counterparts represents a borderland mediation space, tackling mobility and trade-related tensions along international boundaries, with support from Ugandan facilitators.²⁸ Meanwhile, the Lasu Dialogue between the Saju and Renya clans took place in Jabara Boma in Ezo county bordering Tambura county, and dealt with inter-clan violence linked to land and movement, placing it within the realm of route-of-passage spaces, often governed by customary and kinship-based norms.

These agreements also demonstrate the evolving role of local mediators. Chiefs, religious leaders, civil society organisations, and women's groups have acted as conveners and guarantors of peace across these processes. The prominence of community-led dialogues, such as those in Otego Payam and Lasum, illustrates a continuing reliance on hybrid authority structures with which formal and informal actors co-produce stability. The pending Kakwa Customary Law Agreement further signals a growing interest in codifying customary practices as a means of regulating conflict and justice, in response to gaps in formal governance.

Taken together, the local peace agreements in Yei highlight how varying local actors contribute to conflict resolution in ways that do not always align neatly with the timelines or logic of national peace processes. They exemplify 'patchwork peace', wherein multiple processes simultaneously manage violence, reconstruct local order, and create negotiated zones of coexistence.

The local peace agreements documented in Yei also illustrate not only the vibrancy of grassroots peacebuilding but the functional and spatial diversity of such efforts. Several of the Yei initiatives provided pre-negotiation functions – de-escalating conflict, rebuilding trust, and preventing further fragmentation within and between armed groups – while other processes sought to implement or localise broader national commitments, especially in relation to civil-military relations and reintegration. The 2024 Kakwa Customary Law Agreement, for instance, reveals a framework-building logic aimed at harmonising local governance and justice mechanisms outside formal state structures.

Yet, the fragility of these agreements, as illustrated by persistent insecurity, defections, political manipulation and weak enforcement, also demonstrates that local peace processes are shaped by fragmented local sovereignties and overlapping governance claims, particularly in contested spaces like urban Bomas and borderland areas. These dynamics underscore how peace efforts in places like Yei must navigate multiple, sometimes competing, layers of authority and legitimacy.

The recommendations from the workshop participants arising from these experiences align with this insight: strengthening peace requires not only improved infrastructure (such as road connections or functional telecommunication) and disarmament but also the empowerment of local peace committees, long-term follow-up, and support for intermediary actors who operate across scales. The Yei experience therefore illustrates the importance of recognising and resourcing local agreements not as peripheral add-ons to a national peace process, but as essential spaces where political order is negotiated and renegotiated in real time.

Western Bahr el Ghazal – Wau

Regarding broader national conflicts, the Bahr el Ghazal region was relatively peaceful during the first months of the 2013 civil war, however, this changed in the second wave of violence in 2016. The region had generally been an SPLA stronghold throughout the conflict that ended in 2005 and experienced fewer ethnic divisions and violence as a result of the 2013 civil war that followed South Sudan's secession from Sudan.

At the onset of violence in December 2013, the region did send troops out to fighting in the more affected neighbouring states of Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile.²⁹ Whilst it has remained disconnected from the national conflict, Bahr el Ghazal has nonetheless sustained ongoing local conflicts predominantly centring around cattle raids and revenge killings,³⁰ particularly in the Western Bahr el Ghazal-Warrap border region.

The region was affected by the fractured relationship between the SSDF and SPLA during the implementation of the [2005 CPA](#) between the Government of Sudan and the SPLM/SPLA. The SSDF had signed an agreement to merge forces with the SPLA in 2006. At the local level, Western Bahr el Ghazal state has continued to experience communal conflicts of varying intensities over the years. Whilst other factors such as power politics play a role, observably the key drivers of intercommunal violence in Bahr el Ghazal are land-related disputes and cattle raiding.

Local Peace Agreements in Wau

Local peace processes in Wau and the surrounding areas of Western Bahr el Ghazal illustrate a dense network of conflict resolution initiatives operating across intersecting political, ethnic, and livelihood-based divides. These efforts reflect a layered conflict ecology where disputes over land, cattle migration, political allegiances, and military presence frequently intersect. From communal clashes between farmers and pastoralists to disputes between organised forces and civilians, the peace initiatives in Wau respond to both long-standing grievances and more recent escalations. They also demonstrate how iterative, locally grounded dialogues can become embedded forms of conflict governance, often in the absence or weakness of formal state institutions.

One of the most prominent features of the Wau context is the recurrence of conflict between agriculturalists and pastoralists, particularly along cattle migration corridors crossing Western Bahr el Ghazal and Warrap states. The Marial Bai processes (2016),³¹ including the so-called 2nd Bussere Review,³² stand out as functionally hybrid; while they address concrete implementation questions (e.g., cattle routes, reparations, and small arms control), they also operate as framework-building efforts by institutionalising dialogue and dispute resolution mechanisms such as the Interstate Coordinating Committee and the Dispute Resolution Committee, composed of traditional authorities.

These negotiations are renewed annually, suggesting an evolving civic-led infrastructure that builds legitimacy through repetition and community engagement. Similar to the pattern so far described in the analysis of areas in Western Equatoria, spatially, processes in Wau also tend to span routes-of-passage and borderland environments, where competition over land and access overlaps with shifting seasonal patterns and administrative boundaries.

Other agreements in Wau underscore the fluid and often tense nature of civil-military relations, where the boundaries between civilian and military roles frequently blur, generating friction and uncertainty. In 2017–2018, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) facilitated a series of dialogue forums in Wau that brought together government officials, opposition representatives and displaced communities to address these tensions and support conditions for safe return.³³ While no formal MoUs were signed during these engagements, they helped lay the groundwork for later ceasefire arrangements and informal coordination mechanisms.

These included the 2018 trust-building efforts facilitated by UNMISS, as well as monitoring frameworks established under the R-ARCSS – such as the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism (CTSAMM) and the Joint Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JVMM). Though limited in scope, these processes aimed to re-establish civilian movement, reduce armed presence in key areas, and rebuild trust between parties. Collectively, they illustrate the pre-negotiation role of local settlements: mitigating immediate threats while paving the way for more sustained political arrangements.

In parallel, long-standing ethnic disputes – such as the Luo-Fertit conflict in Mapel (2005)³⁴ and the reported Ndogo-Jur tensions in 2022 – suggest that local settlements remain fragile when political support and follow-up are lacking, though publicly available sources do not provide formal confirmation of a distinct Ndogo-Jur conflict. In the past, several agreements failed or stalled due to insufficient enforcement or absence of national will, pointing to the structural constraints that often hamper local processes even when initial consensus is reached.

