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Case of South Sudan**



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## Mediation as a Conflict Management Tool in the IGAD Region: A Case of South Sudan

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** This study examined mediation as a conflict management tool in South Sudan from 2005 to 2023, focusing on key peace agreements including the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) of 2015 and the Revitalized Agreement (R-ARCSS) of 2018.

**Methodology:** The research adopted a descriptive design using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, targeting stakeholders such as government officials, civil society organizations, rebel representatives, and grassroots actors. Purposive sampling was employed, while data collection relied on interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis.

**Findings:** The research revealed that IGAD's mediation efforts contributed to notable achievements. However, effectiveness was degraded by lack of inclusivity, limited political will, and insufficient cultural sensitivity. Exclusion of grassroots actors especially women, youth, and local leaders reduced legitimacy and local ownership of agreements. Concerns were also raised about mediators' impartiality due to national allegiances and reliance on top-down communication. Respondents emphasized the need for reforms to embed inclusivity, integrate indigenous conflict resolution practices, and embrace adaptive methods.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice:** Structural-Functional Theory and Narrative Mediation Theory provided the theoretical framework, highlighting the role of mediation structures and communication in peacebuilding. The study offered policymakers, both within South Sudan and internationally, evidence-based recommendations for improving mediation strategies and conflict management mechanisms. The study helped practitioners involved in mediation processes in South Sudan by identifying best practices and areas for improvement. The study provided valuable academic insights and a foundation for future research into conflict resolution in similar volatile settings.

**Keywords:** *Mediation, IGAD, South Sudan Conflict, Peace Agreements, Conflict Management*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The South Sudan's protracted conflict was driven by ethnic divisions, political rivalries, and historical grievances. These factors have severely undermined economic development stability, and social cohesion. Despite the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) efforts of leading mediation in conflict management, the effectiveness of its interventions remains debated. This study examined IGAD's mediation processes by analyzing its strategies, communication approaches, and the role of variables such as trust building and free communication in promoting constructive dialogue. Mediation was chosen due to its confidential, voluntary, and relational advantages in conflict management

While international mediation had good outcomes in conflicts such as Mozambique, Liberia, and Bosnia, IGAD's efforts in South Sudan have faced significant challenges. Although agreements like the 2015 ARCSS and the 2018 Revitalized ARCSS brought temporary progress, weak implementation, political deadlock, persistent mistrust, and recurring violence continued to undermine peacebuilding. The ethnic tensions between leaders Salva Kiir and Riek Machar, combined with stalled reforms and ongoing humanitarian crises, limit the long-term effectiveness of mediation. The study concluded that, while IGAD's mediation has achieved partial gains, comprehensive and sustained peace in South Sudan requires enhanced strategies, stronger institutions, and greater commitment to reconciliation.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Since 2013, South Sudan has experienced cycles of violence despite the mediation efforts by IGAD and other international actors. The 2013 Addis Ababa Agreement and the 2015 ARCSS, both aimed at power-sharing and ceasefire but collapsed due to renewed fighting. The 2018 Revitalized Agreement (R-ARCSS) tried to revive these efforts with wider support, but ceasefire violations continued. Additional initiatives such as the 2020 Rome Declaration and the 2021 Juba Peace Agreement sought to promote inclusivity, political will, and integration of rebel groups, yet they also failed. These recurring breakdowns highlighted continued weaknesses in mediation processes, motivating the study to investigate IGAD's mediation effectiveness and find ways to strengthen its role in managing South Sudan's conflict.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review to the study aimed at providing a comprehensive overview of existing studies and scholarly works relevant to the mediation as a conflict management tool. This was done by examining various sources, including academic articles, books, and reputable online resources. Through a systematic analysis of the literature, the study used Structural-Functional Theory and Narrative Mediation Theory to establish the foundation upon which the research was built.

