



**IN TRANSFORMATION  
INITIATIVE**

# The South Sudan Initiative: Supporting the National Dialogue process



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study details In Transformation Initiative's (ITI) engagement in South Sudan and its support for the South Sudan National Dialogue (SSND). It also gives a summary of the context of the conflict in South Sudan and the peace process in the country. The lessons learnt will strengthen the ITI peacebuilding model and will be used to review the efficacy of models, strategies and tools in conflict management and peacebuilding.

A civil war erupted in South Sudan two years after independence in 2011. The increasingly ethno-nationalist conflict internally displaced two million people and turned another two million into refugees. In December 2013 political infighting within the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) became violent and led to former vice president Riek Machar's taking up arms against the government of President Salva Kiir. The Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS), subsequently signed in Addis Ababa in August 2015, restored a status quo ante, with Machar and his group re-installed into government and Machar in the position of First Vice President. However, increasing tensions between factions and individuals led to a renewed outbreak of violence in July 2016. The country has since been unable to achieve sustainable peace and address the ethno-centric and political issues that underpin the conflict.<sup>1</sup>

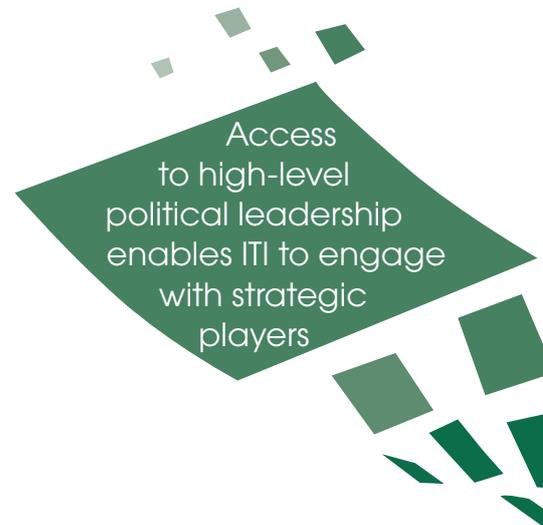
The analysis of the South Sudanese case shows that there was a failure to reconfigure the state architecture both politically and administratively. Following the widespread euphoria after the signing of the ARCSS, not enough effort and resources were put in place to create a stable government. Not enough attention was paid to integrating the various militia groups into the national defence force and to the participation of the various regions and tribes to ensure an equitable constitutional solution for the country. Furthermore, the government lacked the capacity to contain any local uprising, including situations of unrest in the country, leading to problems with the command structure of the military and accountability. Although the ruling party appeared to be better resourced and took advantage of the political and leadership vacuum, collectively, the government failed to address service delivery challenges in the country. It was, arguably, inevitable that these political and administrative shortcomings by government and the ruling party would plunge the country back into violent conflict.

ITI's involvement in South Sudan focused on supporting and advising the National Dialogue process, based on the South African transition experience. In July 2017 ITI was invited by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) to engage with the National Dialogue Steering Committee (NDSC) and leadership in structuring and developing a



roadmap for the implementation of a national dialogue. ITI engaged with various stakeholders including leadership from various political parties and civil society organisations to promote inclusive participation in the national dialogue process. Based on the activities implemented by ITI, several lessons were learnt from the intervention.

- Access to high-level political leadership enables ITI to engage with strategic players who can mobilise and influence their constituencies to shift from conflict situations towards peaceful resolutions.
- It is crucial to legitimise the national peace and dialogue process by motivating the value of an inclusive process with broad national stakeholder participation.
- Hosting civil society and religious leadership in South Africa to discuss the methods and approaches needed to mobilise civil action in a socially depressed environment is a successful strategy. Hosting these delegations outside South Sudan created a neutral environment that facilitated delegates to engage more closely and effectively than they would normally do in their own environment.
- It is important to help local-level leadership refine their vision and implementation plans for a national dialogue.
- The political capital and experience of individual ITI directors and associates is a critical factor in influencing how they are invited to support peace projects. This then creates an opportunity for ITI to share the South African experience in specific national contexts.



## INTRODUCTION

This case study forms part of a series of country case studies that document the lessons learnt from In Transformation Initiative (ITI) projects and interventions carried out since its inception in 2013. The lessons learnt analysis assesses the implementation strategies resulting from ITI's principle-based approach to peacebuilding based on the South African transition experience. Several case studies will be shared with practitioners in conflict management and peacebuilding for dialogue on methods and approaches towards developing peaceful resolutions and transition processes in countries experiencing conflict.

The case study is based on ITI's experience and assistance in the South Sudan National Dialogue (SSND) process between 2017 and 2019. The information on which the analysis is based is derived from internal ITI progress/project reports, annual reviews and documentation relating to engagements with stakeholders in both South Africa and South Sudan. Furthermore, interviews were also conducted with three members<sup>2</sup> of the ITI directorate and one member<sup>3</sup> of a partner organisation involved in facilitating, organising and informing the project.

South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in July 2011 as a result of a 2005 peace deal between the two nations. This brought an end to 20 years of conflict in Africa's longest civil war. However, the country was unable to realise peace and stability, with a civil war erupting in 2013 when political infighting escalated into violence, as South Sudan's President Salva Kiir Mayardit accused former deputy president Riek Machar of an attempted coup.<sup>4</sup> The conflict, which has evolved over time, continues to devastate the country. South Sudan faces an immense humanitarian crisis with abuses against civilians by both government forces and opposition fighters, despite a peace agreement signed in August 2015.<sup>5</sup> Political conflict, economic distress and drought conditions have resulted in large-scale displacements, continued violence and food insecurity. Several processes have been instituted by various local, regional and international actors in an attempt to avert the crisis; however, these have been largely violated. This includes a series of peace deals signed by the parties at the instruction of regional groups such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).<sup>6</sup> Increasing pressure from other countries in East Africa, as well as IGAD, has compelled the South Sudanese leadership to bring an end to the violence and instability in the country. IGAD thus facilitated intra-South Sudanese peace talks involving religious leaders and thematic committees on governance, security and trust building, among others. This was prior to the National Dialogue process.