What stands out in Wau is the multiplicity of actors involved in mediation, ranging from state authorities and chiefs to international organisations and local NGOs. While government-led processes played a significant role, religious leaders, CEPO, and civil society actors such as Hope Agency for Relief and Development (HARD) and Women Training and Promotion Association (WOTAP), were often the ones maintaining community trust and enabling continuity between agreements. This reinforces the observation that local peacemaking is not a singular event but a distributed and adaptive process, often reliant on non-state actors operating across administrative levels.

The Wau context offers a vivid example of how diverse spatial settings (urban, rural, and cross-county) and mixed functional roles (de-escalation, implementation, framework-building) coexist in a fragmented conflict environment. As such, the peace efforts around Wau, whilst they have to some extent been tied to shifts in national level politics and to political factors shaping cattle keeper tensions in recent years, do not merely complement the efforts of the national peace process; they constitute a parallel, decentralised peace infrastructure in their own right.

The feedback from participants in the Wau workshop underscores both the promise and fragility of local peacemaking in Western Bahr el Ghazal. The consultative nature of the process, which has been centred around dialogue, joint analysis, and reflection, was widely appreciated, especially as a means of socialising and legitimising the agreements beyond their immediate signatories.

Yet participants were candid in identifying persistent structural and relational barriers to sustainable peace, including the absence of political will, the dominance of hierarchical attitudes among parties, the corrosive effect of hate speech, and a limited willingness to compromise.

These dynamics often prevent local agreements from moving beyond symbolic gestures into transformative social contracts. As seen in the Wau context, while local agreements may open space for short-term stability or coexistence, their success depends on follow-through, political endorsement, and active citizenship.

Recommendations from the workshop speak to this reality. They highlight the urgent need to bridge the gap between locally negotiated solutions and national frameworks – through constitutional inclusion, greater awareness of the R-ARCSS, and sustained government engagement with local by-laws and agreements. Calls for support to community-level peace conferences, expanded data collection down to the payam level, and donor backing for trauma healing and youth empowerment initiatives reflect a nuanced understanding of peace as both a procedural and relational endeavour.

The experience of Wau shows that the durability of peace does not solely rest on the text of agreements, but on the depth of local engagement, the empowerment of mediating institutions, and the ability to embed these processes into broader systems of governance. These findings not only validate the relevance of local peacemaking but also underline its dependence on systemic support to realise its full potential.

Northern Bahr el Ghazal – Aweil

Northern Bahr el Ghazal, with Aweil as its capital, is a borderland state located in the northwestern corner of South Sudan, adjacent to Sudan. The region is home primarily to the Dinka Malual, one of the largest Dinka subgroups, and has long been shaped by its cross-border relations with Sudanese pastoralist communities such as the Misseriya and Rizeigat. Historically, the Aweil region served as a key recruitment and mobilisation base for the SPLA during the Sudanese civil wars, and it continues to play a prominent role in South Sudan's political and military landscape. The area is primarily agrarian and pastoral, with strong seasonal migration dynamics and cyclical tensions over land, water, and cattle routes that cut across state and national boundaries.

Since independence, Aweil has remained relatively stable compared to other regions in South Sudan, particularly during the early phases of the civil war that began in 2013. However, its stability has at times masked deeply rooted political contestation and militarisation. With the two main military-political factions – SPLA-IG and SPLA-IO – never fully integrated, Northern Bahr el Ghazal became the epicentre of a critical shift in South Sudan's power politics. In April 2014, President Salva Kiir appointed Paul Malong, a militia leader from Aweil and then governor of Northern Bahr el Ghazal, as SPLA Chief of General Staff.

The appointment exacerbated ethnic and political tensions, particularly among Nuer communities, as Malong, who had already been accused of playing a central role in the killing of Nuer civilians in Juba in December 2013, was replacing the most senior Nuer figure in government.³⁵ His dismissal in 2017³⁶ only deepened regional instability; Malong went on to form the South Sudan United Front/Army (SSUF/A), which rejected the R-ARCSS peace framework, further complicating the conflict profile of Bahr el Ghazal and fragmenting national opposition structures.³⁷

Aweil has also been significantly affected by the broader impacts of displacement, cross-border migration, and returnee flows following conflict in Sudan and food insecurity within South Sudan. Its border position makes it a hub for trade, humanitarian operations, and transhumance, but also a flashpoint for seasonal disputes. Despite these challenges, the region has developed a strong tradition of local peace processes.

Aweil's regular migration conferences between Dinka Malual and Sudanese nomadic groups represent one of the most enduring and institutionalised local peace infrastructures in the country. These dialogues, often organised in advance of the dry season, focus on shared natural resources, access to markets and health services, and mitigation of potential violence between communities.

Local Peace Agreements in Aweil

Aweil stands out as a region with one of the most institutionalised traditions of local peace processes in South Sudan. It demonstrates both the persistence of local agency in peacemaking in the country and the enduring relevance of local agreements by their ability to navigate communal, pastoralist, and cross-border conflict dynamics. Particularly notable is the long-standing commitment to annual migration dialogues between the Dinka Malual and nomadic pastoralist communities from the North, such as the Rizeigat and Misseriya. These recurring processes underscore a deeply embedded local infrastructure for cross-border conflict prevention and seasonal coordination, anchored in shared needs, historical co-existence, and mutual dependence on land and water resources.

Many of the agreements from Aweil serve as pre-migration or pre-negotiation frameworks that aim to anticipate tensions and reduce violence before the dry season begins each year around November, with cattle movement beginning early on in the dry season in December. Others function as platforms for managing and reviewing past conflicts (post-migration), addressing unresolved grievances, and re-affirming commitments. These meetings often take place in formal venues such as hotels or administrative buildings (e.g., Aweil Grand Hotel, South Sudan Hotel), suggesting an increasing formalisation and institutional legitimacy of these local mechanisms. This formalisation reflects the layered spatial characteristics of Aweil's agreements, many of which address contexts that lie primarily along routes-of-passage, yet are deeply entangled with borderland dynamics, as these passages often span political boundaries between Sudan and South Sudan.