## **The IGAD Mediation Processes and Conflict Management**

Mediation has increasingly been acknowledged as an effective conflict-resolution mechanism due to its ability to promote communication, address underlying issues, and preserve relationships between disputing parties. Scholars such as Bercovitch and Houston (2020) describe mediation as a neutral intervention targeted at aiding negotiation and mutually acceptable outcomes, a process often preferred over coercive approaches. Recent global examples, including UN-led negotiations in Yemen (BBC News, 2021) and mediation efforts in the Israel-Palestine conflict (Al Jazeera, 2022), highlight its importance. However, the field faces continuous challenges, such as the weak enforceability of mediated agreements and the complexity introduced by power asymmetries and cultural differences (Carnevale & Choi, 2020; Richmond & Pogodda, 2022). To improve mediation outcomes, scholars suggest for stronger mediator skills, greater inclusivity and transparency, and integration with enforcing mechanisms like arbitration and transitional justice (De Waal & Ibreck, 2023; Zanker & de Vries, 2020).

In the conflict of South Sudan, scholars emphasize that mediation processes must be inclusive, locally grounded, and sensitive to the country's socio-political complexities. Exclusionary practices have continually resulted in fragile agreements that lacks community legitimacy (Nduwimana & Murithi, 2021), while inclusive dialogue platforms are deemed essential for long-term peace (Tadesse, 2020). Past peace failures have been attributed to the exclusion of grassroots actors whose involvement is key for understanding community dynamics and sustaining ceasefires (Okello & Mbutu, 2022). Regional engagement by IGAD remains critical, with neighbouring states playing a major role in facilitating mediation (Kamau, 2020). Scholars also stress the importance of addressing economic drivers of conflict to support sustainable peace (Ali, 2017) and integrating gender perspectives to ensure that women's voices shape durable mediation outcomes (Chuol, 2021).

### **Key Mediation Processes Used by Regional Organizations in Managing Conflicts**

Globally mediation processes have been used to manage conflicts through diverse set of strategies implemented by regional and international organizations. These approaches included shuttle diplomacy, where mediators facilitated indirect communication between conflicting parties, as seen in UN-led efforts in the Middle East (UN, 2020). Track II diplomacy as was used by the AU in the Sudanese peace process. This supported informal dialogue through civil society engagement to complement official negotiations (AU, 2019). Peacekeeping missions, supported by organizations such as the EU in the Balkans, also played a key role by providing security and creating a conducive environment for dialogue (EU, 2021). In addition, structured peace processes overseen by OAS in Colombia offered phased strategies involving ceasefires, disarmament, and agreement implementation (OAS, 2018). Confidence-building measures, utilized by ASEAN in the South China Sea disputes, and multi-track diplomacy, applied by the OSCE in Ukraine, further

led to promoting trust and inclusive engagement among various stakeholders (ASEAN, 2017; OSCE, 2020).

In the East African region, IGAD emphasized the significance of regional cooperation and an integrated approach to conflict management. It acknowledged the interconnected nature of regional conflicts and championed a combination of strategies like mediation, diplomatic negotiations, peacekeeping, and capacity-building. IGAD's approach ensured inclusive dialogue involving all relevant actors and stated the need for long-term solutions addressing both immediate triggers and underlying root causes. While mediation processes have yielded notable successes, the emotional dimensions of conflicts of local leaders and grassroots communities remain insufficiently studied. This gap calls for an urgent need for research focusing on the emotional dynamics that shape mediation outcomes and community-level peacebuilding.

