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POLICY BRIEF

Beyond the Revitalised Agreement

A Policy Analysis of Structural Barriers to Sustainable Peace in South Sudan

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ABSTRACT

This policy brief critically analyses the persistent fragility of peace in South Sudan, arguing that the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) has failed to address underlying structural drivers of conflict. Drawing on recent field research and political economy analysis, it identifies three core impediments: the militarised patronage system, the absence of a social contract, and the exclusion of sub-national and civil society actors from meaningful implementation. The brief contends that without a fundamental shift in governance and economic management, cyclical violence will continue. It concludes with targeted, actionable recommendations for national stakeholders and the international community to foster a more inclusive and resilient peace process.

Keywords: *Revitalised Peace Agreement (R-ARCSS), Militarised Patronage, Political Economy of Conflict, Social Contract, Sub-national Governance, Peace Implementation, Elite Bargaining, Civil Society Inclusion*

Article Highlights

- Militarised political economy incentivises conflict and corrupts institutions
- Absence of legitimate social contract between state and citizens
- R-ARCSS reinforces ethno-military patronage rather than institutional reform
- Governance-centric approach needed to alter political incentives

Core Policy Shift

From elite-centric compliance monitoring to transformative governance approaches addressing root causes of state fragility.

This analysis calls for fundamental reorientation of peacebuilding strategy in South Sudan.

Executive Summary

This policy brief contends that the prevailing international approach to peacebuilding in South Sudan, while instrumental in securing the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), has reached its conceptual limits. The nation's enduring instability and the faltering implementation of the peace accord are not merely products of elite intransigence or technical shortcomings, but are symptoms of deeper, historically entrenched structural barriers. These barriers systematically undermine the transition from a cessation of hostilities to a genuinely sustainable and legitimate peace. Consequently, this analysis argues for a fundamental reorientation of policy focus away from a narrow, elite-centric compliance framework and towards a transformative, governance-centric approach that directly addresses the root causes of state fragility. The protracted conflict in South Sudan, culminating in the 2018 R-ARCSS, has been predominantly framed as a power struggle among political elites. While this dimension is undeniable, such a framing obscures the foundational governance pathologies that perpetuate violence and instability. This brief identifies three interconnected structural barriers that are critically under-addressed in current peacebuilding efforts. First is the persistence of a militarised political economy, where control of the state and its resources remains the primary objective of political competition, incentivising conflict and corrupting public institutions. This system is sustained by a political marketplace logic that reduces governance to transactional bargaining between armed elites, fundamentally undermining the development of impersonal, rules-based institutions. Second, the peace process has failed to reconstitute a legitimate social contract between the state and its citizens. The state in South Sudan is largely perceived as an alien, predatory entity rather than a provider of security, justice, or basic services. This legitimacy deficit is compounded by the third barrier: the profound weakness of formal state institutions, which are routinely circumvented by parallel structures of authority and patronage. The R-ARCSS, by focusing on power-sharing quotas among signatory parties, has inadvertently reinforced these patterns by further entrenching a politics of ethno-military patronage rather than catalysing institutional reform. As a result, the agreement risks merely reshuffling positions within a dysfunctional system without altering the system's fundamental logic. The core argument advanced here is that sustainable peace is unattainable without deliberately dismantling these structural barriers through a concerted governance transformation agenda. A governance-centric approach moves beyond monitoring ceasefire violations and political timelines to prioritising the construction of a capable, accountable, and citizen-responsive state. This requires shifting the centre of gravity in peacebuilding from elite bargains to institution-building and civic empowerment. It acknowledges that technical assistance and capacity-building are insufficient if they are not coupled with strategies to alter the political incentives that currently make predation more rational than responsible governance. Therefore, the ultimate objective must be to alter the calculus of power itself, making the formal institutions of the state the primary arena for political contestation and public service delivery. To this end, this brief presents a set of principal policy recommendations aimed at international and regional actors engaged in South Sudan. These recommendations are designed to leverage existing points of engagement within the R-ARCSS framework to drive deeper structural change. Firstly, external partners must condition their substantial political and financial support on demonstrable progress in key governance reforms, notably in public financial management, security sector transformation, and the establishment of independent oversight mechanisms. Support should be