In addition to cross-border peace infrastructure, internal land disputes and community-level tensions have also been addressed through local peacemaking. Agreements, ranging from the Korok land dispute in 1954 to the recent Padum-Parek conflict (2024) reveal how local authority structures, traditional leaders, chiefs, and local councils continue to play vital roles in resolving long-standing disputes. These reflect territorially bounded peace efforts, often drawing on customary norms and deeply rooted practices of reaching community consensus.

Dialogues such as the Aweil East-West Paramount Chiefs' disagreement over administrative headquarters or the Wedwiel refugee-host community peace forum show how new layers of friction are forming over issues ranging from displacement to political representation, and are being absorbed by this expanding repertoire of local conflict resolution.

The relative success of many of Aweil's local peace processes reflects strong local ownership, sustained institutional memory, and iterative engagement. However, partial successes and unresolved cases – such as continued violations of grazing agreements by some Misseriya herders – also point to the fragility of these processes when enforcement is weak or political will is lacking.

The emphasis on convening review conferences, establishing peace committees, and creating coordination platforms shows how local actors have developed mechanisms for implementing and maintaining peace agreements over time, even in the face of repeated challenges. The inclusion of youth, attention to hate speech, and broader social cohesion dialogues (as seen in various Youth Dialogues and Social Media Awareness forums) signal a recognition that sustainable peace requires tackling the deeper social fabric of inter-communal relations, not just the terms of resource access.

The Aweil experience illustrates how deeply rooted traditions of local peacebuilding, especially in contexts of seasonal migration and land use, can offer durable mechanisms for conflict mitigation – provided they are supported by coherent institutional frameworks. While the region benefits from an impressive legacy of local dialogue and cross-border coordination, workshop participants highlighted key areas requiring reinforcement. Strengthening the local court systems in line with the Local Government Act (2009) and updating customary laws would enhance legal clarity and community trust in dispute resolution. Establishing conflict resolution committees at each administrative level would institutionalise mediation structures beyond ad hoc interventions.

To sustain peaceful coexistence in an increasingly politicised and resource-constrained environment, participants also called for the promotion of national unity, anti-tribalism initiatives, and inclusive awareness campaigns that foreground nonviolent conflict resolution. Finally, the absence of a clear and enforceable land policy continues to be a major driver of recurrent disputes; addressing this policy gap is essential if the lessons of Aweil's successful local peacemaking are to contribute to broader national stability.

Upper Nile State – Malakal

Upper Nile State, situated in the northeastern region of South Sudan along the border with Sudan and Ethiopia, has historically held strategic importance due to its rich oil reserves, access to the White Nile, and its position at the crossroads of major ethnic and political boundaries. The state is home to a diverse population, including the Shilluk, Nuer, Dinka, Mabaan, and other smaller communities. Its capital, Malakal, was once a vibrant cosmopolitan city known for its trade, administrative significance, and relative ethnic coexistence. The eruption of South Sudan's civil war in December 2013, however, marked a turning point for the region, and for Malakal in particular.

Malakal was one of the first urban centres to be engulfed by intense intercommunal and political violence following the outbreak of the conflict. The city changed hands multiple times between government and opposition forces, leaving behind scorched neighbourhoods, devastated infrastructure, and massive civilian casualties. What had been a multi-ethnic and commercially active city was transformed into a battlefield marked by ethnic cleansing, systematic destruction, and displacement.³⁸

Particularly hard-hit were the Shilluk and Nuer populations, who fled in large numbers, many seeking refuge in Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites established by UNMISS. Even after formal ceasefires and peace agreements, Malakal remained deeply polarised, with displaced populations reluctant to return due to fear of retaliation, militarisation, and unresolved land and property disputes. The PoC sites in Malakal were subsequently targeted in early 2016 during further outbreaks of violence arising from inter-ethnic tensions between Shilluk and Dinka communities.³⁹

The layered nature of the conflict in Upper Nile, which has featured shifting alliances between SPLA-IG, SPLA-IO, local militias, and community defence groups, has exacerbated communal tensions and obstructed efforts to rebuild intergroup trust. Yet, despite the traumatic rupturing caused by the civil war and the continued militarisation of local politics, there have been efforts, often led by churches, civil society, and international organisations, to rebuild local dialogue structures and foster reconciliation. These local initiatives have included intercommunal peace dialogues, return and reintegration conversations, and youth engagement on peacebuilding and trauma healing. Efforts, however, have often been limited in scope, poorly coordinated, or overwhelmed by the scale of displacement and political interference.

Local Peace Agreements in Malakal

The local peace agreements documented in Malakal and the broader Upper Nile region demonstrate how layered and fragmented local conflict dynamics have become in the aftermath of national civil war and mass displacement. In contrast to earlier imaginaries of the local as a clearly defined geographical or communal space, many of these agreements are spatially complex and politically entangled. Several took place not in traditional community settings but in highly constrained humanitarian spaces – most notably the PoC site in Malakal – where the Chollo, Dinka, and Nuer communities negotiated coexistence amidst conditions of trauma, militarisation, and external aid governance. These agreements aimed less at restoring pre-war social relations than at establishing basic conditions for coexistence amid displacement and politicisation.

Some of the peace initiatives, especially the 2016 Chollo-Dinka-Nuer dialogue in the PoC site and the May 2023 Chollo-Nuer reconciliation dialogue, can be seen as implementation-oriented agreements. Their immediate goal was to re-establish daily cohabitation, safety, and community-level coordination in shared spaces. Yet their function also bordered on the symbolic; these processes challenged the dominant perception of communities as irreconcilably divided by war and offered microcosmic instances of what post-war reintegration could look like in urban, multi-ethnic environments.

However, such agreements exist in contested policy vacuums. Lacking formal recognition or integration into national frameworks, these agreements endure mainly through interpersonal trust and third-party facilitation by religious or humanitarian actors. Related research shows that, given the nature of the recent conflict in Malakal and the number of dialogues already implemented, there remains a strong demand for additional initiatives. However, these must be carefully designed to use a conference or dialogue model suited to addressing the specific inter-ethnic tensions and recent conflict events in Malakal.⁴⁰

Other agreements, such as the 2021 border dialogues between Ulang, Baliet, and Nyirol or between Nasir and Ulang, dealt with territorial demarcation disputes at the county level and illustrate another key spatial logic: the use of local agreements as instruments of boundary management. These agreements served clear framework functions, providing guidelines to reduce violence and pre-empt seasonal or administrative tensions.

The durability of such agreements depends on their capacity to transcend short-term dispute mitigation and to feed into broader inter-county governance arrangements, something that remains highly underdeveloped in Upper Nile due to a lack of state legitimacy and operational capacity.

