



Organising a national dialogue in South Sudan

While the people in South Sudan have been exposed to very high rates of violent crime, there is little agreement on the causes and possible solutions of conflicts. The (transitional) government could organise a national dialogue to gain these insights and foster recommendations. The project team developed a method to provide figures on war crimes that could support this dialogue.

When faced with violence, the people in South Sudan should be able to rely on justice services such as the police, the courts or informal mediation. Besides, peace and stability in the country requires dealing with the multiple violent crimes that the population has suffered in the last sixty years. The aim of this project was to investigate people's experiences in relation to violence, truth, justice and reconciliation and needs to deal with them. The team developed an analytical instrument for interviews, and came up with recommendations that facilitate the alignment of justice services with the needs of the Southern Sudanese people.

The research: methodology and insights

The research was a collaboration between the University for Peace Centre (UPEACE) in The Hague, and two NGOs: South Sudan Law Society (SSLS) and PAX, a Dutch peace building organisation that is also based in Juba. Thirty-four trained Sudanese enumerators conducted a survey in 2015 in Juba town, in Wau town and in two refugee camps: Juba Protection of Civilians (POC) site and Bentiu POC. In total, 1,912 respondents were interviewed. The enumerators gathered qualitative information during subsequent in-depth interviews and in four workshops aimed at sharing, fine-tuning and verifying the findings.

The survey showed that the people in South Sudan have been exposed to very high rates of violent crime. Sixty per cent of the respondents reported that their households had experienced one or more violent crimes in the past five years. These crimes included cattle-raiding, murder, sexual abuse, armed robbery and physical assault, and were mostly committed by armed groups or military personnel. In almost three-quarters of the cases, the household simply did nothing in response to the crimes because the police, the courts or informal mediation were unavailable, unreliable or too expensive.

The survey also found that there is little common ground among parties on the causes and possible solutions to the conflicts. The researchers therefore stressed the importance of a national dialogue or 'truth-seeking effort', to generate consensus about the core facts and circumstances of the conflict. The researchers also made a number of recommendations to the (transitional) Government of South Sudan concerning the development of a reliable justice sector, such as allowing open discussion and debates on issues related to justice and reconciliation, and actively promoting a truth-seeking effort with all stakeholders. Recommendations to donors and NGOs included investigating war crimes, and capacity building on civil rights.

This research project is part of the research agenda of the Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law and funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through NWO-WOTRO Science for Global Development.



Output

The team produced fifteen documents about issues urgently requiring a solution, such as the position of prisoners, and sexual abuse of women. The toolbox developed by the team consists of instructions, and a worksheet-file with a questionnaire. It is straightforward for enumerators to use this to systematically interview people, and to collect and analyse data on their mobile phone. All these products are shared with about two hundred stakeholders from, among others, three UN-organisations, the Dutch embassy, the South Sudanese government, and fifty South Sudanese NGOs. The researchers were also interviewed by two radio stations for programmes about war crimes and justice, both broadcast in South Sudan.

Outcomes and expected impact

Thirty-four Sudanese enumerators, including researchers from South Sudan Law Society (SSLS), have now been trained to systematically interview people on war crimes and justice needs. SSLS and other South Sudanese peace organisations want to use the toolbox to continue these investigations. During 2015, however, the situation in South Sudan deteriorated, making operating there impossible. Many South Sudanese peace organisations are now operating out of Nairobi and Kampala. The researchers recommended that international donor organisations should continue their support for these organisations, and pressure the South Sudanese government to allow the functioning of civil society.

Future activities

In the coming years, PAX and SSLS will use the recommendations of this project in their continuing efforts to build peace in South Sudan.

- Project title: **Intersections of justice and conflict in South Sudan**
- Project coordinator: Rens Willems, UPEACE Center The Hague (NL)
- Consortium partners: PAX NL & South Sudan Law Society (SSLS)
- Focus country: South Sudan
- Duration: Two years (end date: 2 February 2016)
- Website: www.nwo.nl/en/research-and-results/research-projects/i/01/12601.html
- Research programme: Security and Rule of Law (www.nwo.nl/srol)
- Fund: Applied Research Fund (ARF)
- Call: First call (2014)
- Theme: Embedding Justice in Power and Politics

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