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At the time of ITI's involvement in South Sudan in 2017, President Kiir issued a decree to initiate a National Dialogue process to confront the causes of the war and support positive development and peace in the country. However, from its inception the dialogue was criticised for falling short in terms of consultation, inclusivity and neutrality.<sup>8</sup> It is in this context that an opportunity arose for ITI to support the implementation of the agreements emerging from the IGAD-led process and positively influence the National Dialogue process, with the aim of ensuring its eventual credibility and so have a positive impact on the country's peace process.<sup>9</sup>



President Kiir issued a decree to initiate a process to confront the causes of the war

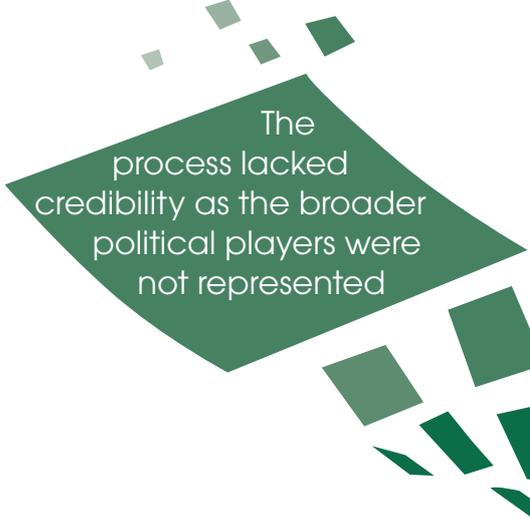
ITI's direct engagements in South Sudan were undertaken between 2017 and 2019 on the invitation of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). During the intervention period ITI engaged with several stakeholders, including the South Sudan National Dialogue Steering Committee (NDSC), the South African mission to South Sudan, the South African Special Envoy to South Sudan led by then deputy president Cyril Ramaphosa, and UNMISS.

Some of the activities carried out by ITI during the project period included:

- Facilitating high-level discussions and linkages between key stakeholders in the country's National Dialogue and peace process
- Promoting inclusivity in the National Dialogue process by including a broader range of role players in the country's political discourse
- Emphasizing the necessity of political will among governing leaders to uphold peace agreements
- Assisting leadership in refining the vision and implementation plan for the National Dialogue process to promote participation and ownership.
- Hosting both civil society leadership and religious leaders from South Sudan in South Africa in learning and knowledge-sharing exercises

One of the main challenges of the intervention was the fact that the National Dialogue process in South Sudan faced criticism from both the international community and South Sudanese citizens. The process lacked credibility as the broader political players in South Sudan were not represented.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the governing leadership had yet to reconcile the deep-rooted political and ethnic tensions that contributed to the start of the 2013 conflict and continued to fuel ongoing clashes and divisions in South Sudan.<sup>11</sup> The lack of formal infrastructure in the country, political instability, violent clashes, economic devastation, internal displacement of citizens and an overall depressed social environment created difficult circumstances for the initiative.

ITI responded to these challenges by reaching out to high-level role players in the country with the influence to enable the necessary participation and changes that needed to be considered and/or implemented.<sup>12</sup>



## LESSONS LEARNT

This assessment is based on ITI's approach of sharing the South African negotiation, reconciliation and transition processes. The South African experience is distinguished by fundamental principles and practices that contributed to the peaceful transition to a democracy.<sup>13</sup> Today, these principles and process still serve as a valuable and relevant model. The following sections will detail ITI's involvement in the South Sudan initiative towards supporting the National Dialogue process, as well as advising the NDSC.

### FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF ITI

ITI's approach to peacemaking initiatives and assisting countries in political transition is based on three foundational principles extracted from the South African peace and transition experience, namely trust, inclusivity and ownership.<sup>14</sup>

ITI's principle-based approach to peacemaking remains relevant and valuable owing to the fact that the ITI directors were intimately involved in negotiating South Africa's transition while being on opposite sides of the negotiation table. This also enables ITI to share its perspectives on the necessity of building trust, making the negotiation process inclusive and applying power-sharing methodologies.<sup>15</sup>

### Helping to Legitimise a National Dialogue Process through the Principles of Inclusivity

Inclusivity ensures that all stakeholders have the opportunity to form part of the solution to the conflict, while being able to express their own interests. This promotes ownership of the negotiation process among the broader sectors of the political discourse. Inclusivity is crucial, as it attempts to engage all relevant national stakeholders, both state and non-state, to encourage national consensus on the resolution and reconciliation of key conflict issues.<sup>16</sup> An inclusive National Dialogue can be a useful mechanism to promote public participation and develop a new social contract towards supporting a peace process or political transition.

As Prof. John Packer<sup>17</sup> says, 'Ultimately, inclusive processes are better processes – facilitating more informed deliberations, broader and deeper concurrence, resulting in more implementable and sustainable agreements. This allows transition from violence through "negative" peace to "positive" peace.'<sup>18</sup> Consequently, ensuring inclusivity in a peace process can contribute to the sustainability of an agreement and allow key groups and citizens to accept and take ownership of the processes and outcomes.<sup>19</sup>

ITI's involvement<sup>20</sup> in the South Sudan initiative occurred at a time when the NDSC (consisting of 93 members) was determining the framework of the



National Dialogue, how it should be carried out, what the objectives were and how the process would be structured to support and promote a peace process in the country.<sup>21</sup> Other international organisations, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNMISS, offered their support to the NDSC and subcommittees in developing a roadmap for the National Dialogue process. Upon the invitation of UNMISS and partnering with the organisation, ITI helped with this initiative to promote inclusive participation in the National Dialogue process.

