



Institute of Social Policy and Research
RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT

COVID-19 and Fragile Peace Process in South Sudan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The recently signed Revitalized peace Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) on 12 September 2018 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, by the warring parties in South Sudan, has been widely extolled and commended as a significant development signaling the dawn of peace.¹ The R-ARCSS provides broad comprehensive framework for key reform processes to usher the country towards stable democracy. As the world suffers from the second wave of COVID-19, the East African region is not an exception, with souring rise in the cases reported. South Sudan cases have ever since increased steadily, thus slowing down the implementation of the peace agreement. This research report mainly focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the R-ARCSS. The study looked at public opinions and perceptions on the impact COVID-19 had on the peace process, especially on the roles played by different actors responding to the pandemic and critical for the implementation of the peace accord in South Sudan. These include political parties to the peace agreement, other armed groups, civil society, peace monitoring mechanism, regional and international partners. It also aims at assessing the implications of the continued caseloads of COVID-19 and how political elites can better implement the peace agreement within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country.

A mixed approach methodology was applied in the study, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques using primary data collected from a wide range of stakeholders and the public by means of Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussion (FGDs). While the secondary data was collected from different reports and government policy on the COVID-19 response in South Sudan. The study interfaced with different community members mainly youth, women, men and local community leaders who are residents of various suburbs of Juba, Torit, Yambio and Wau. These towns were carefully selected based on ethnic diversity of the inhabitants to ensure high probability of interviewing at least one respondent from the three greater regions (greater Bahr el Ghazal, greater Equatorial and greater Upper Nile) of the country and most importantly reflect the multiplicity of views among the majority of the 64 ethnic groups.

Research Findings

COVID-19 impact on R-ARCSS implementation by signatories

- > Pertaining the COVID-19 restrictions, **73% of the respondents believe there are still active COVID-19 preventive restrictions and measures in place.** Respondents identified social distancing, no hand shaking, and use of face mask as some of the measures. However, **government has not strongly imposed these measures** although they encouraged the public to adhere to them. Conversely, **an overwhelming 75% expressed support for the measures** to various degrees to continue to combat the spread of the virus.
- > The assessment of COVID-19 impact on the peace implementation shows that **44.5% of respondents believed that COVID-19 has major effect** on the implementation of the peace agreement. The respondents identified temporary halt in the training of joint forces and inability of political leaders to regularly meet to discuss implementation issues as the most affected peace activities. Consequently, the study found that **65% of the respondents believed COVID-19 became a dominant political issue** that influenced the political dynamics for better part of 2020. Respondents said the political elites turned their attention towards COVID-19 management deliberately to stifle the implementation of the peace agreement.

¹ Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic South Sudan.

- > **The onset of COVID-19 pandemic coupled with the staggering peace process has not helped the worsening subnational violence.** A total of 62.3% respondents agreed that conflict dynamics has significantly changed at the community level as a result of the pandemic. Local peace mechanisms such as community dialogues could not progress due to ban on social gathering and absence of government leadership at the state and county levels.
- > **The pandemic has negatively changed the behaviors and actions of political elites towards implementation of the peace agreement.** This is evident in the 67.3% respondents who agreed that COVID-19 pandemic had influenced the behaviors and actions of political elites especially in regards to the implementation of the revitalized agreement. Subsequently, **the public support of the political elites in the new government was affected** as 36% respondents showed low support for the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGoNU) leaders.
- > **Equally, COVID-19 had impact on the behaviors and actions of other armed actors.** 59.9% of the respondents believed that other armed actors changed their calculations towards the peace agreement. Many respondents said some armed actors used the government inability to manage and control the pandemic for political gain. **Similarly, the public support for opposition groups in the RTGoNU is low.** 50% of the surveyed respondents expressed low support for the opposition groups because of the manner the COVID-19 was managed and peace implementation.
- > **There was significant consensus that government has failed to prioritize funding of the peace agreement activities.** A total of 55% respondents believed that the government has not provided adequate funds to implement the agreement. However, some survey respondents recognized that some activities in the peace agreement do not need any money except political will and decision making which remains elusive.

COVID-19 impact on peace monitoring mechanism

- > The effectiveness of the peace monitoring mechanisms with specific focus on the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC) and the Ceasefire Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (CTSAMVM) before **the pandemic was rated highly, as combined score of 69.7% of respondents believed they were effective.** In contrast, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, **the effectiveness of RJMEC and CTSAMVM has dropped significantly as seen in the combined 53.2% of respondents who said they were not effective.** What is common before and during COVID-19 is the ability of the monitoring mechanisms to hold violators of the agreement accountable for their actions.
- > **The influence and effectiveness of the regional and international partners in the peace implementation dropped during the pandemic,** as 52% of the respondents perceived that the guarantors were less influential on the parties. On the other hand, the regional and international actors **have not done enough to hold parties accountable for their actions and behaviors** as 42% of respondents said the regional and international partners have failed to hold parties accountable.
- > **The COVID-19 pandemic, staggering peace process and surge in the subnational violence has reduced public optimism for peace and hope for a genuine stability.** The study revealed a mixed reaction that 45.3% of the respondents showed low optimism for peace in the country, 37.8% had high optimism and only 17% average optimism for peace at community and national levels.

COVID-19 impact on civil society and stakeholders

- > The civil society ability to pressure the parties to implement the agreement before COVID-19 received very high rating at a combined 68.2% by the respondents who believed they were effective. But with COVID-19, this has changed as **the preventive measures and restrictions imposed by the government have had negative impact on the advocacy and civic education interventions of the civil society.** A combined total of 57.8% respondents strongly agreed that civil society ability to conduct advocacy on the peace implementation was affected by the pandemic.

- › **Despite the challenging operating environment, civil society is yet recognized as reliable stakeholders in conducting civic education around the peace agreement.** The tireless efforts of the civil society groups were acknowledged by the 60% respondents who perceived the civil society has contributed significantly to civic education activities in the communities.

Summary Recommendations

To Government and Political Parties

- › **The political parties and key principals of the agreement should as a matter of urgency initiate activities that will build and restore public confidence** and trust among themselves. The trust building should include the state and county level groups and authorities from all parties. Emphasis should be placed on hotspots of violent conflicts around the country.
- › The second wave of infection raises concerns and uncertainties on the peace process. **The government should find the right balance to ensure the spread of the coronavirus is decisively contained while maintaining some level of functionality of key institutions** and public officials who can move the peace implementation forward.
- › **The relevance of transparent and accountable management of public funds in both COVID-19 response and peace implementation cannot be overemphasized.** It is critical that funding is made available to institutions that respond to COVID-19 and the broader implementation of the agreement. Such funds should strictly and efficiently be used for their intended purposes.
- › **The survival of this peace agreement depends on local ownership, particularly the inclusion and participation of the South Sudanese people at all levels.** The public needs to know the content of the agreement, progress in implementation, challenges and the role they may play to support the implementation process. In addition, the peace accord provides for the right of citizens to actively get engaged in the processes. Therefore, the political parties should ensure that decisions are taken based on concrete consultations and opinions of the people.
- › **Political parties and the Government should galvanize popular support for this complex peace process through joint social mobilization, campaign and civic education at the community level.** The RTGoNU and political parties to the agreement should, as a matter of priority, reach out to the people with messages of hope, peace, forgiveness and reconciliation. This will demonstrate the leadership and responsibility for positive change. It helps build optimism for peace at local and national levels among the citizens.
- › **The power vacuum at the state and local government levels must be addressed urgently.** Nearly five months after the appointment of state governors, there are no state cabinets, assemblies and local governments. This trend is not sustainable and does not help build confidence in the peace process among the citizens. The government and particularly parties to the agreement must take up responsibility and complete the setup of all government institutions as per the peace agreement.
- › **The peace agreement guarantees and provides for the freedom of the civil society to conduct civic education, advocacy and engagement with stakeholders in the peace process. This must be upheld by the RTGoNU.** This is not the case due to restrictions and safety concerns by civil society groups. The government should demonstrate its political responsibility and will and open up civic space and review all legal frameworks that are repressive.
- › **The Coronavirus pandemic is here to stay and requires well-coordinated, empowered and financed institutions at national, state and local government levels to contain the virus and ensure long term national preparedness for similar health disasters.** Without leadership, and with COVID-19, the crisis will only deepen and contribute to more problems for a country already struggling with multiple crises – insecurity, surging humanitarian needs, economic decline and floods. Therefore, the government should work together to use the implementation of the peace agreement as a means to contain the virus.

To the Peace Monitoring Mechanisms and Guarantors

- › **Although movement restrictions curtailed their ability to function, both RJMEC and CTSAMVM must have adapted their monitoring functions beyond issuing narrative reports.** The roles of RJMEC and CTSAMVM are critical determinants of the behaviors and actions of the regional guarantors. Both institutions must step up their monitoring work including timely investigations of all violations, regular briefing of regional, international partners and the public.
- › For the Government of South Sudan to adequately control the COVID-19 pandemic in secure environment, **regional allies to the RTGoNU should maintain maximum pressure on the parties to adapt the implementation of the agreement within the COVID-19 context.** They should maintain consistency in application of their punitive tools among all parties to the agreement.
- › **The time to move from advocacy, soft diplomacy and words to more concrete actions including diplomatic isolation and sanctions for violators of the agreement is now.** After nearly two and a quarter year, the regional and international guarantors have not found the right formulae to genuinely incentivize the implementation of the agreement. This is largely attributed to the unique approach of each country's policy influenced by geopolitical and economic interests.
- › **The peace monitoring mechanisms must maintain transparent and timely access to information by the public and stakeholders.** The peace monitoring mechanisms should ensure timely and unhindered access to the peace implementation information by interested citizens. This must include information on violators of the agreement for the public to be aware.
- › **There is no shortcut to stop the virus when the peace agreement is falling apart. The international partners should continue and step up funding of the critical activities in the peace agreement.** While the COVID-19 pandemic response deserves to be resourced, this should not be entirely in the expense of the political transition that has strong bearing on the ability of the government to combat the virus and achieve peace.

