



Joint Learning Initiative
on Faith & Local Communities
Strengthening Evidence-Based Faith Engagement



The Role and Contributions of South Sudanese Youth in the Signing of the 2018 Peace Agreement



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1. Acronyms

ARCSS – Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan

HLRF – High Level Revitalisation Forum

iDove – Interfaith Dialogue on Violent Extremism

IGAD – Intergovernmental Authority on Development

JLI – Joint Learning Initiative

R-ARCSS – Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan

UNSCR – United Nations Security Council Resolution

2. Introduction

South Sudan and its neighbours have been linked by a fluctuating pattern of conflict. With the proliferation of violent extremism and small arms in these often volatile and neglected regions, including the Lake Chad basin, Sahel, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes, conflict has expanded drastically, arguably becoming the top threat to national and regional security.

While the literature on understanding the radicalisation, trends and radical ideologies in South Sudan that have fuelled violent extremism continues to grow, little attention and focus have been given to the role and contributions young stars are making to build resilience in at-risk communities and cultivate the culture of peace and coexistence. A lot of work and support are still needed.

Youth should be supported to foster public discussion about underlying political, social and economic issues, which are often the root causes of violent extremism. They should be encouraged to take the bold, transformative steps that are urgently needed to advance ideas that further recognise and enhance the participation and leadership roles of youth in contributing solutions that promote peace and stability so they can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality in a healthy environment.

3. Background

On 9 July 2011, South Sudan gained independence from Sudan through a vote which saw southerners vote overwhelmingly in favour of an independent state. This ended many years of protracted armed struggle that dated back as early as 1955 when the first resistance against the establishment in Khartoum was launched to fight against and liberate southern Sudanese from racism, oppression, marginalisation and exploitation of the rich natural resources in the region.

The signing of an agreement under the auspices of Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, known as the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement, brought an end to the first leg of this long, drawn-out struggle as southerners' aspirations, including autonomy, were recognised. Power was devolved from the centre, and the regional government in the south was empowered politically and financially to undertake development and redress some of the existing imbalances.

With the foundation of a country birthed after many years of interminable armed struggle driven by the core principles of justice, liberty and prosperity, hopes were sky-high among the populace and friends of the new country that, with South Sudan managing its own affairs far from the helm of the then rogue Khartoum regime under deposed leader Omer Al Bashir, the new rulers would fulfil the promises of the liberation struggle.

However, the honeymoon period was short-lived due to disagreements in South Sudan's ruling party. The Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army leaders plunged the country back into war in December 2013, starting a new cycle of post-independence conflict. The Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS) was signed in 2015 but yielded little fruit as the country fell back into war barely a year later when soldiers loyal to the President and First Vice President clashed in a dogfight at the Presidential Palace in Juba in July 2016, returning the country to a fully-fledged war that extended to new frontiers that were previously peaceful.

The regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) convened the parties to the South Sudan conflict, including the Incumbent Transitional Government of National Unity, Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition, South Sudan Opposition Alliance and other opposition political parties, to peace talks in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It helped develop the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), signed in September 2018. This agreement lifted the hopes of many South Sudanese. However, its snail-paced implementation continues to raise doubts about the commitment of the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity and parties to implementing it. Five years later, only about 23% of the agreement had been implemented, warranting an extension of the agreement by a further 24 months through a new roadmap signed in August 2022.

4. Rationale

In general, a person aged 18–35 years old is regarded as a youth. However, in South Sudan, there is still no legal framework stipulating who is a youth and establishing a policy for their development. Reference is always made to the African Youth Charter, which describes youth as any person between the ages of 18-35, regional practice and the draft South Sudan National Development Policy.

When discussing youth participation, it is important to consider not only the challenges faced by young people but also the positive contributions they have made to society and opportunities to achieve effective youth participation. Long-term ways to enhance youth

participation include platforms for engagement to develop youths' skills and providing quality education and mentorship.

As members of society and leaders of the future – which is now – young people are at the forefront of sustainable response, accelerated transformation and bold action. In order to create a more sustainable and resilient future and a diverse and inclusive society, it is essential to create opportunities for young people to take action towards the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 16.

Young people's actions need to be invested in, recognised and amplified. Without young people's participation, we will struggle to yield satisfactory results and will lack the innovative solutions and new perspectives needed to significantly promote solidarity and consolidate various actions taken in societies to promote peace.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 is premised on the following five pillars: prevention, participation, protection, partnerships and disengagement, and demobilisation and reintegration. Broad-based meaningful youth participation is needed across the five pillars for the full realisation of the UNSCR.

5. Methodology

In order to understand the roles and contributions of youth to the 2018 R-ARCSS, the author undertook a qualitative assessment of youth in civil society who were part of the peace process in Addis Ababa in the room, around the room and outside the room.

The researcher reviewed existing literature related to the topic and references to existing documentation, such as news articles.

Key informant interviews with focal persons involved in different forms and levels of the peace process were carried out. A total of 10 interviews were carried out, either online via WhatsApp or through direct phone calls.