The main focus of ITI's contribution was stressing the need for an inclusive process that ensured space for stakeholders to participate. Given the protracted nature of the South Sudan conflict and the existence of considerable polarity based largely on ethnic lines, ensuring inclusivity would give the SSND the required legitimacy to further the peace process goals of the country. Throughout the engagement period with the SSND, ITI and UNMISS made extensive efforts to compel the NDSC to take care of issues that would make the SSND more credible and likely garner national support for the NDSC.<sup>22</sup>

ITI's approach included hosting delegations of South Sudanese civil society members, religious leaders and members of the National Dialogue leadership in South Africa to communicate the value and application of an inclusive process in a peace/transition process. It also assisting the different stakeholders in defining their roles in, vision for and structure of the National Dialogue. Additionally, ITI directors Roelf Meyer<sup>23</sup> and Mohammed Bhabha<sup>24</sup> visited South Sudan with the purpose of engaging with the NDSC and the ad hoc committee to the dialogue committee comprising the main opposition parties. These discussions were aimed at motivating the NDSC and the National Dialogue leadership to create a space for broader stakeholder engagement outside of the Steering Committee members and the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM).

During the initiative, ITI and UNMISS also focused on engaging with civil society leaders by hosting a delegation in South Africa in July 2017. The purpose of this engagement was to connect South Sudanese civil society members with South African non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and social movements to learn about ways to mobilise civil action in a socially depressed environment.<sup>25</sup>

Additionally, ITI also hosted a delegation of South Sudanese religious leaders in South Africa in October 2017, to strengthen their role in the peace and National Dialogue process. By sharing the South African experience and the critical role that faith-based organisations and leaders played in the country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) process, ITI helped the South Sudanese religious leaders to understand how to engage with youth, women's groups, community organisations and other networks in the country, and so connect constituencies in the SSND process. Moreover, this delegation would



also meet with Riek Machar,<sup>26</sup> who at the time was under 'house confinement' in South Africa. The engagement was organised with the assistance of the South African government and resulted in a positive cooperation agreement between the religious leaders and Machar regarding his participation in the National Dialogue.

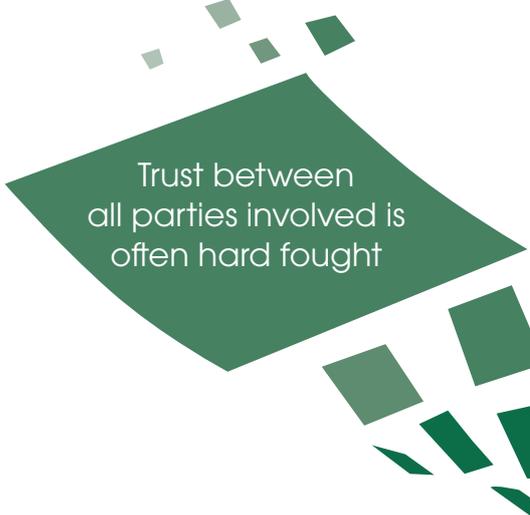
ITI identified and engaged with key figures in the SSND, including Francis Mading Deng, the deputy co-chairperson of the National Dialogue, to participate in dialogue exercises on inclusivity (organised by ITI and UNMISS) and to combat resistance to the idea of an inclusive dialogue process. Deng's support for such a process brought considerable credibility to the dialogue initiatives and motivated other key role players in the National Dialogue structure to take part.<sup>27</sup>

Some of the stakeholders in the National Dialogue were initially hesitant to make the process more inclusive. However, ITI's approach in bringing together the National Dialogue leadership, NDSC, other political formations and civil society groups in planning discussions on the structure of the SSND process enabled all participants to see the value in broadening the process and planning the roadmap of the National Dialogue together. Opening the discussion around the National Dialogue to a broader collection of stakeholders also enabled participants to reflect on how they could support peace in the country at various levels, including the political elite, civil society and grassroots community actors.<sup>28</sup>

### **Building Trust Between Stakeholders through Dialogue**

Promoting trust between negotiating parties is a vital element of any conflict resolution process. Trust between all the parties involved is often hard fought and facilitators are regularly challenged to develop an approach to the peacemaking process that can guarantee the participation of all stakeholders while also presenting themselves as viable and trustworthy facilitating and supporting partners.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the success of the process and engagement of the parties depend on stakeholders' willingness to seek a solution, and the trust awarded to the facilitators supporting the initiative. Additionally, dialogue is a useful tool in resolving conflicts while reconciling groups, building confidence and trust among opponents, and supporting national development.<sup>30</sup>

To promote trust between the various stakeholders, ITI and UNMISS, along with the South African government and the Special Envoy to South Sudan, facilitated several training events, bilateral meetings and trust-building dialogue engagements between the NDSC, National Dialogue leadership, civil society stakeholders and political opposition parties in South Africa and South Sudan.<sup>31</sup> Through these engagements ITI and its partners created a platform where different stakeholders could begin to engage with one another on contentious issues pertaining to the National Dialogue process and the underlying issues fuelling the ongoing conflict in South Sudan.