### **Effectiveness of Mediation Process in Managing Conflicts**

Regional organizations have played a key role in conflict mediation by prioritizing dialogue, neutrality, cultural sensitivity, inclusivity, and adaptability. Scholars largely agree that effective mediation is anchored on trust-building, open communication, active listening, and collaborative problem-solving rather than coercive approaches (Bercovitch & Gartner, 2021, Kim & Emery, 2021). However, IGAD's mediation efforts in South Sudan have been pointed to be elite-driven, top-down approaches that sidelined civil society, women, and grassroots actors, thereby undermining legitimacy and sustainability (Mahmoud & Rolandsen, 2020). Perceived mediator partiality, limited cultural sensitivity and rigid reliance on standardized frameworks such as power-sharing agreements, further limited effectiveness (Gonzalez, 2020; Lanz et al., 2020; Perez & Garcia, 2019). In contrast, organizations such as ASEAN, ECOWAS, the UN, and the OAS demonstrated the value of early context-sensitive engagement, mediator neutrality and capacity building, in enhancing long-term conflict management outcomes (ASEAN, 2018, Johnson & Thomas, 2019 Baker & Wilson, 2021).

The literature also shows that sustainable mediation outcomes rely on enforceability, accountability, and post-agreement mechanisms to monitor compliance and address disputes (Taylor & Garcia, 2020). The OAS exemplifies this approach by integrating monitoring and accountability frameworks that strengthen adherence to agreements and prevent relapse into conflict. Therefore, IGAD can enhance its mediation effectiveness in South Sudan by drawing applicable facts from these experiences through adopting inclusive, culturally sensitive, and flexible strategies that empower stakeholders and address structural inequalities and power imbalances (African Union, 2018; Brown & Miller, 2021). Nonetheless, inclusive mediation encounters challenges such as complex stakeholder dynamics, resource constraints, and implementation gaps. Addressing these limitations requires sustained engagement, sufficient resources, and deliberate strategies to bridge the gap between negotiated agreements and effective implementation, ensuring durable peace outcomes.



## Measures for Enhancing Mediation Process and Conflict Resolution

Promoting mediation processes is key to effective conflict management, more so in Africa where complex and protracted conflicts persist. Globally, various measures have been adopted to improve mediation outcomes, foremost among them cultural sensitivity, inclusive participation, and capacity building. Inclusive participation ensures that all relevant stakeholders are involved, as witnessed in initiatives such as the African Union's Panel of the Wise, although practical challenges such as power imbalances and efficiency remain (African Union, 2019). Similarly, culturally sensitive mediation approaches are critical in contexts where conflicts are deeply embedded in local traditions and norms, requiring mediators to have a strong understanding of indigenous customs and social dynamics (Galappatti, 2018). Capacity building further supports mediation effectiveness through sustained training and resource support, with institutions like the United Nations Mediation Support Unit playing a major role in facilitating mediator competencies (United Nations, 2020).

Additionally, adaptive strategies, integration of technology, and peacebuilding frameworks has further enhanced contemporary mediation processes. Technological tools, such as online mediation platforms, have bettered communication and access to mediation services despite challenges related to digital infrastructure and security in resource-limited settings (Virtual Mediation Lab, 2020). Adaptive approaches permit mediators to respond flexibly to changing conflict dynamics, emphasizing continuous learning and contextual responsiveness (Svensson & Tallberg, 2019). Moreover, aligning mediation with wider peacebuilding and development initiatives, as reflected in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, reinforces the sustainability of peace by addressing root causes of conflict, promoting inclusive governance, and strengthening social cohesion (United Nations, 2015).