Several agreements failed or were only partially successful, including the 2019 Upper Nile National Dialogue,⁴¹ which was relocated to Juba from Malakal with a lack of facilities cited as the reason for moving the dialogue, and the 2022 Kitgwang party conflict resolution attempt. Both processes reveal the limits of local peacemaking when it collides with national-level power struggles. These failures underscore a recurrent pattern observed across South Sudan; the re-purposing of local dialogues for elite political negotiation or party factionalism.

In these cases, the form of 'local agreement' becomes a performative tool, sometimes staging the semblance of resolution while leaving root causes unresolved or even deepening exclusion. Such cases blur the lines between local and national, suggesting that agreements cannot be neatly scaled or categorised without attention to their embeddedness in larger political economies of peace.

The 2024 Dinka Ngok and Chollo agreement, following a violent incident, and the 2023 Agualek–SPLM agreement resolving internal party tensions, show that even amidst volatility, spaces exist for timely intervention and de-escalation. These agreements, while emerging from acute flashpoints, illustrate how community-level and elite-level actors sometimes intersect in shaping conflict trajectories. Such successes are rarely institutionalised, which highlights the need for stronger, state-backed implementation mechanisms and clearer linkages between local dialogue processes and formal governance frameworks.

Taken together, these agreements show that local peace processes in Malakal and Upper Nile are not easily captured by a single model. Their spatial logics range from confined humanitarian enclaves to borderland negotiations; their functions shift between implementation, framework, and elite bargaining; and their outcomes are shaped as much by national-level contestation as by community will. Recognising this complexity is critical not only for understanding the uneven landscape of post-conflict recovery in Upper Nile but also for reimagining what constitutes meaningful local peace in South Sudan more broadly.

The workshop discussions in Malakal underlined that while local peace agreements have demonstrated value in reducing violence and restoring a semblance of cohabitation, their sustainability remains fragile without broader structural shifts. Participants emphasised the urgent need to halt the mobilisation of conflict actors and to convene protective, trust-building spaces, particularly in response to renewed threats against specific groups such as the Nuer in Upper Nile.

A consistent theme across the dialogues was the politicisation of youth and the proliferation of arms, pointing to the necessity of renewed, community-informed disarmament strategies that restore security without reproducing grievances. Participants further highlighted the importance of promoting safe and dignified return for IDPs and cultivating inter-tribal harmony not only through elite mediation but also through strengthened collaboration between churches and local government. These insights reinforce the idea that local agreements are never purely local: their success depends on cross-scalar support, depoliticised governance, and a national commitment to inclusion, unity, and justice.

Cross-contextual Assessments

As the ARCSS and later the R-ARCSS processes unfolded, local communities and peacebuilding actors – especially interfaith groups – began to rely more on self-managed and community-led approaches. These models emphasise gradual, locally driven implementation rather than dependence on external mediation. Interfaith groups or figures often not only mediate local processes on the ground but also serve as conduits for the values that foster broader community buy-in to these processes.

As an indicator of this trend, the PA-X Local peace agreements database which covers agreements from 1990 to the end of 2024,⁴² contains 63 local peace agreements from pre-2011 southern Sudan and South Sudan. Twenty-seven of these agreements involve either mediation or direct participation by religious or traditional actors.* Within this sub-collection of agreements, 43% were mediated by religious actors with over 52% of these taking place after the signing of the initial ARCSS between 2015–2020.

Most of the local agreements for Western Equatoria involved some level of interfaith group involvement. Although only one process from Western Bahr el Ghazal involved religious mediation, there are clearly ongoing practices in the region around the peripheries of the local processes themselves which support and encourage broader practices of local peacemaking. These pull together civic forces including traditional and religious leaders in knowledge exchange workshops on peacebuilding with other community groups.⁴³

As shown in the examples throughout this report of successful processes, many involved community-led incremental approaches with strong civic and religious elements, as was seen in the Marial Bai agreement, which adopted an annual review mechanism, which in turn led to subsequent local agreements. Religious and traditional leaders can be great convening forces, not only in securing a local agreement, but also as powerful mechanisms in the necessary local follow up of agreements, with knowledge of how to most effectively implement the process outcomes and adapt to any conflict or peacemaking shifts post-signing.

* Whilst not a comprehensive collection of all available peace agreement texts or local peacemaking practices, as part of the PA-X Local database, this sub-collection was generated by selecting a search criteria using categories defined on PA-X as; 'Domestic religious organisation/leader or other elder' under 'mediator type'.

Religious and traditional leaders are also part of the intersection between national politics and local processes, and as covered in this report, often form the link between communities and local government authority. More is needed to strengthen and support these figures, whether local religious leaders or local chiefs as traditional authorities. Increasingly local communities report state governors not being present in their areas and dealing with local issues in person, opting to position themselves in Juba for political and or financial reasons.⁴⁴

As an example, and whilst not reflective of all views across South Sudan,* a PeaceRep Perceptions of Peace Survey covering 15 counties in South Sudan found that less than half of respondents viewed governors as ensuring key local issues such as human rights, with between 74–82% of respondents across all areas seeing traditional authorities, the Catholic church, Presbyterian church, other churches and religious communities as ensuring these rights.⁴⁵ In connection to the examples of local agreements described in this report, people also tended to hold more trust in traditional authorities when it came to negotiating agreements relating to cattle disputes specifically.

The case of the local process between the 'Arrow Boys' (SSNLM) and the government captures the complexity of the intersection between national politics and local agendas in the spaces around local processes. The process showed the value of church-led mediation, however it also displayed the themes set out throughout this report; the fragility of local agreements in becoming entangled in political competition and political re-ordering and the spatial trans-scalar dimensions of these processes, when local and national interests overlap. The SPLA chief of staff in Juba at the time, Paul Malong, opposed the agreement, and the SPLA-IO broke away from talks,⁴⁶ continuing negotiations but insisting that the process had national level characteristics. This process was happening in the years immediately preceding the R-ARCSS agreement and at a time when the ARCSS agreement had just been signed. It appeared as complementary to the national process and partially achieved the integration of the SSNLM members into the national army.

* Between 2021–2025, the six-wave survey collection recorded the views of 22,677 respondents across 29 locations (covering all ten states and one administrative area) in South Sudan; so, the survey can be viewed as generalisable to these locations rather than the wider country.