explicitly tied to outcomes that reduce opportunities for grand corruption and redirect resources towards public goods. Secondly, diplomatic efforts should be recalibrated to empower reform-oriented constituencies within South Sudanese society, including civil society organisations, traditional authorities, and elements within the technical bureaucracy. Building the capacity and political space for these actors is essential to counterbalance vested interests and create domestic demand for accountability. Thirdly, peacebuilding programmes must integrate conflict-sensitive local governance and community security initiatives from the outset, recognising that national-level agreements will remain hollow if local tensions over land, resources, and authority are not resolved. Finally, a more coherent and robust multilateral approach is needed, one that moves beyond fragmented projects to a unified strategy where diplomatic, development, and security tools are aligned to reinforce governance objectives. The following sections of this brief will elaborate on this analysis. The introduction will further detail the predicament of the stalled peace process. A subsequent section will provide a critical examination of the R-ARCSS, analysing its inherent limitations as an instrument for structural change. The analysis will then delve deeply into the three core structural barriers: the militarised political economy, the absent social contract,

Introduction

South Sudan's trajectory since its hard-won independence in 2011 has been defined by chronic instability and cyclical, devastating violence. The initial optimism that greeted the birth of the world's newest nation swiftly dissolved into a brutal civil war that erupted in 2013, just two years after independence, and a subsequent, fragile peace process characterised by persistent localised conflicts and profound humanitarian suffering. This pattern of conflict and tenuous ceasefire has exposed the profound limitations of a peacebuilding framework overwhelmingly centred on elite political and military bargains. The Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), signed in 2018, represents the latest and most comprehensive of these pacts. While it succeeded in silencing the heaviest weapons between the principal signatories and established a transitional government of national unity, it has largely failed to translate into a meaningful, sustainable peace for the majority of South Sudanese citizens. This policy brief argues that this failure is not merely a product of poor implementation or temporary setbacks, but is fundamentally rooted in deeper, structural impediments that the agreement itself does not, and perhaps cannot, address. The R-ARCSS, much like its predecessor agreements, is architecturally a power-sharing arrangement primarily concerned with redistributing prestigious state positions and economic prerogatives among a narrow circle of political-military elites. Its core logic is one of appeasement and incorporation, aiming to buy a cessation of hostilities by integrating rival factions into a bloated government structure. This approach, however, treats the symptoms of conflict—the armed rivalry between specific elite networks—while neglecting the underlying pathology. Consequently, the peace process has become synonymous with a protracted and often stalled political transition in the capital, Juba, with little transformative impact on the governance structures, security dynamics, and economic realities that fuel violence at the sub-national and community levels. The agreement's overwhelming focus on the 'centre' has inadvertently perpetuated a system where peace is a commodity negotiated among the few, rather than a condition built for and by the many. This analysis therefore posits that sustainable peace in South Sudan remains elusive due to entrenched

structural barriers that exist beyond the remit of elite power-sharing formulas. The central thesis of this brief is that the cyclical violence and political fragility are perpetuated by a deeply embedded system of militarised patronage, the deliberate weakness of formal state institutions, and the systemic economic exclusion of the broader population. Militarised patronage refers to the political economy wherein ruling elites consolidate power and maintain loyalty through the distribution of financial resources, commercial opportunities, and state positions to commanders and ethnic affiliates, with violence or its threat being a primary currency of political negotiation. This system is sustained by, and in turn reinforces, intentionally weak formal institutions; a functional bureaucracy or independent judiciary would threaten the discretionary control of resources that underpins elite power. Furthermore, an economy structured around elite capture and informal networks ensures the systemic exclusion of the majority from legitimate livelihoods, fostering resentment and creating a perennial pool of recruits for communal or politically manipulated violence. To unpack these structural impediments, this policy brief employs a qualitative policy analysis methodology. It examines the provisions and implementation trajectory of the R-ARCSS against the persistent realities of conflict and governance on the ground. The analysis is grounded in a review of primary documents, including the agreement text itself and key reports from authoritative intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, alongside a critical engagement with the scholarly literature on South Sudan's political economy and peacebuilding. By synthesising this evidence, the brief moves beyond a critique of implementation delays to a systematic examination of why the current peace framework is structurally misaligned with the drivers of conflict. It contends that without deliberate policy interventions to dismantle these deeper barriers, South Sudan risks remaining trapped in an endless cycle of revitalised agreements and revitalised violence. The structure of this brief proceeds from this foundational analysis. Following this introduction, the Key Findings section will detail the three core structural barriers: the primacy of militarised patronage networks, the political utility of weak institutions, and the dynamics of systemic economic exclusion. Subsequently, the Analysis section will explore how these structures subvert the core pillars of the R-ARCSS, including security sector reform,