Trust between all parties involved is often hard fought

ITI also helped members of the NDSC to identify challenges in terms of structures and personalities in their own political context that could hinder momentum in the SSND process, while strategising with members around these issues.<sup>32</sup>

The other dimension of trust rested on how the various stakeholders viewed ITI as an advisor. The longstanding relationship and shared liberation history between South Africa and South Sudan, particularly through the ANC, contributed to the South Sudanese's being open to meeting with ITI as a South African organisation. Moreover, the credibility of ITI directors such as Roelf Meyer was instrumental in ITI's being invited by UNMISS to share the South African experience, having previously addressed South Sudanese political leaders and role players during a conference in Freedom Hall, Juba in early 2017.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, many of the key stakeholders and members of the NDSC were confident that ITI could help them craft a strategy and plan to engage in the peace negotiations. As highlighted by Catherine Shin, ITI always took a neutral position, respected all stakeholders and engaged with them in a professional manner.<sup>34</sup>

### **Promoting the Development of a Home-Grown Solution Owned by the South Sudanese People**

Importantly, ITI's approach to peacebuilding is premised on the philosophy that a lasting solution to a conflict must be designed, developed and implemented domestically to fit the relevant context.<sup>35</sup> Agreements and solutions must evolve locally and cannot be prescribed by external actors, although guidance and advice can be sought. This approach offers the greatest opportunity for sustainable peace, with local stakeholders taking ownership of the process. Moreover, the rise in 'the local turn' in peacebuilding practices suggests that peace is unsustainable if local ownership by political elites and domestic civil society is absent.<sup>36</sup> In the case of South Africa, ownership of and responsibility for the negotiation and transition process was assumed by the South African people as they built their own solution, despite breakdowns and numerous challenges encountered during the negotiation period.

During the dialogue engagements organised by ITI and UNMISS, the South Sudanese stakeholders received guidance from the ITI team as well as from international experts in the field of peacebuilding and political transitions, including Prof. John Packer. Participants received advice on factors such as designing the process, mandate, principles and key issues that needed to be addressed; establishing the decision-making and dispute resolution structures within the SSND process; and developing a constructive future-orientated perspective on the outcomes set by the National Dialogue process.<sup>37</sup>

Although the South African model remained a prominent reference point throughout ITI's engagement, it was emphasized that each conflict context is unique. A home-grown solution and mechanism had to be developed and



owned by the South Sudanese leaders and people. The NDSC and National Dialogue leadership were receptive of the idea of promoting and driving the SSND as an indispensable part of the national purpose and vision for the country.

Additionally, ITI stressed that establishing a sense of nationhood and statehood was essential to the National Dialogue, as this would ensure that ownership and inclusivity were at the core of the process. 'This was a powerful element in the South African process itself,' as Mohammed Bhabha<sup>38</sup> recalled. In an interview, Catherine Shin<sup>39</sup> of UNMISS said that ITI successfully stressed the value of transcending personal interests in a peace or dialogue process towards a country interest that would benefit many others. Through several engagements with South Sudanese stakeholders, ITI inspired role players in the SSND to have confidence in their own process.

## LESSONS LEARNT FROM APPROACHES INFORMED BY ITI'S GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following approaches were successfully applied by ITI during the South Sudan initiative. These approaches and processes were informed by the foundational principles of trust, inclusivity and ownership, stemming from the South African transition experience.

### Hosting Delegations in South Africa

A strategy employed by ITI during initiatives is facilitating learning visits, trust-building engagements and dialogue 'retreats' in South Africa. Hosting these stakeholder delegations in South Africa provides a neutral platform for engagement, removed from the political and conflict context of their own countries. It also allows stakeholders to engage with South African leaders, activists and role players who were directly involved in the peace and transition process in South Africa.<sup>40</sup> This strategy has proven effective in the context of other projects undertaken by the organisation. During the South Sudan initiative three delegations visited South Africa in 2017, including a group of civil society leaders, 20 members from the NDSC and leadership group, and a delegation of South Sudanese religious leaders.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, in October 2017 members of the National Dialogue leadership engaged in a four-day retreat in Cape Town, South Africa hosted by ITI and the South African Special Envoy, led by then deputy president Cyril Ramaphosa.<sup>42</sup> Participants could interact directly with Ramaphosa as he recalled his own experiences as the chief negotiator for the ANC during the six-year negotiation period in South Africa. The 20-member delegation also received inputs from Johnny de Lange,<sup>43</sup> Roelf Meyer and Ebrahim Ebrahim.<sup>44</sup>





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During the engagement, delegates shared their views on the principles, applicability and relevance of mechanisms that contributed to South Africa’s successful peace process. Some of the key points for the delegation included the South African TRC process, structuring of the National Dialogue in South Africa, restorative justice, implementing solutions, mobilising civil society and public support for the peace/transition process, the role of women, institution building and constitutional development.<sup>46</sup>

**High level access**

A key component of ITI’s approach to peacebuilding is its ability to engage with political elites and influential figures within the context of the intervention to maximise its impact. ITI does this by leveraging its international network of leaders in the political, civil society, academia and business spheres, among others, to identify stakeholders who can bring about a positive change in a conflict.

In most cases this network of contacts gives ITI direct access to leaders in the peace process. Moreover, the political capital and extensive peacebuilding experience of ITI’s directors enables the organisation to gain this high level of access around the world. It should also be noted that in the majority of interventions, ITI partners with influential international organisations and peacemaking institutions that are already involved and established in the country of focus. This connection is key to gaining a thorough understanding of the political and social dynamics of the conflict, while also providing linkages to key role players.

