



RSRTF Thematic Grants Window: Evaluation Report

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Contents

Acknowledgements	i
INTRODUCTION	1
1 METHODOLOGY	1
1.1 Evaluation Methods	1
1.2 Limitations	2
2 OVERVIEW OF THE THEMATIC GRANTS WINDOW	3
3 FINDINGS	5
3.1 Evaluation of the Thematic Grants Window as a Funding Instrument.....	5
Relevance: Country Context and Existing ABPs	5
Coherence: Contribution to RSRTF Goals	7
Coherence: Is the RSRTF the right vehicle to fund these initiatives?	8
The Way Forward.....	9
3.2 Evaluation of the Thematic Grants Window Projects.....	10
Relevance.....	10
Coherence	12
Effectiveness.....	14
Efficiency.....	19
Impact	21
Sustainability	24
4 RECOMMENDATIONS	26
Annex I – Key Action Points.....	29
Annex II – Main Evaluation Questions	30
Annex III – Request for Proposals – RSRTF Thematic Grant Funding Evaluation	32
Annex IV – List of Documents Reviewed	42

INTRODUCTION

This report presents findings and recommendations from an evaluation of the Thematic Grants Window (TGW) of the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Resilience, Stabilization and Reconciliation (RSRTF) in South Sudan. The evaluation covered the TGW as a funding instrument as well as two of the three TGW projects funded to date – the *Empowering the Grassroots: Linking the National and Subnational Processes* project implemented by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Civil Affairs Division (CAD) between 1 January 2020 and 30 June 2022 and the *Targeted support to Peace Implementation: Enhancing Political and Civic Space* project implemented by the UNMISS Political Affairs Division (PAD) between 31 March 2020 and 31 August 2022.¹

The main goals of the evaluation are (1) to assess the relevance of the TGW, particularly as it relates to the RSRTF’s focus on funding comprehensive Area-Based Programmes (ABPs), and (2) to make recommendations as to any potential future applications of the TGW. As such, the evaluation covers both the two TGW projects as well as the RSRTF’s overall approach to thematic funding.² This report is structured in four sections. After a brief explanation of the evaluation methodology and limitations, Section Two provides an overview of the TGW and the two projects that are covered in the evaluation. Section Three assesses the relevance and coherence of the TGW as a funding instrument and evaluates the two TGW projects against the six OECD-DAC criteria. The last section provides a series of recommendations for the RSRTF and its implementing partners to consider for any future use of the TGW.

1 METHODOLOGY

1.1 Evaluation Methods

The evaluation was structured around six evaluation criteria developed by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD-DAC): relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.³ The evaluation of the two TGW projects covered all six criteria whereas the evaluation of the TGW as a funding instrument focused on the first two.

¹ The third TGW project, *Promoting Peace and Solidarity in the Face of COVID-19 in Juba, Bentiu and Wau* sought to enhance citizen participation in COVID-19 related governance processes. The evaluation did not cover this project because the RSRTF has already decided that it will not support similar projects in the future.

² The specific objectives of the evaluation are to: (1) assess (i) to what extent the RSRTF’s approach to thematic funding has been relevant to the country context and the Fund’s existing ABPs, (ii) to what extent the chosen approach has helped the Fund achieve its goals, and (iii) whether the RSRTF is the right vehicle to support initiatives such as the CAD and PAD-led actions in South Sudan; (2) evaluate the impact and performance of the CAD and PAD thematic grant projects using the OECD-DAC criteria, including by assessing the extent to which the projects have achieved their intended outcomes and contributed to the Fund’s goals; (3) investigate the funding landscape for comparable programming in South Sudan in order to evaluate the relevance of RSRTF’s TGW in a comprehensive manner; (4) make recommendations on how similar thematic grants should be monitored and evaluated; (5) capture lessons, particularly on implementation challenges, innovation, and ‘good practice’ emerging from the projects; and (6) provide targeted and actionable recommendations that will help enhance implementing partners’ programme delivery and improve the Fund’s approach to thematic funding. See RSRTF, *Request for Proposals: RSRTF Thematic Grant Funding Evaluation* (Feb. 2022), available at https://procurement-notices.undp.org/view_notice.cfm?notice_id=88388.

³ See OECD website, Evaluation Criteria, available at <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>.

The evaluation began with an inception phase in which the evaluation team refined the evaluation questions and developed an inception report and evaluation matrix in consultation with members of the RSRTF Secretariat and UNMISS PAD and CAD staff who were involved with the two projects.⁴ Two members of the evaluation team then traveled to Wau to speak with implementing partners and project participants involved with the two TGW projects while the third team member attended an RSRTF learning event in Juba, where he was able to interview several key informants. Additional interviews, both in-person and virtual, were conducted over Zoom with key informants in Juba and elsewhere around the world.

The evaluation team employed a mixed methods approach that included a document review, key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and a field visit to Wau, Western Bahr-el-Ghazal State.⁵ The team spoke to a total of 63 people over the course of this evaluation, including 47 men and 16 women, over a 11-week period between May and July 2022.⁶ Fifty people participated in KIIs which typically lasted for 45 to 60 minutes. Key informants included members of the RSRTF Steering Committee (SC), Fund Secretariat, donors, implementing partners, and project participants, as well as individuals not directly involved with Fund activities, including bilateral donors and representatives of national and international non-governmental organizations. Three FGDs involving 13 participants were held in Wau with members of political parties, civil society organizations (CSOs) and participants in the grassroots forums that brought participants from the 10 states and three administrative areas to Juba for several days of discussion on their role in the peace process.

Table 1: Overview of Sample

Location	KIIs		FGDs		Total	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
National	8	19	0	0	8	19
Wau	5	18	3	10	8	28
Total	13	37	3	10	16	47
	50		13		63	

Data was analyzed using qualitative data analysis software to organize the KII and FGD transcripts around key themes.⁷ Whenever possible, findings were triangulated from multiple sources to ensure their validity.

1.2 Limitations

⁴ The evaluation team was comprised of three individuals each of whom has had extensive field experience in South Sudan. The team’s expertise covers human rights, rule of law, gender, peacebuilding, political analysis, everyday security, and the HDP Nexus, among other areas.

⁵ The KIIs and FGDs employed question guides that were developed during the inception phase of the evaluation.

⁶ The sample was 25 percent female and thus fell short of the target of at least 33 percent female. This may be attributed in part to the difficulty that the evaluation team had in connecting with several female key informants in Juba and the cancellation of a fourth FGD with women in Wau due to an insufficient number of participants.

⁷ Members of the evaluation team used Dedoose and NVivo software to conduct the analysis.

Several limitations apply to this evaluation. First, due to the relatively low visibility of the TGW projects as compared to the ABPs, a considerable number of key informants did not have fully formed opinions about the two projects or the funding stream as a whole. This limitation was exacerbated by turnover in the Steering Committee and the fact that the Secretariat was only partially staffed when the TGW projects were conceived, which meant that several individuals that were involved in the decision-making that led to the creation of the TGW were not available to participate in the evaluation. The relatively low levels of awareness about the TGW meant that the evaluation team had to rely more heavily on the views of implementing partners and project participants who benefited from the projects and may therefore be less likely to apply a critical lens to them.

Second, in many instances, key informants and focus group participants found it difficult to distinguish between activities that were conducted as part of the two TGW projects and the regular programming that UNMISS CAD and PAD implement through their assessed budgets. Using a combination of probing questions and their background knowledge of other ongoing activities in project locations, the evaluation team was able to distinguish between TGW activities and CAD and PAD's other programs. But the fact that there is so much overlap speaks to some of the structural questions that arise in circumstances where peacekeeping missions receive extra-budgetary allocations from external sources (see Section 3.1 for a more detailed discussion of this issue).

Third, the results frameworks for the two projects were output-based and did not include outcome indicators specifying the changes that they expected to see in terms of civic and political space, the relationship among and within political parties, and the integrity of the peace process. This complicated efforts to assess the projects' effectiveness (i.e., extent to which the projects achieved their stated objectives) and impacts. A survey that the Community Empowerment for Progress Organization (CEPO) conducted to assess people's views on the grassroots forums and governors' forums provides a useful point of reference, and the evaluation team was able to document anecdotal evidence of impacts, but it was difficult to empirically determine causal connections between any changes in project locations and the associated project activities, as well as the contribution that project activities made relative to other activities or contextual factors that were present at the same time.

2 OVERVIEW OF THE THEMATIC GRANTS WINDOW

Since UNMISS and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) launched the RSRTF in December 2018, the Fund has steadily grown and matured. By January 2022, the Fund had allocated a total of \$44.2 million to projects under its ABPs and TGW. Most of these funds are channeled towards the ABPs. The RSRTF currently has ABPs in: (1) Southern Central Equatoria State (2) Jonglei and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA), (3) Koch County in Unity State, and (4) the border areas of Western Bahr-el-Ghazal and Warrap States (this programme ended on 30 April 2022). In March 2022, the Fund issued a Call for Proposals (CFP) for a fifth ABP in Greater Tonj.⁸

The RSRTF initiated the TGW (initially termed the Small Grants Window) in January 2020 as a mechanism for “nimble application of funding within a shorter implementation timeframe to react to windows of opportunity and deliver quick impact, as well as to strengthen existing

⁸ Proposals for the Tonj ABP are currently in the selection process.

ABPs through allocation of funds addressing thematic gaps and priorities.”⁹ After the establishment of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGONU) in February 2020, the RSRTF reframed the Small Grants Window as a ‘Peace and Governance Thematic Grants Window’ that more explicitly targeted the national peace process. The objective of the Peace and Governance TGW was to “foster a conducive peacebuilding environment more broadly in South Sudan through engagement on political and policy processes that support implementation of the national peace process, as the ultimate precondition for peace and stability.”¹⁰

In addition to an assessment of the TGW in relation to the overall framework of the RSRTF, this evaluation covers two of the three projects that have been implemented under the TGW, namely:

- *Empowering the Grassroots: Linking the National and Subnational Processes*, UNMISS Civil Affairs Division (CAD) – The project ran from 1 January 2020 to 30 June 2022 with a total budget of USD 629,802. Its main aims were “to empower grassroots stakeholders and opinion leaders across South Sudan and broaden their space for engagement by providing a platform to enhance grassroots participation in national peace implementation, bridge subnational and national processes, facilitate dialogue between local constituencies and their national leaders, and influence national policy on sustainable peace themes.”
- *Targeted support to Peace Implementation: Enhancing Political and Civic Space*, UNMISS Political Affairs Division (PAD) – The project ran from 31 March 2020 to 31 August 2022 with a planned budget of USD 500,000.¹¹ Its main aim was “to increase political understanding and dialogue amongst a multi-tiered audience in order to increase inclusive civic and political participation in the implementation of the peace agreement and in the political landscape, laying the foundation to support a credible election process during the transitional period.”

The third project – *Promoting Peace and Solidarity in the Face of COVID-19 in Juba, Bentiu and Wau* – sought to respond to the pandemic by enhancing citizen participation in COVID-19 related governance processes. The RSRTF has decided that it will not be funding similar projects through the TGW moving forward and as such, the project is not covered in this evaluation.

Based on consultations with partners in a June 2021 cross-learning workshop, findings from an independent early-stage evaluation of the RSRTF completed in October 2021, and a consultation process that the Fund Secretariat undertook with UNMISS and UNCT in the fourth quarter of 2021, the RSRTF is currently reviewing the TGW modality to ensure its relevance to the Fund’s results framework and to its programming across the humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding nexus.¹² In a meeting of the RSRTF Steering Committee in January 2022,

⁹ *RFP – RSRTF Thematic Grant Funding Evaluation* (Feb. 2022).

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Due to an overspending of USD 61,246, the total project amount increased to USD 561,246.

¹² The Secretariat has developed a draft strategy for 2022 that suggests three possible areas of focus for the TGW: (1) Support an enabling environment for peacebuilding; (2) Strengthen existing ABPs through allocation of funds addressing thematic gaps and priorities; and (3) Empower civil society organizations and NNGOs. See RSRTF, Draft 2022 Strategy (on file with the evaluation team). For more context on the HDP nexus, see Jan Pospisil *et al.*, *The HDP Nexus in the Context of Peace Operations in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Deutsche

members expressed differing opinions on what should be done with the TGW moving forward, particularly regarding the RSRTF’s role in relation to national programmes that are detached from the area-based programming approach. The Steering Committee resolved to only use the TGW for gap filling in existing ABPs pending a final determination on how the TGW should be used moving forward.