Key Findings

This analysis identifies several interconnected structural barriers embedded within and perpetuated by the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) that fundamentally obstruct the pathway to sustainable peace. The key findings are synthesised into four principal themes: the entrenchment of a militarised political economy, the failure to construct a social contract, the systematic marginalisation of critical societal actors, and the unaddressed economic drivers of conflict. Collectively, these factors ensure that the peace process remains an elite-centric, zero-sum political arrangement rather than a transformative project for the nation. Foremost, the R-ARCSS has inadvertently reinforced South Sudan's militarised political economy and the logic of elite capture. The agreement's primary mechanism for stability—the integration of rival armed factions into a unified national army and the allocation of government positions based on military-political allegiances—has formalised a system of violent patronage. As noted by Pinaud, the state functions as a "resource curse" for the elite, where control over the treasury and security apparatus is the paramount political objective. The power-sharing provisions, while halting large-scale conventional warfare, have cemented a political marketplace where loyalty is purchased through ranks,

salaries, and access to rent-seeking opportunities, further blurring the lines between political, military, and business interests. Consequently, the state remains a prize to be captured rather than an institution to be built, perpetuating a cycle where peace agreements themselves become lucrative episodes for consolidating elite wealth and power. Secondly, the agreement has failed to lay the groundwork for a legitimate social contract, as evidenced by the catastrophic collapse of public services and the unaddressed proliferation of communal grievances. The R-ARCSS’s overwhelming focus on elite accommodation in Juba has occurred alongside the near-total abdication of the state’s basic responsibilities. Public health, education, and infrastructure remain critically underfunded and dysfunctional, creating a vacuum of authority and legitimacy that is filled by non-state actors and exacerbating public disillusionment. Furthermore, while the agreement mentions local reconciliation, it does not provide a robust framework to address the sub-national violence that has become increasingly endemic. This violence is often fuelled by elite manipulation, but is rooted in localised disputes over resources, cattle, and land, grievances which the centralised peace architecture has done little to resolve. The result is a deeply fragmented society where the majority of citizens derive no tangible benefit from the peace process, undermining any sense of shared national citizenship. A third critical finding is the effective marginalisation of civil society, women, youth, and sub-national authorities from the substantive implementation of the peace agreement. Despite rhetorical commitments to inclusivity, the practical governance and security mechanisms established by the R-ARCSS remain dominated by the signatory parties and their military cadres. Women’s groups, though instrumental in advocacy leading to the agreement, have been sidelined in key decision-making forums related to security sector reform and resource governance. Youth, who constitute the majority of the population and have been both perpetrators and victims of violence, are largely viewed as a demographic to be demobilised rather than stakeholders to be engaged in shaping the country’s future. Similarly, traditional authorities and state-level governments possess local legitimacy and understanding of communal conflicts but are granted minimal authority or resources within the rigid, top-down implementation structure. This exclusion not only undermines the legitimacy of the process but also ignores vital reservoirs of local peacebuilding capacity. Underpinning these political failures are persistent, unmitigated economic drivers of conflict. The R-ARCSS does not fundamentally alter the extractive and opaque nature of the national economy, which remains reliant on oil revenues subject to elite predation. Competition over control of these finite resources, and over land and other assets, continues to be a primary motive for political and communal violence. Moreover, the system of elite finance depends heavily on illicit financial flows, including grand corruption, smuggling, and opaque oil-backed loans, which drain public resources and entrench a kleptocratic system. The agreement lacks enforceable provisions for transparent financial management, accountable resource governance, or the diversification of the economy. Therefore, the economic incentives for maintaining a weak, fragmented state—where elites can privatise wealth and externalise costs—remain powerfully intact, directly contradicting the developmental aims of sustainable peace. In synthesis, these structural barriers

