

## **The effect of foundational state design processes, transitional political processes & election support on diplomatic relations & peaceful dispute resolution**

Effect: No effect (While decentralisation as a policy was partly successful in Ghana, it was met with several limitations in Sudan, the state design processes in terms of the military junta and its illiberal state policies have been unsuccessful in Myanmar towards achieving the outcome)

Confidence in study findings: Low (three studies, low confidence)

### **Short summary**

State design processes are examined through the complex interaction between formal and informal rules in governing countries with dual governance systems, ie, decentralization, specifically focusing on Ghana and South Sudan by Aikins and Kwori. Both studies highlight how the legacy of colonialism, with its imposition of formal structures upon existing traditional systems, has created a situation where formal and informal rules often operate in parallel, leading to conflicts and challenges in implementing effective governance and conflict resolution mechanisms. The study on Ghana explores this dynamic through the lenses of chieftaincy succession and traditional land management, finding that while the formal government institutions are not directly involved in the selection of chiefs or land allocation, their actions and interference can significantly impact the informal processes, leading to distortions and disputes. Kwori's study on decentralization in Juba County, South Sudan, reveals a mixed picture of its impact on ethnic conflict resolution. The study focuses on decentralization as a strategy for resolving ethnic conflicts but states its limitations in a context where formal decentralization efforts have not been fully implemented and are often undermined by the continued influence of informal power structures and practices. The study uncovers factors hindering decentralization's effectiveness in achieving distributive justice and resolving conflicts.

The state processes and governance structures in the study on Myanmar, on the other hand, refer to the military regime approach to peacebuilding, characterising it as "illiberal" due to its focus on state security and control through coercion and clientelist concessions, rather than addressing core issues of democracy, human rights, and federalism. This illiberal peacebuilding, while achieving some degree of conflict containment, ultimately fails to resolve the underlying political and ethnic tensions, leading to a cycle of ceasefires and renewed hostilities

### **Long summary**

#### *The intervention*

The interventions discussed aim to create governance structures that facilitate peaceful dispute resolution, which can be seen as a foundation for stable diplomatic relations. In Ghana, the proposed interventions for resolving chieftaincy and land disputes, such as documentation, independent mediation, and law enforcement, aim to build trust and transparency between traditional authorities and the state (Aikins, p.344-346). This, in turn, could contribute to a more stable and cooperative environment for diplomacy by reducing the potential for conflict escalation. In South Sudan, the call for a fully devolved system of governance with strong accountability mechanisms seeks to address the root causes of ethnic conflict by promoting distributive justice and equitable access to resources (Kwori,p.3,10). This approach could foster a more inclusive and participatory political

landscape, potentially leading to improved inter-group relations and a conducive environment for diplomacy. In Myanmar, the military junta resorts to a range of illiberal peacebuilding strategies aimed at consolidating its power and suppressing dissent, thus centralising governance and power.

#### *How is the intervention expected to work*

The interventions focus on addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting more just and equitable governance structures. By mitigating the underlying tensions and grievances that often fuel conflict, these interventions aim to create a more stable and cooperative environment conducive to peaceful interactions both domestically and internationally.

For instance, in Ghana, the measures for resolving chieftaincy and land disputes aim to establish clear procedures, enhance transparency, and foster greater trust between traditional authorities and the state which is undermined by a high level of government interference (p.iii). Resolving these long-standing disputes could reduce the potential for violence and instability, contributing to a more harmonious domestic political landscape. This internal stability and cooperation could, in turn, create a more favourable environment for diplomatic engagement with other countries as it reduces the risk of internal conflicts spilling over into regional or international affairs (p.92).

Similarly, in South Sudan, the emphasis on fully devolved governance with robust accountability mechanisms seeks to address the underlying causes of ethnic conflict, such as unequal access to resources and political power (p.3). By promoting distributive justice and ensuring that all groups feel represented and included in the political process, this intervention could contribute to a more stable and peaceful society. A more inclusive and equitable society is likely to be less prone to internal conflict and better equipped to engage in constructive diplomatic relations with its neighbours (p.5) Furthermore, by establishing a framework for peaceful dispute resolution within South Sudan, the intervention could create a model for addressing regional conflicts and promoting cooperation among neighbouring countries (p.10)

In Myanmar, the intervention, characterised as illiberal peacebuilding prioritises state security and control through a combination of military force and economic incentives designed to co-opt ethnic armed organisations (p.3). However, this approach fails to address the root causes of the conflicts, such as the demand for federalism and greater ethnic autonomy (p.9). It is argued that this strategy will likely result in a cycle of ceasefires and renewed hostilities as underlying grievances remain unaddressed (Smith 2018, Lintner, 2020 in Stokke, p.5) This continued instability and the military junta's prioritisation of control over genuine dialogue is unlikely to foster trust or create a conducive environment for meaningful diplomatic relations with other countries or peaceful resolution of internal conflicts (p.13).

#### *The evidence base*

There are three qualitative studies reporting on the effects of **Foundational state design processes, Transitional political processes & Election support on Diplomatic relations & Peaceful dispute resolution**. These studies are Aikins, K. S. (2011). *Can local governments be effective? Case studies of post-Independence Ghana (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas)*; and Kwori, M. W. (2022). *Effects of decentralization on ethnic conflict resolution in South Sudan: A case study of Juba county. Social Sciences & Humanities Open, 6(1), 100369.*; and Stokke, K., Kham, K. K. M., Nge, N. K., & Kvanvik, S. H. (2022). *Illiberal peacebuilding in a hybrid regime. Authoritarian strategies for conflict containment in Myanmar. Political Geography, 93, 102551. Liberal peace transitions: between state-building and peacebuilding. Edinburgh University Press.* All references are from these three studies.

#### *The evidence*

The evidence focuses on the interaction of formal and informal governance structures and their impact on conflict resolution but does not explicitly discuss diplomatic relations in this context

- 1) Kwori's study on decentralization in South Sudan, reveals a mixed picture of its impact on ethnic dispute resolution. While decentralization has increased local responsiveness and citizen participation, its implementation has been hindered by various factors. Limited local autonomy due to external forces, impunity of powerful individuals, and a lack of distributive justice have constrained local government's ability to address conflicts effectively. Weak institutional capacity at the local level exacerbates these challenges. Although decentralization has fostered inter-ethnic cooperation to a limited extent, achieving its full potential requires complete devolution of power, robust accountability systems, and a strong commitment to distributive justice
- 2) Myanmar's transitional political processes have been largely orchestrated by the military to maintain its dominance. The 2008 Constitution, a cornerstone of this strategy, establishes a facade of democracy while preserving military control. Election support, often limited to technical aspects, has raised concerns about fairness and credibility. The military's reluctance to address the root causes of ethnic conflicts and its obstruction of meaningful political reforms have hindered progress towards a lasting and inclusive peace. The peace initiatives under military leadership have been primarily focused on containing armed groups and maintaining the status quo, rather than on achieving a just and sustainable peace. This approach has resulted in a prolonged state of "no war, no peace," with limited prospects for genuine conflict resolution (p.1)

#### *Confidence assessment*

Overall confidence: Low Confidence Qualitative Study (It is unclear whether the study uses an established small n approach; theoretical framework is not presented; the procedural steps for data analysis is not clearly defined; no triangulation done; no explanation and justification for sample/case selection strategy is provided; sources of potential data bias is not addressed)