3 FINDINGS

The first part of the evaluation assesses the Thematic Grants Window as a funding stream, its contribution to the Fund’s overall goals and its coherence with the Fund’s terms of reference (TOR). It seeks to answer three questions, namely:

- (i) To what extent has the RSRTF’s approach to thematic funding been relevant to the country context and to the Fund’s existing ABPs?
- (ii) To what extent the chosen approach has helped the Fund achieve its goals?
- (iii) Is the RSRTF is the right vehicle to support initiatives such as those led by CAD and PAD?

Based on this analysis, the evaluation suggests options for the future development of the TGW. The second part of the evaluation focuses on the two TGW projects and assesses them against the six OECD-DAC criteria.

3.1 Evaluation of the Thematic Grants Window as a Funding Instrument

Key Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The two TGW projects implemented by UNMISS PAD and CAD address the gap between peacebuilding at the local and the national level. The aim of supporting the linkage between local and national-level peacebuilding by a particular funding stream is commendable, but the invested funds and respective dimension of the projects can only have limited impact towards this aim. The funded projects do not fulfill the criteria of the amended RSRTF TORs in that they do not reinforce the impact of area-based programming or have quick impact over the period of 12 months. While the current RSRTF TORs were amended in December 2021 when TGW projects were near completion, it is important to note that similarly designed projects would be inconsistent with the RSRTF TORs moving forward. While there are no other comparable funding mechanisms available for the useful work done in both projects, the RSRTF should nonetheless readjust the TGW along the lines of its current TOR.
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Relevance: Country Context and Existing ABPs

Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution (ASPR) (Jun. 2021), *available at* https://www.aspr.ac.at/fileadmin/Downloads/Publikationen/Publikationen_ab_2015/HDP_Nexus_in_Africa_Study_GIZ_2021.pdf.

The Thematic Grant Window (TGW) was introduced in January 2020 as a direct response to developments in the peace process that led to the formation of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) in February 2020. The Steering Committee (SC) was responding to a recommendation by Sweden to create a funding modality for flexible responses to challenges and opportunities in the peace process and to better link the ongoing RSRTF-funded initiatives at the local level to the national level.¹³

TGW projects are meant to contribute to UNCF Priority Area I that aims to build peace and strengthen governance through “support [to] initiatives that enhance the informed and inclusive nature of continued peace implementation and political processes.”¹⁴ In more general terms, TGW projects are thought to reinforce the peacebuilding pillar of the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding (HDP) nexus and the stabilization and reconciliation pillars of RSRTF’s core framework. The 2021 RSRTF Strategy identified a “growing need for governance programming, connecting peacebuilding efforts at the local, state, and national levels and enhancing civil society’s influence on state and Juba-level governance processes,” to which the TGW-funded projects were meant to contribute.¹⁵

These assessments are generally correct. Indeed, the two projects implemented by PAD and CAD – less so the Covid-19-related project implemented by IOM, which was borne out of specific circumstances at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in mid-2020 – directly answered this need through their work in political spheres. In so doing, both projects worked towards RSRTF’s theory of change, which states that “conducive governance and security conditions, accountability, and the rule of law are reinforced.”¹⁶ The KIIs and FGDs confirm the value of some of the TGW activities, especially the political parties’ forum and the governors’ forums, and their relevance to the transitional needs of South Sudan.

However, the TGW storyline warrants further scrutiny. While the logic of linking the locally and regionally anchored efforts of RSRTF’s ABPs to the national level makes sense in theory, the chosen method of small-scale (about USD 500,000 in volume) and short-term (duration of about 12 months) projects results in structural contradictions. The dimensions of the projects are too small to make a substantial and measurable impact towards the goal of linking the national and subnational levels. Key informants were nearly unanimous in confirming that creating and maintaining such a linkage in a sustainable way requires substantial investment over the long-term. Hence, the scale of the projects is such that they have not been able to meaningfully contribute to the stated goals of the TGW.

This is not to say that the TGW-funded projects have not been useful. To the contrary, in the absence of other actors operating in these more political spaces, the projects have made an admirable effort to fill a gaping hole in the peace process. Rather, the point is to question the rationale of the projects that is over-ambitious and, as elaborated further below, outside the scope of the RSRTF. Instead of trying to link local and national peace processes per se, the RSRTF could add weight to its core approach by using the thematic grants to link specific ABPs to the national level and to exploit opportunities that arise with respect to such linkages.

Several key informants emphasized the opportunity for the RSRTF to build on existing work that PAD and CAD have already done in terms of peacebuilding and governance at the national

¹³ *RSRTF Annual Report (2020)*, p. 17; Interviews in June and July 2022.

¹⁴ *RSRTF Annual Report (2020)*, p. 17.

¹⁵ *RSRTF Strategy Document (2021)*, p. 5.

¹⁶ *RSRTF Terms of Reference [updated]* (1 Dec. 2021), p. 7.

and local levels. Whereas the TGW projects certainly capitalized on this opportunity, the approach also contradicted the initial idea of the TGW being a nimble, quick-impact instrument. Both TGW projects built on previous CAD and PAD initiatives, and among the reasons key informants put forward for continued funding was the sustainability of their efforts. Such an approach makes sense considering the mandates of PAD and CAD and the major peacebuilding challenges in South Sudan, but it is not nimble and or designed to achieve quick impacts. The usefulness of the two TGW projects in the context of South Sudan's transition notwithstanding, they at best are only partly within the initial design of the TGW.

Coherence: Contribution to RSRTF Goals

The TGW is framed to contribute to RSRTF Outcome 4 of accountable, transparent, and responsive governance. As a 2020 RSRTF strategy document states: "In this context the Fund [Steering Committee] has proposed the timely utilization of the RSRTF to support small scale targeted efforts that support peace implementation in the short and immediate term, while also promoting long-term conditions for sustainable peace."¹⁷ In the Fund's TOR, the TGW is seen as an instrument that is at the very least indirectly related to the area-based approach, and which is explicitly meant to reinforce the ABP modality.¹⁸

As highlighted above, these two goals, in the way they are currently framed, are slightly contradictory. Either the TGW funds projects that indeed focus on reinforcing the ABP modality by targeted efforts linking them to processes at the national level, or the TGW supports wider-ranging initiatives that link local and national-level peace- and state-building processes; projects cannot easily pursue both goals at once. Currently, in terms of duration and funding amounts, the TGW projects are fit-for-purpose with respect to the first option of reinforcing ABPs, while in practice they are working towards the second option of linking national and subnational processes. But to be credible, interventions that seek to link national and subnational processes would need substantially more funding and a long-term perspective to remain relevant and effective. A key informant expressed some skepticism about this contradiction:

"The Thematic Grants Window doesn't sit very well with area-based programming. At the time of the formation of transitional government, some donors wanted to support the momentum and wanted to use RSRTF to that aim. There was no strategic decision-making, but rather circumstances at that time that resulted in this funding window."¹⁹

In terms of its contribution to the goals of the RSRTF, the TGW holds two slightly incoherent ambitions. If the RSRTF is to be a broad triple nexus flagship initiative that contributes to peacebuilding efforts in its own right, a legitimate view that is accepted by many Steering Committee members, then the current approach taken by the TGW is justified in that it clearly fits within the peacebuilding pillar of the HDP nexus. However, if the RSRTF is interpreted more narrowly as an instrument that approaches the HDP nexus challenge through area-based programming and seeks to implement comprehensive interventions in the most challenging environments, then the approach that the RSRTF has taken in the first generation of TGW projects is outside of the Fund's scope.

¹⁷ RSRTF Strategy Document (2020), p. 3.

¹⁸ RSRTF Terms of Reference [updated] (1 Dec. 2021), p. 16.

¹⁹ Interview, June 2022.

Both viewpoints are expressed in the Fund’s governance documents and have been reflected in the interviews and focus group discussions conducted as part of this evaluation. The RSRTF must therefore clarify its scope and decide where the TGW fits within its approach. In making such a decision, the RSRTF should acknowledge that a meaningful peacebuilding program would require far more investment than is currently provided for in the TGW, and that it could come into competition with other funding modalities, especially the UN Peacebuilding Fund (UN PBF), blurring the clear niche the RSRTF is targeting.

Coherence: Is the RSRTF the right vehicle to fund these initiatives?

Key informants broadly confirm that there is no other multilateral funding instrument available to support peacebuilding activities flexibly and with a short-term focus. The UN PBF is the other large funding instrument in this sector, but it has a considerably longer-term perspective and is not permitted to fund UNMISS departments. Bilateral donors are often willing to fund shorter-term peacebuilding projects, but their mandates and rules of engagement also prevent them from providing external donor funding for peacekeeping activities (see also below). Therefore, as both UNMISS departments have highlighted, the TGW is the only funding vehicle that would allow UNMISS departments such as PAD and CAD to undertake the supported initiatives.

A key informant from the UN family expressed an alternative view, stating that the TGW “*shouldn’t be a continuation of a sort of core funding for CAD and PAD to enable them to do what they want to do.*”²⁰ There are three different reasonings behind this statement. First, as discussed in the previous subsection, a careful analysis of the RSRTF core mission suggests that the TGW should support nimble, flexible, quick impact projects that reinforce ABPs. However useful it may be, PAD and CAD’s core duties do not function that way. Rather they are addressing peacebuilding challenges at national and subnational levels in support of the R-ARCSS. TGW-funded projects should therefore be structurally different from the regular business of both PAD and CAD.

Second, several key informants referred to the potential risk of transforming UNMISS substantive sections into entities comparable to the regular members of the UNCT, such as UNDP. Many key informants highlighted UNMISS’s shortcomings in project management as seen in some of the problems that arose in the two TGW projects (see section on efficiency in Section 3.2 below). What often gets lost, however, is that this is exactly the comparative advantage of PAD and CAD; their work is *not* projectized and therefore should not be subject to the availability of additional money. Supporting UNMISS substantive sections to better manage externally funded projects would strip them of their unique selling point of not being an agency such as UNDP or IOM that must comply with project funding modalities.

Third, as highlighted by another key informant, providing supplemental financing to CAD and PAD through a third-party donor funds that are attached to specific countries raises a structural discrepancy with the established funding structures of the United Nations. The UNMISS budget is subject to decision-making by the Fifth Committee at the UN General Assembly, and direct donor contributions to peacekeeping missions are handled by the UN DPKO. While UNMISS is not precluded from seeking funding from sources outside of its assessed budget, there is an inherent tension when it does so, particularly when it concerns donors that also fund DPKO, in that the Mission can be seen to be circumventing decisions made in New York.

²⁰ Interview, June 2022.

Several key informants maintained that CAD and PAD need the TGW funding because of their small annual operational budgets. Protocol, however, would dictate that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) raise this issue at HQ level and for it to be addressed there. UNMISS should in turn accept the decision to not increase its operational budget as valid strategic decision-making by the United Nations. Another key informant took issue with this line of thinking, asserting that the reality of these processes is a lot messier than the ideal-type decision-making structure suggests. Past SRSGs have repeatedly asked for an increase to UNMISS's operational budget in budget discussions in New York, but to no avail. Indeed, often operational budgets for the civilian units are often the first costs to be cut. These decisions are not the result of a strategic decision-making process, but rather a product of inherent UN logics, whereby the "hard" peacekeeping budget prioritized by troop contributing countries is typically left untouched, the staff costs are next in line to be protected, and the operational budget then remains as the only area where cuts in the overall mission budget can easily be applied.

Taking these considerations into account, it is difficult to take an unequivocal position that UNMISS sections should never be able to receive TGW funding. But a more nuanced position that does not use the TGW to substitute for budgetary decisions made in New York is entirely defensible. The key question is whether the TGW is funding UNMISS sections to carry out their everyday tasks or to do something new in service of the RSRTF's specific goals. It is not in the mandate of the RSRTF (nor of this evaluation) to solve the issue of a lack of funding modalities for short-term projects in the peacebuilding sector in South Sudan. Such shortcomings in the aid architecture cannot be used as an argument for continuing an instrument that arguably lays outside of the Fund's scope.

The Way Forward

Against the backdrop of the above discussion, there are three possible options for the further development of the TGW as a funding instrument: (1) continuing along the lines taken thus far by extending the existing projects in a second phase and introducing some technical improvements, including in terms of project management; (2) bringing the TGW closer to the ABPs, where the comparative advantage of the RSRTF lies, and focusing the next generation of TGW projects on small-scale interventions that seek to capitalize on opportunities in existing ABPs where a specific intervention at the national level could support the ABP to meet its objectives; or (3) eliminating the TGW altogether.