To The Civil Society and Stakeholders

- › **Step up advocacy and pressure on the peace parties** – the public expects to witness an aggressive advocacy and pressure on the political parties by the civil society despite the restricted environment. This is legitimate expectation. The onus is now on the civil society groups to carefully maintain consistency to demand for full implementation of the agreement within the COVID-19 pandemic context.
- › **Scale up civic education** – the public expects intensive civic education on the peace process by the civil society groups. This should be taken to the rural areas where majority of the people live. The civic education should focus on key thematic and milestone activities that are critical to the transitional process instead of broad awareness that confuses the citizens more. For example, awareness on the permanent constitution making, census, elections and key reforms is important.
- › **Speak with one voice and be consistent** – the civil society should forge common ground understanding of their fundamental convergence areas of advocacy and maintain consistency. The public needs credible information backed up with facts and evidence. This is paramount to raise an informed population that can actively get engaged in governance conversations.
- › **Build coalition with other stakeholders in and outside the country** – the civil society should amplify their voices through closely working with the church in-country and fellow networks in the region.
- › **Built proactive advocacy approach** – the civil society should be proactive in their advocacy and map out regional and global events that they can influence to ensure the guarantors pressure parties to implement the agreement.
- › **Advocate for transparent and accountable management of COVID-19** – the civil society should ensure the government and partners are checked for their actions and decisions as well as utilization of resources meant for the COVID-19 response and the peace implementation.

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents findings and analysis of the COVID-19 pandemic impact on the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS). The research draws secondary information from different literature, particularly reports of the peace monitoring mechanisms, government COVID-19 response measures and primary data collected from citizens in Torit, Juba, Yambio and Wau. In Juba, the study reached suburbs hosting diverse communities who hail from across the different parts of South Sudan to increase inclusion of different perspectives that can reflect the national character in the report. The primary data were collected from 450 people including 389 randomly selected respondents from the public who responded to semi-structured interviews (SSIs) and 121 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) participants in Juba, Yambio, Wau and Torit.

The study examined public opinions and perceptions on the impact COVID-19 had on the peace process, especially on the roles played by different actors responding to the pandemic in South Sudan. These include, political parties to the peace agreement, other armed groups, civil society, regional and international partners. This aims at assessing the implications of the continued caseloads of COVID-19 and how political elites can better implement the peace agreement within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. The research is part of the Institute of Social Policy and Research (ISPR) studies on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Sudan. The research series includes the analysis of government transparency and accountability of COVID-19 response resources, impact of COVID-19 on gender and the impact of COVID 19 on trade and the health sector in the country.

The first part of this report is an introduction that includes the executive summary, research purpose, methodology, sampling process and study demographics. The second part of the report discusses the background of the peace process and onset of COVID-19 in South Sudan. The third part examines the research findings. The fourth section discusses the research findings and the conclusion. And lastly, policy recommendations for different stakeholders.

Research Purpose

This research aims to generate insights on opinions and perceptions of citizens on government response to the COVID-19 pandemic, its implications on the peace agreement implementation and suggests practical recommendations to stakeholders to accelerate the peace process within the pandemic context. The research objectives are; (i) to examine the public opinions and perceptions on the pandemic impact on the peace process; (ii) to analyze the impact of COVID-19 on the role of stakeholders in the peace agreement implementation and (iii) to propose recommendations for stakeholders to accelerate implementation of the agreement.

Methodology

The study utilized mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative using primary and secondary data, including those collected from wide range of stakeholders and the public. Secondary research includes desk review of different reports and government policies on the COVID-19 response in South Sudan. The primary data were collected through public survey of 389 respondents (153 females, 39.4% and 236, 60.6% male) and 13 focus group discussions involving 121 (48 females and 73 male) participants. In total, 510 people participated in the study. Out of the 389 public survey respondents, 78% were aged between 18-39 years and 22% were aged 40 years and above. The study interfaced with different community members mainly youth, women, men and local community leaders who are residents of

various suburbs of Juba, Torit, Yambio and Wau. These towns were carefully selected based on ethnic diversity of the inhabitants to ensure high probability of interviewing at least five respondents from the three greater regions of the country. Most importantly, to reflect the multiplicity of views among the majority of the 64 ethnic groups in South Sudan.

Sampling Process

The study was conducted from September – October 2020 in four major towns and purposively selected residential suburbs of the towns. In each town, 75 respondents with at least 40% female were randomly selected for the interviews. The residential areas in these towns were selected based on their closeness to the city center, cosmopolitanism and places of origin of inhabitants. This was deliberately designed with a view to have high probability to interview diversity of respondents from the greater regions of the country. The actual data collection involved random picking of respondents from the tenth household reached or on count of every tenth of the individual seen in any given location for the interviews.

Study Limitation

The focus of the study targeted respondents of different communities across South Sudan who are residents of Juba, Torit, Yambio and Wau. Due to the small sample size, this research report is not representative of nationwide views and perceptions on the impact of COVID-19 on the peace agreement implementation. Discussions around the peace agreement remain sensitive and respondents are careful to offer their views exhaustively. The research team explained and introduced themselves clearly and seek consent of respondents before proceeding with the interviews. The research team reached out to several peace monitoring mechanisms and stakeholders among whom others did not respond.

Table 1: KII Survey respondents

Gender Descriptions		
Sex	Frequency	Percent
Male	236	60.70%
Female	153	39.30%
Total	389	100%

Table 2: Geographical coverage

Location	Frequency	Percent
Yambio, Western Equatoria State	75	19.3
Juba, Central Equatoria State	164	42.2
Wau, Western Bahr el Gazal State	75	19.3
Torit, Eastern Equatoria State	75	19.3
Total	389	100

Table 3: Locations of data collection

Location	Area	Male	Female
Juba	Joppa	9	2
	Gurei	8	5
	Jebel Yesua	6	6
	Kator	6	7
	Rejaf	5	7
	Total	34	27
Torit	Neema 1	5	1
	Inkas	3	5
	Malakia	5	0
	Total	13	6
Wau	Nazareth	5	3
	Lokoloko	6	3
	Masana	5	4
	Total	16	10
Yambio	Town center	10	5
Grant Total		73	48

COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN FRAGILE PEACE AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS CONTEXT

COVID-19 Situation in South Sudan

The world is experiencing a second wave of global health crisis as new cases of COVID-19 surge. The pandemic has caused immeasurable social, political and economic crises. East African countries are not spared as cases continue to rise across the region. The pandemic has exposed the weak health systems, crisis preparedness and disaster response mechanisms in the region. As of November 3, 2020, the East African Community (EAC) member states have registered 78,751 cases of COVID-19, with 51,904 recoveries and 1,257 deaths. Kenya leads the region with 56,601 cases and 1,027 deaths, Uganda with 12,971 cases and 114 deaths and Rwanda with 5,155 cases and 35 deaths² among others. South Sudan cases have increased to 2,926 cases and 59 deaths³. There is no clear data on the caseloads and fatalities rate in Tanzania since the authorities stopped formal testing and tracing of contacts⁴.

In South Sudan, the government lifted several restrictions including inter-state travel test policy, ban on social gatherings and resumption of near normal life. This has complicated the accuracy of the infection and fatality rate and increased public skepticism. The country continues to struggle with the limited capacity for testing and surveillance and medical personnel. South Sudan humanitarian needs will increase far beyond the direct health impacts of the pandemic. The context is one of multifaceted protracted crises compounded by chronic poverty, conflicts, limited infrastructure, weak health system and limited investment by the Government in basic social services. The humanitarian situation remains dire as millions of people are still in need of food aid, in addition to 300,451 refugees, 276,896 spontaneous refugee returnees⁵ and 1.4 million⁶ IDPs, many of whom live in large, densely populated Protection of Civilian (PoC) camps with inadequate hygiene items.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, the government has established a national high level taskforce chaired by the President and deputized by the First Vice President. It endorsed several public health guidelines developed by the Ministry of Health and partners to mitigate the spread and impact of the pandemic. The taskforce provided daily update to the country on the national response to the disease. However, for unknown reasons, the taskforce was dissolved in May 2020 and reconstituted into the National Taskforce Committee (NTF) chaired by the Vice President for the Service Cluster. In addition to the NTF, the government formed a National Steering Committee led by the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health, with participation of health partners. As part of the preventive measures, the government imposed several restrictions, including controlled movements, banned social gatherings and imposed curfew. But these restrictions were quickly lifted by the Presidency. The scale of the impact of the government response remains unknown as there is little evidence to suggest their effectiveness to stop infection. A society that is traditionally inclined like in South Sudan has struggled to observe global guidelines such as social distancing, lockdowns and handshaking, leave alone the economic impact. This

² <https://www.eac.int/covid-19>

³ Source:

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/may/19/tanzanias-president-shrugs-off-covid-19-risk-after-sending-fruit-for-tests>

⁵ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/ssd>

⁶ <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/south-sudan/document/south-sudan-new-idp-baseline>

means, it is imperative to contextualize conventional preventive measures to ones that are easily adaptable by the communities. For this to take shape, effective, transparent and accountable use of management of this pandemic remains critical success factor.