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

#### Structural-Functional Theory

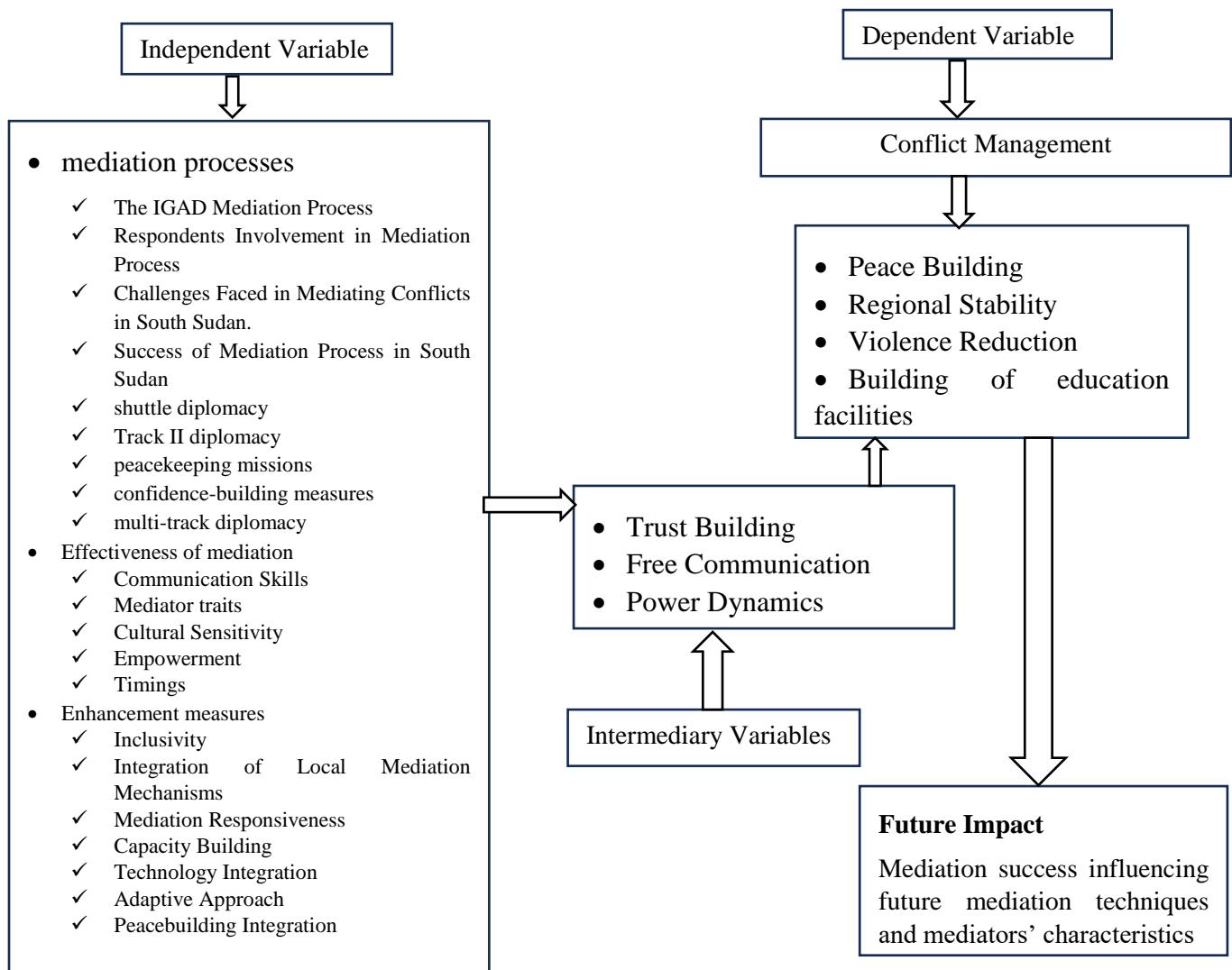
Structural-Functional Theory was pioneered by Émile Durkheim. It views society as an interconnected system whose institutions work together to maintain order, stability, and social cohesion (Durkheim, 1893/2014; Parsons, 1951). Applied to conflict management, the theory emphasizes norms, shared values, and consensus as mechanisms through which mediation can maintain social balance and cohesion, aligning with IGAD's role in promoting peace processes in South Sudan to ensure political stability and societal harmony. However, structural-functionalism has been victimized for prioritizing the status quo and underemphasizing power relations, inequality, and structural injustices (Merton, 1968), suggesting its limitations in addressing root causes of the South Sudan conflict such as ethnic divisions, governance failures, and power imbalances. Despite these limitations, the theory remains valuable in this study as a framework for understanding mediation as a stabilizing force in contexts of recurring instability.

