

Peacebuilding, Reconciliation and Community Cohesion in South Sudan: The Role of Youth

13 February 2016

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Introduction

This document provides a summary of a meeting held in Juba on 13 February 2016 that focused on the role of youth in the future of South Sudan and on possibilities for an inclusive approach that engages youth in peacebuilding, reconciliation and community cohesion. The event was hosted in collaboration with the British Council's Horn of Africa Leadership and Learning for Action (HOLLA) project, which is funded by the European Union.

The speakers' presentations were held on the record. The questions-and-answers sessions were held under the Chatham House Rule and the views expressed are those of the participants. This document is intended to serve as an *aide-mémoire* for those who took part and to provide a general summary of discussions for those who did not.

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Session 1: How do politicians see the role of youth in peacebuilding, reconciliation and community cohesion?

Speakers:

Hon. John Gai Nyout Yoh, Minister of Education, Science and Technology, Government of South Sudan
Manasseh Zindo, Chairperson of the National Committee for Culture, Youth and Sports, Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO)

Dr Lam Akol Ajawin, Chairman, Democratic Change Party

John Luk Jok, Minister of Justice (2011–13); Nominee for Minister of Transport in the Transitional Government of National Unity, SPLM-Former Detainees (SPLM-FD)

Chair:

Rosalind Marsden, Associate Fellow, Chatham House

John Gai Nyout Yoh

The minister began by emphasizing the importance of youth in the history of Southern Sudan's liberation, particularly in the articulation of a national revolutionary agenda, which was driven by educated groups within the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). He explained that in the 1960s and 1970s, it was the youth of Southern Sudan who pioneered revolutionary activities, mobilizing in urban and rural areas as students and then as active combatants.

He explained that from the 1980s to 2000s youth and students completely revolutionized the SPLM/A. Students became the base of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) leadership between 1983 and 1987, while in rural areas where people had less education, the SPLA developed a cadre of volunteers who formed youth battalions. The SPLM manifesto created a unified idea for how to organize youth, and the unity and vision of the SPLM was clear to the youth of Southern Sudan. If there was a lack of clarity as to whether people were fighting for South Sudan or a new Sudan, that was never the case among the youth.

The minister then spoke about how the role of youth shifted after the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Until then, the leadership of South Sudan and the marginalized areas of South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur were in a Catch-22 situation. The liberation of South Sudan was achieved but the war continued in the marginalized areas, unresolved by the SPLM. When the independence of South Sudan came, issues of service delivery, youth empowerment and women's empowerment were never properly articulated.

The speaker reflected on how to formulate a new vision for the empowerment and engagement of youth in South Sudan. The main priority is education, which will allow young people to develop the country. This could be achieved through a unified national agenda, articulated in a curriculum that promotes a vision of the people and country. The second priority is a clear Youth Service Programme. The speaker said that this would enable people to feel they were South Sudanese. Voluntary service for youth would provide technical schools and employment opportunities. He highlighted that there are 250,000 youth within the security sector (army, police) who could contribute to nation building development programmes in infrastructure, agriculture, teaching and vocational training, instead of continuing to fight and break the country up.

The minister concluded by reiterating that the consequences of the current crisis should be a revision of South Sudan's agenda for what comes next. This should focus on education and building a national youth service.

Manasseh Zindo

Manasseh Zindo began by defining youth in South Sudan, explaining that while the United Nations defined youth as those aged between 18 to 24 years, in South Sudan it was more commonly considered to be those aged 18 to 40. He explained that the cultural setting and political environment in which youth are brought up defines who they will become in society and the likelihood of their role in it. Whether there is a violent or a peaceful environment affects who the role models are. He described the political environment in South Sudan as one of violence in which the majority of youth have grown up surrounded and influenced by violence.

The speaker argued that the issue of tribalism has failed young people and must be dealt with when determining their future role in South Sudan. Structural violence is imbedded in tribalism. At community level children are told not to associate with people from certain other communities, a pure manifestation of structural violence. In an environment where there are no jobs or business opportunities for those who are willing to study, young people become vulnerable to peer pressure and cultural prestige, eventually becoming agents of destruction rather than peace.