The focus on high-level access is premised on the critical role top leadership plays in decision-making and stimulating support in their constituencies. However, ITI does not underestimate the important role that non-governmental, religious and civil society organisations play in a peace negotiation and transition process with regard to implementing solutions and galvanising support from constituencies.<sup>47</sup>



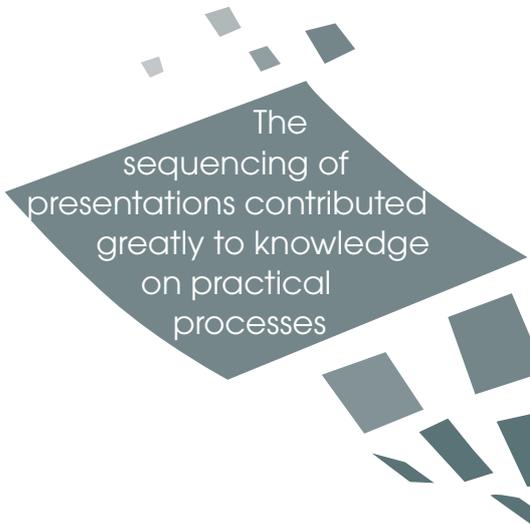
A key component is ITI's ability to engage with political elites and influential figures

During the South Sudan initiative, ITI engaged with members of the NDSC, National Dialogue leadership, opposition party leaders and political elites, including Angelo Beda,<sup>48</sup> Francis Mading Deng, Gabriel Yoal Dok, Mary Bensusio Wani, Elizabeth Achan Ogwaru, Alfred Taban Logune, Riek Machar and Manasa Magok Rundial.<sup>49</sup> In an interview Catherine Shin stated that ITI gained the trust of the SSND leadership owing to the relationships established between Roelf Meyer and leaders such as Angelo Beda and Francis Mading Deng. The ability of ITI's directors to develop and sustain these trust relationships made the stakeholders more receptive to engaging with ITI.

Moreover, Shin noted that the leadership grew to trust ITI because of the relationship that ITI, particularly Roelf Meyer, has with Cyril Ramaphosa. 'This interaction was very powerful in conveying the South African engagements, adding credibility and gravitas to ITI's participation in the South Sudan process,' Shin said.<sup>50</sup>

ITI's ability to structure dialogue engagements with elite stakeholders in a strategic manner, sensitive to the current context and political reality in the country, was demonstrated by its approach to a four-day high-level leadership meeting in South Sudan in March 2019. During this particular engagement, many of the actors were intimately involved in the revitalisation of the peace agreement in the country and some uncertainty existed around whether the leadership would be open to ITI's advice, along with the UNDP and UNMISS intervention towards building trust and strengthening the SSND process.<sup>51</sup>

The sequencing of presentations on peace vs justice, the role of women and risk management contributed greatly to transferring knowledge on practical processes and empowering the high-level actors in the peace process. ITI provided technical assistance to members of the NDSC during the same engagement in South Sudan, where it helped participants develop a strategic roadmap for broadening participation in the SSND and support the establishment of the ad hoc committee of the NDSC.<sup>52</sup>



## MOMENTS OF TRANSFORMATION

To obtain a measurable response among participants engaging in dialogue discussions or peacemaking processes, interviews were conducted with members of ITI and partner organisations involved in the South Sudan initiative. From these interviews some key experiences were recalled – specifically because of the impact these had on participants in their engagements with ITI.

Both ITI director Roelf Meyer<sup>53</sup> and UNMISS officer Catherine Shin<sup>54</sup> recalled the effect of an address given by Meyer in early 2017 during a seminar organised by the UNDP and SSND secretariat members shortly after the NDSC was appointed by President Kiir. The seminar took place in Freedom Hall, Juba, where Meyer addressed political leaders, security officials and generals from the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF) and members of the NDSC, among others. Shin recalled that Meyer's address had a particular impact on the plenary owing to the similarities between the South African experience and the situation in South Sudan, which resonated with people. This included the fact that South Africa had found itself on the brink of a civil war at a time when the need for negotiation, reconciliation and political change was evident. In addition, people both inside and outside South Africa doubted that a peaceful solution or attempt at negotiating a peaceful settlement was possible. South Africa also chose to pursue a home-grown solution despite the challenges, with the process breaking down at multiple points; and the South African process was conducted during a period of violence and national unrest.

Shin stated that

the South African story also resonated with the South Sudanese because at that time the peace agreement had not been signed and overall, the conflict seemed intractable in the face of continued violence and a deep lack of hope amongst citizens and even political leaders.

Therefore, the South African story offered inspiration as an example of a successful peaceful political transition in Africa.

Shin also indicated that many of the senior members of the NDSC and generals connected with Meyer's credentials as a former minister of defence and of constitutional affairs, as well as his background as a lawyer. 'The different facets and areas of experience that Roelf represents as a prominent South African personality enabled a wide range of South Sudanese leaders and influencers to relate to him on a personal level,' Shin said.

According to Shin, Meyer's address during the seminar had a lasting effect on the members of the NDSC – '(after his address) I had so many people come up to me, asking me, can you bring him back, he needs to speak



to everybody'. Moreover, many stakeholders began to reflect on their own responsibilities in the process. Following this first encounter with Meyer, UNMISS began to engage with ITI regarding its involvement in assisting and advising on some aspects of the National Dialogue in South Sudan, on a track two basis outside of the formal process. Sharing the South African experience and political capital of Roelf Meyer as part of ITI thus made a significant impression on many of the South Sudanese leaders involved in the National Dialogue and peace process.



## LIMITATIONS

The South Sudan case study serves as an example of a situation where the external environment presents various challenges, including continued violence in the country and a fluid political landscape. Additionally, factors such as extensive logistical challenges and an ongoing humanitarian crisis have a bearing on the successful implementation of certain processes as developed under the NDSC roadmap supported by ITI and UNMISS.

