



Photo of participants-Aweil, South Sudan

Rural Stakeholders' Engagement in Social Cohesion, Reconciliation and Peace building in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, South Sudan

Background:

Community-level reconciliation, essential in conflict-affected contexts, involves efforts to promote intergroup relationships and to build trust. These processes are related to the development of social capital, which alongside the reduction of horizontal inequalities is a key component of social cohesion. In south Sudan and elsewhere, rural populations are often marginalized and have a much higher incidence of poverty. There is limited evidence, however, on effective ways to achieve social cohesion and peace in south Sudan and elsewhere. Areas identified in the literature where initiatives are needed to facilitate the building of peace, social cohesion and reconciliation in south Sudan include:



- **Identity reconfiguration:** Religious, ethnicity and tribe are forms of identity that have been used to divide in south Sudan. Approaches to reconfigure identity include redefining one's own identity, changing perceptions of the other group, and/or finding a new overarching identity.
- **Cultural heritage preservation:** Northern Bahr el Ghazal- Aweil, South Sudan leaders have engaged in efforts to culturally cleanse areas under its control, including some of the world's earliest examples of farming villages. A programme of collaborative, multi-party engagement is needed to effectively evaluate, promote and protect south Sudan's heritage.
- **Dialogue and conflict resolution:** Strategies to promote social cohesion and reconciliation in south Sudan include sessions designed to change attitudes, clarify and change perceptions and perspectives, develop communication skills, manage difficult conversations, and practice problem-solving skills. Christian Action for Development & Support (**CADS**) in partnership with Democracy International (**DI**) seeks to carry out rural stakeholders' recovery activities/programs and change them as agents for social cohesion, reconciliation and peace building.

Dialogue overview of Social Cohesion, Reconciliation and Peace building.

The five day forum brought together community leaders, CSOs, Government officials, youth groups, faith groups, women groups and NNGOs; to discuss issues engagement in social cohesion, reconciliation and peace building and find solutions. Contribution of the rural stakeholders' and development process is a major concern intended in this project.

The dialogue was opened with a word of prayer by Angelina Athieng and followed by an opening speech from ACEC Chair person, Mr. Mayuol Diing Mayuol. Mauol emphasized that the forum invites all members of public to interact for the benefits of all in this hall. We used to invite many people for fruitful discussions to attract reactions from participants but COVID-19 lockdown has badly interfered but we still need this small number of participants to discuss. I am here today because the Center officer is on leave and I am delegated to fulfill the responsibility until he comes. That is why I am called to open this meeting. I am happy to be here and I thank all of you who have come. This discussion by CADS is important as it talks about social cohesion and we really have issues that affect our social cohesion which we must discuss and find solutions to. Otherwise, the meeting is officially opened and you can now go ahead.



Participants during discussions made comments. Mr. Malith Yuat Malith, the invited chief, said our culture may disappear after 10 years from now if the behavior being observed doesn't change. Our culture is withering and needs restoration and preservation, he said. As the discussion continued, Mrs. Asunta Batista Kaba agreed with chief's statement saying that our Luo Culture is almost disappearing as children don't know its cultural dances. This is an issue we all need to join hands to address together.

On the other hand, the teacher who was invited, Mr. Wilson Ajonga Ajonga said that the only thing to do is to review our cultures and renew good cultural practices. This needs to be done if we want to rescue and reserve our cultural dignity, he ended. One of the participants, Ms. Hellen Achuai said she was deeply disappointed when she paid a visit to Aweil Freedom Square in 2019 and was dismayed by the kinds of dressing styles and behavior which shocked and had never been there from that moment.

Issues of GBV were thoroughly discussed and stories emerged that a young girl of 8 years was raped in Aweil West and the matter took to court and was turned down by the police when the criminal paid the police some money and the young is from a poor family.

This young girl is now at home without treatment and would be traced for rescue by GBV actors to facilitate her treatment court proceeding.

On discussion about factors that affect social cohesion, the following were outlined:

(A) Things that affect social cohesion positively:

- Sports activities
- Education
- Respect and human rights and
- Cultural dances among others

(B) Things that affect social cohesion negatively:

- Forced marriage
- Misunderstanding
- Rape and
- Power abuse among others



Achievement

Outcomes, outputs, achievements...

- The discussion was attended by 5 participants, 2 males and 3 females
- The discussion was attended according to schedule
- Media representatives were invited to cover the discussion and some participants were asked to comment on issues being discussed by media
- Democracy International (DI) provided funding to facilitate the discussion for five days
- Participants were equipped with conflict resolution skills

Challenges and Lessons Learned:

The lessons learnt were challenges which had indicators of withered culture and Key recommendations made by the participants as follows:

- Promoting good cultural practices
- Advocacy for behavioral change
- Promoting diversity to promote cohesion
- Review on cultural practices
- Resumption of cultural dances
- Avoiding prostitution by embracing healthy practices
- Promoting social cohesive activities such as cultural dances

Program

SUCCESS staff in the Civic Engagement Center and Christian Action for Development & Support (CADS) will follow up the activity outcomes with community leaders, youth leaders and other stakeholders.

Success Story Contact(s):

Angelina Athieng told the participants that a school girl who completed senior four secondary was forced to be married to a lost boy against a husband of her choice. As a result, this girl became mate and is being tied down now in Aweil West-Marial baai at Akuongyook.

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