Ultimately, however, elements of the SSNLM members absorbed into the government forces defected, leaving Juba and returning to Yambio to operate both for the 'Arrow Boys' and for government units such as the police or SSPDF.⁴⁷ The process became a site of instability, both displaying and leveraging the positive effects of church-led mediation. At the same time, it was also serving the individual aims of local elites and governors who were able to use the post-agreement SSNLM integration sites as an opportunity to recruit more locals into the SSNLM.⁴⁸ This may have removed more youth combatants from the local space in the short term, but their later defection ultimately contributed to insecurity. Arguably, this also likely complicated or added further blockages to later sequences of the national peace process in certain areas.

In some respects, the multiple functions of this local process benefitted individual actors within their immediate contexts but did not necessarily advance broader local peacebuilding efforts across interconnected regions in South Sudan. As national-level negotiations increasingly absorbed elements of militarisation and political contestation in the course of the R-ARCSS transitional period, the structuring of local agreements became more entangled with these dynamics.

Key Recommendations

Several key recommendations highlighted in this report remain particularly relevant in this regard:

- ▶ there is a need for widespread awareness-raising of R-ARCSS and its core provisions, especially regarding the unification of forces;
- ▶ there is a need for the implementation of a comprehensive disarmament programme to support sustainable local peace;
- ▶ dedicated support mechanisms are needed to ensure that local agreements are effectively followed through.

In the case of the Azande and Balanda process, political dynamics influencing the structuring of the R-ARCSS agreement also shaped new unfolding local conflict and subsequent local peace efforts in the region. The power-sharing provisions in the national agreement that provided for an allowance to both parties for allocating their designated share of governor positions and other local authority positions, fostered political reshuffling that would eventually intersect ethnic group tensions and trigger violence in Tambura.

In choosing Alfred Futuyo, who is partly of Balanda heritage, as governor of Western Equatoria, Riek Machar changed the historical record of governorships in the area, where the position had predominantly been held by members of the majority Azande Avungara group, which was tied to President Salva Kiir's party.⁵⁰ In response, both parties sent out militias to Greater Tambura in Western Equatoria, with the once peaceful area that had avoided the conflict becoming the new site of national conflict spillover. Political strife increased and politics in the area became ethnicised, following the 2021 violence⁵¹ and the subsequent 2022 negotiations.

The R-ARCSS security implementation, to some extent, eroded local and community chief authority in both Western Bahr el Ghazal and Western Equatoria. McCrone describes cantonment site dynamics and several armed groups inflating the size of their forces in recruitment drives as ultimately eroding chief authority, as these local traditional sources of authority became 'unable to prevent the recruitment'. Instead, the 'Arrow Boys', who were once under the authority of the chiefs in their communities, took on their own system of informal militarised community governance. These processes partly reflected the militarised unravelling of the national peace process.⁵²

Conclusions

The case studies examined in this report provide insight into the complexity, potential, and limitations of local peace agreements across South Sudan. These cases are illustrative of a broader spectrum of local peacebuilding initiatives that, while often modest in visibility, carry significant weight in the everyday navigation of conflict and coexistence. There are no universal formulas for securing sustainable local peace; instead, successful agreements are shaped by context-specific dynamics, and hinge on conditions such as inclusivity, complementarity with other peace efforts, civil society engagement, robust process design, and attention to structural issues.

These conditions function as part of a landscape that is far more dynamic and fluid than conventional peacebuilding frameworks often assume. Armed conflict in South Sudan operates through overlapping and sometimes contradictory dynamics, rather than neatly layered local, subnational, and national levels. In this sense, local agreements are not merely localised enactments of national peace processes; rather, they are embedded interventions with their own logic, timelines, and effects.

Local actors navigate a terrain shaped by insecurity, marginalisation, mobility, and political uncertainty, where local agreements can both support and disrupt national agendas. Some reinforce the logic of the national peace framework, such as the R-ARCSS, while others implicitly challenge it by creating alternative spaces of authority and accountability.

Agreements span different functions, with some serving as frameworks for ongoing engagement, others functioning as tools for temporary stabilisation, and some others even aiming at implementing aspects of broader peace processes. Spatially, they range from territorially bounded inter-communal pacts to route-of-passage agreements regulating seasonal cattle migration. Several of these agreements – especially those involving civil-military dialogue and land conflict resolution – act as pre-negotiation mechanisms that set the stage for broader transitions in power or authority at the subnational level. Few of these agreements, however, show signs of achieving full transformation of conflict; rather, they tend to 'dissolve' conflict, softening its edges and containing its escalation without necessarily resolving its deeper political roots.

South Sudan's local peace agreements are best understood as infrastructures of transition – mechanisms that provide communities with temporary mechanisms for managing insecurity, enabling return and coexistence, or even just limiting violence. Their success depends not solely on whether violence ceases, but on whether they create practical and moral legitimacy among the populations they affect.

Moreover, these agreements should not be burdened with expectations to achieve what national processes have failed to deliver. Their value lies in their embeddedness, adaptability, and responsiveness to specific grievances. They are part of a 'decoupling' of local peacemaking from the national peace process; a form of dispersed, pragmatic, and sometimes non-linear transition management that does not require coherence but instead thrives in fragmentation.

Given these insights, policy actors should resist the temptation to overly formalise or instrumentalise local peace processes within national peace frameworks. Instead, support should focus on strengthening the autonomy, capacity, and sustainability of local peace infrastructures. This includes empowering local chiefs, religious leaders, and civil society groups with resources, training, and platforms for dialogue, while acknowledging the political nature of local peacemaking and protecting these actors from co-option by elite interests.

National and international actors should also invest in monitoring and adaptive implementation mechanisms. There is an urgent need to accept that agreements may need to be revised, renegotiated, or dissolved in ways that reflect changing dynamics on the ground.

Finally, a shift is needed in how success is evaluated. Rather than expecting resolution or transformation, policymakers should value dissolution and containment – that is, the ability of agreements to reduce violence, maintain mobility, and enable social repair without necessarily solving all underlying tensions. Local peace agreements should be recognised as legitimate expressions of political agency, not just technocratic instruments for stabilisation. Embedding this perspective into South Sudan's broader peace architecture will allow for a more realistic, responsive, and context-sensitive approach to navigating the country's evolving transitions.