The political environment in South Sudan is extremely fluid, and changes in alliances can occur within a short period of time, affecting the overall dynamics of the political discourse.<sup>55</sup> At the time of ITI's involvement in the South Sudan project, the National Dialogue process preceded the signing of the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) and was therefore in a fragile and uncertain state. Although ITI and UNMISS successfully supported the NDSC in developing a roadmap for the process and determining some of the strategic objectives, the implementation of the process was entirely driven by the National Dialogue leadership and the South Sudanese government.

Additionally, following the signing of the R-ARCSS and the development of the new unity government, the National Dialogue process was no longer the main focus. However, it could be argued that supplementary work on reconciliation and dialogue could have been carried out to support the longevity and implementation of the R-ARCSS.

Upon reflection, it could also be said that ITI's short engagement in the South Sudan initiative might be considered a limitation. Based on the many lessons emanating from the South African process, ITI could have provided further assistance on issues such as constitutional development and institution building in South Sudan, under the new unity government. However, as ITI's interventions in countries are mainly by invitation only, the possible results of a prolonged engagement cannot be determined at this stage. Lastly, funding constraints in both the implementation of the NDSC roadmap and ITI's continued involvement in South Sudan contributed to the project's coming to a close in March 2019.

In managing the various risks and limitations encountered when operating in countries experiencing active conflict, ITI takes a flexible approach to the realisation of project goals, as was the case in the South Sudan initiative.<sup>56</sup> ITI also reaches out to other strategic networks, including high-level in-country or external networks, that provide the necessary surveillance to assist ITI in deciding whether to continue with activities in a country, delay or suspend these, or to change its approach.



## CONCLUSION

The extensive experience and expertise of the ITI directors attest to the capacity of the organisation to implement its projects effectively. The intimate involvement of four of the directors in the South African transition process has allowed them to work in areas of conflict and transition for more than 20 years, bringing with them a wealth of experience that has benefited governments and organisations across the world. ITI therefore has established an institutional base for sharing this collective experience and skills set.

ITI successfully engaged with members of South Sudan's civil society and religious leaders to strengthen the role and mobilisation of these organisations in the peace process and National Dialogue. This project also provides examples of creative and alternative ideas and concepts for building trust and facilitating suitable dialogue in a country context such as South Sudan. Moreover, this case study shows how to approach a peace process in a controversial and fragile context through the adaptable approach employed by ITI at different junctures in the project.

Despite the challenges faced by the SSND process and its leadership, the NDSC was able to benefit from ITI's advice regarding the structure of the dialogue process. The National Dialogue's credibility was improved by the engagements between the NDSC and several other stakeholders (including seven opposition parties, women's organisations and community groups) facilitated by ITI. There is, however, still a long way to go in South Sudan given the mutation of the conflict into several strands that continue to complicate the peace process.<sup>57</sup>



There is still a long way to go in South Sudan given the mutation of the conflict

# PROJECT TIMELINE

2017

## JULY 2016 – APRIL 2017

### South Africa

#### PURPOSE OF TRIP

Meetings with analysts and experts on South Sudan to determine a possible ITI contribution. At this point advice points away from involvement.

#### CONTEXTUAL EVENTS DURING THIS TIME

National Dialogue initiative started by President Salva Kiir Mayardit, President of the Republic of South Sudan and Chairman of the SPLM.<sup>58</sup> From the outset the initiative is viewed with distrust, as the initiative’s leadership is appointed by the president from within the ruling SPLM.

The challenge is ensuring that the process is as inclusive and participatory as possible.

## 4-7 JULY 2017

### Pretoria and Johannesburg, South Africa

#### PURPOSE OF TRIP

ITI hosts a delegation of civil society leaders from South Sudan. The purpose of the visit is to engage with SA NGOs and social movements to learn about mobilisation and civil action in a socially depressed environment.

After its visit the delegation also visits other countries in transition from which they hope to learn and to build strategic partnerships essential in the South Sudanese context.

#### CONTEXTUAL EVENTS DURING THIS TIME

Not much traction is achieved regarding the peace process in South Sudan. No peace agreement has been signed yet.

The peace process is fragile and hope for a successful outcome is low among the South Sudanese people and the international community.

The sequencing of the establishment of the National Dialogue process and Steering Committee is unusual as it precedes the signing of an official peace agreement, which raises suspicions over the credibility and viability of the process, as well as its aims.

2017

**JULY 2017**  
**Juba, South Sudan**

**PURPOSE OF TRIP**

Roelf Meyer visits Juba at the invitation of UNMISS and meets with the National Dialogue team of approximately 100 appointed individuals with the purpose of sharing ideas, advice, experiences, and insights into their dialogue process.

During this visit he invites the leadership group to South Africa for a week-long retreat where they can be helped to refine their vision and implementation plans.

**CONTEXTUAL EVENTS DURING THIS TIME**

The National Dialogue Steering Committee is appointed between March and April 2017. The UNDP, UNMISS and other international organisations partner with the Steering Committee to assist it in determining the functions, objectives and process of a National Dialogue programme.

The preliminary stages of the National Dialogue process are underway.

The National Dialogue process lacks credibility, as well as broader representation from political players and civil society in South Sudan.

**12-13 OCTOBER 2017**  
**Pretoria, South Africa**

**PURPOSE OF TRIP**

A second delegation consisting of South Sudanese religious leaders visits South Africa. The purpose is to meet Riek Machar, who is under 'house confinement' in South Africa in 2017.

ITI arranges this meeting for the delegation with the South African government's assistance. The outcomes are positive and ongoing cooperation with Machar and the religious leaders is agreed upon.

**CONTEXTUAL EVENTS DURING THIS TIME**

South Africa, and consequently ITI, plays a role in supporting Riek Machar's participation in the peace process.

Through the South African Special Envoy to South Sudan, ITI provides linkages and meetings between members of South Sudanese religious organisations and Machar in hopes of reinvigorating his participation to support the National Dialogue and promote political stability in the country.