The National Steering Committee developed a COVID-19 Country Preparedness and Response Plan which was issued at the end of March 2020. The plan outlined activities that were initially to be carried to contain the spread and effects of the virus. The contingency plan came with a financial requirement of some US\$ 149.8 million⁷. As of June 2020, available literature show that the country received more than \$27 million to respond to the pandemic. The funding largely came from donors including World Bank, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom (FCDO), African Development Bank (AfDB), Global Partnerships for Education (GPE) and European Union (EU)⁸. This is in addition to various in-kind donations by business communities and well-wishers in and outside the country⁹. Despite the generous contributions to support the pandemic response, the government is still struggling to adequately manage cases as there is only one active case management center located in the national capital, Juba, at the Dr. John Garang Infectious Disease Center. Other planned centers are not functional due to inadequate equipment and human resource. Following the government's lifting of preventive restrictions in early May 2020¹⁰; contact tracing, testing and infection control have since dropped. This has increased skepticism on reported numbers and further complicated the scale of infection beyond control of the already overstretched health system of the country. As the country returns to near normal amid increasing cases of infection in the region, the risks are high in South Sudan, for the virus might remain even if other countries succeed to stop it.

Fragile Peace Process

The signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) on 12 September 2018 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, by the warring parties in South Sudan, was widely extolled and commended as a significant step signaling the dawn of peace.¹¹ The R-ARCSS provides broad comprehensive framework for key reform processes to usher the country towards stable democracy and socio-economic progress. These processes include; establishment and operationalization of Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGONU), transitional security arrangements and security sector reform, strengthening effective resource and economic governance, transitional justice and permanent constitution making.¹² The agreement acknowledges the need for inclusion and participation of all stakeholders including regional actors, civil society and citizens in these processes. To that effect, the agreement established inclusive peace implementation mechanisms such as the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC), Ceasefire Transitional Security Arrangement Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (CTSAMVM), Strategic Defense and Security Review Board (SDSRB), National Constitution Amendment Committee (NCAC), Joint Defense Board (JDB) and Joint Transitional Security Committee (JTSC).¹³ These mechanisms serve as platforms for inclusive leadership and participation in the implementation of the peace agreement.¹⁴

⁷ National COVID 19 Response Plan 2020

⁸ https://ijshr.com/IJSHR_Vol.5_Issue.3_July2020/IJSHR_Abstract.0045.html

⁹ https://www.tika.gov.tr/en/news/tika_provides_equipment_to_the_ministry_of_health_of_south_sudan-58347

¹⁰ <https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/south-sudan-lifts-covid-19-restrictions-despite-rise-cases>

¹¹ Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic South Sudan.

¹² Ibid, Chapter I, II, IV, V and VI of the R-ARCSS respectively.

¹³ Ibid – R-ARCSS.

¹⁴ Ibid

Since 2018, the implementation of the agreement has remained steady, dodgy and slow with key consequential activities largely behind schedule. The double-extension of the pre-transitional period explains the fragility and unpredictable behaviors and actions of the political elites to fully comply with the provisions of the accord. Despite the delays, the notable progress in the implementation of the agreement is in Chapter One, which mainly provides for the establishment of a Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGoNU), legislative review of security sector laws and the interim constitution, and the unification of rival forces. Modest progress has been made but a lot desired to be completed to demonstrate new paradigm of political will, maturity and attitude towards stability. The RTGoNU remains partially formed nine months since the Presidency was established in February 2020, and Cabinet in March 2020, respectively. Without tangible political will to fast track key activities, including the completion of the training and deployment of necessary unified forces, enactment of the laws, formation of the transitional national assembly and state governments, adherence to the ceasefire, permanent constitution making and reforms in the economic and natural resource sector, the current peace deal will remain theoretical to many South Sudanese. As the pandemic persists, the future success of the agreement further fades in an already politically uncertain region.

COVID-19 Exacerbates Humanitarian Crisis

South Sudan faces one of the worst global humanitarian crisis with millions of its citizens internally displaced and refugees in the region. According to the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), more than 1.4 million¹⁵ people are internally displaced, including more than 200,000 in Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites across the country. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that nearly 2.2 million¹⁶ South Sudanese live as refugees in the neighboring countries, and South Sudan hosts 300,000 people¹⁷ as refugees, mainly from Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Eritrea and Somalia. The onset of COVID-19 pandemic compounds already a dire situation characterized by hunger, disease, conflict and natural disasters - like floods and locusts. The integrated food classifications (IPC) puts that more than 5.3 million¹⁸ people are in severe need of food aid and 20,000 are at risk of famine. The unprecedented level of floods in 2020 means the situation is likely to be dismal in 2021, as crop production has reduced and unclear effect on livestock. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP) estimate that more than 27,000¹⁹ hectares of crop farms and 72% heads of cattle were lost during the floods. With surging numbers of COVID-19 cases in the region, declining economy and fragile peace process, South Sudan braces itself for a much deeper humanitarian crisis during the lean season. The unprecedented flood in nearly half of the country has affected more than 800,000²⁰ people mainly in greater Upper Nile region. About 368,000 people are displaced from their ancestral homes²¹. Despite these challenges, South Sudan economy continues to shrink with hyperinflation and skyrocketing prices of basic needs that increased by 33%²² in September 2020. This humanitarian crisis caused by natural disaster, conflict, declining economy and now pandemic explains the unique vulnerability and increased

¹⁵ <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/south-sudan/document/south-sudan-new-idp-baseline>

¹⁶ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/southsudan>

¹⁷ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/ssd>

¹⁸ <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-response-monitoring-review-january-march-2020>

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-snapshot-september-2020>

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

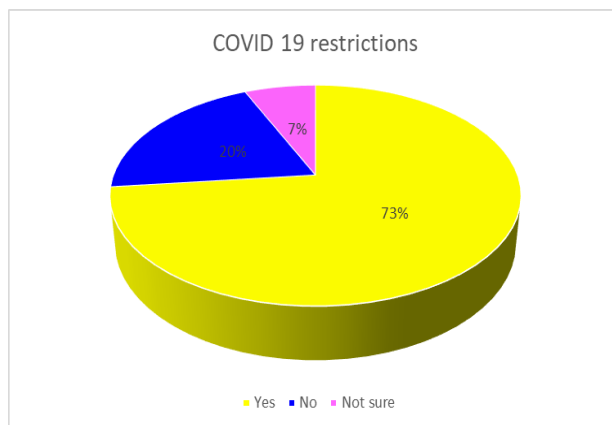
risks the country faces. As such, there is no short cut to implementation of the peace agreement to ensure stability, security and safety of people to return to productive lives as well as improve the economic situation.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

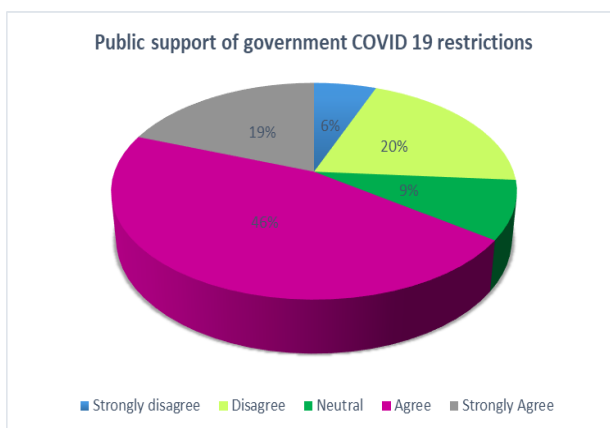
COVID-19 Impact on R-ARCSS Implementation

COVID-19 restrictions imposed

The study assessed the existing COVID restrictions in communities. When respondents were asked about existing restrictions at local and national levels, majority of them (73%) believed there are still preventive restrictions related to COVID-19. Meanwhile, 20% said there were no restrictions and 7% were not sure. During the Key Informants Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), participants identified social distancing, no hand shaking, use of face mask whenever one is in public place and ban on social gatherings as the common restrictions and preventive measures enforced in the country. Some of the other social behaviors that the government has raised awareness on at the community level include; asking the public to stop spitting saliva when in a public place, covering mouths using either handkerchief or tissue whenever sneezing and sanitizing surfaces. However, in the states, like in Torit and Wau, FGD participants said the COVID-19 preventive and restrictions were not largely followed by the communities because of economic hardships and cultural barriers.

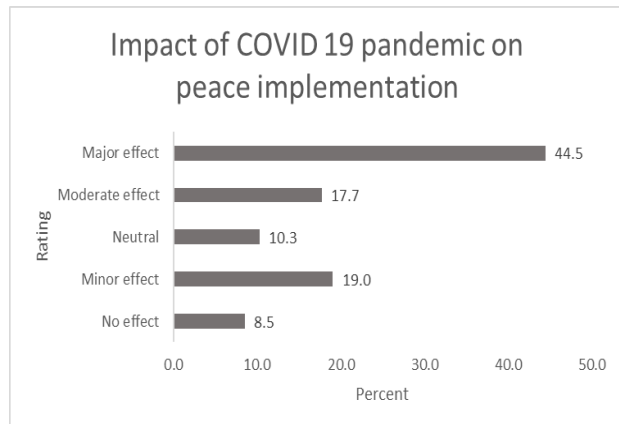


The research also asked respondents' perceptions on whether or not the public supported the government COVID-19 preventive measures and restrictions. An overwhelming 75% expressed support for the measures to various degrees. At least 46% agreed that the public were in support of the measures and 19% strongly agreed, while only 6% strongly disagreed and 20% disagreed. What this means is that, the public was in support of the government actions to stop the spread of the virus. But this perspective is mainly in Juba. Some of the restrictions, like social distancing, were not widely accepted, practiced and followed in the states due to economic hardships, social and cultural barriers, as communities continued to gather at funerals and marriage ceremonies as well as eat together in pool system.

