An illustration in a stylized, line-art style with a yellow-to-orange gradient background. It depicts a group of people participating in a protest or demonstration. Several individuals are holding up large, blank white rectangular signs on wooden poles. The figures are rendered in simple outlines with some flat color fills, suggesting a diverse group of people. The overall composition is dynamic, with figures in various poses and directions, conveying a sense of movement and collective action.

# Conflict and Connectivity in South Sudan Report

Defy Hate Now & Center for Strategic and Policy Studies

August 2021



## **DEFY HATE NOW (DHN)**

**DHN** works on providing community-based and data-driven solutions to the problem of hate speech, disinformation, and misinformation. Defy Hate Now seeks to support the voices and actions of citizens working against online induced conflict within and outside affected regions by bringing youth, community leaders, grassroots organizations and further civil society stakeholders into a peace-oriented media and information literacy framework. Bridging gaps of knowledge and awareness of social media mechanisms between those with access to technology and those without, Defy Hate Now is a growing network of online and offline peacebuilders.

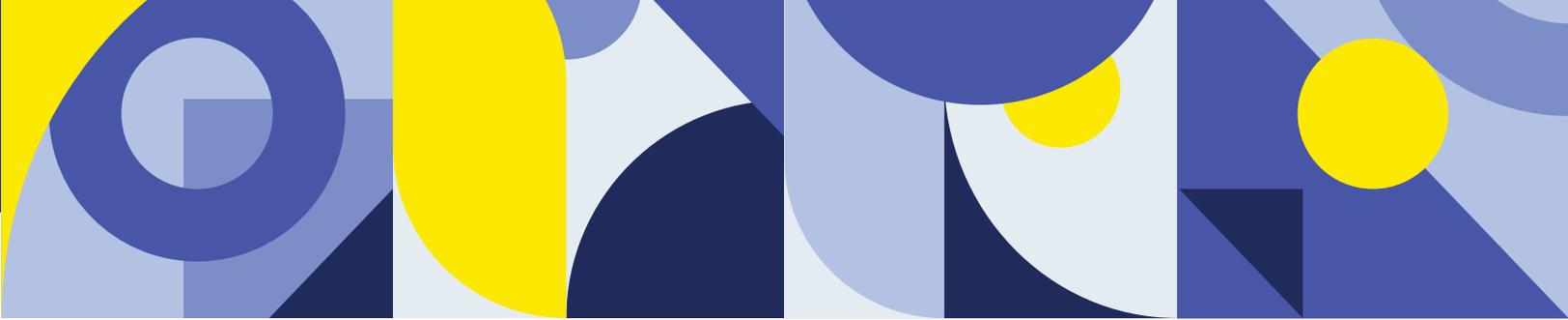


## **SOUTH SUDAN CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND POLICY STUDIES (CSPS)**

**CSPS** was established in July 2011 in Juba as a national think-tank in South Sudan. Since then, CSPS has been aspiring to inform and shape the path of the new country with regard to good governance based on human rights and democratic tradition, under the aegis of which the national resources are utilized sustainably for the well-being of the citizenry and humanity at large. CSPS aims at enabling the participatory development, state and nation-building as guided by applied research, which would make it possible to either influence or predict the best or worst possible future options with strategies and policies that are drawn out of objectively balanced critical thinking.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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# Executive Summary

This report broadly provides an analysis of the relationship between conflict and connectivity in South Sudan as it has evolved with major socio-political events in the country from 2013 to 2019. Particularly, it focuses on people's access to public information and how they communicate with each other during conflict and in the absence of conflict paying special attention to the accessibility, affordability, and availability of mobile phone and Internet networks to the South Sudanese people.

There are five key factors, from this analysis, that collectively determine and shape the nature of conflict and connectivity in South Sudan. These factors include infrastructure, population density, fluctuating economy, third party interference and digital media. To fully understand the interaction of conflict and connectivity, it is imperative to look at these factors comprehensively to devise practical and effective action points. This report, therefore, articulates various connections and relationships among these factors and demonstrates how they collectively shape conflict and connectivity in South Sudan.