**10-13 OCTOBER 2017**  
**Cape Town, South Africa**

**PURPOSE OF TRIP**

20 members of the National Dialogue leadership participate in a four-day retreat at Boschendal Centre in Franschhoek. The purpose is to assist the delegation in defining the vision and role of a National Dialogue.

Then deputy president Cyril Ramaphosa attends the gathering in his capacity as Special Envoy to South Sudan and addresses the group, challenging them to be inclusive and to find creative ways to resolve the crisis and stop the violence in their country.

## 2019

### AUGUST 2018 TO MARCH 2019

#### South Africa and South Sudan

##### PURPOSE OF TRIP

Follow-up work carried out with the NDSC towards making a more credible institution in aiding the achievement of the revitalised peace agreement.

##### CONTEXTUAL EVENTS DURING THIS TIME

September 2018 sees the signing of the R-ARCSS. This paves the way for a power-sharing government to be installed in May 2019, with Machar as vice president.

Days before the deadline, they agree to a November 2019 postponement owing to outstanding differences. Key areas include carving out state boundaries, creating a unified national army and protecting Machar.

On 7 November they extend the deadline by another 100 days.

### 4-6 MARCH 2019

#### Juba, South Sudan

##### PURPOSE OF TRIP

ITI hosts dialogues with an ad hoc committee to the NDSC comprising the seven main opposition parties and the secretariat of the committee.

The focus is the implementation of the R-ARCSS and the participation of opposition parties in the National Dialogue process.

Agreement is reached for the parties to be integrated into the structures of the NDSC.

##### CONTEXTUAL EVENTS DURING THIS TIME

The process of National Dialogue discussions and engagement has to be rolled out to as many parts of the country as logistically possible.

Following the signing of the R-ARCSS in 2018, the role and purpose of the NDSC and established structures under the SSND are increasingly unclear.

What supporting functions can these structures offer to continue to support reconciliation and sustain peace under a new unity government?

## 2020

### FEBRUARY 2020

Machar is officially sworn in as first vice president after he and Kiir agreed to move forward with a power-sharing government. However, outstanding issues between Machar and Kiir remain and will be negotiated under the new government.

Rival forces must still be consolidated into a single army, a process that the United Nations and others have described as being behind schedule and poorly provisioned. The current peace is extremely fragile and the threat of continued violence remains present. The human rights crisis in the country continues to deteriorate amid extreme food insecurity, internal displacement, lack of developed infrastructure, active armed militias and rampant corruption.