The data collection and analysis process was entirely qualitative. The consultation focused on two key questions:

- 1) **How have young people participated in the peace process, and what has their impact been?**
- 2) **What are examples of how young people have participated in the implementation of the peace agreement?**

With the above questions, every participant had the opportunity to not only identify their personal experiences but also give feedback on ways other young people participated in the peace process.

The approach used for the research reached out to 10 youths for interviews over the phone and online via WhatsApp. The data collected was transcribed and the views expressed were cleaned, forming the backbone of this report.

6. Findings

In South Sudan, young people continue to defy the odds to carve themselves a role in building peace and social cohesion in their communities. This is despite the existing challenges of poverty, lack of education, insecurity, shrinking civic space and a crippling economy as a result of the vicious cycle of conflicts in the country. These efforts have to be harnessed and promoted across the country, and the necessary support and environment for such efforts to succeed must be created.

During the High Level Revitalisation Forum (HLRF) and subsequent rounds of peace talks, young people were credited with bringing new ideas, experiences and high energy to the negotiations. A classic example is the hanging of a painting depicting a rolling carpet, reflecting the closure of the old and dark chapter in South Sudan's history – one of war, diseases, hunger, human rights abuses and killings – and the beginning of a new bright future – one of hope and fulfilment of the liberation promising peace, development and advancement in society. Many people in the peace negotiations remarked how powerful that image was and that it had an influence on moving the process forward.

The following examples showcase in detail the contributions of the youth in South Sudan to the peace process.

Layer 1 – In the room:

Youth participation within formal peace architecture and structures inside the room during negotiations and political dialogues.

In previous peace negotiations in South Sudan, such as the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the 2014 Agreement on Resolution of the Conflict in Jonglei State and the 2015 ARCSS, there was little inclusion and participation of youth in the formal negotiations. However, the adoption of the UNSCR 2250 in 2015 provided a legal and moral tool for South Sudanese youth to demand to be present in the peace process, playing different roles in different capacities. This is largely because of the greater role youth-led organisations took after the 2016 conflict in working to advocate for an end to the South Sudan war. The HLRF provided an avenue as the IGAD mediators were keen on youth participation.

The youth delegates at the HLRF convened youth from across parties to develop a common agenda for young people and to commit to youth-friendly provisions within the framework for peace in South Sudan. This is exemplified by the joint position paper for the Minister of Youth Affairs in the country to be a youth – ultimately, it was guaranteed that the Minister would be younger than 40 years old.

Also, the delegates called for broad participation of young people in the governance structures to be formed, including the Parliament, Executive and Commissions. This resulted in many young people being appointed to constitutional positions when the Government of National Unity was formed in 2020 and the National Assembly reconstituted in 2021.

It has also led to youth-friendly provisions, such as the Youth Enterprise Development Fund, Women Enterprise Development Fund, Students Fund and a youth-sensitive disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme.

The effective advocacy by young people also further realised their inclusion in the peace agreement's implementation mechanisms, and lastly, the participation of refugees in the negotiations. This was important to ensure a diversity of opinion was heard, especially views from those who were victims of the conflict on their needs and the design of a dignified return of all refugees and internally displaced persons to their places of origin.

Layer 2 – Around the room:

Young people not directly in the room but close to the peace agreement and connected (able to get in the room) through formal or informal mechanisms.

Youth delegates and networks built a working relationship with those inside and outside the room, effectively providing an information resource centre to the public on the progress of the talks and, where necessary, generating pressure to see traction in the process.

The amplified voices of young South Sudanese prompted the political actors and negotiators to take young people's issues seriously and commit to addressing them within the framework for peace. Youth demands were granted, such as participation in the peace implementation phase. One youth was also a signatory to the agreement, and affirmative action for women at 35% was achieved.

In addition, youth made themselves and their issues relevant by lobbying regional countries with greater leverage on the direction of the peace talks, the international community, religious leaders and political parties.

Layer 3 – Outside the room:

Young people who engage and participate through informal and alternative approaches. Self-creation of observation roles

The majority of youth participated in the peace process through numerous alternative formats. Youth took ownership of the agreement and assigned themselves the role of observation. This was captured in a brilliant way when the South Sudan Civil Society Forum developed a creative social media campaign using the hashtag **#SouthSudanIsWatching**. The public was enlisted to take photos in sunglasses painted with the South Sudanese flag and share them on social media with a message. The campaign was launched to mark the opening of the HLRF.



This cemented young people's role as observers of the peace process, generating focus on progress and putting pressure on the warring parties, who at times exhibited no will to negotiate and reach a peaceful resolution of the conflict in South Sudan. This was possible against a backdrop of the unity citizens showcased through the campaign, compelling the warring parties to be responsible for making peace.

Youth-led digital creativity

During the South Sudanese peace process, the youth-led movement #Anataban created an e-delegate participation platform. The platform provided a resource centre for information for civil society groups, youth and citizens with vital information about the peace process.