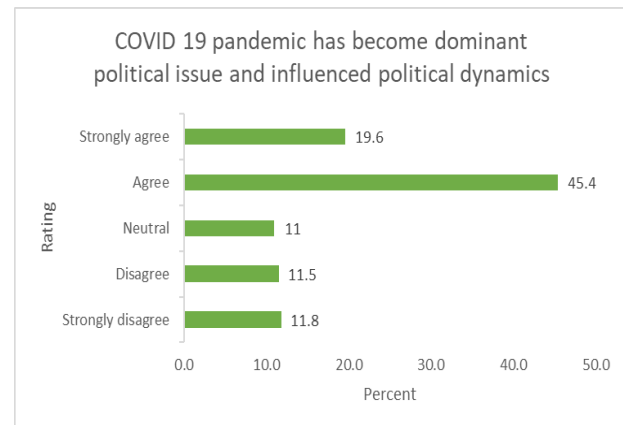


COVID-19 impact on the peace implementation

The research assessed the impact of COVID-19 on the peace process from major effect to no effect. Of the 389 respondents, 44.5% believed COVID-19 has major effect on the implementation of the peace agreement, 17.7% said moderate and only 8.5% of the respondents said there was no effect. Some of the affected activities of the peace agreement due to the pandemic cited by respondents include; delay in the training of joint forces, including movement of troops and deployments to provide security, inability of political leaders to regularly meet and discuss implementation issues, especially when some senior political leaders got infected. The restrictions of the pandemic did not allow gathering for meetings in the beginning which negatively affected the implementation of the peace. The onset of COVID-19 led to increased restrictions in the movements of people, yet other peace activities required moving to other countries and internal states.



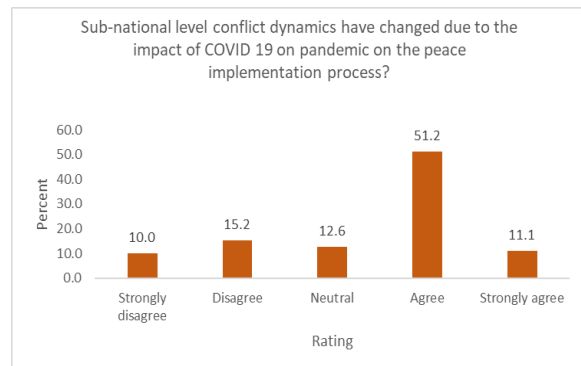
On the other hand, the study found that COVID-19 became a dominant political issue that influenced the political dynamics for better part of 2020. Out of the 389 respondents interviewed, 65% believed the pandemic was a dominant political issue – with 45.4% agreeing and 19.6% strongly agreeing that COVID-19 was dominant topic of discussions among political elites in the country since March 2020. The focus group discussants added that, the political parties shifted all efforts onto COVID-19 and forgot the implementation of the peace agreements. This was also largely driven by self-interest by elites, according to the participants. They also added that too much concentration was given to the management of the COVID-19



pandemic although it was not working, compromising the implementation of the peace agreement. Meanwhile, key informants alluded that instrumental confidence boosting dialogues and meetings among the political elites were either abandoned or stopped, which further affected the implementation of the peace agreement. Some respondents accused the political parties for using the COVID-19 as an excuse to delay the implementation of the peace agreement. Similarly, the public and community sensitization on peace implementation was badly affected since most focus was shifted to COVID-19. The media programmes, especially radio programs, reduced discussions about peace implementation but rather shifted attentions to COVID-19, hence slow peace implementation process. The FGD participants also said that since there were no community gatherings, people could not share ideas on the peace implementation but rather focus on COVID-19. According to the respondents, although the COVID-19 pandemic has had major impact on the peace process, it is not entirely to blame for the slow implementation or lack of progress in moving the peace process forward. The political elites exploited the COVID-19 situation to their own advantage and benefit.

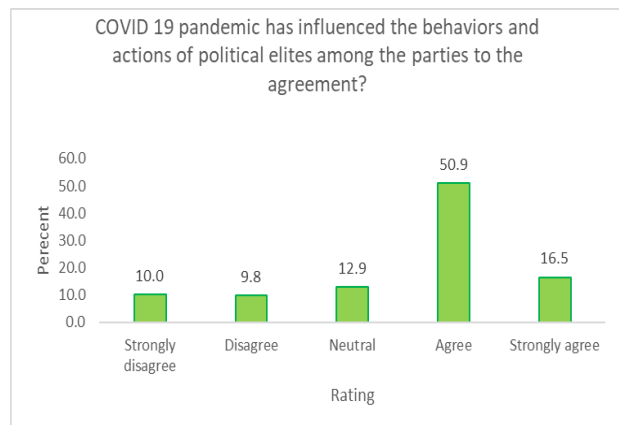
COVID-19 influence on subnational violence

The onset of COVID-19 pandemic coupled with the staggering peace process has not helped the worsening subnational violence during the year. Out of the 389 respondents, 51.2% agreed and 11.1% strongly agreed that conflict dynamics has significantly changed at the community level. Majority of focus group discussants and key informants concurred with this postulation. They said there was no positive change in community conflicts since the COVID-19 pandemic started, instead it increased, due to lack of government leadership at the local level, economic hardships exacerbated by the COVID-19 restrictions, unemployment and lack of food. Communities' peace building and conflict resolution mechanisms, such as dialogue meetings, were banned due to COVID-19, which further aided inter-communal violence. Due to the closure of schools as many youths were idle and engage in criminal cases, increased sexual behaviors, leading to teenage pregnancies that have caused conflict between parents in some places like Yambio. On the other hand, some respondents alluded that, the limited movement of people due to COVID-19 restrictions controlled population movements to some extent controlled crimes in the urban areas. For example, in Torit, Eastern Equatorial State, FGD participants attributed the relative calm in the town to the preventive measures imposed by the government.



COVID-19 influence on behaviors and actions of political elites

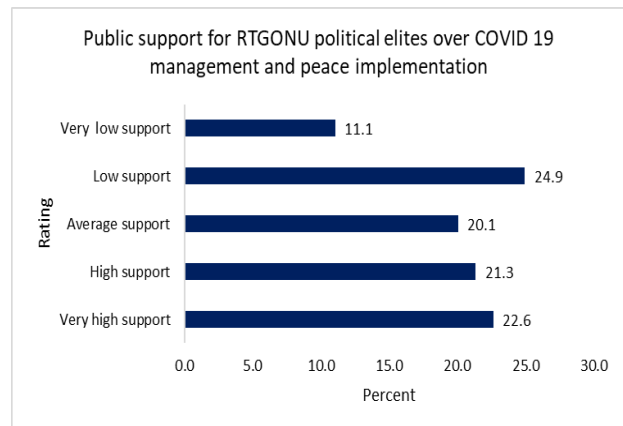
The study also deduced that COVID-19 pandemic had influenced the behaviors and actions of political elites, especially in regards to the implementation of the revitalized peace agreement. This is showed in the 50.9% and 16.5% of respondents, who agreed and strongly agreed respectively. Some participants of the FGDs added that COVID-19 created fear among the parties to the revitalized peace agreement because no meetings could take place. Everyone was concentrating on his or her own survival.



Restricted movements due to the pandemic brought peace agreement activities to standstill as a respondent in Jebel Yesua said: ***“to a great extent, COVID-19 has influenced the behaviors and actions of the parties to the agreement”***. Another FGD participant in Kator added: ***“before Corona, parties tried to work together through meetings but due to Corona, they were not able to meet regularly as expected”***. More respondents mentioned that the parties were unable to make any further progress in the implementation of provisions, such as security arrangement – as the training of the organized forces was temporarily stopped as a precautionary measure. Regular meetings between parties and partners to evaluate the progress of peace implementation were restricted. This contributed to delayed formation of the state and local government, as well as the national assembly. In another FGD in Gudele, the participants concurred that most of the peace agreement activities were put aside as political elites put

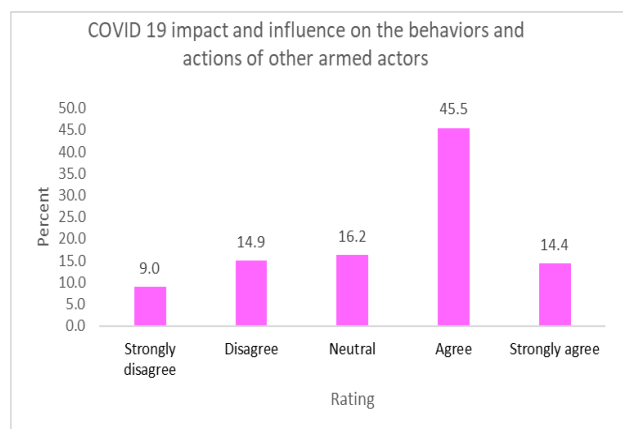
their efforts on the new crisis. Others believed that COVID-19 opened up fresh opportunity for elites to corrupt public funds as well as derail genuine implementation of the peace agreement to their gain.

Despite the weak management of the COVID-19 pandemic and slow progress in the implementation of the agreement, the public support towards the new government political elites remains mixed. This is affirmed by the 24.9% low and 11.1% very low support against 22.6% very high and 21.3% high support of the RTGoNU political elites by the public. Participants identified the most pressing issues were linked to lack of adequate information flowing from the government to the public on COVID-19. This has particularly worsened shortly after the dissolution of the high level taskforce and the creation of the national task force committee. On the agreement implementation, FGD participants cited the continued insecurity in some parts of the country, worsening economic conditions and continued political disagreement between the parties as some of the critical elements that manifest lack of progress.