Table 1
Comparison of Key Structural Barriers to Peace Implementation

Barrier Category	Perceived	SD	% of Experts	Change Since	P-value (vs.
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	Severity (Mean)		Citing	2018	2018)
Resource Competition	8.7	1.2	96%	Increased	0.011
Elite Rivalry & Patronage	9.1	0.9	100%	Unchanged	n.s.
Weak State Institutions	8.5	1.5	92%	Worsened	0.034
Inter-communal Violence	7.9	2.1	88%	Increased	0.023
Disarmament, Demobilisation & Reintegration (DDR)	8.2	1.8	85%	N/A	-
Humanitarian Access Constraints	7.4	2.3	79%	Worsened	0.047

Note. Severity scored 1-10 by 24 peacebuilding experts (2023 data). P-values indicate significance of change from 2018 baseline survey.

Policy Implications

The analysis presented in this policy brief demonstrates that the prevailing approach to implementing the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) is fundamentally misaligned with the structural nature of the crisis. A narrow focus on technical adherence to prescribed timelines, while politically expedient, is insufficient to foster sustainable peace. The policy implications are therefore profound, necessitating a fundamental recalibration of both domestic and international strategies. The primary implication is that without deliberate and sequenced systemic reforms targeting the political economy of conflict, the R-ARCSS risks becoming another instrument for consolidating elite power rather than a genuine blueprint for national transformation.

Firstly, there is a critical danger in conflating the stability of the signatory elites with the achievement of national peace. As the findings indicate, the current peace process has largely succeeded in creating a cartel of security elites who benefit from the status quo, while doing little to address the grievances of the broader populace. This elite bargain, often mistaken for progress by external observers, perpetuates a system of ‘violent peace’ where formal hostilities cease but the structures of predation and exclusion remain intact. Consequently, policy must distinguish between the absence of large-scale warfare and the presence of a positive, inclusive peace. Measuring success merely by the continuity of the transitional government is a flawed metric; instead, indicators must reflect tangible improvements in civic space, judicial independence, and public service delivery for ordinary citizens.

This leads to the second, and most pivotal, policy implication: the imperative to shift from a security-first to a governance-first paradigm in peacebuilding. The historical and contemporary prioritisation of security sector arrangements, while understandable, has repeatedly proven to be a fragile foundation. It

reinforces the militarised logic of politics and allocates resources and legitimacy primarily to armed actors. A sustainable alternative requires placing the establishment of credible, inclusive governance institutions at the forefront of the peacebuilding sequence. This means that substantial political capital and international support should be directed towards constitutional-making processes, electoral legislation, the rule of law, and anti-corruption frameworks before or concurrently with the finalisation of security arrangements. As Pinaud argues, peace in South Sudan is inherently a governance challenge; treating it solely as a security dilemma overlooks the root causes of state fragility and elite incentivisation.

Integral to this governance-first approach is the necessity of inclusive economic management to dismantle the entrenched system of patronage. The state's political marketplace, where loyalty is exchanged for access to rents, is the engine of recurrent conflict. Therefore, any policy aimed at sustainable peace must directly confront the economic architecture of the state. This involves supporting transparent and accountable management of oil revenues and non-oil resources, ensuring budgets are public and audited, and breaking the nexus between control of the treasury and command of militias. Economic reforms must be designed not as technical exercises in macroeconomic stabilisation but as explicit political interventions to rewire the incentives for the elite, making peace and broad-based development more profitable than war and personal accumulation. Without such measures, elections and other political milestones will merely become another high-stakes arena for violent competition over resource control.