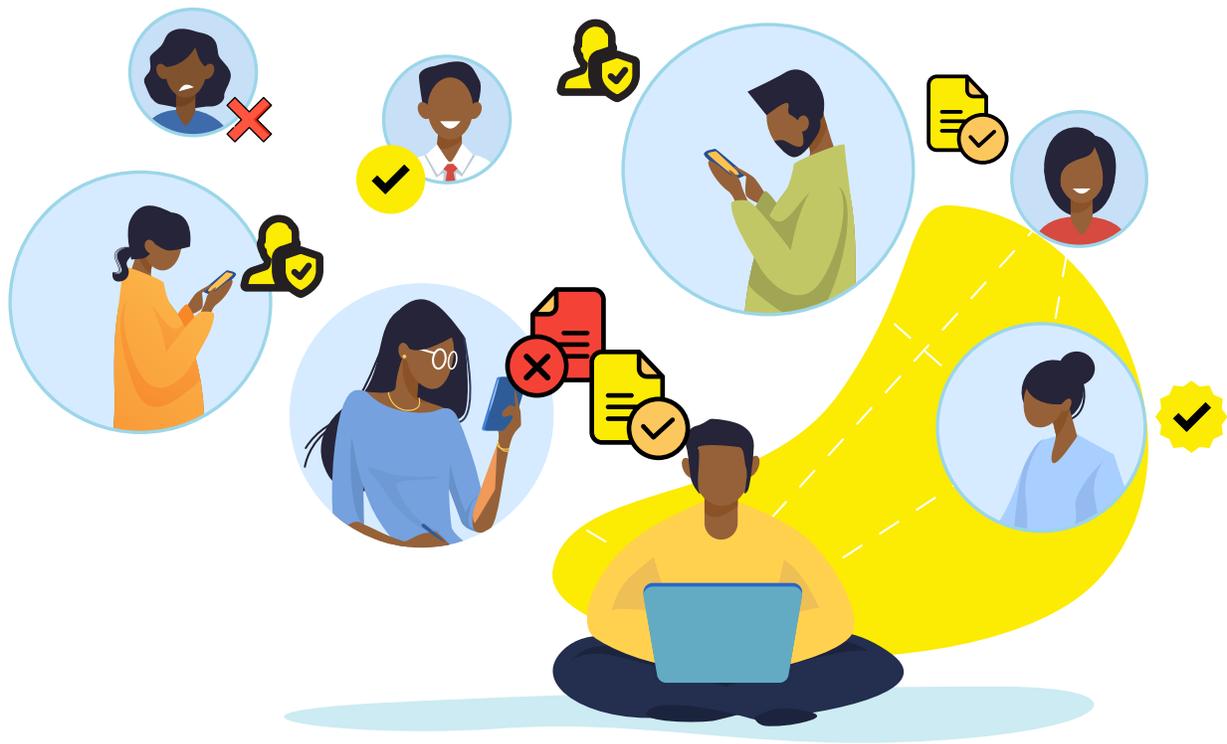
This analysis is informed by digital ethnography, focus groups and interviews with key people and organizations in South Sudan. The participants are drawn from selected regions of Central Equatoria (Juba and Yei), Upper Nile (Malakal) in South Sudan, and Rhino Refugee Settlement (Arua) in Uganda. This methodological approach is used strategically to capture the diversity of South Sudanese people and to enrich the study in breadth and depth.

Key findings highlight the complexity that arises at the nexus of digital technologies and conflict in South Sudan. For instance, infrastructure has a double-edged impact on conflict; it contributes to the escalation and de-escalation of conflict. Good infrastructure enhances communication and mobility during conflict with both positive and negative effects as it serves warring parties indiscriminately.<sup>1</sup> It also enhances humanitarian interventions and contributes to a faster reconstruction after conflict by facilitating access to critical services such as health care. Further, access to digital media platforms also has both positive and negative effects; it expands the civic space while simultaneously creating challenges related to surveillance, hate speech, misinformation, and fake news.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are key action points that can aid the response to this complex interaction of conflict and connectivity in ways that leverage the benefits of digital technologies in peacebuilding. We recommend actors to:

- Develop a robust digital legal framework to govern the use of digital media platforms. This should be done in collaboration with service providers, civil society organizations and the public.
- Strengthen access to public information by creating trustworthy channels via which the public can access important information from government agencies.
- Create an environment for dialogue, mediation, and resolution as a means to build and increase trust among communities.
- Invest in post-conflict measures that address systemic causes of conflict in the country.
- Invest in digital literacy programs across the country to counter the effect of misinformation and fake news via digital media.
- Establish communities of practices that can act as credible sources of information as a complementary axis to digital literacy programs.
- Foster a civic space in which citizens can claim their rights and enjoy freedoms.



## Introduction

This report is based on a research project that explores the nexus of conflict and connectivity in South Sudan. The project broadly examines the relationship between conflict and connectivity in South Sudan, the effect of conflict on connectivity and the ways in which phone and Internet connectivity influence conflict. It focuses on the mechanisms through which people access public information and how they communicate with each other during conflict and in the absence of conflict. Specifically, the accessibility, affordability, and availability of mobile phone and Internet networks to the people in South Sudan and how these factors vary between 2013 and 2019.

