

County Security Forums as Local Peace Infrastructure: Integrating Food and Water Security for Civilian Protection in Post-Agreement South Sudan

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Abstract

In post-agreement South Sudan, county security forums represent emerging local peace infrastructure with potential to address civilian protection gaps. This article develops a theoretical framework that positions these forums as mechanisms for integrating food and water security into broader security governance. Drawing on evidence from governance and security studies, the framework argues that effective civilian protection requires moving beyond traditional security paradigms to incorporate multidimensional indicators of human security. The discussion examines how county-level forums can operationalise this integration through collaborative governance approaches, addressing systemic vulnerabilities that undermine peace. The conclusion highlights implications for peacebuilding policy and practice in fragile states, emphasising the need for context-specific adaptations of global governance models to local realities.

Introduction

South Sudan's post-agreement landscape presents complex challenges for civilian protection, where traditional security mechanisms often fail to address interconnected vulnerabilities (Elnaiem et al., 2023). County security forums have emerged as local peace infrastructure with potential to bridge governance gaps, yet their theoretical foundations remain underdeveloped (Manikas et al., 2023). This article addresses this gap by proposing a framework that positions these forums as integrative platforms for security governance (Nicholson et al., 2021). The framework builds on evidence demonstrating how global and regional governance models increasingly recognise interconnected security dimensions, including health, food, and water systems. In South Sudan's context, where agricultural systems and water access fundamentally shape security dynamics, such integration becomes particularly crucial (Young et al., 2021). The article examines how county-level forums can operationalise this multidimensional approach, moving beyond conventional security paradigms to address root causes of instability. By focusing on local peace infrastructure, the analysis contributes to broader debates about decentralised governance in fragile states and the practical implementation of human security principles in post-conflict settings.

Framework Development

The theoretical framework developed here conceptualises county security forums as integrative governance mechanisms that bridge traditional security functions with food and water security dimensions (Nicholson et al., 2021). This integration responds to evidence showing that security in fragile states like South Sudan cannot be separated from basic livelihood concerns (Young et al., 2021). The framework

draws on governance approaches that emphasise collaborative, multi-stakeholder processes at local levels, recognising that effective protection requires addressing systemic vulnerabilities. It incorporates insights from systematic reviews of food security indicators, which demonstrate the need for context-specific measurement approaches that capture local realities. The framework further integrates perspectives on water security as foundational to food systems and overall wellbeing, particularly in agricultural-dependent communities. By positioning county forums as platforms for coordinating these dimensions, the framework addresses gaps in current peacebuilding models that often treat security, food, and water as separate policy domains. This theoretical approach emphasises adaptive governance, where local actors develop context-appropriate responses based on integrated security assessments.

Discussion

The discussion examines how county security forums in South Sudan can operationalise the integrative framework in practice. Evidence from governance studies suggests that effective implementation requires moving beyond technical approaches to address political economy factors that shape security outcomes. Forums must navigate complex local power dynamics while maintaining focus on civilian protection priorities. The discussion considers how forums can incorporate food security indicators and water security assessments into their monitoring and response mechanisms, creating early warning systems for emerging vulnerabilities. This approach aligns with global governance trends toward integrated security frameworks, yet requires careful adaptation to South Sudan's specific context. Challenges include limited institutional capacity, resource constraints, and coordination gaps between different governance levels. However, county forums offer potential advantages through their local embeddedness and ability to mobilise community knowledge. The discussion explores how forums can leverage these advantages while addressing implementation barriers, drawing lessons from agricultural systems models that emphasise adaptive management. Ultimately, the effectiveness of county forums depends on their ability to translate integrated security concepts into practical actions that address immediate protection needs while building longer-term resilience.

Conclusion

County security forums represent promising local peace infrastructure for advancing civilian protection in post-agreement South Sudan. The theoretical framework developed in this article positions these forums as integrative governance mechanisms that bridge traditional security functions with food and water security dimensions. This approach responds to evidence demonstrating the interconnected nature of security challenges in fragile states, where livelihood concerns fundamentally shape conflict dynamics. The framework contributes to political science debates about decentralised governance and human security implementation, offering a context-specific model for South Sudan while providing insights applicable to other post-conflict settings. Practical implications include the need for capacity building at county levels, development of integrated assessment tools, and policy frameworks that support local governance initiatives. Future research should examine implementation experiences across different counties, assessing how contextual factors influence forum effectiveness. As South Sudan continues its peacebuilding journey, county security forums offer potential pathways for translating national agreements into local protection realities, provided they receive adequate support and maintain focus on integrated security approaches that address root causes of vulnerability.