Annexes

i) List and Description of Peace Agreements – Yambio

Context	Description	Parties	Date	Outcomes
<p><i>The 'Arrow Boys' emerged as a community defender in response to the activities of LRA rebels. Initially 'Arrow Boys' are said to have had an arrangement with the local government, stipulating that upon defeating LRA, its members would be compensated. A pact that was never honoured.</i></p> <p><i>Towards the end of 2015, armed factions of the wider 'Arrow Boy's movement from Yambio eventually joined the SPLA-IO coalition. The South Sudan National Liberation Movement (SSNLM) which had originated from a group of Arrow boys based in Birisi-Gangura payam in Yambio also continued operating as an independent local armed actor in Western Equatoria.</i></p>	<p>For a period of approximately three years an interfaith initiative led H.L Bishop Eduardo Hiiboro Kuassala, facilitated a negotiation between Arrow Boys/SSNLM and government. The interfaith group comprised members of various religious denominations, women, youth, and community leaders. Ultimately an agreement between Arrow Boys/SSNLM and the government was reached.⁵³</p>	<p>The SSNLM and Government of South Sudan.</p>	<p>2 April 2016</p>	<p>Successful</p> <p>n.b. An example of a local process which relates strongly to the politics of the national; the agreement was made in the context of an informal preliminary agreement towards the end of 2015,⁵⁴ had clear mediation support provided by a collection of religious leaders and referred to the national ARCSS agreement. The agreement also had elements of military power sharing, with provision for merging some of the SSNLM members into the SPLA government forces.</p>
<p><i>Inter-communal clashes between the Azande and Beri ethnic groups.</i></p>	<p>An inter-community peace dialogue was initiated between the two parties leading to a local agreement signed between the two communities.⁵⁵</p>	<p>The Azande and Beri Ethnic Groups</p>	<p>18 July 2017</p>	<p>Successful</p>

Context	Description	Parties	Date	Outcomes
<p><i>In 2005 there was a conflict between the Azande and Dinka in Yambio. This conflict led to the loss of lives of both the Azande and Dinka.</i></p>	<p>In response to inter-ethnic conflicts numerous peace agreements were entered into between Azande and Dinka communities in Yambio.</p> <p>The agreement is between the Ambororo and Gbudue under the leadership of the then Paramount Chief Atoroba Gbudue. It is reported that as part of the agreement, members of the Ambororo community were to vacate Western Equatoria State.</p>	<p>Azande and Dinka Communities in Yambio.</p>	<p>2005</p>	<p>Unsuccessful as invasion is still reported.</p>
<p><i>In the same year there was a conflict between the cattle keepers of Yirrol and farmers of Greater Mundri.</i></p>	<p>Another set of agreements is reported to have been entered into between the farmers and pastoralists in Mundri.</p>	<p>Farmers and pastoralists in Mundri</p>	<p>2005</p>	<p>These agreements were reported to have been partially successful but that there was a need for follow up to ensure a lasting solution.</p>
	<p>Local agreement that was signed in Ri-Rangu. It was facilitated by an interfaith group with support from the Governor of Gbudue State.</p>	<p>SPLM-IO and the Government</p>	<p>17 August 2017</p>	<p>This agreement has been documented but still needs more follow-up.</p>

Context	Description	Parties	Date	Outcomes
<p><i>A violent inter-communal ethnic conflict between the Azande and Balanda of Greater Tambura, which became perfused with negative national politics and governor politics fuelling ongoing tensions. It could be argued, however, that violence was initially triggered by an ethnic group land dispute.⁵⁶</i></p> <p><i>The conflict has been characterised by hate speech and messages, and revenge killings. To date, this local conflict has caused the displacement of over 10,000 people. UNMISS protection of civilian sites and various churches in the area have been needed in order to shelter those displaced.</i></p>	Community dialogues have been conducted and there has been relative peace in the region with IDPs returning to their homes.	The Azande and Balanda	2022	An agreement has not yet been reached. However, it is reported that the communities are on the verge of agreeing to one.
<i>An intercommunal tribal agreement.</i>	This process was mediated by religious leaders under an inter-religious platform.	Azande and Jurbel	2021	Successful
<i>Clashes between SPLA and SPLA-IO.</i>	Under the leadership of an interfaith group, the two groups entered into an MoU that was signed at the Tourist Hotel in Yambio.	SPLA and SPLA-IO	2017	Successful

Context	Description	Parties	Date	Outcomes
<i>Intercommunal conflict between Azande and Balanda.</i>	<p>Talks between the conflict parties were facilitated by interfaith group resulting in an MoU between the Azande and Balanda. The MoU was followed by grassroots dialogues which were jointly led by interfaith groups and the national ministry of Peacebuilding. The dialogues were held in Yambio to popularise the MoU among members of the community.</p>	Azande and Balanda	2022	Successful

ii) List and Description of Peace Agreements – Yei

Year	Agreement	Description	Status
2018	Agreement between SPLM-IG and SPLM-IO (Grassroots initiative)	The Grassroots peace initiative addressing dissatisfaction within opposition over military ranks, power sharing, and defection issues.	Successful
20 November 2021	Otogo Community Dialogue	Dialogue between government, rebel group, and community resolving suspicions and restoring community security.	Successful
2013	Kakwa Cross Border Conference (South Sudan and Congo)	Dialogue between South Sudan and Congo resolving movement freedom issues, supported by Uganda.	Successful
2022	Civil-Military Dialogue in Otogo Payam	Addressed human rights violations by military, improved civil-military relations.	Successful
2022	Host Community, Returnees, IDPs and Military Dialogue	Resolved misunderstandings due to poor coordination among stakeholders.	Successful
9 November 2024	Kakwa Customary Law Agreement	Aimed to harmonise customary laws among chiefs and traditional leaders.	Pending
20 May 2024	Lasu Dialogue (Saju and Renya clans)	Resolved killings between Saju and Renya clans in Jabara Boma.	Successful
26–29 November 2024	Civilian-Military Dialogue in Yei Town	Addressed military abuses including abductions, looting, and road ambushes across four Bomas.	Successful

iii) List and Description of Peace Agreements – Wau

Context	Description	Parties	Date	Outcomes
<i>Conflict between farmers and cattle keepers/pastoralists</i>	The peacebuilding process was carried out under the 32 state system in what were then, Wau, Tonj, and Gogrial states. It was facilitated by the Wau State government, Netherlands Municipality Association (VNGI) and UNMISS. The process led to the Marial Bai Agreement also known as the 2nd Bussere Review.	Famers and pastoralists	15–17 November 2016, and years following	<p>Successful</p> <p>n.b. As noted throughout this report, often the issue of follow up implementation exists as a barrier to lasting resolution of local peacebuilding efforts.</p> <p>This process involved annual review peace conferences which brought together pastoralists and agriculturalists from the three states to address a range of issues connecting to pastoralist and farmer conflicts. This fosters an ongoing in-person dialogue addressing reparations for lost crops and cattle, DDR small arms provisions and detailed cattle movement procedures which involves authorisation from the local Boma*/ Paramount Chief.⁵⁷</p>

* Within an area or community, and depending on the context of the area, paramount chiefs are the most senior local authority figures, followed by heads or executive chiefs and then sub-chiefs. These traditional leaders manage community disputes and oversee courts at the various administrative levels; county, payam and boma. Paramount chiefs also link local communities and government and manage a range of social issues for communities including peace processes and aid delivery.