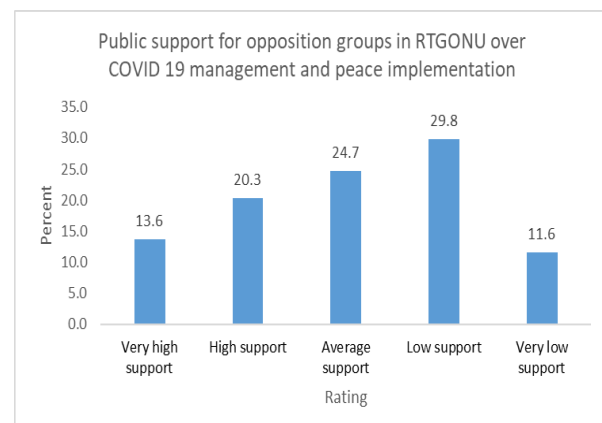


COVID-19 influence on behaviors and actions of opposition and other armed groups

The pandemic also influenced the behaviors and actions of the other armed actors. At least 45.5% agreed and 14.4% strongly agreed that COVID-19 made other armed actors to change their calculations of the peace agreement implementation. Some key informants said many armed actors used the pandemic as political tool to show the inability of government to control and manage it. Some leaders lost their lives because of the pandemic. The restrictions of COVID-19 hindered every activity of peace implementation, which made other armed actors to use it as scapegoat for their actions.

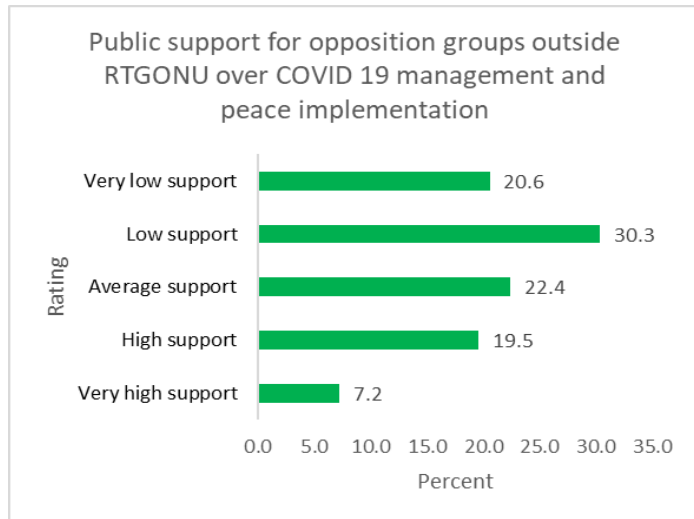


The public support for opposition groups in the RTGoNU pertaining their contribution in the management of COVID-19 and peace implementation was very low. At least 29.8% showed low support and 11.6% very low support for the opposition group. In the FGDs, the main reasons cited for this rating included the weak capacity of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army – In Opposition (SPLM/A-IO) nominee to the health ministry whom participants accused of incompetence. Another reason



provided was the persistent disagreement allegedly advanced by the opposition parties, split and defections were seen as lack of political seriousness by the public.

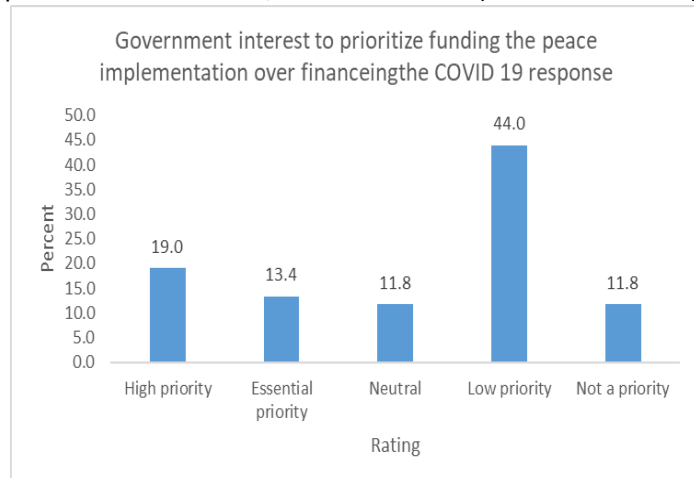
There was also very low support by the public for opposition groups that are outside the RTGoNU. They only enjoy 20.6% very low support and 30.3% low support among those interviewed. Main reasons for the low support include, the lack of clarity of the agenda of such groups, public fatigue to continue in the dire situation of economic hardships imposed by bad politics, war and perceived tribal ideology of the opposition groups.



COVID-19 impact on government funding of peace agreement

Meanwhile, there was significant consensus that government has failed to prioritize funding of the peace agreement activities. Out of the 389 respondents interviewed, a total of 55.8% (44.0% and 11.8%)

of the respondents said financing the peace activities was low priority for the government. However, the FGD participants attributed this trend to the drop in government income due to reduced prices of crude oil in international market and that led to low government revenue. According to a key informant in Jebel Yesua, ***“the national government closed the chapter of the peace agreement and put much emphasis on the COVID-19 issues, because it has been funded by the international community and they want to benefit from it”***. The government has not either invested



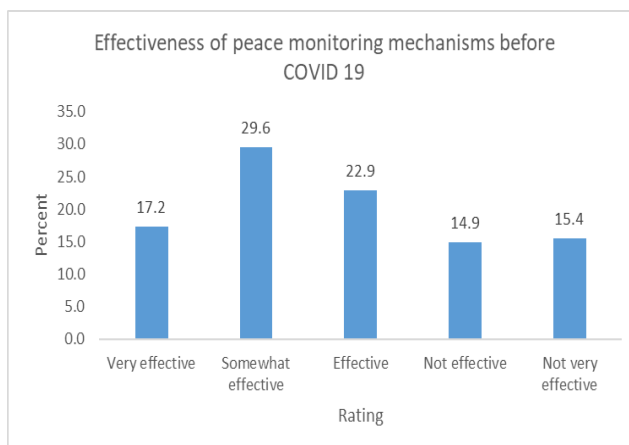
enough in funding COVID-19 activities as anticipated since donors, UN and NGOs are the ones helping communities. So there was no change in government funding regarding peace implementation which cannot be blamed on the pandemic. This had led to gap in public information sharing on the peace process by different actors. According to an FGD participant in Munuki ***“most of the awareness programs on COVID-19 and other issues concerning peace implementation are not known by the public, especially in regards to funding”***. Despite the lack of funding, some respondents believed the problem is beyond just funding COVID-19 over peace activities because implementations of some activities in the peace agreement do not need any money, except political will and decision making. On the government claim of lack of money, participants disagreed that with resources at government disposal, there is no excuse of lack of resources that can facilitate the implementation of the planned peace agreement activities. They blamed the of lack funding of the peace agreement activities to corruption in the government, where individuals want to benefit from the process.

COVID-19 Impact on Peace Monitoring Mechanisms

COVID-19 impact on RJMEC and CTSAMVM functions

The study assessed the effectiveness of the peace monitoring mechanisms with specific focus on the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC) and the Ceasefire Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (CTSAMVM). Before the pandemic, both RJMEC and CTSAMVM were rated highly in effectively monitoring the implementation of the peace

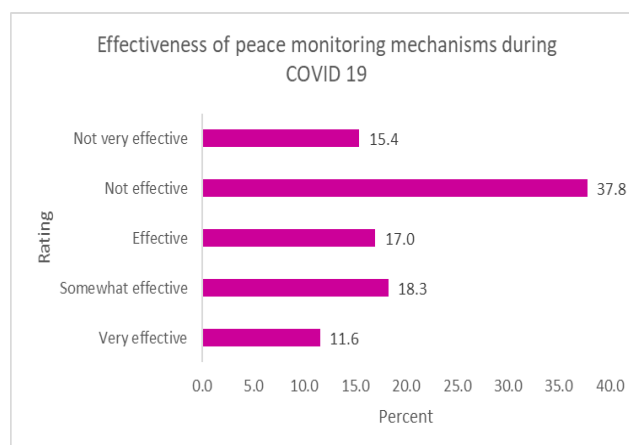
agreement with scores of 17.2% very effective, 29.6% somewhat effective and 22.9% effective ratings. The same perception was shared among FGDs participants and key informants who said the RJMEC and CTSAMVM often reported the slow progress and violations in peace implementation before the pandemic. They also cited the regular movement of CTSAMVM to the communities to investigate cases, raise awareness on the peace activities and the verification of occupied civilian centers. However, the participants blamed RJMEC and CTSAMVM of inadequately holding violators accountable for their actions as stated by a participant in Rejaf: ***“the RJMEC and CTSAMVM always notices any violations of the parties to the peace agreement, but takes no actions”*** and a key informant from the youth groups added that ***“RJMEC and CTSAMVM speak and write good reports, but they are not doing enough as the implementation of the agreement remained behind schedule”*** youth representative. It should however be underscored that, the mandate of both CTSAMVM and R-JMEC is mostly confined to reporting other than executing the outcomes of the reports they produced.



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In contrast, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the effectiveness of RJMEC and CTSAMVM have dropped significantly as seen in the 37.8% respondents who said they were not effective and 15.4% said not very effective. The FGD participants and key informants were in agreement. They reported low visibility of the monitoring teams in their communities despite the increased cases of violations in April, May and June 2020.

Respondents in Juba and Wau particularly said, they did not see any RJMEC or CTSAMVM investigations to cases of insecurity that were witnessed. Notably, the respondents were particularly concerned by lack of intervention from the two mechanisms on the recent disagreements between rival forces of the parties to the peace accord. According to the FGD participants, due to the pandemic, both RJMEC and CTSAMVM found it so hard to move from one area to another in order to monitor the implementation of the agreement due to limited or restricted movement of the monitors and conduct of meetings, which affected effective follow up of activities with the parties. Some

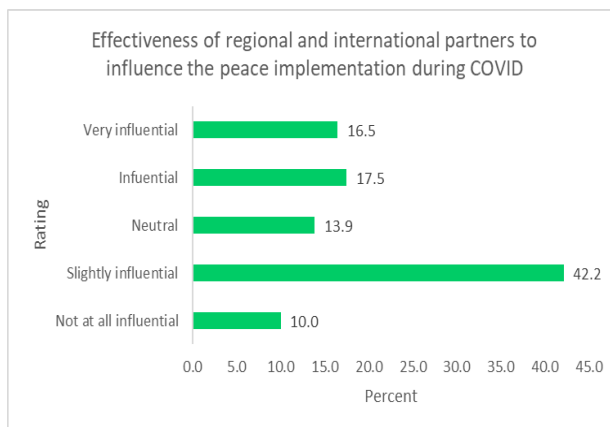


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respondents also cited that community awareness programs conducted by CTSAMVM were affected due to the virus since there were no community gatherings allowed by the government.