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### **Narrative Mediation Theory**

Narrative Mediation Theory was developed in the 1990s by Monk and Winslade. It was grounded in the narrative therapy work of White and Epston which explains that conflict arise from competing narratives through which individuals or groups interpret their experiences (Winslade & Monk, 2000). The theory emphasizes on storytelling and the deconstruction of dominant narratives to expose underlying assumptions and power relations. Through this, parties will be enabled to develop alternative narratives and re-author shared meanings that support reconciliation. Through processes such as re-authoring and action planning, narrative mediation translates transformed stories into practical steps for conflict resolution. This approach is particularly relevant to the South Sudan conflict, where ethnic and political divisions are reinforced by entrenched historical narratives, and it offers a more inclusive and transformative framework than Structural-Functionalism by addressing issues of power imbalance and promoting sustainable peace within IGAD-mediated processes (Winslade & Monk, 2000).

## 2.2 Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

**Source: Researcher, (2024)**

## 2.3 Research Gaps

From the literature reviewed, it is crystal clear that while extensive studies have been conducted on mediation as a conflict management tool, there remain gaps in understanding its application in the South Sudan conflict under IGAD. Much of the existing scholarship stresses the general processes, challenges, and effectiveness of mediation but pays a deaf ear to the role of inclusivity of grassroots actors, communication approaches, and integration of local cultural dynamics in shaping mediation outcomes. Equally, the long-term sustainability of mediated agreements has not



been adequately explored, with studies focusing on immediate results rather than post-agreement implementation. Furthermore, little research has been examined on how Structural-Functional and Narrative Mediation perspectives can be jointly applied to explain the dynamics of IGAD's mediation in South Sudan. Therefore, this study sought to bridge these gaps by analyzing IGAD's mediation processes in South Sudan, with particular attention to inclusivity, communication strategies, cultural sensitivity, and sustainability of peace agreements.

### **3.0 MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The study adopted a descriptive research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of mediation as a conflict management tool within the IGAD region, with South Sudan as the case study. South Sudan was selected as the study location due to its history of protracted conflict since independence in 2011, IGAD's central role in mediating peace processes, and the regional implications of its instability. The study targeted a diverse population of actors above 19 years, including government officials, rebel groups, opposition parties, diplomats, civil society organizations, NGOs, religious and traditional leaders, grassroots representatives, and academic experts, estimated at 6 million people according to World Bank (2023). A sample size of 400 respondents was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula, with purposive, stratified, expert, maximum variation, and snowball sampling techniques ensuring representation across key stakeholder groups. Data were collected using questionnaires, interview guides, and document analysis, with instruments pretested on 30 respondents outside the study population to refine clarity and reliability. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and correlation statistics to identify patterns, while qualitative data from interviews and document reviews were thematically coded to extract recurring themes, with triangulation applied to integrate findings. Ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, cultural sensitivity, avoidance of exploitation, and safeguarding participant well-being, ensuring responsible dissemination of findings.

### **4.0 FINDINGS**

The study achieved high response rate, showing the reliability and robustness of the data collected. 250 questionnaires were administered, out of which 241 were successfully completed and returned, representing a 96.4% response rate, while all 150 interview guides were completed, showing a 100% response rate for interviews. These response rates exceeded the 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error recommended in classical statistical estimation theory (Cumming, 2014), marking a strong likelihood that the findings are representative and reproducible. High participation across respondent clusters including government officials, diplomatic actors, rebel groups, opposition parties, civil society organizations, NGOs, community elders, religious leaders, academics, and local community members was attributed to stakeholder interest in mediation outcomes, professional obligations, and trust built through confidentiality assurances. Slight non-

response among civil society organizations, community elders, rebel groups, and local respondents was linked to logistical constraints, mistrust, literacy limitations, or security concerns.