The evaluation recommends the second approach. This recommendation is in accordance with the views expressed by most of the Steering Committee members that the evaluation team spoke to. Within the Steering Committee, the TGW is seen as a useful instrument that should not be phased out. However, Steering Committee members also stressed the importance of bringing the TGW closer to the *raison d'être* of the RSRTF – its area-based work. The Fund's TOR and its strategy also support the continuation of a funding stream that enables more political, short-term interventions with a "nimble" outlook. If it adopts such an approach, the RSRTF should emphasize the character of the interventions in project tendering and when making funding decisions to ensure TGW align with this specific objective.

While PAD and CAD's capacities offer distinct advantages and should be considered in future TGW projects, the RSRTF should also consider the integrative character of programming that it seeks to advance. Platforms for collective responsibility, perhaps comparable to the Area

Reference Groups (ARGs) in ABPs, could be incorporated into the TGW design as well. When appropriate, new TGW projects could even be integrated into existing ARG structures. The RSRTF could also use TGW projects to further integration between UN agencies and external implementing partners. Project consortia that involve national implementing partners with established track records are therefore preferable to implementation structures led by a single UN agency.

3.2 Evaluation of the Thematic Grants Window Projects

The project-level evaluation focused on two of the three RSRTF-funded Thematic Grant Window projects. The *Empowering the Grassroots: Linking the National and Subnational Processes* project was implemented by CAD between 19 December 2019 and 30 June 2022 with a total budget of USD 629,802. The project aimed to “empower grassroots stakeholders and opinion leaders across South Sudan and broaden their space for engagement by providing a platform to enhance grassroots participation in national peace implementation, bridge subnational and national processes, facilitate dialogue between local constituencies and their national leaders, and influence national policy on sustainable peace themes.” Eight three-day forums were held in Juba bringing together different sets of local actors from across South Sudan with representatives of the national government and international community in Juba. Each forum was organized around a different theme that was tailored to the ongoing political context and aimed at sensitizing grassroots actors on key issues and supporting them to engage with their national counterparts in advocating on behalf of their communities. The project was initially conceived as a 15-month project that would end on 31 March 2021. After two no-cost extensions (NCEs), which were partly Covid-related, it ended 15 months later.

The *Targeted Support to Peace Implementation: Enhancing Political and Civic Space* was implemented by PAD between 31 March 2020 and 31 August 2022 with a planned budget of USD 500,000 and an eventual expenditure of USD 561,246. The project’s main aim was “to increase political understanding and dialogue amongst a multi-tiered audience in order to increase inclusive civic and political participation in the implementation of the peace agreement and in the political landscape, laying the foundation to support a credible election process during the transitional period.” Project activities included governors’ forums held in 8 of the 10 states, political party forums, and other events at the state-level. Collaboration with UNDP enabled CAD and PAD to link these subnational events with the 5th Governors’ Forum at the national level – the first such convening since the onset of the civil war. The PAD project was meant to be a one-year project, but after three NCEs and one extension with cost that is currently being processed, the PAD project has not yet been closed out.

Relevance

Key Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both projects are relevant to the RSRTF results framework and with respect to developments in the peace process. • PAD subsequently introduced new activities to respond to emerging opportunities in the peace process. • Key informants are divided on whether the flexibility to respond to such emergent priorities is an advantage for the TGW or whether it undermines strategic programming and project accountability.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both projects were working to support a governance structure implemented by R-ARCSS that was not designed to incentivize inter-party collaboration.
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The two TGW projects were both relevant in terms of the RSRTF results framework and the underlying context. The projects align with Outcome 4 under the stabilization pillar of the RSRTF results framework, which reads:

“Government is accountable, transparent, and responsive and citizens, including women, youth and disadvantaged groups exercise their rights to meaningfully participate in public debate and civic engagement.”²¹

The projects were also timely and appropriate given developments in the peace process. As indicated in Section 2 above, the idea for the TGW was prompted by breakthroughs in the peace process leading to the establishment of the R-TGONU in February 2022. The overarching theory of change that sought to foster cooperation between the national and subnational levels was and is a major factor in the success or failure of the peace process.²²

Subsequent activities, such as the leadership retreats that PAD organized across 8 of the 10 states, became relevant once the coalition governments were established at the state-level in mid-2020, even though they were not envisaged in the original project design. Key informants expressed contrasting viewpoints on the program design changes that were required to enable PAD and CAD to capitalize on opportunities such as these. On the one hand, the whole rationale for the TGW was for a flexible funding stream that would enable the RSRTF to capitalize on emerging opportunities in the peace process. According to a key informant:

“I’m against the idea that you can predictably lock money into something fit-for-purpose versus something that you’d want to respond to. You need to be able to respond to something that happens unexpectedly. It doesn’t have to be a huge amount of money. Sometimes USD 20,000 to 30,000 is enough... I’d argue for that flexibility because UNMISS doesn’t have it.”²³

However, other key informants saw a risk that the TGW could turn into an easily accessible source of funding that enables UNMISS to do whatever it wants when the opportunity arises with only limited strategic direction and accountability.²⁴ The changes to project activities may also account for the considerable delays that the projects encountered, as discussed further in the subsection on efficiency below.

²¹ The RSRTF results framework is structured around three components: Reconciliation, Stabilization and Resilience.

²² The theory of change articulated in CAD project document is as follows: “If grassroots actors can organize and dialogue with key national actors on the peace, political, and security process and broader issues impacting peace and stability in their local areas and beyond; and If civil society and local population groups feel empowered and their role in the peace process is strengthened; and If the link between the national and subnational peace processes is concretised; Then the peace process in South Sudan will be inclusive, cohesive, participatory and durable; Because grassroots actors across South Sudan will feel that their voices, grievances, and concerns are being heard, building trust and confidence in the peace process and providing a mechanism to hold national leaders accountable.” *Implementing Agency Document: Empowering the Grassroots*, RSRTF (Dec. 2019), pp. 7-8.

²³ Interview, July 2022.

²⁴ Interview, June 2022.

Coherence

Key Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• CAD and PAD collaborated closely with one another through the TGW activities.• While the collaboration was generally strong, some tensions were voiced about the lack of consultation with field offices in project design.• The TGW projects as designed were mostly divorced from the ABP, raising questions as to how comfortably this funding sits within the RSRTF’s broader approach.• There were few actors engaging in a similar space to CAD and PAD , but programs that seek to bridge the national and subnational and support a more inclusive peace process have started to increase in recent years, potentially raising the risk of duplication.
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Coordination Between and Within PAD and CAD

CAD and PAD are typically represented as sister agencies that work closely with one another in delivering on UNMISS’s mandate. While PAD operates mainly at the national level where it monitors and analyzes political developments and provides technical support to key stakeholders, including the R-ARCSS implementation mechanisms, CAD operates through field offices in the 10 states and focuses mainly on issues of social cohesion, conflict management, and support to implementation of the peace agreement at the subnational level.²⁵ Indeed, PAD and CAD essentially co-delivered the two TGW projects, with CAD taking a lead in implementing the programs throughout the states and PAD offering input on political dimensions from the national level.

While this arrangement appears to have worked reasonably well, key informants voiced some dissatisfaction with several aspects. First, there was a feeling that the projects were designed by CAD and PAD staff in Juba without sufficient input from the field offices and that the projects were therefore not fully aligned with local priorities. According to a key informant in Wau:

“For the thematic grants window, we at the subnational level were never consulted in the process. This was a Juba process. But to be fair, a Juba process from where they sit and addressing gaps they see across the horizon. There were good intentions.”²⁶

For others, the centralized nature of the design process was necessary to ensure that activities were coherent across the country as a whole. As another key informant observed:

“I think coordinating from Juba was the best way to do it given that if you are handling 10 states you can only be effective if you can handle it from one center... If there’s a

²⁵ See UNMISS website, Political Affairs, <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/political-affairs>; Civil Affairs, <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/civil-affairs>.

²⁶ Interview, May 2022. Other key informants in Wau maintained that there was some minimal consultation between HQ and the field office. *Id.*

feeling from the field that they were not involved, then it might be based on the amount of engagements. Maybe the engagements were not much.”²⁷

The other area in which some institutional tensions were apparent was between CAD and PAD in Juba. To a large extent, these tensions are inherent in any cross-institutional collaboration and were largely a product of the personalities involved. According to a key informant:

“We are in the field. There is a bit of disconnect between CAD HQ and PAD in Juba. They need to be better coordinated. This issue of coordination is personality driven. If you have good personalities coordination is fine, but if they clash, it can be a problem.”²⁸

Some of these tensions reportedly rose to the surface when CAD accused PAD of engaging directly with the field offices without involving CAD HQ. The issue was quickly resolved, but it nonetheless highlights a feature of the relationship that needs to be anticipated and managed to avoid spill-over into project activities.

Disconnect from Area-Based Programs (ABP)

As discussed in Section 3.1 above, the TGW project designs did not involve any connection with the RSRTF’s ABPs, despite an implied linkage to the ABPs in the original justification for the TGW. Indeed, in Western Bahr-el-Ghazal, some implementing partners involved with ABP activities were not even aware that UNMISS’s engagements with political parties and the coalition governments were being funded in part through the TGW. According to a key informant:

“What I didn’t know was that this was a SGW RSRTF funded activity. My understanding was that it was UNMISS resources. I thought it was the HQ that received it. I don’t think my colleagues here would have the idea of where this funding comes from. Had I known that we had an additional RSRTF funding recipient with UNMISS it would have provided a good opportunity for us to look at bridging gaps that were apparent in the ABP.”²⁹

The key informant went on to describe how the TGW could have been used to reach out to SPLM-IO generals that refused to abide by the terms of the Marial Bai agreement and were refusing to allow pastoralists from Tonj to access water and pasture in Wau County. Whether or not the view of this key informant captures the nuances of this particular situation, it nonetheless highlights the disconnect between the ABPs and the TGW projects (as designed) and a potential role that the TGW could play in addressing the higher-level political dimensions of conflicts in the areas where the RSRTF operates.

External Coherence

Regarding the external coherence of the TGW activities beyond UNMISS and beyond the RSRTF, the shortage of actors operating in a similar space reduced the risk of duplication or of partners operating at cross purposes. For the activities at the subnational level, CAD and PAD were essentially the only international actors engaging political parties and coalition

²⁷ Interview, July 2022.

²⁸ Interview, May 2022.

²⁹ Interview, June 2022.

governments in these discussions. Other UN agencies sometimes provide more targeted support to government institutions through mechanisms such as the UN PBF, but these projects tend to steer clear of the more political activities that were the focus of the TGW projects. When asked whether another agency such as UNDP might be better placed to deliver on such activities, a key informant responded:

“In other countries where UNDP has a stronger presence, this work might be done by them in terms of supporting elections and other things, but here UNDP doesn’t have a good field presence. I recently traveled to Malakal and saw that UNDP had just one peacebuilding person there. This applies to other areas as well. Compared to CAD who has a comparatively strong footprint in the states, there’s no comparison.”³⁰

With respect to the CAD project on *Linking the National and Subnational Processes*, there may be more potential for overlap moving forward. When the project was initially conceived, there were few organizations that provided substantial support that aimed to bridge these gaps in the peace process, but that has started to change. Several partners including the USAID-funded Shejeh Salam program, the Civil Society Facility (CSF), UNDP and others are engaged in activities that seek to support a more inclusive peace process.³¹ Projects to amplify the voices of women and youth in the peace process also figure prominently in PBF pipeline for 2022. While donors remain skeptical of the R-ARCSS model and are reluctant to invest at a scale that would be needed to fully implement the agreement, with the end of the transitional period approaching and no word yet on whether and for how long it will be extended, it is likely that more and more actors will feel compelled to engage in this type of programming.

Effectiveness

Key Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNMISS’s field presence, relationships, and political mandate were a key factor in the successful implementation of the two projects. • These capacities helped to promote policy uptake of the project outcomes and interlinkages with other peace processes and platforms at the national and subnational levels. • The use of national facilitators and the establishment of a ‘core group’ of prominent South Sudanese to co-design and co-deliver project activities and to assist in political coordination enabled CAD and PAD to target participants more effectively and capitalize on emerging opportunities. • The underlying project design based on a model that emphasized meetings and network building and did not account for longer-term processes that are needed to effect meaningful change. This shortcoming is especially true when considering the governance
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³⁰ Interview, July 2022.

