



USAID/Nick Acosta

# Democracy and Governance

## A DECADES-LONG PARTNERSHIP: USAID AND THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH SUDAN

The partnership between the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the people of South Sudan goes back decades. U.S. engagement in South Sudan began decades before the country’s independence and remains based on values including peace, human rights, democracy, and a people’s right to a government that uses public revenue transparently to meet public needs. Some 50 years after USAID established its presence in what was then southern Sudan, the United States remains the leading international donor to the people of South Sudan. This includes assistance to civil society, to promote peace, advance human rights, aid victims of violence including sexual and gender-based violence, and build sustainable independent media.

## DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE IN SOUTH SUDAN

South Sudan’s Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGoNU) has not fulfilled its commitments outlined in the 2018 Revitalized Peace Agreement. Twelve years after independence, South Sudan still lacks the constitutional framework, democratic institutions, or open civic space needed to build accountable governance structures and complete the transitional period with free, fair, and peaceful elections proposed in late 2024. Misuse of public funds, corruption, and human rights violations—including against women and girls, journalists, and activists—restrict civic space and democratic progress.

USAID strengthens civil society, promotes peace, and creates the foundation for sustainable, independent media to achieve a more democratic and self-reliant South Sudan.

## **STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY AND BUILDING LASTING PEACE**

Years of war, political and social turmoil, and recurring waves of national and subnational violence have decimated South Sudanese civil society. USAID focuses on rebuilding communities suffering from conflict by forging trust between people from different communities and ethnic groups and laying the foundation for peace. Shejeh Salam, which means “promoting peace” in South Sudan’s Juba Arabic vernacular, is USAID’s flagship peacebuilding and civil society strengthening program in South Sudan. The program supports and promotes locally led peace initiatives and brings together communities marred by conflict in “peace committees” where they work together to resolve conflict and establish viable paths forward. The program builds on USAID’s long history of promoting peace across South Sudan’s diverse communities and ethnic groups and precedes the country’s independence.

## **ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS**

The people of South Sudan have endured years of gross human rights violations. Indiscriminate attacks on civilians, extrajudicial killings, recruitment of children into armed forces, and widespread violence against women and girls have defined South Sudan’s brief history. The civil war that erupted in 2013 was characterized by the targeting of civilians based on ethnicity, as well as widespread, grotesque conflict-related sexual violence—human rights violations that continue today without accountability. A resurgence of intense conflict in Juba and other parts of the country in 2016 exposed thousands of civilians to additional indiscriminate ethnically-motivated violence and trauma. The people of South Sudan have yet to see the human rights protections, basic services, and resources they expected at independence. In the absence of minimal human rights protections, USAID promotes trauma awareness, reconciliation, and transitional justice, working through local civil society organizations such as the Transitional Justice Working Group to establish survivor groups that bring atrocity survivors together with indigenous chiefs, youth and women’s organizations, and local authorities to share and process their traumatic experiences.

## **BUILDING SUSTAINABLE AND INDEPENDENT MEDIA**

South Sudan has among the lowest literacy rates in the world and less than 7 percent internet penetration. Reaching 95 percent of the population across this diverse and remote country, radio is the most influential communications tool. Yet, the journalists promoting free and open communications through some 2,500 bomas—the country’s lowest-level administrative units which typically include several villages—are often muzzled by government-imposed censorship and threats, contributing to a culture of fear and self-censorship. USAID funds a network of radio stations that broadcasts programs in 11 languages, reaching millions of South Sudanese across the country with accurate and reliable information related to peace, politics, economics, and health. Our support is helping communities come together in safe spaces to debate and share ideas. USAID funds equipment to put radio stations on the air, trains journalists to conduct appropriate research and tell compelling and accurate stories. Radio messaging amplifies community-led peacebuilding and prevention of

gender-based violence initiatives. In August 2023, USAID joined community leaders in Leer County to commemorate the first radio broadcast since 2016 of Leer FM, the only radio station available to more than 77,000 residents, since conflict forced the station to close. To reach other rural communities, USAID has provided thousands of solar-powered radios to more than three million South Sudanese since 2010.