Demographic analysis revealed big gender disparities among respondents. Overall, males constituted 84.4% of participants, while females accounted for 15.6%. Several key stakeholder groups particularly community elders, rebel groups, and religious leaders had no female representation at all. This imbalance reflected deeply entrenched cultural and systemic barriers that sideline women from formal mediation processes. The findings supported prior research showing that male-dominated mediation structures systematically exclude women's voices, often relegating them to symbolic rather than influential roles (O'Reilly et al., 2015; Smith, 2020). Respondents noted that women's exclusion undermines inclusive peacebuilding, despite international frameworks such as UNSCR 1325 advocating for gender inclusion. The study concluded that cultural norms and limited political will continue to constrain meaningful female participation, thereby weakening mediation effectiveness and sustainability (Shepherd, 2015; Robinson, 2020). Age distribution analysis indicated that respondents aged 36–45 years formed the largest group (39.4%) and those aged 46 years and above (26.3%) followed. Youth representation, particularly among those aged 19–25 and 26–35, was low despite South Sudan's predominantly youthful population (United Nations, 2022). Older respondents were found to dominant roles in Track II diplomacy and shuttle diplomacy due to their cultural authority, experience, and professional networks (Zartman & Anstey, 2020). Conversely, younger participants demonstrated potential for adaptability, innovation, and operational engagement but faced structural barriers to inclusion. The findings suggested that mentorship and capacity-building initiatives could bridge generational gaps and enhance the sustainability of mediation efforts (Beardsley et al., 2021).

Educational attainment among respondents also shaped data quality and perspectives. Participants with education below secondary level formed the largest group and contributed valuable indigenous knowledge and experiential insights, consistent with findings on the significance of local knowledge systems in conflict management (Deng & Willems, 2022). Respondents with secondary, college, and university education had higher analytical engagement with mediation frameworks and governance structures. Higher education levels correlated with greater exposure to formal mediation processes, while lower education groups emphasized traditional and community-based mechanisms. This educational difference enriched the study's analysis and enhanced validity by incorporating multiple perspectives, aligning with methodological recommendations on demographic inclusivity in qualitative and quantitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Findings on Objectives of the Study**

This section looked into the IGAD-led mediation processes in managing the South Sudan conflict. More focus was given on the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS, 2015) and the Revitalized ARCSS (R-ARCSS, 2018). The outbreak of civil war in

December 2013 exposed South Sudan to a widespread violence, massive displacement, deepened ethnic divisions, and one of the world's worst humanitarian crises (Motsamai, 2017; Vertin, 2018). Given its regional legitimacy, prior mediation experience in Sudan and Somalia, and support from the African Union (AU) and United Nations, IGAD emerged as the primary mediator.

The IGAD mediation process was complex and faced with challenges. Although IGAD started shuttle diplomacy and appointed three Special Envoys, different national interests among member states undermined cohesion and mediator neutrality. Respondents largely perceived mediators as representing state interests rather than IGAD's collective mandate, compromising impartiality and weakening enforcement of ceasefire agreements. Furthermore, parties were drawn into negotiations without a mutually hurting stalemate, leading to repeated violations of cessation of hostilities agreements and limited commitment to peaceful resolution (Vertin, 2018).

The mediation was planned in four phases. The first focused on halting violence and resolving the issue of detained SPLM leaders, leading to the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities (CoH) and detainees' agreements in January 2014. However, persistent violations slowed progress. The second phase looked into inclusivity by incorporating faith-based organizations, civil society, women, and political parties, though their roles remained contested and largely marginalized. The third phase emphasized on the substantive political and governance issues but stalled due to elite resistance to power-sharing compromises. The fourth phase addressed the IGAD-Plus framework, culminating in the signing of ARCSS in August 2015 and the formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity (Melhe & Ajok, 2018). Despite this, renewed violence necessitated revitalization through the High-Level Revitalization Forum, leading to the R-ARCSS in 2018.