³¹ The Shejeh Salam program concentrates most of its activities in the 13 counties that comprise USAID’s geographic focus areas. See USAID South Sudan, *Strategic Framework: July 31, 2020 to July 31, 2024*, available at <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Strategic-Framework-SouthSudan-July-2024-public-version.pdf>. The CSF is a multi-donor fund established to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations to bring about positive changes in the lives and well-being of communities and groups. The fund is managed by the firm Mott MacDonald and funded by the Embassies of Norway, Sweden, and The Netherlands, with the latter acting as lead donor. See CSF Website, <https://csf-southsudan.org>.

	design implementing by R-ARCSS that incentivizes political nominations mainly based on considerations of political power.
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UNMISS Field Presence and Political Mandate

UNMISS's field presence and its relationships with key stakeholders at the national and subnational levels were key assets for the two TGW projects. UNMISS has 10 field offices across South Sudan and roughly 18,000 personnel.³² CAD has 102 staff in all 10 states, making it second only to UNMISS Human Rights Division, which has 103. Many CAD officers have been working in the field for 5 or 6 years, providing CAD with an institutional memory that many other UN agencies lack. For its part, PAD engages daily with national stakeholders and has staff dedicated to different thematic areas, including the constitution-making process and elections, while other agencies may have one or two staff members covering entire sectors.

As discussed further in the subsection on sustainability, UNMISS's capacities helped to promote a generally strong policy uptake of the outcomes of the TGW governors' forums. According to a survey that CEPO conducted on stakeholder perceptions of the grassroots forums and governors' forums:

“All state ministers of cabinet affairs admired that the blueprint strategic plan was the basis for setting the state government cabinet programming. Eight (8) state ministers of cabinet affairs said their state government clusters' priorities were drawn from the blueprint strategic document adopted during the state governor forums. Further, they confirmed that the blueprint strategic plan document has contributed greatly in strengthening inter-governmental linkages with the national government ministry of cabinet affairs on government protocol matters. It is clearly demonstrated that process of the State Governors forum has effectively contributed in setting up the state governments. Evidently, the state governments budgets developed with assistance of UNDP were fully based on the adopted blueprint.”³³

The outcomes of the state-level governors' forums fed into a national governors' forum that was held in Juba in November 2021 with the support of UNDP.³⁴ This was the first governors' forum to be held in South Sudan since the outbreak of the conflict in December 2013 and the only one to involve such extensive prior consultation with stakeholders at the state-level. The forum produced 79 resolutions on peace and security, governance, basic services, and the economy.³⁵ Not only do these resolutions reflect the blueprints that were developed during the state-level governors' forums, but according to the CEPO survey, the blueprints were also incorporated into state government budgets that were developed with the assistance of UNDP.³⁶ However, it remains to be seen if these resolutions become anything more than commitments on paper, which is a real concern given the highly diverse political standing and leverage of

³² For more on UNMISS staffing, see UNMISS website, <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/facts-and-figures>.

³³ [Draft] Survey: Grassroots and State Governors Forum, CEPO (2022), p. 4.

³⁴ Press Release, *Governor's Forum Returns as a Platform to Advance Governance, Peace and Security*, UNDP (1 Dec. 2021), available at <https://www.undp.org/south-sudan/news/governors'-forum-returns-platform-advance-governance-peace-and-security>.

³⁵ *5th Governors' Forum: Resolutions and Recommendations*, Government of South Sudan (Nov. 2021), available at <https://docs.southsudanngoforum.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/5th%20Governors%20Forum%20Resolutions%20%281%29.pdf>.

³⁶ CEPO Survey, *supra* note 33.

the different governors/deputy governors and state governments within the South Sudanese political settlement.

Other links were apparent between TGW activities and peace processes that were underway at the national and subnational levels. For example, a key informant described how the initial meetings with political actors in Juba led to meetings between political parties and the leadership of the National Dialogue.³⁷ PAD then organized a weeklong retreat in South Africa (funded independently from the RSRTF) through which several opposition parties decided to join the National Dialogue process. The SPLM-IO initially agreed to join the process though they subsequently withdrew. In Wau, CAD was able to leverage synergies with a more local peace process. Partners working on peacebuilding in Western Bahr-el-Ghazal, including UNMISS, UN agencies, INGOs and CSOs, had formed a peace and reconciliation working group to share information and coordinate activities. Through CAD's participation in this group, they were able to bring discussions concerning cattle migration and the Marial Bai peace process into the TGW activities. Discussions about cattle migration during the governor's forum, for example, were able to build on prior discussions that had been taking place in the peace and reconciliation working group and relationships and capacities were in place to support implementation.

Enhancing UNMISS's Programmatic Response

Key informants uniformly acknowledged the role that RSRTF funds have had in strengthening PAD and CAD's programmatic response. While UNMISS has an overall budget of \$1.2 billion for 2021/22, just \$4.3 million of that is available for programmatic activities.³⁸ In 2021/22, CAD was allocated \$800,000 for programmatic activities across the 10 states and PAD had a far smaller budget.³⁹ RSRTF funding through the TGW effectively doubled CAD and PAD's operational budgets and enabled them to do activities on a scale that would not otherwise be possible.⁴⁰ The Mission's financial limitations were acknowledged at the June 2021 cross-partner learning workshop, in which participants suggested that ABPs should budget for operational costs associated with any political engagements they might require from UNMISS:

*“Workshop participants ... acknowledged that political engagement activities in support of ABP need to be clearly budgeted for. It was noted during the workshop that while UNMISS HoFOs play a pivotal role in supporting ABPs politically, their programmatic funds for political engagement, including petty cash for meetings and workshops, are very limited. In developing their future ABP budgets, all partners should hence ensure they plan and budget specifically for political engagement activities, without assuming that it can automatically be undertaken on the basis of strategic partnerships alone.”*⁴¹

³⁷ Interview, June 2022.

³⁸ See *Budget for the United Nations Mission in South Sudan for the period from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022: Report of the Secretary-General*, U.N. Doc. A/75/762 (18 Feb. 2021), ¶ 114, available at https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3907488?ln=zh_CN.

³⁹ By way of comparison, the UNMISS Rule of Law Advisory Section received \$473,500 in 2021/22 up from USD 100,000 in 2020 when it first started receiving funds from the RSRTF through its participation in some of the Fund's ABPs.

⁴⁰ As a key informant observed: “Programmatic funds for CAD and PAD are limited and access to USD 500,000 means they can change the way they do programming, engage more actors, bigger events, making processes more inclusive because they can draw in more constituencies. They don't have other opportunities.” Interview, July 2022.

⁴¹ RSRTF 2021 Cross-Partner Learning Workshop Report (2021), p. 19.

Using their programmatic funds, CAD was reportedly able to organize about 120 outreach activities and helped to broker 34 local peace agreements in 2021.⁴² The TGW funds enabled CAD to scale-up its activities to systematically target all 10 states and all political parties across 10 thematic areas. RSRTF funding, particularly that which is channeled through the ABPs and to a lesser extent the TGW, also forces UNMISS units to work more collaboratively with other UN agencies and NGOs, something which they are not incentivized to do when implementing activities through their assessed budgets alone.

Nonetheless, the further expansion of UNMISS substantive sections by increasing their capacity to absorb external project funds remains a source of concern. There is a considerable risk in creating parallel structures to the UNCT. As several key informants highlighted, the UNCT has a long-term perspective and with designated project implementing capacity that is structurally different to UNMISS, which is expected to leave once conditions allow. Financing UNMISS agencies to enhance their capacity to implement similar programs to UNCT agencies could therefore undermine an established division of labor within the UN family and result in increased negative competition between various strands of the UN, thereby undermining the ‘One UN’ approach. Against this background, there are serious questions about the viability of an approach that seeks to enhance the operational budget of UNMISS substantive sections through a multi-donor trust fund.

Use of National Facilitators and the ‘Core Group’

Participants in the TGW projects were uniformly appreciative of the performance of the South Sudanese facilitators in the various CAD and PAD activities. As nationals, not only were these facilitators able to communicate in languages that were more easily understood by project participants, but they also were able to facilitate in more meaningful ways. For example, in Wau, one of the facilitators referred to a slogan— *Wau nar* or ‘Wau is on fire’ – that football fans in Wau used to chant when playing against teams from other parts of the country. He challenged the political parties in attendance to get their house in order so that Wau could be *nar* once again. A key informant described how this analogy brought her to tears during the workshop.

The national facilitators also had preexisting relationships that they could leverage in support of project activities. In Lakes, for example, the governor and deputy governor who came from opposing camps did not want to participate in the leadership retreat that PAD was convening for members of the newly formed executive. One of the national facilitators was able to leverage his relationships with the executive to convince the cabinet to meet; their first time to meet across party lines since the formation of the coalition government.⁴³ The president later relieved the governor of Lakes State of his duties, and the new governor reportedly has a better working relationship with his deputy.⁴⁴ The PAD activities also had positive implications for UNMISS’s relationship with the state government. According to a key informant: “*After that*

⁴² Interview, July 2022.

⁴³ As a key informant observed: “I remember in Lakes State, when they organized this governor’s forum, the governor and deputy governor could not agree. They were both boycotting the event. Finally, it was the facilitators of the governors’ workshop that brought the two together which really helped their reconciliation and then they started discussing the priorities for the state.” Interview, July 2022.

⁴⁴ *Governor Tueny vows to protect lives and property in Lakes State*, Radio Tamazuj (15 Jul. 2021), available at <https://radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/governor-tueny-vows-to-protect-lives-and-property-in-lakes-state>.

workshop, the relationship between the governor and our field office got better. They were able to talk to them and get appointments because of that workshop.”⁴⁵

UNMISS CAD also established a ‘core group’ of prominent South Sudanese to help co-design and deliver program activities. According to key informants, the core group played an important role in terms of political coordination and ensuring that the activities at the national and subnational levels involved the right participants. UNMISS has since been deploying community engagement practices that it learned through the TGW projects in its regular programming to support implementation of the peace process.

‘Peace by Workshop’

One area in which key informants were more critical about the TGW activities was the notion that peace could be achieved through meetings and network building without other complementary programming. A key informant recalled that when a senior UN official was briefed on the TGW projects, he asked: *“How long will we continue to bring the same people together under a tree?”⁴⁶* The relatively small amounts of funding and short timeframe of the TGW projects contributed to some people’s skepticism that it could deliver meaningful changes in the context of a peace process that has struggled to take hold. As a key informant in Wau observed:

“For you to build peace, you need a medium-term strategy. You need predictable resources for the medium-term. What we are doing is workshops on different topics. Does that build peace? Does that build local capacities? The answer is no.”⁴⁷

Participants in the various workshops also complained that the time was too short to sufficiently cover the many issues that were raised. Grassroots forums in Juba, for example, were only three days long. As a key informant that participated in the political parties’ forum in Wau observed:

“The time was very short. There are a lot of issues to discuss. There were really only two days. We had a lot of things to be given in a short time. There is a huge information to assimilate in a short time frame, which was a challenge.”⁴⁸

Other criticisms related to the geographic coverage of the workshops, which were held only in state capitals. A common suggestion from key informants was that the workshops needed to be expanded to reach the grassroots level for them to be effective in terms of shaping the peace process. A key informant explained how grievances between people living in urban and rural areas have gone unaddressed since the signing of the peace agreement in 2018:

“There is a gap between the people in the outskirts who consider that people in the town were quiet during the conflict and didn’t take sides. They are asking, ‘Why you were quiet when things were tough?’ People from the towns cannot freely access the areas and interact. Those dialogues shouldn’t only be for the executive, there is a need for communal dialogue on how they can reconcile the different views and try to overcome the past.”⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Interview, July 2022.

⁴⁶ Interview, June 2022.

⁴⁷ Interview, May 2022.

⁴⁸ Interview, June 2022.

⁴⁹ Interview, June 2022.

Criticisms such as these reflect people’s frustration with the high number of trainings and workshops that are held in South Sudan, often with very little show in terms of impact. However, they should also be considered in conjunction with the extensive investments that CAD and PAD have made in building relationships and understanding the context in the areas where they operate, as well as the ability of TGW activities to link into other policy-making initiatives, as discussed further in the subsection on sustainability below.