Using a mixed methods approach – digital ethnography, focus groups and key informant interviews – the project focuses on three main regions of South Sudan and one refugee camp in Northern Uganda as an analytical lens into the country. Strategically, Juba, Yei, Malakal and Rhino Camp in Northern Uganda are geographically, economically, and ethnically diverse. Their experience with conflict is equally diverse. Juba, the largest city, is the capital and is in the Central Equatoria State, Yei is in Central Equatoria State, Malakal is in the Upper Nile State and Rhino Camp is a refugee camp in Arua District in Northern Uganda that hosts South Sudanese refugees.

This project is part of Defy Hate Now's broader work that aims to enhance trust among communities as a means towards peacebuilding. Besides articulating the relationship between conflict and connectivity, the main objective here is to demonstrate the impact of increased use of digital media on the political landscape in South Sudan during conflict. This draws attention to the centrality of digital technologies and by extension connectivity in peacebuilding among communities in South Sudan.

In an analysis of digital technologies in South Sudan, five key factors emerge. These factors collectively determine the accessibility, affordability, and availability of mobile and Internet networks which in turn shapes the nature of conflict and connectivity in South Sudan. These factors include *infrastructure, population density, fluctuating economy, third party interference* and *digital media*. To fully understand the nature of conflict and connectivity, it is imperative to look at these factors in a comprehensive way that can inspire practical and effective calls to action. In subsequent sections, we tease out the various connections and relationships among these factors and broadly demonstrate how they collectively shape conflict and connectivity in South Sudan.



## An Overview of the Political Landscape in South Sudan

*The 2013-Armed Conflict:* There has been an active civil society in South Sudan since its independence. For example, the church tried to avert conflict<sup>2</sup> in the country in the aftermath of the big reshuffle of 2013.<sup>3</sup> The cabinet reshuffle where President Kiir removed the entire cabinet in July 2013<sup>4</sup> in what was seen as a power wrangle among the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement's (SPLM) is believed by some to be a precursor to the December 2013 conflict.<sup>5</sup> On 15 December 2013, gunfire erupted in the military barracks of Giada and Bilpam in

South Sudan's capital city of Juba. It started between soldiers loyal to President Salva Kiir and former vice president Dr. Riek Machar. In the subsequent hours and days, the fighting had spread to other neighborhoods in Juba with reported targeted killings based on ethnicity. The events of December 2013 led to a civil war that has kept raging with varying intensity, first engulfing the Greater Upper Nile region before spreading to other parts of the country in the months and years that followed.

**The 2015 Peace Agreement:** The devastating war raged throughout the country taking ethnic undertones with allegations of genocide in Juba and Bentiu by the Government and rebel forces reported. On 27 August, President Kiir signed a peace agreement that had been signed 10 days earlier by opposition leader and former Vice-President Riek Machar. The peace agreement provided a framework for parties to end hostilities and addressed a wide range of issues including power sharing, security arrangements, humanitarian assistance, economic arrangements, justice and reconciliation and the parameters of a permanent constitution.<sup>6</sup>

International and regional calls for a peaceful resolution to the conflict yielded the Agreement for the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) which was signed in Addis Ababa in 2015.<sup>7</sup> The agreement was signed between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and Army in Government (SPLM/A-IG) and SPLM/A in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO), as represented by President Salva Kiir Mayardit and First Vice President Riek Machar Teny Dhurgon respectively. It was signed on 17 August 2015 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and on 26 August 2015 in Juba, South Sudan, and ratified by the South Sudan National Legislative Assembly on 10 September 2015. The agreement sought to end the civil war that had broken out in South Sudan in December 2013, following power struggles between Kiir and Machar and the allegations of an attempted coup made by the former against the latter. ARCSS culminated in the formation of a Transitional

Government of National Unity (TGoNU) on 29 April 2016 with the return of Machar, who had fled Juba following the outbreak of the civil war.<sup>8</sup> A power-sharing government was agreed and the main rebel leader, Dr. Riek Machar, became the Vice President.

**The 2016-Armed Conflict:** After Dr. Riek Machar was sworn in as the Vice President, relative peace returned to the country. But the implementation of the peace agreement went at a snail pace. In July 2016, a shootout between bodyguards of the President and Vice President erupted at the Presidential Palace in Juba where a meeting between the principals to the peace agreement, attended by high-ranking government officials, was happening. For the following hours and days, the fighting continued in the capital city. The Vice President then fled to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The following years were marked by widespread violence and abuses by the armed forces across the country. Another disgruntled SPLA commander, Gen. Thomas Cirillo Swaka, abandoned the national army and formed his own rebel group – the National Salvation (NAS).<sup>9</sup>

**The 2018 Peace Agreement:** With violence having reached disproportionate levels, the regional Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD)-Plus (UK, US and Norway) sponsored talks were held in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa. The peace deal was signed in September 2018. It built on the foundations of the ARCSS as the name suggests: Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS). Although the implementation of

the main provisions of the agreement have been problematic, there has been relative peace even though the other armed groups who are non-signatory to the peace agreement are still waging war against the government.