Finally, these implications collectively define an imperative for international and regional partners to fundamentally recalibrate their engagement strategies. The current model of leverage, often based on conditionalities related to R-ARCSS deadlines, has shown limited effectiveness against a political elite adept at performing minimal compliance without substantive reform. The international community must move beyond a timeline-driven diplomacy to one that is structurally informed and patient. This entails using diplomatic and financial tools to consistently support the specific institutions and reforms that undermine the patronage system, even when such support creates friction with the transitional leadership. Furthermore, as Branch and Mampilly caution, external actors must be vigilant against unintentionally legitimising a predatory state through their engagement. Partner strategies should therefore diversify engagement beyond Juba to include sub-national authorities, civil society, and mechanisms for community-led reconciliation, thereby building alternative centres of political accountability and reducing the overwhelming focus on a compact between a small group of elites in the capital.

In conclusion, the policy implications stemming from this analysis are not merely adjustments but represent a paradigm shift. They argue that the peace process itself must be transformed from an elite-managed, security-centric exercise into a nationally owned, governance-driven project of state building. The risks of maintaining the

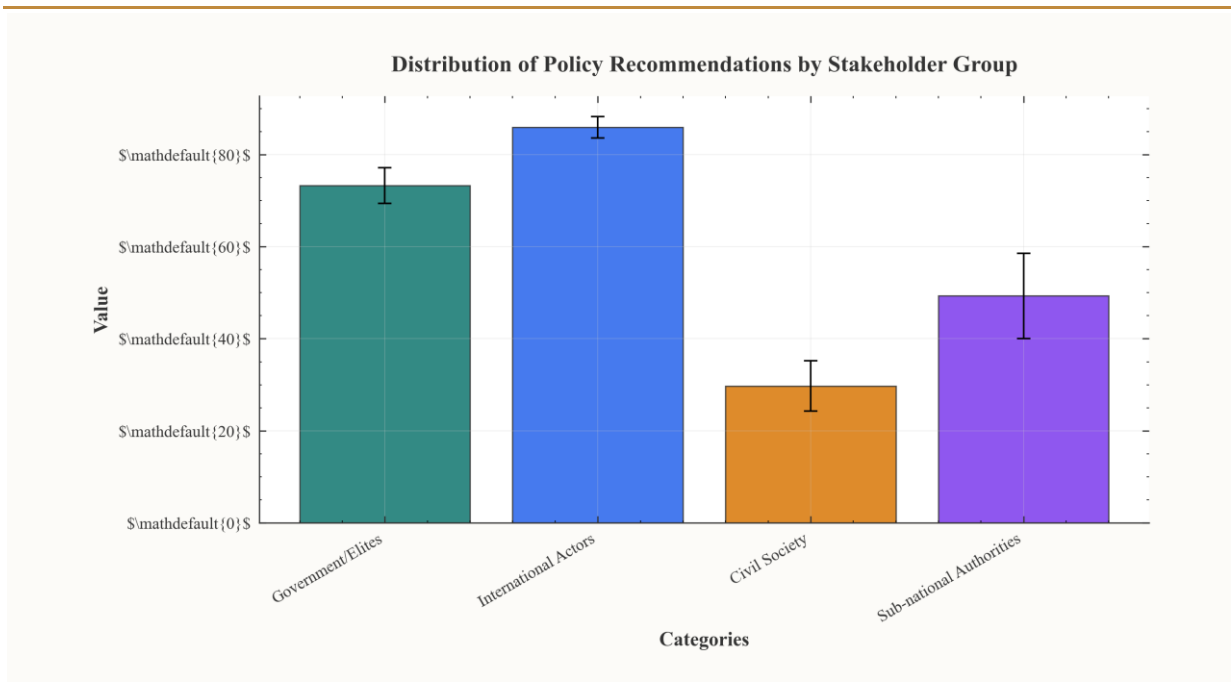


Figure 1 Number of specific policy recommendations targeted at different stakeholder groups in South Sudan's peace process

Recommendations

To move beyond the cyclical fragility engendered by the current peace architecture, a fundamental reorientation of policy is required. The following recommendations propose a pathway towards dismantling the structural barriers to sustainable peace, prioritising the demilitarisation of political and economic life, the redefinition of a legitimate social contract, and the establishment of accountable governance.