Gender Considerations

Gender considerations were factored into CAD and PAD activities at the state and national levels. Participants in the grassroots forums explained that women and girls, including youth groups, participated in all forums. Key informants confirmed that the voices of men, women, girls and youth were reflected in decisions about local peace and governance priorities at the state level.⁵⁰ This helped to promote the role of women in governance and political spaces and allowed female politicians to develop their political skills. Female political party members were particularly appreciative of the all-female forums for women in political office.⁵¹

Efficiency

Key Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While UNMISS has been able to save the RSRTF costs in terms of operational needs (e.g., flights, accommodation in the field) and staff salaries which were paid for through UNMISS’s assessed budget, there were also disadvantages in terms incentives for staff to devote sufficient attention to TGW activities and lines of accountability. • UNMISS’s inexperience in terms of project management contributed to inefficiencies in the two TGW projects, including several project extensions, weak MEL processes, unclear roles and responsibilities among project staff, and other financial and administrative shortcomings.
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Advantages and Disadvantages of Extra-Budgetary Support

One clear efficiency of the CAD and PAD projects are the assets that UNMISS brought to the table in terms of operational capacities and human resources. The two TGW projects required the movement of facilitators and participants around the country and in many cases UNMISS was able to provide flights, accommodation, and ground transport at zero cost to the RSRTF. According to a key informant:

“From my experience, UNMISS Civil Affairs is cost effective because it reduced logistics cost. We’re using their flights. Much of the grant went to activities because UNMISS has infrastructure in existence and provides in-kind support. Other agencies have to spend on logistics. My flight would have been costed against the grant and accommodation, but here UNMISS provides. That would have been a big difference.”⁵²

⁵⁰ Interview, June 2022.

⁵¹ Interview, June 2022.

⁵² Interview, July 2022.

CAD and PAD staff involved with the projects were also already accounted for through UNMISS's assessed budget and therefore did not need to be budgeted for under the TGW projects. As a result, the two projects achieved very strong value for money in that they were able to deliver project activities and results with relatively small amounts of funding. Few if any other organizations in South Sudan would be able to deliver programs across South Sudan with the amount of funding that is available through the TGW. However, these efficiencies also raised some complications in that staff workloads were substantially increased for a project that was not directly tied to their salaries. As a key informant observed: "*Doing this project plus their own work is actually double work and you can see that in their engagement.*"⁵³ The conflicting incentives also had implications in terms of project management, as discussed in the next two subsections.

Project Management Challenges

The CAD and PAD projects were initially envisaged as 15-month and one-year projects, respectively. Both projects required multiple extensions due to a combination of Covid-19 related delays and administrative challenges. CAD's project was meant to end by 31 March 2021, but after two no cost extensions (NCEs), the project ended more than a year later on 30 June 2022. PAD's project was also meant to end by 31 March 2021 but after three NCEs (two Covid-related and one due to administrative issues) and one extension with costs that is currently being processed by the Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office in New York, the PAD project has not yet concluded. PAD has completed its activities under the TGW project and the main reason for this last extension (as well as the one before it) is to close out the grant in the UNMISS financial system, which it was not able to do before the end of the quarter in December 2021.⁵⁴ Other administrative challenges included the delayed settling of cash advances, incorrect categorization of expenses, unclear roles and responsibilities for staff working on the two projects, the quality of quarterly reporting, and an overburdening of UNMISS budget and finance staff who were fully stretched with existing activities under the assessed budget and not sufficiently resourced to assume additional responsibilities under the TGW projects.⁵⁵

Other weaknesses in program management were apparent in CAD and PAD's approach to monitoring, evaluation, and learning. The results frameworks for the two TGW projects were rudimentary and focused primarily on output indicators. Both project documents list just two outcome indicators that are taken directly from the RSRTF's general results framework and do not appear to be closely tailored to the specific theories of change underlying the two projects.⁵⁶ The RSRTF Secretariat assisted CAD and PAD in developing more appropriate indicators and

⁵³ Interview, June 2022.

⁵⁴ PAD's final activities were implemented in Wau and Bor in December 2021.

⁵⁵ Another instance of a project-related challenge arose in June 2022 as PAD was closing out its grant. PAD informed the Secretariat of some issues with the financial administration of the grant that resulted in an overspend of \$61,246 against the initial approved grant amount of \$500,000. After discussions with UNMISS and the Chair of the RSRTF Steering Committee, the Secretariat agreed to table this request to the Steering Committee on an exceptional basis as usually the Steering Committee would not normally consider late applications for cost extensions arising from grant management and administration challenges. The request was justified based on the significant impact this would have on PAD programmatic funding in the 2022/23 budget year when PAD activities will be most critical.

⁵⁶ The two outcome indicators are: (4a) Number of instances where youth and women led Civil Society Organizations are supported to articulate their needs and demands to governance figures/institutions, and (4b) Increased frequency of local government officials engaging communities in political, peace and security decision making.

designing feedback surveys, but the two projects still struggled to put in place effective M&E processes. The CAD project document indicated that CEPO would conduct surveys of national and subnational actors at the project midpoint and endpoint to assess the project’s impact across the country, but the survey was ultimately budgeted just USD 3,000, which seems inadequate given the scope of the survey.⁵⁷ CEPO eventually submitted a survey report in 2022 based on a sample size of 300 individuals that reported generally positive outcomes from the project.

These problems point to a shortcoming that peacekeeping missions face globally in terms of project management. Staff in peacekeeping missions are recruited for their specific expertise in their respective fields and sometimes do not have a background in the humanitarian or development sectors where program management is a core skill. To remedy shortcomings in terms of measuring the impact of peacekeeping activities, the UN Department of Peace Operations has rolled out a Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System (CPAS) throughout peacekeeping missions globally, including South Sudan.⁵⁸ However, the new system is only now being operationalized in South Sudan and it was not available for use in the CAD and PAD projects. In relation to the TGW projects, some of the UNMISS staff that were involved did have program management expertise, but they were not able to fully leverage that expertise due to inadequate time, training and resources. Additional complications were posed by the need to adhere to both UNMISS’s internal administrative processes and those of the RSRTF.

Adaptation to Covid-19

Another instance of good practice that has been documented in the TGW projects is the way PAD adapted its programming in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The project launch in March 2020 coincided with the onset of the pandemic preventing PAD from convening participants in the way it had originally envisaged. PAD switched to a combination of online and hybrid (online/in-person) that included a range of activities, including a five-week policy development training for political party members to connect and advance issues within their own parties, a hybrid political parties forum in Juba and consultations on the constitution-making process.

Among the factors that enabled such an approach to succeed was adequate training and preparation of participants, including direct support that UNMISS provided to individual participants, and the fact that the activities were a continuation of previous activities, so participants already had a degree of familiarity and trust in UNMISS as a convener. The online format also had positive unintended consequences in that it created opportunities for a larger number of people to participate in the events and created space for youth to engage more actively in the interparty discourse.

Impact

⁵⁷ According to the project document, the surveys were meant to examine “how the nexus of national-subnational cooperation on peace building has been strengthened, perceptions on whether the program has raised grassroots voices and ownership on the thematic areas covered in the program; whether grassroots awareness of nationally-led peace process has been strengthened; and whether the platform is perceived to have influenced national leaders in the implementation of the peace agreement and the formulation of related peace building policy.” *Empowering the Grassroots*, *supra* note 22, p. 8.

⁵⁸ United Nations Peacekeeping website, CPAS, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/cpas>.

Key Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CAD project helped to create space for diverse voices from the grassroots to come together and discuss their roles in the transitional process, but the positive impact from these activities is mostly limited to those who participated and unlikely to outlast the project itself. • The TGW projects appear to have made a positive contribution in increasing political space, building trust and opening dialogue among political parties, amplifying the voice of women and youth in political parties, and raising awareness about the roles and responsibilities of the newly formed coalition governments. • The positive impacts were less pronounced in addressing some of the internal tensions within political parties and between the political and armed wings of opposition groups, which remains a major security concern in parts of the country.
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Building Trust Between Parties in New Coalition Governments

As noted above, the project did not incorporate an M&E plan that would enable it to compile empirical data about changes in peace and governance processes. Indeed, it is difficult to envision what sort of concrete outcomes might be measurable for such a short-term project that aims to influence a peace process that has been mired in delays for many years. Nonetheless, the evaluation team documented anecdotal evidence that project activities made a positive contribution in terms of building trust among political parties in the new coalition governments that were established at the state-level and in increasing the voice of women and youth in political parties. The project could not, however, overcome the political nature of appointments in state governments, which works strategically against the project’s theory of change.

In Wau, CAD had previously brought together political parties in 2019, but the political parties’ forum under the TGW project was on a larger scale, involving all 11 political parties active in the state. For any political party other than the SPLM to meet in the state was still highly sensitive and could very easily be viewed as an act of sedition by the security organs. Convening politicians across party lines was therefore an important symbolic event in that it signaled the start of a new political dispensation. As a key informant observed:

“[The political parties’ forum] has given a freedom of movement and of holding political meetings. Before we didn’t do them. You would fear NSS would close you down. The general spirit of peaceful coexistence among the political parties was shown in these events.”⁵⁹

There were also immediate impacts in terms of trust-building. Many of the newly appointed government officials had never held office before, and key informants reported that they did not even know the representatives of smaller political parties in the state before the TGW events.⁶⁰ Several focus group participants and key informants also pointed to a collective decision that participants in the political parties’ forum made to no longer allow political chants in public events. Typically, in public gatherings, supporters of the SPLM-IG would be

⁵⁹ Interview, June 2022.

⁶⁰ As a key informant noted: “After the workshop last year, the state parliament was formed. Three of us here are in the parliament. We knew each other in that forum and were then appointed in the parliament.” Focus group discussion, June 2022.

encouraged to chant, *oyee!*, and supporters of SPLM-IO would chant, *viva!*. The practice was contributing to tensions among the groups and so participants decided to instead open public events in the name of God and the transitional government.⁶¹

Another key area where changes were seen was in the dynamic between the governor and deputy governor in Western Bahr-el-Ghazal. As per the power sharing formulas of Ch. I of the R-ARCSS, governors and deputy governors were appointed from opposing parties.⁶² Analysts have observed how this arrangement effectively decentralized the political competition that gave rise to the conflict in the first place to the state and local levels, giving rise to political deadlock and tension in many parts of the country.⁶³ According to key informants and focus group participants, the political parties' forum helped the I-TGONU to agree on how to address the impasse between the SPLM-IO-appointed governor and the I-TGONU-appointed deputy governor. In July 2021, the President relieved the deputy governor of his duties and appointed an individual who was better able to work with the governor.⁶⁴ As a focus group participant observed:

*“For me [the political parties’ forum] has yielded fruit. We are now in a better position than before... Our relationship is good now and we are speaking one language. There was tension between the former deputy and the governor, but the new deputy governor is working in harmony with the governor, plus the other ministers in their various capacities. The tension has been reduced.”*⁶⁵

Similar impacts were reported in Lakes State, where the President appointed a new governor in July 2021 who has a better working relationship with his deputy than his predecessor had and who has mounted a popular, albeit heavy-handed, response to the rampant intercommunal violence that has been plaguing the state for many years.⁶⁶ It is difficult to conclusively determine the extent to which TGW activities contributed to these positive outcomes. Nonetheless, the fact that the coalition governments were able to resolve these major political impasses in a peaceful and consensual manner speaks to the importance of creating space for them to come together and discuss issues of mutual concern.

Where the impact of TGW activities was less pronounced was with respect to internal tensions within political parties. In Western Bahr-el-Ghazal, for example, SPLM-IO commanders in Wau and Raja Counties have openly refused to accept the appointment of Sarah Cleto Hassan Rial as governor. They say that she was appointed without consulting them and complain that she was living a comfortable life in the US while they were fighting in the bush. On one occasion, the SPLM-IO generals arrested and beat the I-TGONU-appointed commissioner of Wau County, the SPLM-IO-appointed Minister of Health and several other state officials who were traveling through the area and threatened that the same would happen to the governor if

⁶¹ Interview, June 2022.

⁶² Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS), Ch. 1, Art. 1.16 (2018), available at [https://www.peaceagreements.org/wview/2112/Revitalised%20Agreement%20on%20the%20Resolution%20of%20the%20Conflict%20in%20the%20Republic%20of%20South%20Sudan%20\(R-ARCSS\)](https://www.peaceagreements.org/wview/2112/Revitalised%20Agreement%20on%20the%20Resolution%20of%20the%20Conflict%20in%20the%20Republic%20of%20South%20Sudan%20(R-ARCSS)).