*The formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity.* The R-ARCSS stipulated that a government of unity was to be formed based on the percentages agreed upon by the signatories. Despite the formation of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGoNU) taking almost two years to be formed, it eventually happened in bits at various levels of governance in South Sudan. It started with the formation of the National Government where key ministries were filled as well as the national commissions followed by the Governments of the different states although Upper Nile's was formed months later. The Transitional National Legislative was later constituted but it is yet to hold a session in an official capacity.



## An Overview of Digital Technologies in South Sudan

Although the northern part of the country did not have a well-developed telephony in the initial years of the war, other sectors of the infrastructure did flourish. By 1990, the telephone services sector had picked up after the privatisation of Sudatel – a northern Sudan-based telephone services provider. The National Telecommunication Corporation (NTC) was established in line with the privatization policy. In 1997 a group within Sudatel established Mobitel a private mobile phone company. In 2005 Areeba another company became a second mobile phone operator but was later bought by the

South African company MTN. Initially Sudatel possessed shares in Mobitel, but after these were sold the company started Sudani its own mobile telephone provider. In 2001, Sudani was one of the companies under US embargo and did not have an established presence in Southern Sudan.<sup>10</sup>

Towards the end of the civil war in Sudan when the peace talks were being concluded in Kenya, two companies received licences from the National Telecommunication Corporation (NTC) in 2005; Network of the World (NOW) and Gemtel via Uganda gateway. Gemtel started activities in South

Sudan in 2003 in rebel-controlled areas. In 2007, NOW was bought by Vivacell. Vivacell started with a handful of subscribers, but after the independence of South Sudan in 2011 the number of its customers tripled. The peace accords also allowed for other nationwide mobile operators including Kuwait's Zain, South Africa's MTN, and Sudan's own Sudani.

Mobile network operators sought to expand their networks in some areas of the country, but by late 2016 both Zain South Sudan and MTN South Sudan had cut back their workforces in a bid to save on operating costs, while their falling subscriber bases have strained revenue. Zain South Sudan in particular recorded considerable financial losses in 2015 and 2016.<sup>11</sup> This was as a result of the South Sudan civil war that broke out in 2013 which negatively impacted the country's economy.

South Sudan inherited one of the least developed telecommunications and Internet infrastructures and markets upon its formation. Although an opportunity for investment in ICT infrastructure, such developments were hampered by the effects of the civil war. After the destruction from the war, there was minimal investment in all sectors including the telecommunications. This hindered the development of the country's international fibre optic cables and a national network that could reliably serve both urban areas and remote areas. Recognizing the critical role that underdeveloped ICT infrastructure plays in holding the economy back, the government has provided investment incentives for service providers. Such efforts led to the establishment of the cable link by Liquid Telecom in February 2020. The cable which connects Juba directly to the company's submarine landing station at Mombasa, is South Sudan's first direct international fibre link.<sup>12</sup> This development has helped drive down the price of retail Internet services for residential and business customers.



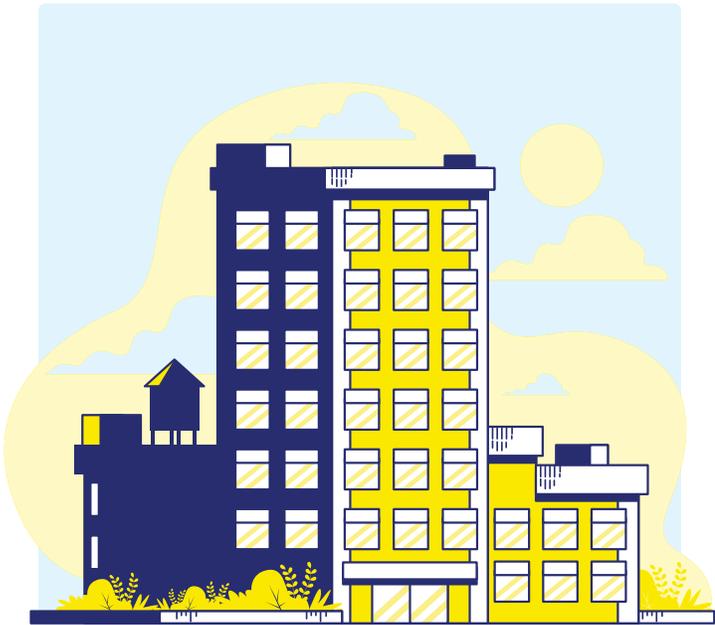
## Connectivity and Conflict: Key Insights

This study confirms a strong connection between conflict and connectivity and draws out nuances that shape that interaction. From the participants and digital ethnography, there are many factors that shape the interaction between conflict and connectivity. These factors reinforce each other to produce catalytic or deterrent effects on conflict in the country. These factors are crucial before, during and after conflict.