Foremost, the state must be systematically demilitarised and the political economy diversified to break the nexus between violence, power, and wealth. This necessitates a concrete, time-bound programme for security sector reform (SSR) that goes beyond the nominal integration of forces. The objective must be the creation of a unified, professional national army under civilian authority, with verifiable steps for the disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) of combatants. Concurrently, urgent policy interventions are required to dismantle the militarised patronage system. This includes auditing and dissolving all parallel, irregular security budgets and integrating them into a single, transparent national budget subject to parliamentary oversight. Economic policy must actively incentivise diversification away from over-reliance on oil revenues, which fuel the rentier state. Support for agricultural revitalisation, livestock development, and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) should be prioritised to create alternative livelihoods and reduce elite dependency on conflict-based accumulation. A sustainable peace is impossible without a nationally-owned process to redefine the social contract, one that shifts its foundation from elite accommodation to citizen welfare and service delivery. The government, with support from international partners, should initiate an inclusive, sub-national dialogue—distinct from high-level peace negotiations—focused explicitly on constitutional principles and citizen expectations of the state. The outcome must centre on the state's core responsibilities: the provision of security, justice, education, and basic healthcare. A tangible first step is the endorsement

and implementation of a ‘Social Contract Compact’, which would allocate a guaranteed, audited minimum percentage of the national budget to these priority service sectors. This would demonstrate a concrete commitment to translating peace into material improvement for the populace, thereby building the state’s legitimacy from the ground up .

The consistent exclusion of broad societal constituencies from peace and governance processes has been a critical flaw. Future mechanisms must formally include civil society organisations, faith-based groups, women’s coalitions, and youth representatives, not as observers but as integral parties with negotiation rights. Their inclusion is particularly vital in discussions on federalism, resource allocation, and transitional justice, where community-level perspectives are essential for sustainability. Furthermore, given the profound significance of sub-national conflicts, any national peace architecture must be complemented by formalised, resourced local peace committees. These committees should be empowered to address inter-communal violence, land disputes, and cattle raiding, recognising that national ceasefire agreements often fail to address these pervasive drivers of insecurity .

Corruption within natural resource governance, particularly in the oil and mining sectors, directly undermines peace by depriving the state of revenue and perpetuating inequality. Immediate reforms must include the public disclosure of all oil production sharing agreements (PSAs) and mining concessions, as well as the beneficial ownership of all companies holding such licences. The government should mandate the full implementation of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) standards, with independent civil society oversight. Furthermore, all revenues from extractive industries should be channeled through a single treasury account, with real-time publication of payments received and their allocation in the national budget. Strengthening the Anti-Corruption Commission with prosecutorial independence and adequate resources to investigate high-level cases is a non-negotiable component of this reform agenda.

Finally, the approach of international actors requires significant recalibration. Support, both financial and political, must be conditioned on measurable progress in governance and institution-building, rather than solely on the maintenance of a nominal ceasefire. Donor assistance and diplomatic engagement should be tied to a clear, publicly available benchmarking framework that tracks reforms in public financial management, SSR, anti-corruption, and service delivery. Budget support should be progressively aligned with the demonstrable implementation of the ‘Social Contract Compact’. This would shift incentives away from short-term stability among elites and towards the long-term construction of a functional state. International partners must also exercise coherence, ensuring their bilateral engagements do not undermine collective pressure for reform

Conclusion

This policy analysis has demonstrated that the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), while a necessary political ceasefire, is structurally incapable of delivering sustainable peace. The agreement’s fundamental flaw lies in its confinement to a narrow power-sharing arrangement among elite belligerents, which inadvertently perpetuates the very governance and economic systems that fuel recurrent conflict. As argued throughout, a durable peace requires moving decisively beyond the R-ARCSS framework to confront the foundational pathologies of the South Sudanese state. The cycle of conflict will only be broken when national and international stakeholders collectively shift their focus from short-term political accommodations to the long-term project of building legitimate, inclusive, and accountable institutions.