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- 2 Ivor Jenkins, interviewed on 3 July 2020; Roelf Meyer, interviewed on 3 July 2020; Mohammed Bhabha, interviewed on 8 July 2020.
- 3 Catherine Shin, interviewed on 8 July 2020. Catherine Shin works in the Political Affairs Division of the United Nations Mission In South Sudan (UNMISS).
- 4 Mercy Corps (June 2019). "The Facts: What You Need to Know About the South Sudan Crisis". <https://www.mercycorps.org/blog/south-sudan-crisis>
- 5 Machar and Kiir sign a peace accord in August 2015, and Machar is reappointed as vice president. Fighting between supporters of both leaders break out again in July 2016 and Machar goes into exile. He is re-appointed as vice-president in February 2020 as part of South Sudan's Unity Government, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/02/timeline-south-sudan-independence-200222173029619.html>
- 6 In Transformation Initiative (June 2018). "Contextual Analysis of Target Countries". Internal Documentation ITI.
- 7 Data reflects situation as of June 2019. Source: <http://data.unhcr.org/SouthSudan/regional.php>
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- 12 In Transformation Initiative (May 2017 to April 2018). "Final Report for Grants from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)".
- 13 In Transformation Integrated Governance Policy. Version 1.4 (ratified on 31 January 2019), [http://www.intransformation.org.za/wp-content/themes/intransformationinitiative/docs/integrated\\_governance\\_policy\\_1.4.pdf](http://www.intransformation.org.za/wp-content/themes/intransformationinitiative/docs/integrated_governance_policy_1.4.pdf)
- 14 In Transformation Initiative, <https://www.intransformation.org.za/>
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- 16 Planta, K.; Prinz, V.; and Vimalarajah, L. (2015). "Inclusivity in National Dialogues – Guaranteeing Social Integration or Preserving Old Power Hierarchies?" In Inclusive Political Settlements Background Paper 1, November. Published by the Berghof Foundation.
- 17 Prof. John Packer is a Constitutions and Process Design Expert with the UN Standby Team of Mediation Experts. He also engaged with a select group of the National Dialogue leadership during the October 2017 dialogue engagement hosted in South Africa by ITI, UNMISS and the SA Special Envoy to South Sudan.
- 18 Packer, J. (2013). "Q&A on Inclusivity in Peace Processes, In Civil Society Dialogue Network Discussion Paper No. 7", [https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/ChallengesOpportunitiesInclusivity\\_Packer\\_2013.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/ChallengesOpportunitiesInclusivity_Packer_2013.pdf)
- 19 Planta, K.; Prinz, V.; and Vimalarajah, L. (2015). "Inclusivity in National Dialogues – Guaranteeing Social Integration or Preserving Old Power Hierarchies?" In Inclusive Political Settlements Background Paper 1, November. Published by the Berghof Foundation.
- 20 Prior to the SSND negotiations and discussions around political settlements were essentially top-down processes with no participation from all the relevant groups. There was no inclusivity, and this created an enormous amount of distrust. Furthermore, there were no channels of communication to all stakeholders and citizens, including those in remote parts of the country. The purpose of the NDSC was to bring all the groupings together, not only the political parties but also civil society, thereby promoting inclusivity. In addition, the NDSC sought to involve all the groupings in decision-making and to create a sense of ownership of the dialogue process. The NDSC also attempted to reach citizens at a grassroots level in order to establish a bottom-up approach.
- 21 Vhumbunu, C.H. (2018). "The National Dialogue Initiative in South Sudan: Assessing Progress and Pitfalls". Published in ACCORD Conflict Trends 2018/1, <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-national-dialogue-initiative-in-south-sudan/>
- 22 In Transformation Initiative (May 2017 to April 2018). "Final Report for Grants from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)".
- 23 Roelf Meyer was the chief negotiator of the National Party (NP) government during the multiparty negotiating forum in 1993; served as Minister of Constitutional Affairs under President Nelson Mandela; chaired the South African Defence Review Committee (2011–2014) and is an active consultant on peace processes, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/roelof-petrus-roelf-meyer>
- 24 Mohammed Bhabha is a former Member of Parliament, qualified attorney, and experienced negotiator. He was part of the African National Congress (ANC) team at the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), and later as part of the agreements on the final South African Constitution. He continues to work on transitional and constitutional support projects internationally, <https://www.intransformation.org.za/directors/>
- 25 In Transformation Initiative. (May 2017 to April 2018). "Final Report for Grants from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)".
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- 28 Catherine Shin, interviewed on 8 July 2020.
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- 33 Shortly following the appointment of the NDSC in early 2017, the UNDP and other international peace organisations organised a seminar on the National Dialogue process, which took place in Juba. The seminar saw presentations from several experts in the field of mediation and peacebuilding, including an address by Roelf Meyer. According to Catherine Shin, this address had a profound effect on the NDSC plenary and would motivate the invitation to ITI to engage further with various groups in the National Dialogue process and political stakeholders in South Sudan.
- 34 Catherine Shin, interviewed on 8 July 2020.
- 35 In Transformation Initiative Integrated Governance Policy. Version 1.4 (ratified on 31 January 2019), [http://www.intransformation.org.za/wp-content/themes/intransformationinitiative/docs/integrated\\_governance\\_policy\\_1.4.pdf](http://www.intransformation.org.za/wp-content/themes/intransformationinitiative/docs/integrated_governance_policy_1.4.pdf)
- 36 Donais, T. (June 2014). "National Ownership and Post-Conflict Peace Building: From Principle to Practice". In Policy Brief No.43. Published by CIGI.
- 37 In Transformation Initiative (October 2017). "Notes on Boschendal Retreat". Compiled by Catherine Shin of UNMISS. Internal ITI document.
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- 41 In Transformation Initiative. (May 2017 to April 2018). "Final Report for Grants from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)".
- 42 In Transformation Initiative (October 2017). "Notes on Boschendal Retreat". Compiled by Catherine Shin of UNMISS. Internal ITI document.
- 43 Johnny de Lange was a member of the National Assembly of Parliament, representing the ANC from 1994, a former Chair of Justice Committee, former Chair of Water and Environment and former Deputy Minister of Justice, <https://www.gov.za/about-government/contact-directory/johannes-johnny-hendrik-de-lange-adv-0>
- 44 Ebrahim Ebrahim was a member of the African National Congress (ANC) National Executive Committee (NEC); participated in the Congress of the People Campaign, which adopted the Freedom Charter in 1955; former member of Umkhonto we Sizwe; charged under the Sabotage Act in 1961 and sentenced to 15 years imprisonment at Robben Island. He was released in 1979. Served as Head of International Affairs at the ANC Head Office (2006) and as Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation (2009); continues to be an active consultant in conflict resolution and peace processes, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/ebrahim-ismail-ebrahim>
- 45 A group photo of participants during the October 2017 NDSC delegation retreat in Cape Town, South Africa. The participants included 20 members of the NDSC, members of the South African Special Envoy to South Sudan, members of the ITI directorate and partner organisation UNMISS, as well as South Africans and international presenters. Source: ITI project photos
- 46 In Transformation Initiative (October 2017). "Notes on Boschendal Retreat". Compiled by Catherine Shin of UNMISS. Internal ITI document.
- 47 Carl, A. (2019). "Navigating Inclusion in Peace Processes". Published by Conciliation Resources in ACCORD issue 28, <http://www.c-r.org/accord/inclusion-peace-processes>.
- 48 Angelo Beda and Francis Mading Deng served as co-chairs of the NDSC; Gabriel Yoal Dok was deputy co-chair of the NDSC and presidential advisor; Mary Bensusio Wani and Elizabeth Achan Ogwaru were members of the National Dialogue Leadership; Alfred Logune Taban was chairman of communications at the National Dialogue Secretariat; Riek Machar was re-appointed as vice president under South Sudan's Unity Government (February 2020); Manasa Magok Rundial is former speaker of South Sudan Parliament, [https://www.ss.undp.org/content/south\\_sudan/en/home/library/democratic\\_governance/guide-national-dialogue-south-sudan.html](https://www.ss.undp.org/content/south_sudan/en/home/library/democratic_governance/guide-national-dialogue-south-sudan.html)
- 49 In Transformation Initiative (May 2017 to April 2018). "Final Report for Grants from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)".
- 50 Catherine Shin, interviewed on 8 July 2020.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 United Nations Mission In South Sudan (UNMISS), Political Affairs Division (February 2019). "Dialogue Series: Bridges to Peace Leadership Dialogue". Dialogue Proposal Document.
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- 54 Catherine Shin, interviewed on 8 July 2020.
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- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Pedersen, J. (May-June 2017). "In Transformation Initiative, South Sudan Opposition Parties Gathering". Internal ITI document assessing the context of the project.