Prior to acts of violence and during conflict, telecommunications operations in South Sudan were used as tools for mobilization and sensationalizing of communities by elites who fuelled conflict by hosting live social media events such as Facebook live videos streamed from Diaspora to incite local communities into acts of violence.

These live media events mainly target local youth groups and influential individuals who have access to social media to join militant political activities along ethnic lines that have had a devastating impact on the social fabrics of cultural groups that have existed together for a long time.<sup>13</sup> Post-conflict, telecommunications play a critical role in building trust, contact tracing and reconnecting family members, uniting warring groups and communities through various peace campaigns, resolving disagreements through dialogue.

The following factors contextualize these nuances and demonstrate how conflict and connectivity are shaped by broader factors and how conflict and connectivity in turn shapes other aspects of society.



## **a. Infrastructure**

Infrastructure is a double-edged sword in shaping the nature of conflicts; it plays a crucial role in both conflict escalation and conflict de-escalation. Good infrastructure facilitates access to critical services such as humanitarian response, health care, emergency evacuation of civilians trapped in conflict and access for humanitarian organizations involved in conflict de-escalation and peace building. A good road network and telecommunication infrastructure, for example, enables the government and the international community to easily respond to conflict in a timely manner curtailing the impacts and length of conflict. Availability of basic infrastructure is also important in addressing post-conflict challenges such as poverty and establishing a recovery strategy because they offer access to labour markets, food production, trade among others.

Similarly, and in a more negative vein, good infrastructure provides accessibility and ease of mobility for militant groups contributing to the continuation of conflict. Internet penetration and access to mobile phone devices, for example, makes communication easy and fast and aids in coordination. This is the case in South Sudan. On the other hand, poor infrastructure makes coordination and movement challenging among armed groups mitigating the effects of conflict. Inadvertently, this results in a prolonged conflict which in the long run impacts communities that have to deal with the effects and uncertainties of conflict and makes recovery efforts futile.

In the wake of civil upheaval in the country there is extensive destruction of infrastructure including communication equipment and related public facilities. Conflicting parties vandalize, destroy and loot facilities incapacitating the country's infrastructure. During conflict, key facilities and services are commandeered by different armed groups creating fear among people who refrain from using the facilities out of safety concerns. For instance, during conflict the highway between Yei and Juba, has been used by opposition soldiers to attack civilians travelling across the country. Besides deterring travellers, this also significantly reduces the movement of goods with negative impacts on trade. Such security challenges on trade routes between Juba and the Northern areas of South Sudan thus affect the flow and prices of goods with adverse effects on the economy.



## **b. Population Density**

Conflict affects the population in various ways which in turn affects how people connect to mobile phones and the Internet. With extreme degrees of conflict, there are significant changes in population density; civilian casualties and people who escape conflict zones contribute to a decrease in the population. This decrease in population affects the demand of telecommunications services which leads to reduced to no services as network providers make economically viable decisions. With closure of facilities, there is fragmented connectivity throughout the country; people in certain regions have access to facilities while other regions are completely cut off. In areas where conflict is cyclical this further shapes the nature of recurring conflict as the flow of information changes. Without access to mobile phone and Internet services people in conflict areas

are relatively shut off, the information that they receive via other media such as radio may be heavily censored and biased.

Population density is also affected by a decline in food production in the country. Conflict not only disrupts people's livelihoods but also the farming seasons. During conflict, there is reduced farming activities resulting in a widespread food shortage. Overall, the little available food crops are not enough to sustain the population. This precarious situation prompted the UN in 2014 to declare the South Sudan food crisis the worst in the world.<sup>14</sup>

The displacement of populations associated with conflict also contributes to the shifts in population density. This happens in different ways: when an area cannot sustain the surviving population after conflict, when people move from conflict zones for safety reasons, and when civilians are forcefully ordered to leave villages. People who remain in conflict zones become at-risk populations. For these populations there is restricted access to information because of the destruction of telecommunications infrastructure and the withdrawal of services by network providers to cut operational costs.