The speaker discussed the case of the Arrow Boys in Western Equatoria state. The Arrow Boys came into existence as a force for peace. In 2006, the government of Southern Sudan allowed Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) to set up camp in Western Equatoria during the latter's peace talks with the government of Uganda. When the talks failed, the LRA unleashed their brutality on the people of Western Equatoria, while the SPLA watched from a distance. The Arrow Boys stepped in to protect the people of the state and defend their heritage, thus becoming a force for peace. The Arrow Boys were never appreciated by the government of South Sudan or provided with opportunities, and thus remained disgruntled. In the violent political environment of South Sudan, when the December 2013 crisis erupted the Arrow Boys found a partner in the SPLM-IO and began to fight the government.

The speaker argued that the SPLM-IO believes that youth can play a crucial role in the stabilization of the country and towards fostering peacebuilding, reconciliation and community cohesion, but that this could only happen if the political environment is changed from one of violence to one of peace. Freedom of association and expression must be available to young people if South Sudan is to value their role.

Lam Akol Ajawin

The speaker began by outlining concepts that are important for shifting policy designs regarding youth. Youth are half the present and all the future, he said, and they participate within the present and continue into the future. According to the last census, youth form 72 per cent of the population. If South Sudan is to grow as a nation, its young people need to be central to planning.

He highlighted that most young people are uneducated and in the countryside. They are vulnerable to manipulation, such as in relation to cattle rustling and recruitment into war. Even the few educated youth do not have clear direction. Before independence, people were exposed to different kinds of education and upbringing in Khartoum, East Africa, the wider region and the diaspora. As a nation South Sudan needs to harmonize these backgrounds and values in order to create a unified group that can act as one.

The speaker explained that the constitution made English the official language, yet most rural people only speak Arabic. Even the country's leaders speak Arabic in official meetings and statements. There should be a programme to teach people English.

He argued that youth programmes need to operate in an environment of peace. The peace agreement should be properly embraced to enable this. In order to benefit from the energy of the country's young people, the government must offer opportunities that make them feel that they are living a life of significance. This is not only in terms of material life but also the moral and convictional side of the equation. The speaker gave the example of young comfortable professionals from the West who have joined ISIS and embraced radicalism. This illustrated that other elements of human life must be addressed by a vision that offers practical solutions to questions arising on a daily basis. There are other issues that matter to youth and these need to be addressed by achievable government policies and programmes.

The speaker argued that the youth should be empowered but not controlled. It may be possible to control a few of them but the rest will be lost. Evidence has shown that initiatives that are small-scale and start from the bottom achieve better results than top-down directives from government. He suggested the youth should be supported to engage on issues of importance to them, whether political, economic or social. In so doing, South Sudan would benefit from the realization of their potential.

He argued that peace was needed in order to achieve this goal. The youth had been manipulated into an instrument and the fodder of war. South Sudan must strive to transform its youth into a tool for nation building. Education is at the heart of this. Countries that advanced rapidly, such as the Asian tigers, did so through educational planning and development. Singapore and Malaysia were given as examples.

The speaker pointed to a key factor in South Sudan's current situation being the limited budget for education, which since 2005 never surpassed six per cent of the total budget, and even that had not been implemented or allocated. He said that the country needed to do more in terms of technical education also as professions and valuable artisanal skills (e.g. in plumbing, carpentry and electricity) are also needed to develop the correct mix of skills on a national level and to employ youth more widely in society. Creating incentives for young people to choose these livelihoods is important.

He next addressed the responsibility of youth to ensure the rights of their group and not be manipulated by violent or negative interests. He called on young people to assert their independence, advocate their concerns as a group and not be divided by parochial interests. He encouraged them to form a solid body and assert their interests, highlighting that nobody can win elections without the 72 per cent of the electorate that young people represent.

The speaker highlighted his party's programme 'blueprint for change'. He touched on the principal aspects of this that crosscut youth issues with other areas. These included: adopting a culture of peace rather than one of war; reducing marriage dowries in order to encourage young people to have partners; engaging young people in a literacy campaign; paying attention to health; implementing programmes to rehabilitate youth with special needs; fighting tribalism among youth by exposing them to a national outlook on issues; and paying special attention to technical teaching to promote self-reliance after leaving school.