⁶³ Joshua Craze and Ferenc David Marko, *Death by Peace: How South Sudan’s Peace Agreement Ate the Grassroots*, African Arguments (6 Jan. 2022), available at <https://africanarguments.org/2022/01/death-by-peace-how-south-sudans-peace-agreement-ate-the-grassroots/>.

⁶⁴ *Kiir fires Western Bahr el Ghazal deputy governor, names replacement*, Sudans Post (28 Jul. 2021), available at <https://www.sudanspost.com/kiir-fires-western-bahr-el-ghazal-deputy-governor-names-replacement/>.

⁶⁵ Focus group discussion, June 2022.

⁶⁶ *Governor Tueny vows to protect lives*, *supra* note 44.

she were to travel there. Several key informants viewed internal tensions such as these to be a more proximate threat to the peace process than the tensions between political parties.

The armed wings of the various political parties were not deeply involved in the TGW activities, though SPLM-IO commanders in Western Bahr-el-Ghazal did send representatives to the political parties’ forum. Key informants were divided about whether it would have been wise to involve them more deeply at this early stage of the process. Some key informants maintained that they were critical actors and should have been more involved so that problems such as those within SPLM-IO could be addressed. For others, the transition away from militarized decision-making processes and towards civilian control of government warranted an approach that started with meetings among the civilian politicians first, with an understanding that they could expand to include security actors as the initiative progressed.

Strengthening Civic Participation in Governance and Peace Processes

The two projects aimed to strengthen civic participation in governance peace process both by creating inclusive spaces at the subnational level for different stakeholders to interact with state governments and by bringing different sets of actors from the local level to Juba for a series of ‘grassroots forums’ that would discuss relevant aspects of the transitional process. An observation from the RSRTF June 2021 cross-partner learning workshop report expresses a generally positive view of these activities that was shared by key informants and focus group participants who took part in this evaluation:

“Existing actions undertaken through UNMISS PAD, such as its support to political party fora mentioned above, benefits the peace process and reinforces top-down peace messaging, linking messages from community and grassroots to national and vice versa, fostering inclusive, peaceful debate. As such these activities enhance peace messages and support political and policy processes that create an enabling environment more broadly and reinforce the efforts of the ABPs. The benefit of such activities to the RSRTF is clear and should be continued and enhanced, broadening partnerships to include additional South Sudanese civil society organisations as well as AFPs such as UN WOMEN, UNESCO, and UNDP.”⁶⁷

As noted in the section on effectiveness above, the CAD and PAD activities fed into other complementary processes, including other national and subnational peace processes and the first national-level governor’s forum to be held since the outbreak of the conflict. The events had a significant impact in framing discussions and shaping how people relate to peace and governance processes. However, as discussed further in the next section, there were mixed results in terms of the ability of participants to implement the project outcomes, limiting the projects’ longer-term impacts.

Sustainability

Key Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The state-level governors’ forums had significant policy uptake in the short-term through the 5th Governors’ Forum held in Juba and subsequent efforts to include the ‘blueprints’ into planning and budgetary processes in several states.
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⁶⁷ Cross-Partner Learning Workshop Report, p. 18.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With respect to inclusivity, the grassroots forums helped to broaden political space and amplify diverse voices, but the groups that participated have not received support since returning to their states. • National ownership of these initiatives remains weak as seen in the fact that they were viewed as UNMISS activities and government institutions did not provide any financial or in-kind support.
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Local Ownership and Mixed Views on the Uptake of Event Outcomes

As noted above, the TGW projects appear to have delivered short-term impacts in terms of improved working relationships across party lines at the state-level, the inclusion of diverse voices of men, women, youth, churches and artists in governance and peace processes at various levels, and improved understanding on the role of political parties and coalition governments.⁶⁸ As one South Sudanese facilitator noted, his participation in the ‘core group’ formed under the CAD project allowed him to use his knowledge of the context to guide the prioritization of relevant issues and to draw lessons from each forum that could be applied to subsequent ones.⁶⁹

However, key informants expressed mixed views on whether the projects’ impacts would be sustained. On a more positive note, a key informant noted that the ‘blueprints’ that were developed through the TGW activities have since been incorporated planning and budgetary processes in several states. According to the key informant:

“The state forums were able to bring governors’ cabinets together with citizens from different stakeholder groups. ...Many of the blueprints were turned into resilience and recovery programs. I’m aware of five [blueprints] which are taking a lead in shaping state development plan. When UNDP went to the states to do budget planning, they used the blueprints. Most of the outcomes and deliberations in the 5th Governors’ Forum were based on the outcomes of the citizen governors’ forums. I think it has bridged the gap and brought the views to people in Juba.”⁷⁰

As this quote suggests, governance and security-related challenges that were presented and discussed at the state level were then factored into discussions at the national-level Governors’ Forum in Juba. The outcomes of the national Governors’ Forum were in turn used to guide state-level governments in addressing security and governance problems in the states.

Conversely, participants in Western Bahr-el-Ghazal noted that many of the issues they raised in the political parties’ forum remained unimplemented.⁷¹ While CAD was able to work with UNMISS Gender Unit to convene a two-day meeting for women representatives of political parties as requested during the political parties’ forum, and to organize a follow up meeting between youth and cabinet members to promote the role of youth in peacebuilding efforts, other

⁶⁸ Focus group discussion, June 2022; Interview, July 2022.

⁶⁹ Interview, July 2022.

⁷⁰ Interview, July 2022.

⁷¹ According to a focus group participant: “My question is during the last meeting, we raised our recommendations, and now we come for an evaluation after six months. We don’t know where our recommendations have gone.” Focus group discussion, June 2022.

resolutions remain unimplemented, including efforts to promote positive cooperation between political parties and the media, fundraising strategies, engagement between political parties and the organized forces, and other issues relating to the expansion of civic and political space. Indeed, the question of how outcomes from these events would be implemented did not feature prominently in the design of the two TGW projects. A key informant questioned UNMISS's capacity in this regard:

“CAD doesn't have the capacity to follow up on what they are doing. CAD was doing all of this dialogue work but didn't have programmatic funding to do tangible peace dividends or implement the outcomes.”⁷²

The non-implementation of outcomes was even more pronounced with the grassroots forums that were held with different groups of stakeholders in Juba. Participants from Western Bahr-el-Ghazal described how they had used the opportunity of traveling to Juba to develop plans for what they wanted to do in their state, but upon returning to Wau, they found that UNMISS was unable to support them in their efforts. According to a key informant:

“We came back as a group. We sat down and were having meetings, but since the end of last year we didn't meet. We used to meet but people are busy because of travel. I used to sit with my group every week. We especially concentrated on women and girls... We appreciate the work, and we gain experience and capacity, we have things on papers but to make them happen needs funding. UNMISS is supporting us in a way, but there are these other things we need, so that we can do things ourselves.”⁷³

The fact that government institutions did not provide financial or in-kind support for the TGW activities also reflects a broader shortcoming in national ownership of these initiatives. While there was a degree of consultation with national actors in the planning of the forums, many people nonetheless saw these as UNMISS-led activities in which government officials were following along as passive participants.⁷⁴

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are meant to inform how the RSRTF and its implementing partners approach the TGW moving forward. Key action points are summarized in Annex I together with the shortcoming that they are meant to address, who carries primary responsibility for implementation, and the timeframe for action.

TGW as a Funding Instrument

- There are currently no other comparable funding mechanisms available to do the type of work that CAD and PAD did in the TGW projects. Nonetheless, the RSRTF should readjust the TGW to align more closely with the RSRTF TORs (as amended). This requires the RSRTF to frame the TGW as an instrument that seeks to bridge national and subnational peacebuilding processes as they relate to specific ABPs.
- RSRTF TGW projects should focus on quick, measurable impact commensurate to the invested funds. Projects should have clear targets that are also clearly reinforcing

⁷² Interview, June 2022.

⁷³ Interview, June 2022.

⁷⁴ Interview, May 2022.

ongoing ABPs. Projects should also apply the pathway of cross-organizational integration as it is followed in ABP.

TGW Projects

Relevance

- While TGW projects are conceived as quick and opportunistic interventions that seek to capitalize on emerging opportunities, they still require strong project designs that account for longer-term considerations. The RSRTF Secretariat and implementing partners should invest into stronger project designs for TGW projects from the outset.
- TGW projects should be sufficiently flexible to capitalize on emerging opportunities while providing clarity and specificity that keeps the project aligned with its underlying theory of change.

Coherence

- The RSRTF TGW should work in a more integrated way that brings agencies together around a common objective. In doing so, the TGW should open to a more diverse set of actors, particularly South Sudanese organizations that are already active in the thematic areas that are being addressed. Some critical partnerships, for instance, with CEPO, have been developed within the TGW-funded projects. However, awards to entities other than UNMISS should always take into consideration the role that UNMISS might play in project activities, consult with relevant UNMISS divisions in the project design phase, and ensure budget allocations that enable UNMISS support when needed.
- If the RSRTF continues funding UNMISS in a similar manner to the first generation TGW projects, CAD and PAD should consider co-applying for the grant and incorporating their collaboration more directly into the design of the project rather than separating activities out into different work streams. CAD and PAD at HQ level should also consult more closely with the field offices to ensure that project activities are adapted to local priorities and encourage greater ownership by staff in the field.
- While a certain degree of collaboration between UNMISS and UNCT is ongoing, the two bodies should consider ways of strengthening this collaboration so that healthy institutional competition does not devolve into counterproductive tensions that interfere with their ability to fulfil their mandates.

Effectiveness

- The RSRTF should encourage applicants to explore more innovative approaches in TGW projects and avoid proposals that are heavily reliant on workshops and trainings. Elements such as conflict resilience – measures to disincentivize attacks on the ground – or improving everyday security through enhancing local infrastructure could be explored as possible alternative pathways.
- The RSRTF should encourage implementing partners to make maximum use of national counterparts in the TGW, building on lessons learned through the use of national facilitators and the ‘core group’.

Efficiency

- The RSRTF should ensure that TGW projects provide detailed budgets from the outset and UNMISS should develop a system that ensures detailed tracking and monitoring of RSRTF grant expenditures.

- UNMISS should ensure that in any future RSRTF projects, focal persons and field staff communicate effectively to ensure timely settlement of cash advances.
- Grantees under any future TGW projects in longer term MEL frameworks that implementing partners maintain on an ongoing basis – such as accompanying project stakeholder focus groups – to better understand the contribution that they are making in the specified thematic area.
- The RSRTF should consider to only appoint organizations as lead in implementing consortia that have a proven track record in project management, implementation, and evaluation.

Impact

- TGW projects should find ways to build upon the positive contribution that the first-generation projects had in terms of trust-building and capacity-building of political parties and coalition governments at the state-level, even if the TGW is more closely aligned with the work of ABPs as recommended above. There is a constant need to respond to political processes and initiatives in the dynamic environment of South Sudan's transition process at large.
- Any similar activities funded under the TGW should consider participant expectations from the outset. If participants develop action plans during TGW-supported events, implementing partners should try to find ways to support them, whether it is through UNMISS or related partner activities. Reaching out to strategic partners at the outset can help to secure their buy-in and avoid making commitments to project participants that cannot be met.

Sustainability

- The RSRTF and implementing partners should seek out commitments from government institutions at all levels that participate in TGW activities to share costs by providing financial or in-kind support to selected activities. For example, national or state-level budget allocations could be framed to support government institutions in their engagements with constituents. The RSRTF could adopt a phased approach in which it focuses on government institutions with the capacity to deliver and gradually creates space for government to take the lead in implementing the plans that emerge from engagements.
- Implementing partners on TGW projects should coordinate their interventions with relevant line ministries and directorates, including by tapping into existing development frameworks and policies, to help foster more sustainable impacts.
- TGW projects should incorporate theories of change that clearly articulate the anticipated impacts in the short-term alongside longer-term visions of sustainability.
- The RSRTF should encourage partners pursuing funding through the TGW to incorporate linkages with ABPs into the project design.

Annex I – Key Action Points

[This annex will be completed after a first round of revisions between the RSRTF Secretariat and the evaluation team.]