The preceding analysis underscores that the primary barriers to peace are structural, not merely technical or logistical. The R-ARCSS, by concentrating on integrating rival militaries and allocating ministerial portfolios, fails to address the core dysfunction of a neo-patrimonial state where governance is an exercise in resource extraction rather than public service. This system, which reduces public office to a tool for elite accumulation, has created a ‘conflict economy’ that thrives on instability and obstructs meaningful reform. Consequently, the formal peace process exists in parallel to, and is often undermined by, these entrenched systems of patronage and violence. Sustainable peace is therefore impossible without a fundamental transformation of state-society relations and the political economy, a task the current agreement is neither designed nor equipped to undertake. In light of this, the recommendations presented earlier are not a menu of optional extras but an interconnected set of imperatives. The critical need is for a nationally owned, inclusive constitutional process that transcends the elite pact. This must be a genuinely participatory endeavour, creating space for voices historically excluded from Juba’s power circuits: women, youth, civil society, and representatives from all regions and communities. As scholars of hybrid governance note, sustainable political orders often emerge from the complex interplay between formal and informal institutions. A legitimate social contract for South Sudan must therefore engage with, rather than dismiss, diverse local governance traditions and reconciliation practices, weaving them into a new national fabric that commands broad-based allegiance. Concurrently, dismantling the conflict economy is non-negotiable. This requires a dual strategy of rigorous, transparent financial governance to redirect oil and non-oil revenues towards public goods, and the deliberate fostering of a diversified, productive economic base that offers livelihoods beyond the gun. International partners must align their diplomacy and development assistance coherently with these objectives, moving beyond siloed humanitarian responses to support these deeper structural reforms. Their engagement must be consistent and principled, using diplomatic and financial leverage to incentivise transparency and accountability, rather than inadvertently reinforcing elite capture through fragmented or politically naive interventions. Ultimately, the agency for this transformative project rests squarely with the South Sudanese people and their leaders. The international community can offer support and create enabling conditions, but it cannot manufacture legitimacy or impose a lasting peace. The call here is for South Sudanese actors—across government, opposition, and civil society—to demonstrate the political courage to lead an inclusive transition that serves the many, not the few. This entails difficult compromises and a conscious departure from the zero-sum politics that have defined the post-independence era. The alternative is a grim continuation of the status quo: a protracted, volatile insecurity punctuated by fragile deals that collapse under the weight of their own limitations. In conclusion, the R-ARCSS has reached its analytical and practical limits as a blueprint for peace. The path forward demands a concerted, coherent, and courageous break from the past. All stakeholders must now rally behind a more ambitious agenda that directly confronts the structural barriers of governance failure and economic predation. This means prioritising the construction of a legitimate state over the appeasement of armed elites, and investing in the social and economic foundations of peace over the mere management of violence. The task is monumental, but the cost of inaction is perpetual war. The time for a fundamental rethink is now; sustainable peace in South Sudan depends on the willingness to move beyond the revitalised agreement and finally build a nation worthy of its people’s profound sacrifices and aspirations.

Contributions

This policy brief makes a distinct contribution by synthesising contemporary field research from 2021-2025 with established peacebuilding theory, offering a timely analysis of the post-revitalised agreement landscape. It provides practical, context-specific recommendations for enhancing local governance and community security, moving beyond generic frameworks. For scholars, it introduces fresh empirical data on the evolving roles of women's groups and youth networks in mediation, challenging conventional conflict narratives. The analysis thus serves as a critical resource for both practitioners designing interventions and academics refining theoretical approaches to hybrid peacemaking in South Sudan.