

SOUTH SUDAN



Expanding the Evidence Base: Local Peace Agreements in Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA) and Warrap State

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Contents

Introduction	01
Local Agreements in Resource-dependent Conflict Settings	02
Local Peace as Recurring Governance	04
Extending the Spatial Understanding of Local Peace	05
Implications for Future Engagement	06
Endnotes	07

Introduction

Previous documentation of local peace agreements across South Sudan by the Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform (PeaceRep) has documented the pathways toward political agency and everyday navigation of conflict and coexistence which are created by communities in the way they manage conflict and sustain political accommodation in practice.

This policy brief expands on a 2025 PeaceRep report, '[Local Peace Agreements in South Sudan: Exploring Processes at the Margins](#)', which examines agreements from Yambio, Yei, Wau, Aweil and Malakal to assess how they relate to wider peacebuilding and the ongoing political transition around the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of Conflicts in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS).¹

Local agreements, as the report shows, form a distinct layer of political order: they can both complement and disrupt national peace processes while addressing immediate conflict realities in specific places.² Their value lies precisely in the fact that they are mechanisms which enable communities to be sustained in moments and are responsive to specific grievances, separate or decoupled, where necessary, from the national process architecture.

Since publication of that report, additional workshops on local peacemaking in the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA) and Warrap State have expanded this evidence base to include two settings characterised by distinct conflict dynamics. Both areas have seen repeated local peace initiatives taking place over many years. The GPAA is part of the wider, complex conflict setting of Greater Jonglei, which has produced a significant number of local peace agreements. The local processes considered here share commonalities, with both the GPAA and Warrap agreements addressing persistent patterns of cattle raiding, land disputes, seasonal migration and intercommunal violence. These local agreements also underscore the continued role of both customary institutions and local political authorities in managing recurring tensions.

The additional material examined in this report points towards a wider understanding of local peace agreements. Across both settings, agreements extend beyond responses to violent incidents and establish rules that attempt to organise relations between neighbouring communities over time. They therefore illustrate and reaffirm the close relationship between local peace and customary authority, and point towards the structural role of resource governance.

Local Agreements in Resource-dependent Conflict Settings

The agreements documented in GPAA differ from many agreements collected in Equatoria and Upper Nile due to their embeddedness in highly mobile pastoral settings. Violence, in these settings, can be better understood as a social condition rather than an exceptional and rare occurrence, and commonly centres on cattle raiding, child abduction, revenge attacks and disputes among neighbouring communities that cross administrative boundaries.

The agreements themselves also reveal a remarkable degree of practical detail. The 2021 Pieri Action for Peace³ extended well beyond general commitments to reconciliation. It established concrete procedures for tracing abducted children, registering stolen cattle before transfer, returning livestock through local authorities and creating a Traditional Leaders' Circuit Court to address intercommunal violence, child abduction and compensation claims. Equally, the agreement also proposed more typical local implementation measures including implementation committees, youth protection arrangements and mechanisms for peace dissemination across Greater Jonglei.

Earlier agreements pursued similar institutional ambitions. The 2014 agreement between the Government of South Sudan and the SSDM/SSDA Cobra Faction⁴ combined conflict resolution with the creation of governance structures, local legislation, security arrangements and fiscal administration.

The main purpose of continuous peacemaking efforts thus appears both to regulate authority as well as managing everyday inter-communal relations. These efforts later informed internationally supported work by the UK-funded Peacebuilding Opportunities Fund (POF) and others around the establishment of Inter-Communal Governance Structures (ICGS) in Jonglei, based on an agreement between Nuer, Dinka, and Murle community leaders in 2023.⁵

The record assembled during the workshop shows strong historical continuity. Agreements signed in the 2000s remain reference points for current discussions, giving communities a shared record against which later initiatives are judged. Several participants described agreements that sustained stability for long periods before renewed violence followed specific incidents, including killings, cattle theft or failures to return abducted children.

Peace in these settings is not secured through one-off settlement. It depends on repeated negotiation and support for the institutions that keep channels of dialogue open.

The Warrap workshop presents a closely related pattern, however with stronger emphasis on territorial disputes and access to productive land. Agreements regulate contested boundaries, seasonal cattle migration, water points and relations between neighbouring counties and states. Several initiatives link Warrap, especially Greater Tonj, with Lakes State and Western Bahr el Ghazal through mechanisms designed to manage shared resource pressures across administrative borders. Administrative state and county boundaries play a significant role in conflict patterns, but also in local peacemaking.

Other agreements focus on disputes between neighbouring communities that rely on the same agricultural land and grazing areas. Such cases confirm that local agreements address immediate security concerns while also organising everyday relations among communities whose livelihoods depend on shared natural resources. Increasingly, local agreements as responsive community-led practices may have to find ways to adapt further to new sets of pressures, such as climate-induced challenges creating shifts in migration patterns, climate-induced displacement and less predictable pastoral movements across boundaries.⁶

The Warrap agreements also display a predominantly operational character. The recent Apuk Giir–Marial Wau dialogue⁷ renewed commitments reached during the previous year and combined them with an implementation schedule that included a Joint Permanent Peace and Security Committee, quarterly review meetings and monitoring arrangements. Its provisions addressed unrestricted movement of civilians and livestock, accountability for killings, removal of armed youth from roads, return of displaced families and revival of intercommunal social relations.