The e-delegates forum involved a 30-minute Facebook live session with a delegate in the peace process who provided updates. These videos were amplified in civic engagement forums, such as workshops and conferences. This programme was important in a way that had never been imagined as it triggered offline conversations in South Sudanese households, schools and other public spaces, such as tea places, increasing access to information on the peace process and the discussions between the warring parties. It also provided accurate information to citizens both inside and outside the country at a time when there was a lot of misinformation, disinformation and propaganda around the negotiations.

As a young woman from South Sudan noted, “If diaspora gets accurate information, then they would promote positive messages”.

Sweeping for peace



Once again, youth knew their role did not end with advocating for an agreement – they also needed to advocate for its implementation. They decided to sustain and maintain their voices by creating other alternative means of being heard. #NADAFLEBELEDNA (Learn us clean our country) was born as a vehicle to champion youth voices and action moving forward. On a monthly basis, hundreds of youth gathered to clean a neighbourhood or streets in Juba, promoting campaign messages to clean their country.

The movement mobilised youth under the slogan, “do not just be youthful, be useful”. This was a direct call for youth, who constitute the majority population of the country (72%), to claim their rights.

For the organisers of this campaign: “This is not a cleaning project, it should not be misunderstood, we are actually protesting. Cleaning is a protest because we are tired of wars. If we clean the streets, we can also clean the bushes. We can clean this country out of corruption, nepotism and tribalism.” Interview with a young South Sudanese man.

The above examples provide many ways youth in South Sudan have carved out a role for themselves to participate in society, challenging the cycle of conflict, exclusion, marginalisation and poor service delivery and envisioning their aspiration to build inclusive, safe, just and peaceful societies.

7. Conclusion

The UNSCR 2250 is the first ever resolution recognising the positive role young people play in maintaining and promoting peace and security. It asks for “[the establishment of] integrated mechanisms for meaningful participation of youth in peace processes and dispute-resolution”. The subsequent Youth, Peace and Security Resolution, UNSCR 2419 (2018), reiterates the importance of youth participation by asking for “inclusive representation of youth for the prevention and resolution of conflict, including when negotiating and implementing peace agreements”. Such policy documents have been instrumental in cementing youth participation in the implementation of peace agreements. For example, in the case of the 2018 R-ARCSS, youth gained over six representatives in different mechanisms with a gendered lens, including the Revitalised Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, Ceasefire Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism, National Constitutional Amendment Committee and Strategic Defence and Security Review Board.

The participation of youth in the South Sudan peace process has not only challenged the negative stereotypes about youth in the country but contributed to wider stability in the country as young people are on the front line responding to peacebuilding needs at the grassroots level. Many are involved through youth organisations they have formed to provide early warnings, resolve disputes, protect women from sexual violence and cultivate a culture of peace in the next generation of South Sudanese.

The effective participation of young people in the 2018 peace process provides a foundation and sets a precedence for their subsequent inclusion in the national dialogue and regional and national conferences. To a large extent, youth participation in public life is now engrained in any public discourse in the country.

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The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of the participants. They can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the author and volunteers involved in the research.

About the Author

Patrick Godi is a South Sudanese youth leader, policy researcher and co-founder of various initiatives. He specializes in Youth, Peace and Security and strongly advocates for youth mentorship, participation in policy development, and decision making for positive societal change.

Patrick has successfully contributed to peace mediations and policy issues including the South Sudan peace process, has also contributed to shaping national frameworks including co-authoring the recently published policy briefs on Youth Enterprise Fund and Understanding the causes of youth unrest in South Sudan.

He has special interest in cross regional and continental issues which has influenced him to collaborate with peers in Africa and Europe to advance youth agency in social-economic and political development.

In 2019, he was part of the African Union's study group on the 'Roles and Contributions of Youth to Peace and Security in Africa'. The consultations were in line with African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) communique 807th which seeks to put youth at the epicenter of Governance, Peace and Security in Africa. The report & Continental Framework

on Youth, Peace and Security was adopted by the AUPSC communique 933th on 23rd June 2020.

In 2020, He was selected to become a member of the Common Futures Conversation – a new initiative developed by Chatham House to deliver innovative ways for young people in Africa and Europe with a ‘seat at the table’ in major policy discussions. As a community member he collaborated with peers on contributing potential solutions to Police Violence and made a presentation before Chatham House research experts, policy makers and politicians.

His work in Youth, Peace and Security has seen him become part of international, continental and regional initiative’s including the Chatham House, African Union, Mo Ibrahim Foundation and the African Youth Networks Movement - a Pan African network under the patronage of stateswoman Graca Machel, where he is a Steering Committee member.

He is also an influential leader in South Sudan’s vibrant youth movement #ANATABAN committed to promoting the protection of all human rights, and a South Sudan where citizens enjoy their rights. He continues to advocate for peaceful nonviolent action in addressing the country’s political, social and economic challenges.

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The JLI is a learning network of researchers and practitioners, building fair and equitable spaces to create and share evidence on religions in development and community work. The JLI aims to strengthen partner-ships between and amongst faith and non-faith actors, internationally and locally.

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