Context	Description	Parties	Date	Outcomes
				<p>These locally led renegotiation agreements are a way of reviewing implementation but importantly are also a way of creating multiple iterative moments to build community engagement in the process, generating civic-led management of implementation.</p> <p>As part of gradual and phased follow up, these conferences have provided for a range of mechanisms including an Interstate Coordinating Committee on Cattle Seasonal Movement consisting of people from each state, a Monitoring Committee and a Dispute Resolution Committee consisting of chiefs from each state selected by Paramount Chiefs.⁵⁸</p>
<i>Clash between government and opposition forces</i>	Wau State government, together with UNMISS, JVMM, and CTSAMM, facilitated the dialogue leading to the MoU and a resolution to engage in trust-building to enable free movement.	Government and opposition forces	30 November 2018	Successful

Context	Description	Parties	Date	Outcomes
<i>Intercommunal violent conflict between farmers and pastoralist communities in Wau, Tonj, and Gogrial. It is reported to have drawn in opposition and government forces fighting alongside the cattle keepers and farmers, respectively</i>	The process was facilitated by both the government and partners like Toch, CEPO, CARDO, IOM, HARD, and Malteser International	Farmers and cattle keepers/pastoralists	3–6 July 2019	Successful
<i>Inter-communal conflict between Bessilia and Kayango</i>	The government of WBGs and religious leaders, with support from UNMISS, CEPO, and WOTAP, facilitated a mediation between the conflicting party's representatives.	Bessilia and Kayango	27–28 July 2022	Successful
<i>Intercommunal conflict between the Luo community and Fertit community in Mapel</i>	The process was supported by Hope Agency for Relief and Development (HARD) resulting in an MoU.	Luo and Fertit communities	17 August 2005	Unsuccessful Was not implemented due to lack of political will.
<i>Clash between government and opposition forces in Wau county</i>	UNMISS, CTSAM, and JVMM facilitated the process leading to an MoU.	Government and opposition forces	2018	Successful

Context	Description	Parties	Date	Outcomes
<i>Conflict between the communities of Greater Bahr el Ghazal and the organised forces in Wau town.</i>	The process was led by government and led to the signing of the Kongor Agreement.	The communities of Greater Bahr el Ghazal and the organised forces in Wau town	1991	Successful
<i>Dispute over land orchestrated entrance of members of the Jur community to Ndogo lands where they were accused of cutting down trees and renaming some areas.</i>	The process led to the Communiqué between Rihan Fai, Ndogo, and Jur (Luo)	Rihan Fai, Ndogo, and Jur (Luo)	2022	The situation is reported to be calm after the final engagement by CEPO
<i>Intercommunal land dispute</i>	The process was facilitated by WATAP leading to the Makiriembi and Ujot.	Ndogo and Jur (Luo)	2022	Unsuccessful

iv) List and Description of Peace Agreements – Aweil

Year	Agreement	Description	Status
1954	Korok Community Land Dispute	They had internal disputes over land issues. However, the conflict was successfully resolved through a community dialogue, during which clear boundary demarcations were established. Both parties were granted their rightful shares in accordance with the decisions of the land authorities. The agreement has remained effective to this day, with no complaints or signs of renewed conflict.	Successful
1962 – 1978	Agual Ayak Leadership Conflict	There was a conflict between the leadership and the community, which tragically led to loss of life due to political tensions. In response, the government initiated a peacebuilding and reconciliation effort, encouraging the people to come together and resolve their issues. As part of the resolution, the leadership was divided into two factions, and peace has since been maintained under the guidance of traditional chiefs.	Successful
2020	KongDare and Ajak Land Dispute	A violent clash involving spears erupted due to a land dispute. The conflict was eventually resolved by the people of Malong Yor, leading to peace throughout the entire community. A peace agreement was signed at Nathamok, the Payam headquarters.	Successful
2020	Renkcard, Misseria and Dinka Malual Grazing Conflict	The conflict escalated due to disputes over grazing land, border demarcations, and water resources. The agreement reached was ultimately unsuccessful, as the Arab nomads repeatedly violated its terms by grazing their cattle indiscriminately upon returning. When the pastures are due for the next season, they attempt to renew the agreement, but without adhering to the original conditions.	Unsuccessful

Year	Agreement	Description	Status
2024	Padum and Parek Land Conflict	The agreement was signed between the two parties to resolve a land dispute. It was concluded in Aweil West County and has proven to be very successful.	Successful
2005 – 2024	Aweil West and East Paramount Chiefs Dialogue	The two Paramount Chiefs had a disagreement over the location of the County Headquarters, which is currently situated far from both Aweil East and Aweil Centre. Each chief wants the headquarters to be relocated to a more convenient and accessible area. As it stands, the current location in Aweil lacks clear oversight or responsibility. This conflict remains unresolved and requires urgent intervention.	Pending
5 March 2024	Dinka Malual and Misseria	Several criminal cases occurred between the Dinka Malual and Misseriya communities. While some of these cases were resolved, others remain unresolved. The agreement addressing these issues was signed under the leadership of Aduong Lual Aduong, Chairperson of the Peace Committee Court in Majok Municipal Council.	Partially successful
27–30 March 2023	Malual and Misseria 2023 Pre Migration Peace Conference	This agreement was made between the Dinka Malual of the Republic of South Sudan and the Misseriya of Western Kordofan. The conflict between the two communities was intensified by political manipulation and incitement. However, their mutual needs for water, grazing land, trade, and fishing created a strong incentive for cooperation and peaceful resolution.	Successful
19 March 2023	Youth position Conference	For over a decade, annual peace conferences have been held between the armed Rizeigat and Misseriya nomads of Sudan and the Dinka Malual of Northern Bahr el Ghazal State. These conferences aim to facilitate the peaceful and free movement of the nomadic groups and their cattle into Dinka Malual territory during the dry season.	Pending