Displacement of population also results in more disputes related to land ownership and land rights. With relative peace post-conflict, returnees come back home only to find their land occupied by other people which triggers more disputes as both parties claim rightful ownership of the land. Without proper legal structures and corruption, these interpersonal land disputes are prone to

exacerbate the overall conflict in the country as Justin & Van Leeuwen (2016) find in a study on land conflict in Yei area.<sup>15</sup> Politics of displacement are connected to a broader political agenda; displacement may lead to a drastic reorganization of land occupation and governance.

Importantly, the displacement of populations resulting from conflict contributes to a heavy psychosocial distress among communities who are separated from family members. Participants involved in this study observe that years after conflict families are still looking to reunite with family members. Connectivity plays a critical role in this regard. With breakdown in communication systems, it is difficult to keep in touch with people who are spread out across different parts of the country.

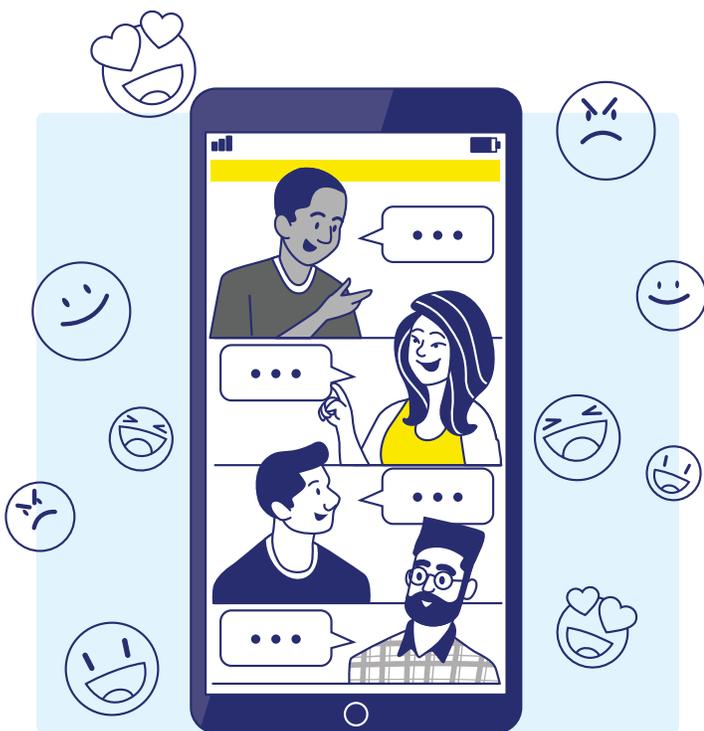


### **c. Fluctuating Economy**

Fluctuating economy is characterized by instability in the market such as rapid decrease of the value of the local currency against the foreign currencies which pushes the prices of basic goods beyond the purchasing power of average citizens. In South Sudan there are several factors that contribute to a fluctuating economy: a weakening South Sudan Pound, external and internal trade barriers, high fuel prices due to border restrictions with Sudan, decline in food production, limited road infrastructure and large security challenges on trade routes, increased government expenditure, influx in returnees generating increased demands driving prices up. As a result, people are pushed to adopt extreme measures to survive which further escalates the conflict. In this situation, there are increased cases of highway robberies, ambushes, armed robberies, public and private sector corruption among others increase as people look for illegal means of survival. For example, the devaluation of the South Sudan Pound in December 2015 brought economic hardships, which in turn resulted in an increase in urban crimes.

This strain on the economy leads to increased tensions among the people. This tension coupled with deep-rooted differences make for a combustible environment. This manifests in different ways including the proliferation of hate speech mediated via social media platforms, an increase in gender-based violence, and the mobilization and co-optation of poor unemployed youth

by different parties. The prolonged conflict in Jonglei, for example, is attributed to poverty, unemployment among the youth and inadequate resources.



#### **d. Third Party Interference**

Another fundamental factor that plays a crucial role in the nexus between conflict and connectivity is third party interference. Third party interference happens in various forms including arbitrary detentions of government critics including human rights activists and academics; summoning, questioning and harassment of journalists; closure, suspension, and censorship of newspapers;<sup>16</sup> blocking of websites;<sup>17</sup> bureaucratic registration process of civil society organizations and surveillance; restrictions of freedom of expression and associations for example the 2018 Jonglei

Authorities ministerial order dissolving all youth associations in the state for allegedly engaging in activities disrupting public order.

With increased connectivity there is a faster and easier flow of information and ideas among the public which makes for an informed public. An informed public is part of a citizenry that is active in its civic duties which includes holding the government accountable. As a result, instruments of power in the country become cautious of an informed and connected public which may result in these agencies having to exert censorship measures over the public<sup>18</sup> to control the kind of information available to the people. Demonstrably, increased connectivity does not necessarily result in increased democracy. An environment in which information is highly controlled and policed is potentially a volatile environment.