Effectiveness of regional and international actors to pressure parties

There were mixed reactions to the influence and effectiveness of the regional and international partners in the peace implementation during the pandemic. 42.2% respondents said the guarantors were slightly influential, 17.5% stated that they were influential and 16.5% suggested that they were very influential respectively. However, 13.9% of the respondents remained neutral and 10% of them said the regional and international partners were not influential at all. This analysis resonates with the views of many participants of the FGDs and key informants who said guarantors lost sight of the agreement implementation as many countries began to look inwards into their own national crisis management.



On the other hand, the study showed that regional and international actors have not done enough to hold parties accountable for their actions and behaviors as 42% of respondents said the regional and international partners have failed to hold parties accountable. Only 36% of respondents believed guarantors have held the parties to account and 22% of them said maybe they did something. Most FGDs participants said the regional and international partners left the agreement in the hands of the parties thus the slow implementation as **“supporting and oversight bodies like IGAD have left everything in the hands of the parties to the agreement”**, according to an FGD participant in Jebel Yesua.

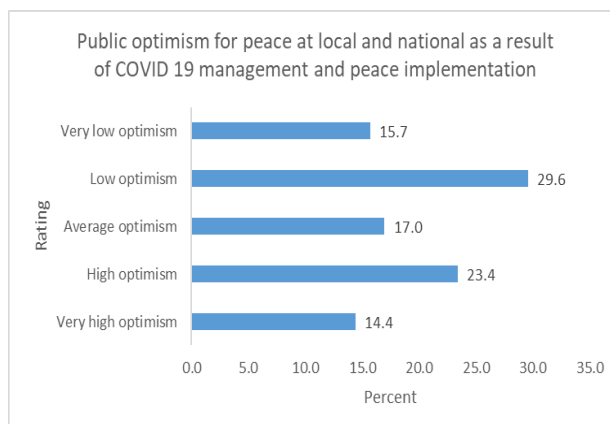


The respondents blamed the lack of progress in the peace agreement implementation to largely inadequate political will by the main parties, especially the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement - In Opposition (SPLM-IO) leader Dr. Riek Machar and President Salva Kiir.

Respondents wanted to see the regional and international guarantors hold these parties accountable for their actions and behaviors that derail peace, security and stability, including enforcing tight deadlines for implementing certain activities in the agreement and punishing those engaged in activities that circumvent the peace implementation process. Equally, the civil society representatives said the international community had tried to put pressure on government and opposition elites to implement the agreement which included imposition of targeted sanctions and upholding the arms embargo on South Sudan. However, the political elites have learnt to survive with such punishments with support of the region.

Public optimism for peace

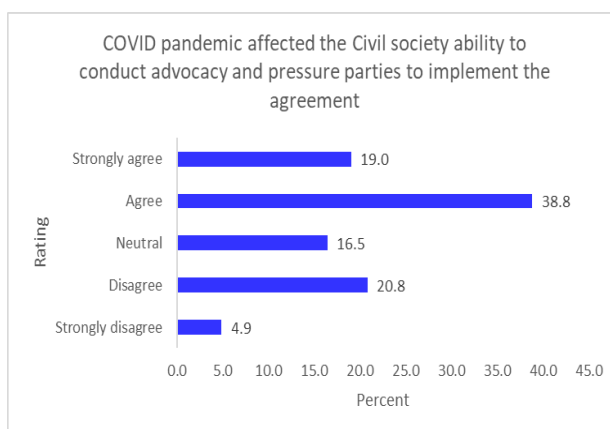
The COVID-19 pandemic, staggering peace process and surge in the subnational violence has reduced public optimism on the peace and hope for a genuine stability. The study revealed mixed reactions, as 29.6% of the respondents show low optimism and 15.7% of them very low optimism for peace in the country. Meanwhile, 23.4% of respondents had high optimism and only 14.4% of them had very high optimism for peace at community and national levels. When asked about their perspectives on peace, the respondents attributed the lack of progress in the implementation of the peace agreement to continued violence in communities, delay in completing the formation of the government, increased defections of government and opposition politicians and military elites as bad signs of a deteriorating peace process. In addition, the ailing economy, lack of provision of basic services by the new government and persistent cases of embezzlement of public funds were some of the examples of uncertainty of the peace implementation process. With COVID-19 now, the public does not trust the government to find a quick fix due to continued disagreement on implementation modalities. For instance, a respondent in Yambio said ***“there is no chance of peace in this country. I do not really know if the leaders of this country know what the people are going through. Many people thought this agreement will be different but they were wrong”***.



COVID-19 Impact on Civil Society and Stakeholders

COVID-19 impact on civil society advocacy

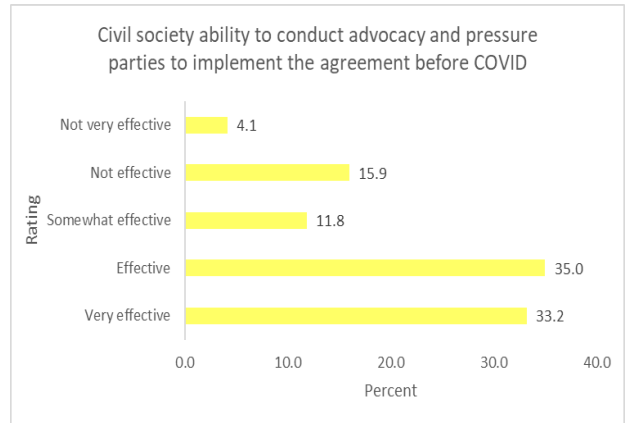
The pandemic has not spared the work of civil society groups. The preventive measures imposed by the government have had negative impact on the advocacy and civic education interventions of the civil society. As shown in the diagram, 38.8% and 19% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed respectively, that civil society ability to conduct advocacy on the peace implementation was affected by the pandemic and its related restrictions imposed by the government. The factors include the limitation of movements, ban on meetings and public gatherings and to greater extent commitment and enthusiasm of the civil society groups dropped.



The civil society advocacy to pressure the parties to implement the agreement before COVID-19 received very high rating. A combined proportion of 68.2% respondents believed they were effective. Only 4.1% respondents perceived the civil society were not very effective and another 15.9% said they were not effective in conducting advocacy around the peace process before the COVID-19 pandemic. The FGD respondents gave examples of civil society meetings with key political leaders in country and

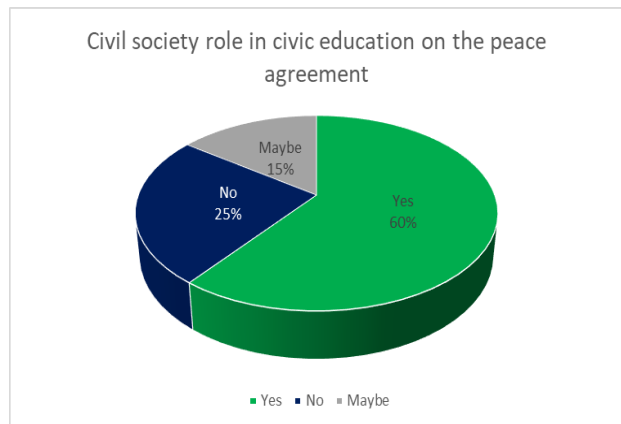
regionally before COVID-19 as critical initiatives that has had impact on the peace process. The continued media campaign, analysis of the peace agreement implementation and voices of civil society groups in the different peace mechanisms were also considered crucial pressure points by the participants.

The pandemic has equally negatively impacted on the ability of civil society to participate in implementation of the peace agreement. While the importance of civil society involvement in peace process has been recognised and affirmed by the presence of their representatives in most of the bodies formed to oversee the implementation of the peace agreement, the restrictions put in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic impose more restrictions to already shrinking civic space. The pandemic has restricted and limited civic space simply by curtailing the ability to meet and interact face-to-face with community members, international, regional and local actors responsible for implementation of the peace agreement. The physical aspect of coming together which is really at the heart of community engagement in implementation of the peace agreement was largely taken away. This has greatly hampered the ability of the civil society to monitor and influence the implementation of the peace agreement and engage with stakeholders.

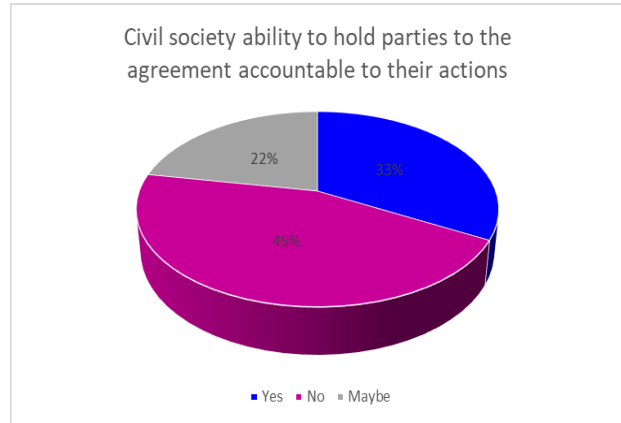


Civil society work on civic education

Notably, civic education around the peace agreement was linked to the tireless efforts of the civil society groups. When asked whether civil society has done enough civic education on the agreement, as per the chat, 60% of the respondents perceived the civil society has contributed significantly to civic education activities in the communities, only 25% of the respondents did not see that impact and 15% of them were not sure. Many respondents cited the various radio talk shows, community events, workshops and trainings that civil society organizations have held on the peace agreement. Some of the respondents also gave examples of the billboards, radio jingles, artworks, social media campaigns and **Hagana** (implying “Ours”) events organized to share messages of peace as some of the activities they attended. On the other hand, some respondents believed that the civil society has not done enough to raise civic education.