Year	Agreement	Description	Status
28 September – 3 October 2023	Cross-Border Dialogue on Land Disputes Among Communities of Aweil North, West, South, East, and Centre Counties	This dialogue took place in the context of forced displacement and flooding, and it was successfully conducted and concluded at Aweil Grand Hotel. The conflict had arisen over land issues. As a result of the discussions, it was agreed that key government institutions and local leaders would take responsibility for ensuring that land disputes across Northern Bahr el Ghazal (NBeG) are resolved peacefully in accordance with the resolutions reached during the dialogue.	Successful
18–21 April 2024	Wedwiel Host Community and Refugees Peace Conference	This peace conference was organised to promote peaceful coexistence between refugees and the host community in Wedwiel. The primary issue identified was the use of hate speech, which had contributed to tensions between the two groups. As a resolution, it was agreed that any individual found engaging in hate speech would be reported to the respective community leader for appropriate action. The agreement was officially signed at South Sudan Hotel in Aweil West County, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State.	Not assessed
18–22 March 2024	Dinka Malual and Rizeigat Pre-Migration Peace Conference	This peace conference was held at Aweil Grand Hotel in Aweil Town, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State. The agreement was reached between the Dinka Malual agropastoralists of South Sudan and the Rizeigat pastoralists from Eastern Darfur State in the Republic of Sudan. The objective of the conference was to foster peaceful relations and cooperation ahead of the seasonal migration period.	Partially successful
26–28 September 2024	Youth Dialogue for Peace and Community Cohesion	This dialogue was held at the Ministry of Gender, Child, and Social Welfare in Aweil, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State. The initiative aimed to address key social challenges affecting youth and the wider community. The primary focus was to curb the misuse of social media, particularly hate speech and defamation of individuals' private lives, and to advocate for an end to early and forced marriages. The dialogue promoted awareness, accountability, and positive youth engagement for lasting peace and community cohesion.	Successful

Year	Agreement	Description	Status
18 March 2023	Dinka Malual, Rizeigat, and Misseriya Peace Coordination	This peace initiative was launched to address and prevent further loss of life resulting from violent incidents between the Dinka Malual, Rizeigat, and Misseriya communities. The process was prompted by the killing of a young man from the Dinka Malual by members of the Misseriya community in Abuameth, Babanusa, as well as the grievous injury of an SSPDF soldier, whose eye was removed, by Misseriya individuals at the Majak Wuoi military base on 15 March 2021. The coordination aimed to promote justice, accountability, and reconciliation among the affected communities.	Successful
26–28 November 2019	Dinka Malual and Misseriya Pre-Migration Conference	This conference was held at the ACDF Compound in Wanyjok, Aweil East State. It brought together the Dinka Malual and Misseriya communities to address long-standing issues rooted in the devastating experiences of consecutive civil wars during the era of a united Sudan. The dialogue focused on resolving contentious issues related to access to water, grazing land, trade, and fishing. The conference aimed to foster peaceful coexistence ahead of seasonal migration and to strengthen cross-border cooperation between the two communities.	Successful
18 December 2024	Tri-State Annual Pre-Seasonal Cattle Movement Conference	This conference was conducted across Western Bahr el Ghazal, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, and Warrap States. The primary objective was to assess and reinforce the role of state authorities in the three states (WBeG, NBeG, and Warrap) in creating a platform for dialogue and deliberation among their respective communities. The discussions focused on addressing outstanding issues related to the Marial Bai Agreement, particularly those affecting seasonal cattle movement and inter-community relations.	Successful

Year	Agreement	Description	Status
7–11 June 2022	Pre-Migration Peace Conference for Dinka Malual and Rizeigat	This conference was held at South Sudan Hotel in Nyamlel Town, Aweil West County, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State. The agreement aimed to address key issues between the Dinka Malual and Rizeigat communities, including disputes over their common border, shared natural resources, and the need to strengthen peaceful coexistence. The conference emphasised the importance of friendship and cooperation, recognizing the geographical proximity of the two communities and their interdependence.	Successful
13–17 March 2024	Pre- and Post-Migration Peace Conference	This annual peace conference brings together the Dinka Malual, Misseriya, and Rizeigat communities to address issues related to seasonal migration. The conference was held at Aweil Grand Hotel in Aweil Town, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State. It serves as a platform for dialogue on peaceful coexistence, management of shared resources, and conflict prevention before and after the migration season.	Successful
18 December 2024	Inter-State Cattle Seasonal Movement Coordinating Committee Second Review of the Marial Bai Agreement	This coordination meeting brought together representatives from Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Western Bahr el Ghazal, and Warrap States to conduct the second review of the Marial Bai Agreement on the seasonal movement of cattle. The meeting was held at the Peace Hall, Council of Ministers, in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal State. The review focused on strengthening inter-state coordination, addressing emerging challenges, and ensuring the peaceful and regulated movement of cattle across state borders.	Successful

v) List and Description of Peace Agreements – Malakal

Year	Agreement	Description	Status
2016	Chollo, Dinka, and Nuer Dialogue in POC	Tribal conflict in POC resolved, enabling peaceful cohabitation.	Successful
May 2023	Nuer and Chollo Dialogue	Reconciliation after Nuer exited POC; re-established inter-tribal dialogue.	Successful
2020	KongDare and Ajak Land Dispute	Resolved spear-based fight over land through community mediation.	Successful
2019	Upper Nile National Dialogue	Temporary unity derailed by white army-government disarmament tensions.	Unsuccessful
2022	Dinka Melut and Maban Border Conflict	Unresolved dispute over Kilo 10 border; area taken over by government.	Failed
2024	Dinka Ngok and Chollo Dialogue	Resolved inter-communal conflict after murder incident.	Successful
2022	Kitgwak Party Conflict	Party agreement failed due to unmet demands of Kitgwak faction.	Failed
March 2023	Agualek and SPLM Agreement	Resolved party interests conflict; agreement fulfilled.	Successful
2021	Ulang, Baliet and Nyirol Conflict	Resolved border conflicts between three counties.	Successful
2021	Nasir and Ulang Border Dispute	Border disagreement mitigated through community dialogue.	Successful

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