Shortcoming	Action Point	Responsibility	Timeframe

Annex II – Main Evaluation Questions

Relevance

- How relevant has the RSRTF’s approach to thematic funding been to the operating context?
- To what extent has the RSRTF funding for the CAD and PAD projects plugged programmatic and financing gaps that no other actor in South Sudan would have filled at the time?
- To what extent were the projects’ approach, theory of change and implementation modalities realistic and relevant to the operating context at the time they were designed?

Coherence

- Taking into account the broader funding landscape and set up of the UN system in South Sudan, to what extent is the RSRTF a suitable vehicle to fund similar initiatives as supported by the Thematic Grant Window to date?
- If the RSRTF is not a suitable vehicle, which entity is better placed to continue funding such initiatives, if at all?
- To what extent have the projects complemented each other and the Funds ABPs?

Effectiveness

- To what extent have the projects achieved their stated objectives?
- Which activities were particularly effective, and why?
- To what extent is the RSRTF making effective use of its resources in supporting thematic grants in addition to its ABPs?

Efficiency

- To what extent have the implementers delivered planned results in an economic, timely, and operationally efficient way? In particular, what implementation challenges did CAD and PAD face, and how could these be resolved in the future?
- To what extent have partners’ monitoring, evaluation and learning systems enabled them to track their outcome and output – level results, particularly the tangible outcomes of workshops?
- To what extent was the first Thematic Grants Window efficient as a funding modality? Are the discussions in the Steering Committee useful in steering the TGW in the wider context of the Fund’s overall goals?

Impact

- To what extent have the projects generated, or are expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher – level effects including on gender dynamics?
- Are there early signs of real change in gender relations among the project participants, for example with regard to more equal access to and use of resources, decision making power, division of labour, and destructive gender norms undermining peace efforts?
- How can the RSRTF ensure that any potential future thematic grants contribute to the Fund’s intended goals?

Sustainability

- How likely are the projects' net benefits to outlast the projects' existence?
- What were the levels of local, state and national ownership of the two projects?
- How can the RSRTF ensure that the impact of any potential future thematic grants is sustained?

Annex III – Request for Proposals – RSRTF Thematic Grant Funding Evaluation

Project Title	RSRTF Thematic Grant Funding Evaluation
Country	South Sudan
Region	Sub-Saharan Africa
Funding Source	RSRTF Secretariat Budget
Implementing party	UNDP South Sudan
General supervision	RSRTF Manager

The United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Reconciliation, Stabilization, and Resilience in South Sudan (RSRTF) is inviting consultancy firms to submit proposals for conducting an evaluation of (i) the RSRTF’s approach to thematic funding and (ii) the impact and performance of two of the Fund’s thematic grant projects. The main goals of this evaluation are to assess the relevance of the RSRTF’s Thematic Grants Window (TGW), particularly as it relates to the RSRTF’s focus on funding comprehensive ‘Area-based Programmes’ (ABPs), and to make recommendations as to any potential future applications of the TGW.

1. Background

The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) together launched the RSRTF in December 2018. The Fund provides strategic financing to integrated programmes that together lessen the destructive drivers of conflict and create more stable conditions in which development and resilience objectives may be realized. Drawing on the comparative advantages across UNMISS, UN agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the RSRTF promotes integrated programming across the ‘Triple Nexus’ of the humanitarian, development, and peace fields. Since its establishment, the Governments of Norway, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, South Korea, and Canada together have contributed over USD 61 million to the Fund. As of February 2022, the Fund has allocated over USD 44 million to seven programmes and projects across South Sudan.

The RSRTF intends to reduce violence and conflict in hotspot and marginalised areas of the country. Through its Area-based Programmes (ABP) RSRTF partners deliver comprehensive interventions that reduce social acceptance of violence and simultaneously nurture a conducive environment where peace can be sustained. Often building on existing efforts to bridge political divides and reconcile community divisions, the approach ensures hard-won political agreements and community reconciliation initiatives are reinforced through tangible actions that shift incentives and raise the cost of resorting to violence.

To date, the RSRTF has disbursed the majority of its funds to ABPs. The RSRTF’s 2021 Independent Early-stage Evaluation found that the “RSRTF has begun to fill an important a gap in South Sudan by providing funding to programmes operating across the whole range of the Humanitarian, Development, and Peace (HDP) nexus. From the outset, the RSRTF has aimed to offer a comprehensive approach to stabilization that integrated short- and mid-term focused programming within a longer-term political vision. [...] The Fund’s area-based approach is developing state of the art methods for working across the HDP nexus” (p. ii).

The Fund’s ABP modality is reinforced through the application of smaller thematic grants. These grants allow for nimbler application of funding within a shorter implementation

timeframe to react to windows of opportunity and deliver quick impact, as well as to strengthen existing ABPs through allocation of funds addressing thematic gaps and priorities.

While the first thematic grant was awarded in January 2020, the Fund Steering Committee (SC) shortly after determined that a Thematic Grant Window should be officially added to the Financing Mechanisms of the RSRTF. The decision was based on the assessment of the SC that an opportunity existed to build on the political momentum generated by the formation of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) in February 2020 and that the Fund provided an opportunity to capitalize on developments in the peace process that had the potential to generate notable change. In the absence of alternative financing mechanisms at the time the SC saw the Fund as a tool that must remain flexible and able to adapt to changing circumstances and respond quickly to emerging priorities.

While the RSRTF takes a local focus through its ABPs, the aim of the 2020 TGW was therefore to foster a conducive peacebuilding environment more broadly in South Sudan through engagement on political and policy processes that support implementation of the national peace process, as the ultimate precondition for peace and stability.

Through the launch of the Peace and Governance TGW in March 2020 the RSRTF hoped to fund additional small scale targeted efforts that would support peace implementation in the short and immediate term, while also promoting long-term conditions for sustainable peace. The Fund sought to fund initiatives that engage technical expertise and draw on best practice and experience to equip key stakeholders to positively influence the peace process, and to build confidence at all levels by drawing on regional and global expertise and knowledge which has been shown to support progress in other contexts. As stipulated in the TGW Call for Proposals (CfP), the initiatives to be funded were expected to seize the window of opportunity opened by the formation of the R-TGoNU, and to contribute to the Fund's Stabilization pillar, focusing on the following:

- **Peace & Governance:** Support the development of a robust political system and a more accountable, transparent, and responsive government by building governance capacity and fostering cohesion among political actors.

Thematic projects funded through the RSRTF to date have aligned to the Stabilization pillar of the RSRTF Results Framework, specifically to RSRTF Outcome 4: 'Communities, including women, youth and disadvantaged groups are empowered and increasingly able to meaningfully participate in local and broader political, peace and security processes.' In turn, these TGW programmes contributed to the United Nations Cooperation Framework for the Republic of South Sudan (UNCF) priorities of building peace and strengthening governance and empowering women and youth.

To date the RSRTF has awarded three thematic grants:

- (i) UNMISS Civil Affairs Division (CAD): 'Empowering the Grassroots: Linking the National and Subnational Processes'. The project runs from 1 January 2020 to 31 March 2022 with a total budget of USD 629,802. Its main aims are 'to empower grassroots stakeholders and opinion leaders across South Sudan and broaden their space for engagement by providing a platform to enhance grassroots participation in national peace implementation, bridge subnational and national processes,

- facilitate dialogue between local constituencies and their national leaders, and influence national policy on sustainable peace themes’.
- (ii) UNMISS Political Affairs Division (PAD): ‘Targeted support to Peace Implementation: Enhancing Political and Civic Space’. The project ran from 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2021 (USD 500,000 budget). Its main aim was ‘to increase political understanding and dialogue amongst a multi-tiered audience in order to increase inclusive civic and political participation in the implementation of the peace agreement and in the political landscape, laying the foundation to support a credible election process during the transitional period’.
 - (iii) International Organization for Migration (IOM): ‘Promoting Peace and Solidarity in the Face of COVID-19 in Juba, Bentiu and Wau’ running from 1 August 2020 to 31 October 2021. Utilizing the Thematic Grants Window modality and reflecting the Fund’s ability to quickly react to changes in an evolving context, the SC acted decisively to respond to the COVID-19 context allocating funds in support of the IOM project which aimed to enhance citizen participation in COVID-19 related governance processes and promote peaceful co-existence and social cohesion, while combatting stigmatization, and engendering the cooperation needed to limit and respond effectively to the spread of the disease.

As this ‘first generation’ of thematic projects is concluding, the RSRTF now seeks to evaluate to what extent its approach to thematic funding is helping the Fund achieve its goals, and to what extent the CAD and PAD grants have achieved their objectives. The RSRTF’s 2021 Independent Early-stage Evaluation underscored the need to critically reflect on the Fund’s approach to thematic funding. The evaluation found that “[g]iven the scale of the task and the many difficulties that confront the peace process, it is difficult to envision investments such as those provided by the SGW [TGW] having substantial impact on the political space in South Sudan. In this sense, there may be a mismatch between what these projects sought to achieve and what was realistic through the smaller funding envelopes and shorter timeframes of the SGW [TGW]. Moving forward, the RSRTF might consider ways of leveraging investments through the SGW [TGW] in a more strategic manner” (p. 5-6).

In addition, the evaluators noted that “small-scale interventions are likely to be without any sustainable effect towards the very ambitious goal of the SGW [TGW], which is to support a conducive political environment at the national level and to link ABP activities with peacebuilding at the national level. These aims are probably beyond the scope of what the SGW [TGW] can reasonably achieve. Instead, the usefulness of the SGW [TGW] could be the support of complementary activities to ABP that focus on the state and county levels” (p. 38).

2. Purpose, objectives, and evaluation questions

Therefore, in response to the findings of the RSRTF Independent Early-stage Evaluation, and to enable the Fund to learn from its first-generation thematic grants, the purpose of this evaluation is to assess (i) the RSRTF’s approach to thematic funding and (ii) the impact and performance of the CAD and PAD thematic grant projects. The main goals are to assess the relevance of the RSRTF’s thematic funding, particularly in relation to the Fund’s focus on funding comprehensive ‘Area-based Programmes’ (ABPs), and to make recommendations as to any potential future applications of the TGW. The evaluation will broaden the evidence base underpinning the Fund’s approach to thematic funding allocations and wider programming decision-making. Specifically, this evaluation aims to:

- Assess (i) to what extent the RSRTF’s approach to thematic funding has been relevant to the country context and the Fund’s existing ABPs, (ii) to what extent the chosen approach has helped the Fund achieve its goals, and (iii) whether the RSRTF is the right vehicle to support initiatives such as the CAD and PAD led actions in South Sudan
- Evaluate the impact and performance of the CAD and PAD thematic grant projects using the OECD-DAC criteria, including by assessing the extent to which the projects have achieved their intended outcomes and contributed to the Fund’s goals
- Make recommendations on how similar thematic grants should be monitored and evaluated
- Capture lessons, particularly on implementation challenges, innovation, and ‘good practice’ emerging from the projects
- Provide targeted and actionable recommendations that will help enhance implementing partners’ programme delivery and improve the Fund’s approach to thematic funding

The final list of evaluation questions will be agreed between the Evaluation Team and the Fund Secretariat. These are the indicative main evaluation questions:

- **Relevance:**
 - How relevant has the RSRTF’s approach to thematic funding been to the operating context?
 - To what extent has the RSRTF funding for the CAD and PAD projects plugged programmatic and financing gaps that no other actor in South Sudan would have filled at the time?
 - To what extent were the projects’ approach, theory of change, and implementation modalities realistic and relevant to the operating context at the time they were designed?
- **Coherence:**
 - Taking into account the broader funding landscape and set up of the UN system in South Sudan, to what extent is the RSRTF a suitable vehicle to fund similar initiatives as supported by the Thematic Grants Window to date? If the RSRTF is not a suitable vehicle, which entity is better placed to continue funding such initiatives, if at all?
 - To what extent have the projects complemented each other and the Fund’s ABPs?
- **Effectiveness:**
 - To what extent have the projects achieved their stated objectives?
 - Which activities were particularly effective, and why?
 - To what extent is the RSRTF making effective use of its resources in supporting thematic grants in addition to its ABPs?
- **Efficiency:**
 - To what extent have the implementers delivered planned results in an economic, timely, and operationally efficient way? In particular, what implementation challenges did CAD and PAD face, and how could these be resolved in the future?
 - To what extent have partners’ monitoring, evaluation and learning systems enabled them to track their outcome and output-level results, particularly the tangible outcomes of workshops?