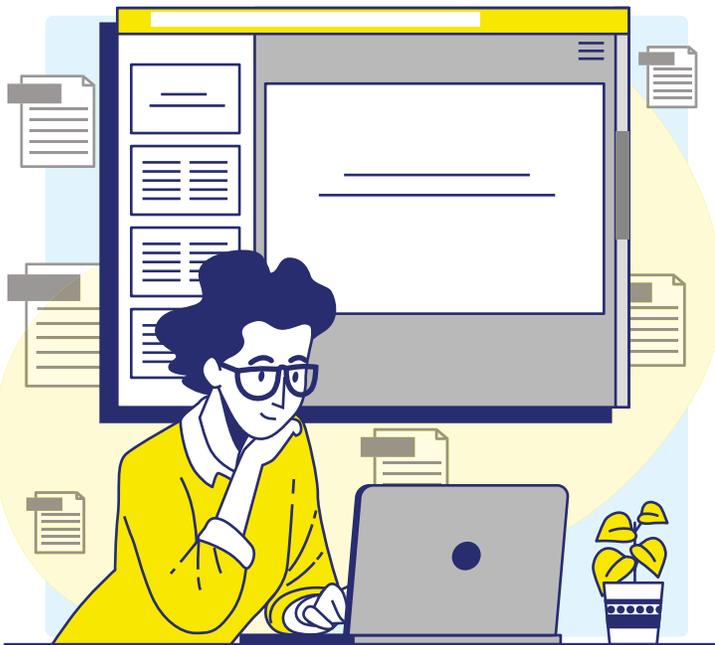
Strict censorship instigates a culture of self-censorship among people. Increased connectivity, particularly through social media, ideally encourages free speech which is fundamentally important for minoritized groups whose voice is not heard via mainstream platforms. However, when people live through strict censorship, they adopt patterns of self censorship to protect themselves and their families. This self censorship crucially prevents efforts and opportunities for honest conversations about collective issues and the root causes of conflict in the country.

As a result of a fluctuating economy, there is rampant corruption in the country. Factoring in censorship and an evolving

telecommunication, corruption is a key factor in connectivity and conflict. Corruption plays a role in which network providers get to operate where and the quality of services they provide to the people, which foreign and domestic investment is allowed and into which sectors of the economy and which forms of media get to operate within the country. All these factors collectively shape the way the public accesses information, which kind of information they access and how that information shapes their opinion about their communities and their country's political environment.

Facebook. These social media platforms have changed the way people access and relate to information in fundamental ways. They have also brought information closer to the public making the public both consumers and producers of information. Consequently, there is an explosion in the amount of information available to the people. Most importantly, the speed with which information moves is very fast. Although this is a positive aspect, in a conflict-prone area or an area emerging from conflict, this can easily instigate clashes.

The geography of collective violence is highly influenced by the geography of collective ideas.<sup>19</sup> Ideas in the public consciousness are easily shaped and mediated by digital technologies particularly social media platforms. Social media has become an elemental factor that shapes public opinion.<sup>20</sup> Being able to influence the public consciousness is a key factor in conflict. Social media has given people the power to create and curate information with positive outcomes such as creating community around a shared problem. However, this has also led to misinformation about different issues; people are quick to share information on social media without verifying the source and the credibility of the information. This means that public opinion can be shaped using questionable information with detrimental results especially in a conflict zone. To be sure, social media is a positive force in raising and shaping the public consciousness which is important in conflict-prone areas since it can be used to build and foster peaceful coexistence among people.



### **e. Digital Media**

With Internet penetration and more people having access to mobile phones and the Internet, most people get information through social media platforms such as Twitter and

Although Internet penetration has increased over time, access is not equal across the country. Access is highly related to socio-economic status, the nature of the economy and infrastructure. As such access to social media varies across the country making information travel through social media differently across the country. For example, youth in urban areas might have more access to the Internet and thus more usage of social media unlike young people in a conflict zone. This difference in access is critical because the people with access to social media might be geographically removed from the location of conflict and yet they might be the same people using social media to circulate information about the conflict zone without verifying that information which can contribute to conflict.