Civil society and stakeholder ability to hold parties accountable for their behaviors and actions that slow down implementation of the agreement received mixed reactions from respondents. 45% of the respondents said “no”, 33% stated “yes” and 22% said “maybe” the civil society tried to hold parties accountable. Most FGD participants concurred saying that civil society groups have been vocal and called out parties that reneged from the implementation of key activities, especially during the pre-transitional period - including transparency in the management of the peace agreement utilization of resources. Civil society has also condemned different situations where the agreement was in danger through press statements, meetings with political and military leaders as well as engaging the regional and international guarantors. But some respondents also said the civil society did not do enough as an FGD participant in Wau said **“to a lesser extend the civil society tried to do their work but we have not heard so much of the CSOs holding the parties to the agreement accountable to their actions on implementation of the peace agreement”**. Participants cited the unique approach to advocacy and continued disagreement among various civil society groups on the agreement as to have negatively affected their ability to hold parties to account. An example includes when a civil society group petitioned the extension of the pre-transitional period while another supporting it, sending mixed messages to the public and parties.



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

COVID-19 Impact on the Implementation of R-ARCSS

The spread of COVID-19 in South Sudan has had a negative impact on the implementation of the peace agreement and placed further stress on an already dire humanitarian situation. Since the first confirmed case of COVID-19 was reported on April 5, 2020, the High Level Task Force (HLTF) imposed nationwide curfew, closed the international borders and restricted interstate travel.²³ Such steps were meant to curb the spread of coronavirus in the country. However, the HLTF decision also took toll on the implementation of the peace agreement. These include, halting training of unified forces, restriction of meetings of the parties and the presidency, and delay in the allocation and distribution of states and counties. Coupled with the lack of political will from the parties to R-ARCSS to implement the provisions of the agreement, COVID-19 further slows the implementation of the peace agreement.

The COVID-19 is an add-on to the ‘plagues’ wrecking the world’s youngest nation, the Republic of South Sudan, as it arrived at a time when the young nation is at a crossroad – rebuilding its fractured society troubled by ‘armed conflict, chronic communal violence, political instability, typified by absence of rule of law and constitutionalism.’ (any citation for the text in inverted commas?) Evidently, COVID-19 is not only a threat to the country’s crippling public health system, but to the fragile peace and weak governance system alike. The tenuous peace deal, the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of

²³ <https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/impact-of-covid-19-on-stability-and-the-peace-process-in-south-sudan/>

Conflict in South Sudan (R-ACRSS), was already in doubt as critical aspects are yet to be implemented. Furthermore, the institutions of peace building and constitutionalism were already lacking, weak or struggling when COVID-19 arrived.²⁴

The implementation of chapter I of the R-ARCSS is lagging behind as of all other chapters of the peace agreement. Since the outbreak of COVID-19 there has been slow progress in the implementation of the governance tasks of the R-ARCSS²⁵. In the absence of regular full cabinet meetings, the First Vice President and the Four Vice Presidents responsible for chairing and overseeing the six RTGoNU ministerial clusters in accordance with Article 1.10 as provided for in Articles 1.7.3.3 and 1.8.2.5 of R-ARCSS conducted regular meetings of each of the ministerial clusters, until the first full cabinet meeting was convened in the second week of September 2020, followed by two others within the month of (October of November?) 2020²⁶.

When the First Vice President confirmed to the nation that he and some members of the High Level Taskforce tested positive for the Nobel Coronavirus, confidence considerably dropped in the ability of the government to manage the crisis²⁷. The First Vice President and the entire members of the cabinet that tested positive for COVID-19 had to self-isolate as per the regulation of the Ministry of Health (MOH) and World Health Organization (WHO). Government business virtually came to a standstill. Council of Ministers meetings were suspended. Important and critical matters were not attended to by the presidency due to absence of the first vice president. All these occurrences led to the delay in resolving important tasks of the R-ARCSS. Nonetheless, there has not been any significant progress even after the leaders were eventually tested negative for COVID-19. The president dissolved the HLTF and replaced it with National Taskforce Committee led by the Vice President for the Service Cluster, who unfortunately, also tested positive for COVID-19 on May 27, 2020.²⁸

Although the parties did not show any political will to implement the revitalized peace agreement, the suspension of physical meeting due to COVID-19 further delayed the formation of the state and local governments, and the transitional legislative assembly. In addition, reviewed legislative bills including the public financial laws and security laws were partly not presented to the cabinet due to lack of regular sittings. In a nutshell, the pandemic exacerbated an already fragile peace implementation environment and greatly affected some milestones, as parties used it as scapegoat for belligerence.

COVID-19 and Transitional Security Arrangements

Security arrangement is one of the most hit by the coronavirus outbreak. The government decided to suspend the training of unified forces as precautionary measure, a decision that affected 29 000 combatants.²⁹ The creation of a unified army was one of the core aspects of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS). Delays in the formation of the united forces had

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ RJMEC Report of September 2020 on the Implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan.

²⁶ *Ibid*.

²⁷ VOA News. South Sudan's Senior Officials Test Positive for Coronavirus; May 18, 2020. <https://www.voanews.com/africa/south-sudan-focus/south-sudans-senior-officials-test-positive-coronavirus>

²⁷ <https://www.theeastafrikan.co.ke/news/ea/Another-South-Sudan-VP-contracts-Covid-19/4552908-5565948-rd42ci/index.html>

²⁸ <https://www.theeastafrikan.co.ke/news/ea/Another-South-Sudan-VP-contracts-Covid-19/4552908-5565948-rd42ci/index.html>

²⁹ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/covid-19-s-sudan-suspends-training-of-unified-forces/1782177>

a negative knock-on effect on the implementation of a number of other clauses of the R-ARCSS. Until now, the unified and the special presidential guards haven't graduated. Reports from CTSAMVM and RJMEC noted that, the cantonment sites are near collapse due to the lack of logistics and supplies (food, shelter, medicine, water, etc.), with some forces abandoning the sites.³⁰ This would further discourage completion of registration of combatants and disrupt the planned disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process. The current state of the cantonment sites poses a risk of approximately 35,000 combatants returning to communities due to lack of resources, including food items and medical supplies resulting from the travel restrictions.³¹

COVID-19 Impact on Humanitarian Relief and Economy

The delivery of humanitarian relief is also affected by the pandemic. The pandemic-related restriction in movement and the loss of opportunities to earn a livelihood have further exacerbated the humanitarian crisis for estimated 6 million food insecure people.³² After the improvement in the security situation, it was estimated that over 600,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and over 225,000 refugees returned to their communities. This progress has also slowed down since March 2020.³³ The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in food commodity price hikes, translating into an early onset on the hunger period and creating an additional urban caseload of about 1.6 million people needing food assistance during this quarter. Despite the COVID-19 border restrictions, refugee and IDP returns continued, but at a much reduced pace compared to earlier this year. In the month of May 2020, UNHCR and partners verified returns of 4,693 South Sudanese refugees from neighboring countries.³⁴

Most importantly, the government response further curtailed the timely movement of humanitarian workers and increased bureaucracies for approval of expatriate staff of humanitarian agencies. The quarantine requirements for international arrivals and before for inter-state movement wasted so much time, hence undermining the work of humanitarian workers in delivering life-saving services. It further led to increased cost of delivery of humanitarian services as many agencies have to pay for costs of quarantine for staff returning to places of work.

COVID-19 and Transitional Justice Processes

According to the R-ARCSS, RTGoNU shall initiate legislation for the establishment of the transitional justice institution (Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing (CTRH), the Hybrid Court for South Sudan (HCSS) and the Compensation and Reparation Authority (CRA)) within three months of its formation.³⁵ However, the COVID-19 outbreak has further delayed steps to kick-start transitional justice processes.³⁶ The May 2020 timeline for enactment of the legislation to create transitional justice mechanisms elapsed without any progress achieved due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has impeded public consultations and participation by South Sudanese, including victims, in the

³⁰ RJEMC June 2020 Report on Status of implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan.

³¹ RJEMC June 2020 Report on Status of implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on Resolution of the Conflict in the republic of South Sudan.

³² <http://www.fao.org/3/ca9192en/ca9192en.pdf>

³³ <http://www.fao.org/3/ca9192en/ca9192en.pdf>

³⁴ Spontaneous Refugee returns to South Sudan monthly update, with data as of 31st May 2020. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/77073>.

³⁵ Article 5.1.1. of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, (R-ARCSS), September 12, 2018.

³⁶ Article 5.2.1.2 of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, (R-ARCSS), September 12, 2018.

conceptualization and formation of the anticipated transitional justice measures due to restrictions on movement, social distancing, risk of physical interactions, and weak internet and digital technology coverage in South Sudan.³⁷ Notably, the R-ARCSS requires that the R-RTGoNU conduct national consultations with conflict-affected communities, especially marginalized and minority groups, so as to ensure that their needs and priorities are incorporated in the draft legislation for the establishment of the CTRH.³⁸ The R-ARCSS anticipated that the national consultations should have been concluded by April 2020.³⁹

The African Union Commission also postponed a meeting with key stakeholders that was scheduled to take place in March 2020, to draft rules and regulations for the operation of the Hybrid Court. This meeting was intended to foster the opportunity for discussions with both State and non-State actors in order to resolve the current stalemate following the Government's failure to adopt the draft Statute and sign the Memorandum of Understanding with the African Union (AU) to establish the Hybrid Court. The AU also expressed security concerns over the use of online communication platforms to convene such a meeting, especially given the highly sensitive nature of the discussions surrounding the Hybrid Court.⁴⁰ However, the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPRs) adopted the use of technology and convened online meeting with civil society, parties to the peace agreement and international partners to assess the transitional justice environment in South Sudan.