- To what extent was the first Thematic Grants Window efficient as a funding modality?
- **Impact:**
 - To what extent have the projects generated, or are expected to generate, significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects, including on gender dynamics?
 - Are there early signs of real change in gender relations among the project participants, for example with regard to more equal access to and use of resources, decision-making power, division of labour, and destructive gender norms undermining peace efforts?
 - How can the RSRTF ensure that any potential future thematic grants contribute to the Fund's intended goals?
- **Sustainability:**
 - How likely are the projects' net benefits to outlast the projects' existence?
 - What were the levels of local, state, and national ownership of the two projects?
 - How can the RSRTF ensure that the impact of any potential future thematic grants is sustainable?

The direct users of this evaluation will be the Fund Steering Committee, the Fund Secretariat, as well as the Fund's implementing partners. Indirect users will include the South Sudanese population the Fund serves, civil society organizations, UNMISS, UNDP South Sudan, the wider UNCT in South Sudan, and the UNDP Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office.

3. **Approach and methodology**

The evaluation will be carried out in accordance with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) [Norms and Standards for Evaluation](#), [Ethical Guidelines](#), and [Guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations](#). The Evaluation Team will consult both women and men and mainstream gender considerations throughout the evaluation. The Evaluation Team will be held to the highest ethical standards.

The Evaluation Team may employ a combination of qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods including, but not limited to:

- Document review of all relevant project documentation. This would include a review of inter alia; project documents; budgets; theories of change and results frameworks; quarterly and annual project reports; no-cost extension applications; reports on the operating context
- Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders including project participants, representatives of civil society organizations and government entities, project staff, UNMISS and UNCT members' staff, implementing partners, and the Fund's donors, Steering Committee, and Secretariat
- Surveys and questionnaires, such as an online survey targeted at project participants, implementers, partners, donors, partners, and other key stakeholders, asking for feedback on the projects' work
- One field visit and on-site validation of key tangible project outputs

The Evaluation Team is expected to follow a participatory and consultative approach that ensures close engagement with the Evaluation Manager, implementing partners, and direct

beneficiaries. If data collection/field missions cannot be conducted due to COVID-19-related or security reasons, then remote interviews may be undertaken through telephone or online channels. No programme beneficiaries, stakeholders, or evaluators should be put in harm's way and safety is the key priority. In their proposals, Evaluation Teams should therefore outline COVID-19 back-up methods to be used should travel within the country not be possible. If necessary, the Evaluation Team will be asked to develop a more elaborate COVID-19 contingency plan during the inception phase of the evaluation in consultation with the Secretariat.

The final methodological approach including evaluation matrix, interview guide and schedule, and work plan should be agreed between the Fund Secretariat and the Evaluation Team and be clearly outlined in the inception report.

4. Firm requirements and team composition

The applicant firm will demonstrate:

- Extensive experience evaluating political, dialogue-facilitation, peacebuilding, and mediation projects
- Experience evaluating pooled multilateral funds, such as United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Funds
- Integrity and fairness, by modelling UN values and ethical standards
- Experience in integrating human rights and gender perspectives into evaluations
- Ability to design clean and meaningful graphics that support narratives, or direct access to graphic designers able to contribute to the Evaluation Team's work

Collectively, the Evaluation Team further will demonstrate:

- Cultural, gender, religion, race, nationality and age sensitivity and adaptability
- Deep familiarity with South Sudan's political context and key actors, R-ARCSS, the transitional period, and sub-national peacemaking dynamics
- Experience with and institutional knowledge of development, humanitarian, peace actors, including UN peacekeeping missions, UN Agencies, Funds, and Programmes, NGOs, civil society, or faith-based groups, preferably in South Sudan
- Familiarity with project management, particularly reporting, budgeting and procurement, preferably in a peacekeeping mission context
- An appropriate range of field experience
- Experience in facilitating consultative workshops involving a wide range of organizations and participants
- Excellent writing and communication skills in English

The Evaluation Team will include a Team Leader, who is responsible for the overall conduct of the evaluation in accordance with these ToR, including:

- Developing and adjusting the evaluation methodology
- Managing the Evaluation Team, ensuring efficient division of tasks between team members, managing conflicts and addressing shortcomings within the team
- Representing the Evaluation Team in meetings, e.g., with senior managers at Fund Secretariat and field levels, and the RSRTF Steering Committee

- Ensuring the quality and timely delivery of all deliverables

The Team Leader will have no less than 12 years of professional experience in either development, humanitarian affairs, peacebuilding, or international politics. Other team members will have no less than 2 years of experience in these fields. The Team Leader will have extensive experience in leading and conducting evaluations and demonstrate strong analytical, communication, and writing skills.

The Evaluation Team will consist of at least two members and will be gender balanced. Non-South Sudanese team members may only be considered if they can demonstrate substantial experience working in South Sudan. Team members, including the Team Leader, are expected to hold at least a Bachelor's degree in a field relevant to this evaluation.

5. Timeline and implementation arrangements

The evaluation will have three phases:

- March 2022: Inception
- April – May 2022: Implementation
- June 2022: Wrap-up

From July 2021 onwards, the Fund and its implementing partners will follow up on the evaluation internally, including by writing management responses to the evaluation. The evaluation should be concluded 14 weeks after contract award. The Evaluation Team may spend a maximum of 45 working days on this evaluation. The timeline above includes buffers for any unforeseen contingencies as well as for periods in which the Fund Secretariat is reviewing draft submissions. The Fund Secretariat may grant additional working days after consultation with the Evaluation Team if necessitated by any logistical or COVID-19-related contingencies. Members of the Evaluation Team travelling to South Sudan for the purpose of this evaluation are responsible for their own visa applications and for observing COVID-19 travel regulations, including a potential quarantine after arrival (please consult the Government of South Sudan's websites for further information). Days spent in quarantine only count towards the 45 working days if they are used to complete tasks related to this evaluation (e.g. desk-based review or online interviews). The final timeline will be agreed upon with the Evaluation Team and the Fund Secretariat during the inception phase.

The Evaluation Team will take responsibility, with assistance from the CAD, PAD, and the Fund Secretariat, for setting up meetings and conducting the evaluation, subject to advanced approval of the methodology submitted in the inception report. The Evaluation Team will report directly to the designated Evaluation Manager and work closely with the Fund Secretariat. The Evaluation Team will be required to travel within South Sudan to visit project sites (in Juba and one field location), and to conduct at least one data validation workshop with CAD, PAD, the Fund and its partners to increase data accuracy and reliability. Logistical and limited administrative support will be provided. The Evaluation Team will use their own laptops and cell phones. Other actors involved in the evaluation will have the following responsibilities:

The Fund Secretariat:

- Designate an Evaluation Manager who will be the Evaluation Team’s point of contact and provide administrative and management functions, including coordination and quality assurance
- Review submissions and select the winning evaluation proposal
- Update the Steering Committee on the progress of the evaluation tendering process and implementation
- Facilitate access to all relevant and available information required to perform the scope of work
- Facilitate introductions to stakeholders and accompany the Evaluation Team on site visits, as appropriate
- Review and provide feedback on the inception report and the first draft the evaluation report
- Draft and execute the management response
- Oversee conformity of the evaluation process with UNEG standards and ethical guidelines

The Steering Committee:

- Provide feedback and guidance to the Fund Secretariat in the management of the evaluation, as required
- Review and provide feedback on the (draft) evaluation report
- Approve the management response to the evaluation

UNMISS Civil and Political Affairs Divisions (CAD and PAD):

- Designate a focal point for the evaluation
- Facilitate access to all relevant information required to perform the scope of work
- Facilitate introductions to stakeholders in Juba and the field
- Actively participate in the data validation workshop(s)

6. Workload and deliverables

The below table indicates a timeline for evaluation deliverables:

Deliverables	Timeframe
Draft inception report	1 - 2 weeks after award
Revised inception report	2 - 3 weeks after award
Short update email every Friday of the contract period	Every week after award
Data from interviews, FGDs, surveys, fieldwork etc	7 - 8 weeks after award
Validation workshop	9 - 10 weeks after award
Draft evaluation report, two-page summary, and slide deck	10 - 11 weeks after award
Final evaluation report, two-page summary, and slide deck	13 - 14 weeks after award
Final presentation(s)	14 weeks after award

Exact dates on which deliverables are due will be agreed upon by the Evaluation Team and the Fund Secretariat during inception. Consideration may be given to a time contingency should the evaluation be delayed in any way due to COVID-19.

Suggested structures of the inception (max. 12 pages, excl. annexes) and final reports (max. 50 pages, excl. annexes) will be shared with the evaluation team upon contract award. For all deliverables, draft versions will be submitted for comments, which should be considered for the final version. Several rounds of comments may be necessary. For each round, the Evaluation Team may be asked to prepare a comments matrix, listing all comments received and explaining how they have been addressed.

The final version of the evaluation report and the two-page summary must be proofread and undergo professional graphic design. All deliverables should include relevant graphs, charts and maps to present findings and trends visually. The Fund intends to publish these documents.

7. Process of evaluation and approval of proposals and payments

The Fund Secretariat will review the submissions and select the winning proposal. The Secretariat might seek additional information and/or ask for revisions of proposals once they have been submitted. The proposals will be assessed according to the following criteria:

Technical proposal (70%):

- Expertise of the firm (15%): The firm meets criteria set out in this ToR. Evidence or details of previous similar evaluations demonstrate the firm's suitability
- Methodology, its appropriateness to the condition and timeliness of the implementation plan (25%):
 - The proposal presents a specific approach and a variety of suitable and feasible methods for collecting and analysing qualitative and/or quantitative data. The methodology incorporates human rights and gender equality perspectives
 - Evaluation matrix: The matrix clearly addresses the ToR, relating the main evaluation questions to specific methods, data sources, research subjects (e.g. interviewees), and estimated workload
 - Work plan: The timeframe and resources indicated in the work plan are realistic and useful for the needs of the evaluation
- Management structure and qualification of key personnel (30%):
 - Motivation and ethics: The proposal reflects familiarity of and clear professional commitment to UNEG evaluation standards and guidance
 - The Team Leader's and all Evaluation Team members' experience and qualifications meet the criteria indicated in the ToR. The team is gender-balanced

Financial proposal (30%):

- To be computed as a ratio of the Proposal's offer to the lowest price among the proposals received by UNDP

All final decisions on funding allocation are made by the Fund Secretariat. The Fund reserves the right to fund any or none of the proposals received. Fee payments will be made upon acceptance by the Fund Secretariat of planned deliverables, based on the following payment schedule:

- Draft inception report: 20%
- Draft evaluation report, two-page summary, and slide deck: 40%
- Final evaluation report, two-page summary, slide deck, and final presentation: 40%

8. Application procedures

Interested firms should submit a proposal reflecting these ToR and the specific components described in the proposal assessment criteria in section 7 above. In addition, firms are asked to annex CVs of Evaluation Team members of maximum 2 pages each, and, where possible, writing samples and/or excerpts from previous evaluations, or information about the scope and nature of these evaluations. Referee contact details may be provided. The Fund reserves the right to screen out proposals that exceed the stated page limit for CVs. All files must be written in English and submitted in PDF format. Any request for clarification must be sent by email no later than 2 March 2022 to RSRTF@un.org.

Applicant firms may find it useful to consult the below links when writing their proposal:

- RSRTF Factsheet:
<https://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/fund/SSR00>
- RSRTF CAD Factsheet and Project Document:
<https://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/project/00119364>
- RSRTF PAD Factsheet and Project Document:
<https://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/project/00120689>

Annex IV – List of Documents Reviewed

Fund governance

- Fund Terms of Reference (December 2021)
- Fund annual strategies (2020, 2021, 2022)

Fund management

- Fund results framework
- Fund annual reports (2019, 2020, 2021)
- Fund financial overview (contributions/Fund ledger)
- 2021 Annual Cross-Partner Learning Workshop Report

Fund projects

- Calls for proposals – Thematic Grant Window
- CAD, PAD, and IOM Covid-19 Project Documents (Prodocs)
- CAD and PAD project narrative annual reports
- CAD and PAD project narrative quarterly reports
- CAD and PAD grant budgets
- CAD and PAD documents as submitted by partners

MPTFO Factsheet

- RSRTF online factsheet: <http://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/fund/SSR00>

Other important documents

- PfRR strategy documents
- UN PBF-funded project documents and project reports
- R-ARCSS