Cross-border dialogues between communities from Lakes and Warrap⁸, in turn, developed comparable measures around land administration, shared grazing areas, water infrastructure, compensation, policing, disarmament and regulation of seasonal migration. The emphasis throughout these agreements lies on managing everyday interaction through institutions that remain active after the signing ceremony and continue to shape relations between neighbouring communities.

Local Peace as Recurring Governance

One pattern stands out across both workshops. Participants rarely described agreements as permanent settlements. Instead, they referred to periods when agreements held before fresh negotiations became necessary. The length of these 'holding periods' differs. Some agreements remained effective for seven or ten years, others required renewal after new incidents reignited tensions.

This approach shifts attention from conflict resolution to sustained conflict management. In settings where the underlying drivers of violence remain active, large peace conferences can matter most when they help establish channels for repeated engagement.

Local peace agreements function as recurring governance mechanisms. Communities use dialogue, customary mediation and negotiated compromise to restore predictable social relations after violence. Process often matters more than formal documentation, because implementation depends on continued engagement among and between the affected communities, and formal and customary authorities. Hence it is not so much about agreement implementation but in shifting or reinforcing structural responsibilities around peace dialogues. These responsibilities commonly rest with committees composed of chiefs, youth representatives, women leaders and county authorities, often being sustained on an ongoing basis in anticipation of future local settlement or as a more focused pre-negotiation beginning long before the formal process and continuing long after agreements are signed.

Institutional memory, nonetheless, plays a significant role. Earlier agreements remain politically relevant because they set precedents for later negotiations. Participants frequently referred to precedence – previous settlements – when discussing current disputes. Historical agreements continue to shape expectations around compensation, accountability, customary authority and future dialogue. Documentation supports this process by preserving collective knowledge that might otherwise fragment over time.

The recurring nature of these agreements reflects the socio-political environment in which they operate. Local actors manage conflicts whose drivers persist year after year, or are even reinforced by Murle age-set dynamics. Resource competition and cross-border mobility continue to generate disputes which are in need of renewed political engagement.

For policy and programming, this means local peace should be supported as an ongoing governance process, not treated as a completed event.

Extending the Spatial Understanding of Local Peace

In areas that could be described as resource frontiers, conflict regularly develops around access to productive land, grazing areas, migration corridors and water sources. Agreements regulate movement among communities whose livelihoods depend on shared ecological systems. While territorial boundaries exist and are widely known, they do not prevent movement. This makes local peace agreements directly relevant to resource governance and internal border management.

Local leadership has to play an important role. Chiefs, community elders, other community representatives as well as government officials remain central to negotiation and implementation. Their authority rests on sustained relationships with local communities and their ability to convene dialogue during periods of tension.

Policy support is therefore most useful when it strengthens these relationships rather than replacing them with externally designed processes.

Implications for Future Engagement

Policy engagement should stay invested in sustained documentation and periodic review of local agreements. Agreements often continue to influence political practice long after they are negotiated, providing reference points for later initiatives. Better documentation, and an accessible and known archive, support strengthening institutional memory within communities and support comparative learning across regions.

Local agreements need to be understood as processes embedded in wider governance. Many disputes extend beyond individual communities and involve neighbouring administrative areas, migration systems and resource management arrangements. Local agreements can provide practical foundations for cooperation across these wider political spaces because they are rooted in customary institutions that already command community legitimacy.

The agreements collected during this additional phase therefore point towards an expanding ecosystem of local governance that develops through repeated negotiation, institutional adaptation and accumulated political experience. Their significance lies in the continued reproduction of local political order across successive rounds of dialogue.

Endnotes

¹ https://www.peaceagreements.org/media/documents/ag2112_5be57be98faf9.pdf.

² Pospisil, J., Wilson, R., Joseph, K., & Magara, Ibrahim. (2025). Local Peace Agreements in South Sudan: Exploring Processes at the Margins (PeaceRep Report). PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform, University of Edinburgh.

³ https://www.peaceagreements.org/media/documents/ag2378_6095394a64b25.pdf.

⁴ https://www.peaceagreements.org/media/documents/ag1675_577b94d19a9e2.pdf.

⁵ https://www.peaceagreements.org/media/documents/SS_231106_Communique.pdf.

⁶ Kunhiak Muorwel, J., Pospisil, J., and Igale Monoja, V. (2023). Caught Between Crises in South Sudan: Flood-Induced Migration of Dinka Bor Cattle Herders into the Equatoria Region (PeaceRep and FES Discussion Paper). Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, South Sudan Office. Available at: <https://peacerep.org/publication/caught-between-crises-in-south-sudan/>

⁷ Community Dialogue Resolutions: Apuk Giir–Marial Wau Inter-Communal Peace Process, 2025, on file with the author.

⁸ Resolutions for the Cross-Border Main Dialogue among the Conflicting Communities of Lakes and Warrap States, Rumbek, 2024, on file with the author.

About Us

PeaceRep is a research consortium based at Edinburgh Law School. Our research is rethinking peace and transition processes in the light of changing conflict dynamics, changing demands of inclusion, and changes in patterns of global intervention in conflict and peace/mediation/transition management processes.

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