COVID-19 restriction on movement

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, there were global restrictions on travel. The implementation of R-ARCSS heavily relies on the regional guarantors, UN and the international community. Accordingly, the restriction on travel and movements have made it difficult for regional guarantors to engage actively in monitoring and supporting the implementation of the R-ARCSS. COVID-19 has also had an impact on the role of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in supporting implementation of the peace agreement. The first few cases of COVID-19 in South Sudan were among UN international staff, and the UN has implemented a number of measures to ensure that its peacekeeping missions do not become vectors for the spread of the disease. The UN froze all rotations and movement of staff, and all non-essential staff were asked to work from home or their UN accommodation.⁴¹

COVID-19 and civil society participation in the R-ARCSS

The pandemic has equally negatively impacted on the ability of civil society to participate in implementation of the peace agreement. While the importance of civil society involvement in peace process has been recognised and affirmed by the presence of their representatives in most of the bodies formed to oversee the implementation of the peace agreement, the restrictions put in place in response to the COVID-19 imposed more restrictions to already shrinking civic space. The pandemic has restricted and limited civic space simply by curtailing the ability to meet and interface with community members, international, regional and local actors responsible for implementation of the peace agreement. The physical aspect of coming together which is really at the heart of community

³⁷ Forty-fifth session, 14 September-7 October 2020 Human Rights Council, Conference room paper of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan

³⁸ Article 5.2.1.3 – R-ARCSS

³⁹ Forty-fifth session, 14 September-7 October 2020 Human Rights Council, Conference room paper of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan

⁴⁰ Forty-fifth session, 14 September-7 October 2020 Human Rights Council, Conference room paper of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan

⁴¹ <https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/impact-of-covid-19-on-stability-and-the-peace-process-in-south-sudan/>

engagement in implementation of the peace agreement was largely taken away. This has greatly hampered the ability of the civil society to monitor and influence the implementation of the peace agreement and engage with stakeholders.

COVID-19 and funding for the implementation of the R-ARCSS

The implementation of the peace agreement has been hampered by change of donors focus to address COVID-19 pandemic. South Sudan's 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan COVID-19 Addendum was launched on the 16th June 2020. The funding appeal to the tune of US \$ 390 million is aimed at supporting the COVID-19 response and address emerging humanitarian needs. This brings the overall humanitarian appeal for 2020 to US \$ 1.9 billion, aimed at assisting 7.4 million people; up from the US \$ 5.6 million planned before the outbreak, by the end of the year.⁴² COVID-19 thus negatively impacted on the implementation of the peace agreement in many aspects. It has limited the space for engagement and dialogue, worsened humanitarian situation, delayed crucial and time-bound milestones of the peace agreement and reduced government and development partners' focus and support to implementation of the peace agreement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To Government and Political Parties in R-ARCSS

- › **Build confidence among political elites** – the political parties and key principals of the peace agreement should as a matter of urgency initiate activities that will build and restore public confidence and trust among themselves. The trust building should include the state and county level groups and authorities from all parties. Emphasis should be placed on hotspots of violent conflicts around the country.
- › **Develop hybrid approach to managing COVID-19 and the peace process** – the second wave of COVID-19 infections raises concerns and uncertainties on the peace process. The government should find the right balance to ensure the spread of the coronavirus is decisively contained while maintaining some level of functionality of key institutions and public officials who can move the peace implementation forward.
- › **Strengthen transparency and accountability in the funding of COVID-19 and peace activities** – the relevance of transparent and accountable management of public funds in both COVID-19 response and peace implementation cannot be overemphasized. It is critical that funding is made available to institutions that respond to COVID-19 and the broader implementation of the agreement and that they are strictly and efficiently used for their intended purposes. Meanwhile, receiving and spending entities must provide timely accountability on the use of the resources to the public.
- › **Increase participation of the public in the peace process** – the survival of this peace agreement depends on local ownership, particularly the inclusion and participation of the South Sudanese people at all levels. The public needs to know the content of the agreement, progress in implementation, challenges and the role they may play to support the implementation process. In addition, the peace accord provides for the right of citizens to actively get engaged in the

⁴² RJEMC 1st April to 30th June 2020 Report on Status of implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on Resolution of the Conflict in the republic of South Sudan.

processes. Therefore, the political parties should ensure that decisions are taken based on concrete consultations and opinions of the people.

- › **Peace dissemination in counties by political elites** – what galvanizes popular support for any complex peace process such as the one in South Sudan is joint social mobilization of the public by the political elites. This has never happened. The RTGoNU and political parties to the agreement should, as a matter of priority, reach out to the people with messages of hope, peace, forgiveness and reconciliation. This will demonstrate the leadership and responsibility for positive change. It helps build optimism for peace at local and national levels among the citizens.
- › **Complete formation of state governments and national assembly** – the power vacuum at the states and local government (counties) levels must be addressed urgently. Nearly five months after the appointment of state governors, there are no state cabinets, assemblies and local governments. This trend is not sustainable and does not help build confidence in the peace process among the citizens. The government and particularly parties to the agreement must take up responsibility and complete the setup of all government institutions as per the peace agreement.
- › **Open up civic space for the civil society** – the peace agreement guarantees and provides for the freedom of the civil society to conduct civic education, advocacy and engagement with stakeholders in the peace process. This is not the case due to restrictions and safety concerns by civil society groups. The government should demonstrate its political responsibility and will and open up civic space and review all legal frameworks that are repressive.
- › **Manage COVID-19 preventive measures by building strong RTGoNU institutions** – the Coronavirus pandemic is here to stay. Well-coordinated, empowered and financed institutions at national, state and local government levels are critical factors to contain the virus and ensure long term national preparedness for similar health disasters. Without leadership, and with COVID-19, the crisis will only deepen and contribute to more problems for a country already struggling with multiple crises – security, humanitarian, economic and floods. Therefore, the government should work together to use the implementation of the peace agreement as a means to contain the coronavirus.

To the Peace Monitoring Mechanisms and Guarantors

- › **Adapt to the “new normal”, strengthen monitoring and actions on violators of the peace agreement** – the COVID-19 lockdown has huge impact on the work of the monitoring mechanisms, particularly IGAD, RJMEC and CTSAMVM. Although movement restrictions curtailed their ability to function, both RJMEC and CTSAMVM must have adapted their monitoring functions beyond issuing narrative reports. The roles of RJMEC and CTSAMVM are critical determinant of the behaviors and actions of the regional guarantors. It is imperative that both institutions step up their monitoring work, including timely investigations of all violations, regular briefing of regional and international partners, and clear reporting of parties found culpable of violations without regards to influence and strength. This should continue within the context of the pandemic.
- › **Strengthen regional approach to COVID-19 management and political processes** – South Sudan, like many of its neighbors, is caught between enforcing pandemic preventive measures and ensuring smooth political transitions. For this to succeed, the regional allies to the RTGoNU should maintain maximum pressure on the parties to adapt the implementation of the peace agreement within the COVID-19 context. In addition, they should maintain consistency in application of their punitive tools among all parties to the agreement.

- › **Punish violators, shift from words to action** – the time to move from advocacy, soft diplomacy and words to more concrete actions, including diplomatic isolation and sanctions for violators of the agreement, is now. After nearly two and half years, the regional and international guarantors have not found the right formulae to genuinely incentivize the implementation of the agreement. This is largely attributed to the unique approach of each country's influence by geopolitical and economic interest.
- › **Increase access to information on the peace process** – access to information by communities and all stakeholders remains critical. The peace monitoring mechanisms should ensure timely and unhindered access to the peace implementation information by interested citizens. This must include information on violators of the peace agreement for the public to be aware.
- › **Finance COVID-19 and peace activities** – there is no shortcut to stop the virus when the peace agreement is falling apart. The international partners should continue and step up funding of the critical activities in the peace agreement. While the COVID-19 pandemic response deserves to be resourced, this should not be entirely in the expense of the political transition that has strong bearing on the ability of the government to combat the coronavirus, and achieve peace.

To the Civil Society

- › **Step up advocacy and pressure on the peace parties** – the public expects to witness an aggressive advocacy and pressure on the political parties by the civil society, despite the restricted environment. This is legitimate expectation. The onus is now on the civil society groups to carefully maintain consistency to demand for full implementation of the peace agreement within the COVID-19 pandemic context.
- › **Scale up civic education** – the public expects intensive civic education on the peace process by the civil society groups. This should be taken to the rural areas where majority of the people live. The civic education should focus on key thematic and milestone activities that are critical to the transitional process instead of broad awareness that confuses the citizens more. For example, awareness on the permanent constitution making, census, elections and key reforms is important.
- › **Speak with one voice and be consistent** – the civil society should forge common ground understanding of their fundamental convergence areas of advocacy and maintain consistency. The public need credible information backed up with facts and evidence. This is paramount to raise an informed population that can actively get engaged in governance conversations.
- › **Build coalition with other stakeholders in and outside the country** – the civil society should amplify their voices through closely working with the church in country and fellow networks in the region. This will ensure uniformity in messaging and collective pressure for the parties to implement the peace agreement within the COVID-19 pandemic context.
- › **Build proactive advocacy approach** – the civil society should be proactive in their advocacy and map out regional and global events that they can influence to ensure the guarantors pressure parties to implement the peace agreement.
- › **Advocate for transparent and accountable management of COVID-19** – the civil society should ensure the government and partners are checked for their actions and decisions as well as utilization of resources meant for the COVID-19 response.