Findings on respondents' involvement indicated limited participation in mediation. Quantitative data indicated that 63% of respondents had no involvement in mediation processes, highlighting a major exclusion. Among those involved, participation was dominated by men (78%), showing persistent gender disparities. Local actors such as religious leaders, community elders, and civil society played crucial grassroots roles, yet many lacked formal mediation training, revealing capacity gaps (Lokuji & Maker, 2022). Most respondents expressed skepticism toward international mediators, favoring locally grounded approaches (Deng & Kuol, 2020).

Major challenges found included lack of political will (85%), ethnic and tribal divisions (75%), external interference (72%), and limited mediator capacity (69%). These obstacles degraded trust, inclusivity, and effective implementation of agreements. Nonetheless, respondents acknowledged notable successes, including the facilitation of peace agreements, reduced large-scale violence, establishment of monitoring mechanisms such as CTSAMVM, and formation of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (IGAD, 2020).

### **Effectiveness of the IGAD Mediation Processes in Managing Conflicts**

This study assessed the effectiveness of IGAD's mediation in the South Sudan conflict with a focus on communication skills, cultural sensitivity, mediator traits, empowerment, and timing.

Data were collected through interviews and questionnaires, exploring perceptions of the conflicting parties regarding the mediation process.

Effective communication was revealed to be essential in mediation for fostering trust, clarity, and willingness to engage. IGAD used shuttle diplomacy, secretariats, and committees to promote dialogue among governments, opposition groups, regional actors, and civil society (Vertin, 2018; Motsamai, 2017). However, top-down approaches, inconsistent communication, and lack of transparency undermined trust and compliance with agreements (IGAD, 2015; International Crisis Group, 2021). Quantitative data showed that 41.7% of respondents rated communication as “moderately effective,” while 30% considered it ineffective, indicating deficiencies in inclusivity, consistency, and grassroots engagement. Mediator traits such as impartiality, neutrality, credibility, and experience were key in building trust. IGAD appointed General Lazaro Sumbeiywo (Kenya), Ambassador Seyoum Mesfin (Ethiopia), and General Mohammed Ahmed Mustafa al-Dabi (Sudan), combining diplomatic and military expertise (Vertin, 2018). Nevertheless, respondents perceived mediators to be aligned with national interests, favoring elites over grassroots participation, which undermined trust and credibility (Apuuli, 2021; Murithi & Mbeki, 2021).

Further, cultural sensitivity was inconsistently applied, particularly regarding gender inclusion and the role of traditional authorities (Melhe & Ajok, 2018; Olonisakin & Okech, 2020). Efforts to include civil society, women, and faith-based actors were seen symbolic, limiting the legitimacy and acceptance of mediation outcomes. Quantitative analysis of mediation strategies revealed that shuttle diplomacy was most effective (72%) due to strong communication and mediator traits, while community negotiation (54%) excelled in empowerment, and inclusive dialogue (45%) remained least effective due to weak implementation. Empowerment of parties was seen to be compromised by external pressures forcing early negotiations, reducing genuine ownership and contributing to repeated agreement violations (Vertin, 2018; Ylönen, 2023). Timing was also a big challenge; mediation began prematurely after the outbreak of conflict in 2013, prior to a military stalemate, resulting in early violations and delayed implementation of the ARCSS in 2015 (Vertin, 2018).

### **Measures for enhancing the IGAD Mediation Processes in Managing the Conflicts in South Sudan**

This study also examined how the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) can improve its mediation effectiveness in South Sudan. It looked onto capacity building, inclusivity, technology integration, adaptive approaches, and integration of peacebuilding mechanisms. Data were collected from 391 respondents through interviews and questionnaires, addressing questions such as how marginalized groups can be better represented, how local mediation mechanisms can be integrated, and how adaptive approaches could enhance responsiveness.