Specifically, digital technologies have had a fundamental impact on the political space. The increased use of digital media platforms has both positive and negative effects. On one hand, there is an increased awareness of rights' violations during conflict through citizen journalism. People are now able to document and share acts of violence such as targeted killings of civilians, abductions and rape through pictures, videos, and stories via social media in real time. In this regard, digital technologies empower citizens and enhance their civic acts. By documenting atrocities, citizens not only contribute to the archive, but they also claim their rights via these digital media platforms. Similarly, digital technologies have enhanced people's collective action.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, increased access and use of digital media platforms has also led to increased disinformation and misinformation.<sup>22</sup> Coupled with political rhetoric, this creates a volatile environment by providing avenues and spaces that have been exploited for orchestrating threats of violence, disseminating hate speech that have sensationalized ethnic groups into violence and the actual mobilization for people to partake in the conflict as one participant observes. Digital technologies essentially amplify any fractures that exist within the society in varying degrees.<sup>23</sup>

# Peacebuilding & Digital Technologies

As established thus far, connectivity plays a critical role in conflict. Conversely, the availability and accessibility of digital technologies has a fundamental role in peacebuilding.<sup>24</sup> Broadly, in South Sudan this has happened in various ways: using the Internet to disseminate the peace agreement, peace messages and programs; holding virtual sessions for community dialogues and awareness activities to mobilize people for peace; political actors also use the Internet and mobile telecom networks to mobilize their supporters and give them updates regarding developments in the country and awareness on key issues concerning implementation of the peace agreement and political activities in the country; it also enables for contextual analysis for areas of intervention in peace building and community cohesion, as well as mobilizing the resources required for peace building and reconciliation work with partners, donors, communities and political groups.

Specifically, different actors in South Sudan have strategically adopted digital technologies in peacebuilding. Non-profit organizations, humanitarian organizations and community-based organizations leveraged digital technologies in peacebuilding efforts and activities in different ways. As an example, organizations such as The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) have conducted programs and projects focused on digital technologies as tools and platforms via which communities can foster

trust. The Peacebuilding and Literacy through Tech Innovation Bootcamp by UNESCO and UNDP, for instance, engages youth to develop mobile applications to facilitate peacebuilding.<sup>25</sup> Defy Hate Now contributes to this important work by using digital technologies in peacebuilding initiatives. The 211Check Initiative<sup>26</sup>, for example, is a platform that includes a community that actively works to counter misinformation and disinformation. Such initiatives not only fact-check and verify information, but they also build a practice and community around trust and credible information sharing.

With increased use of digital technologies in peacebuilding and the role these technologies play in conflict, legal frameworks around digital technologies are important. Currently, the South Sudan Communication Act 2012 regulates the telecommunication networks in the country. The National Communication Authority (NCA) is responsible for the allocation of frequencies and agreements. The NCA mandate of regulating and managing the activities of the mobile phone networks and service providers has eased the tensions between the government regulators and service providers. In terms of digital technologies, the NCA is responsible for ensuring accessible, reliable and affordable communication services through the use of state-of-the-art technologies in all parts of the country as stated in the National Communications Act 2012. The Media Authority Act 2013 promotes the ability of Internet providers to offer internet services without prior approval. Despite increased cases of hate speech, disinformation, and misinformation online, there is a limited digital legal framework in South Sudan.

# Conclusion & Recommendations

There is a complex connection between conflict and connectivity. An analysis of the South Sudan landscape demonstrates the form and factors that shape the nexus of conflict and connectivity in the country. There are five key factors that produce and reinforce this nexus including infrastructure, population density, a fluctuating economy, third party interference and digital media. Through an analysis of these factors, it is evident that the accessibility, affordability, and availability of mobile phone and Internet networks has evolved between 2013 and 2019 with varying effects on conflict and the people in South Sudan.

The accessibility, affordability and availability of digital technologies has changed how people access information. This shift plays a key role in opening the civic space and shaping public discourse in South Sudan which in turn contributes significantly to the absence, presence, or nature of conflict. This aspect of digital technologies presents immense opportunities for the country in terms of peacebuilding. However, in a volatile environment the use of these tools has both positive and adverse effects. In the age of rampant misinformation and disinformation, these tools can easily be manipulated to serve vested interests and escalate conflict through incitement, disinformation, fake news, and hate speech.

In conclusion, the following are key action points that can aid the response to this complex interaction of conflict and connectivity in ways that leverage the benefits of digital technologies in peacebuilding:

- Develop a robust digital legal framework to govern the use of digital media platforms. This should be done in collaboration with service providers, civil society organizations and the public.
- Strengthen access to public information by creating trustworthy channels via which the public can access important information from government agencies.
- Create an environment for dialogue, mediation, and resolution to build and increase trust among communities.
- Invest in post-conflict measures that address systemic causes of conflict in the country.
- Invest in digital literacy programs across the country to counter the effect of misinformation and fake news via digital media.
- Establish communities of practices that can act as credible sources of information as a complementary axis to digital literacy programs.
- Foster a civic space in which citizens can claim their rights and enjoy freedoms.

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