Findings showed that IGAD's mediation processes favored elite political actors while marginalizing IDPs, women, youth, persons with disabilities, and rural communities (Rolandsen, 2018). Respondents called for the need of gender representation, structured forums, decentralized consultations, and legal frameworks to institutionalize inclusion. Quantitative data indicated that 76.2% of participants reported never or rarely accessing capacity-building initiatives, indicating structural inequities in preparatory inclusion. Effective inclusion requires capacity-building for civil society organizations, mediator training in intersectional conflict analysis, and accountability measures.

Stakeholders remarked the potential of integrating local mediation mechanisms, grounded in traditional practices, into formal IGAD processes. Such integration is key for sustainable peace but remains limited due to weak recognition of local actors, top-down approaches, and concerns about mediator impartiality (Maru, 2016; Booth, 2016). Quantitative findings indicated that 52% of respondents rated peacebuilding integration as "Not Effective" or "Slightly Effective," indicating dissatisfaction with current approaches. The study also identified the adaptive approach as a crucial strategy to better IGAD's responsiveness to South Sudan's dynamic conflict environment. Adaptive mediation emphasizes real-time monitoring, iterative learning, and context-specific interventions, allowing mediators to respond to evolving political and localized conflict dynamics (Coning, 2018; Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Digital platforms and technology integration were largely supported by respondents (55.6% strongly supporting), offering tools for conflict mapping, communication, and inclusive participation. Adaptive strategies strengthen legitimacy, empower local actors, and enable IGAD to align high-level negotiations with grassroots realities (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013; Windt & Voors, 2020).

## 5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

Mediation process in the management of the South Sudan conflicts, IGAD was seen at the forefront of mediation efforts that led to major peace agreements like the ARCSS (2015) and R-ARCSS (2018), showing notable success. The major challenges included ethnic divisions, lack of political will, and external interference. Therefore, for long-term peace, more inclusive and culturally grounded strategies are needed.

The effectiveness of the IGAD mediation processes in managing conflicts in South Sudan was seen to be hindered by weak communication, perceived biased mediator traits, lack of cultural sensitivity, and poor timing. Despite shuttle diplomacy showing some success, the exclusion of some rebel group leaders and perceived partiality reduced legitimacy and trust in the process. Future efforts should focus on inclusive participation, neutrality, and culturally aware mediation practices. To enhance IGAD mediation processes in managing the conflicts in South Sudan, IGAD's mediation processes should facilitate capacity building initiatives, inclusive participation of marginalized groups, and decentralization of peace efforts. Also integrating traditional conflict



management mechanisms and adopting adaptive technology supported approaches will ensure more relevant and responsive mediation strategies that align with South Sudan's local realities.

## 5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study recommends that:

1. **Enhance Inclusivity and Local Participation Mechanisms.** The study revealed that 63% of respondents were not involved in mediation processes, especially grassroots actors. Therefore, the mediation process can be improved through developing structured platforms for women, youth groups, civil society organizations, and traditional leaders, in order to participate in every phase of the mediation process—from agenda-setting to implementation monitoring. Creating regional community peace councils supported by IGAD to ensure local voices are integrated and empowered.
2. **Strengthen neutrality and impartiality of mediators.** The study showed that mediators' impartiality was compromised because of national allegiances, leading to perceptions of bias and undermining trust among opposition stakeholders. Therefore, the effectiveness of IGAD mediation can be improved by, having a vetting and selection process, providing mandatory training on impartial mediation ethics and creating an independent monitoring body
3. **To enhance mediation process, IGAD should consider having an adaptive mediation framework that is technology enabled by, developing a digital mediation dashboard for stakeholder input, conflict tracking, and feedback in real time.** Launching an inclusive digital platform (SMS apps or radio-linked apps) to collect local perspectives, especially from hard-to-reach communities.

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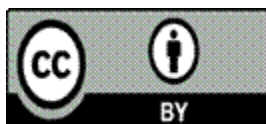
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