Finally, the speaker described agriculture as the country's mainstay, employing 80 per cent of the people. Long-term skills creation should be provided for young people in this sector, including examining what

could be done to benefit soldiers through disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes. It is not just a matter of paying soldiers to leave the army but also one of providing them with a future.

John Luk Jok

The speaker began by emphasizing the importance of youth in nation building, given the current crisis and situation in South Sudan. He touched upon the context of youth in the country, which differs from the UN definition of youth as being aged from 18 to 24 years. In reality the concept of youth in the country is based on roles, responsibilities and social traditions within communities, which does not necessarily fit into a uniform age bracket. For example, in the Nuer culture, if a male of 15 has been given six forehead marks, he ceases to be a boy and becomes considered an adult.

He articulated that peacebuilding must be a process in a country coming out of war. The role of youth needed to be addressed and they should be encouraged towards fostering social harmony and tackling the deep and divisive generational wounds in the unity of the people caused by tribal and ethnic hatred. Having signed the peace agreement, South Sudan is on the road towards national healing and reconciliation, rebuilding positive relationships across ethnic lines between individuals and groups, and moving towards unity and nation building.

The speaker examined the role of youth in peacebuilding in South Sudan. He gave recognition to the presence and important role of youth and their participation in the two-year peace negotiations. This was recognition that they are the majority of the population, accounting for over 72 per cent of it. In the implementation phase of the peace agreement they were represented and participated in the following mechanisms.

- The Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Committee. This is the highest oversight body for implementing the agreement and includes a youth and women's representative.
- The Ceasefire and Constitutional Security Advisement Monitoring Mechanism. This monitors the implementation of the ceasefire agreement across the country.
- The Strategic Defence and Security Review Board. This is the organ in charge of the integration of forces and determining security policy for the country.
- The Board of Economic and Financial Management Authority. This provides oversight over the country's resources, particularly as it has suffered from endemic corruption in the public sector.
- The National Constitutional Review Commission. This body will be reconstituted to discuss the future of the constitutional order and political system in South Sudan. Membership will be widened, and youth and civil society participation ensured.
- The Youth Enterprise Fund. Provided for in the peace agreement, this will be established to make more youth benefit from economic growth and development. The effectiveness of this fund will depend on how it is managed and the amount of funding provided.

The speaker turned to the overall future of South Sudan, stating that the participation of youth at all levels needed to be promoted materially and institutionally in order to build their capacity. He argued that the responsibility for this fell on the government and its partners who supported the country economically.

As a former minister of youth, culture and sports, the speaker discussed how the ministry was the least valued in the cabinet despite the importance of its mandate in nation building. He told an anecdote about asking for funds to be disbursed from a minister in the economic cluster, only for this person to suggest the ministry was just about 'running'. The speaker later switched roles with his colleague in the economic cluster – and his colleague came to appreciate the importance of youth, culture and sport to South Sudan.

The speaker discussed rural youth, highlighting that not much had been done to bring them into the modern economy or to provide them with education. Instead they were left to engage in violent activities such as cattle rustling and in militias, sometimes for political reasons. The speaker advocated special attention and skills' training that prioritizes rural youth. He also argued that youth organizations should communicate among themselves, and the government should recognize and mobilize youth for post-conflict reconstruction as agents of peace. A National Youth Service programme would be the best forum for this, and development partners should encourage, facilitate and help establish such programmes.

Summary of discussion

A question was asked as to the benefit of providing education without transforming the mindset of the people, and whether a truly national agenda can be pursued. Another participant argued that the youth have inherited violence because of the manipulation of the grassroots for political means and mobilization for war. It was noted that South Sudan should identify a unified concept for peace, devoid of individual or political interest. The transformation of the mindset of the country's youth needs one vision and strong leadership, connecting organizations that are addressing youth interests. Empowerment of youth means enabling them through guidance.

A question was asked about mobilizing youth for peaceful activities and nation building. It was argued that South Sudan is made up of a multi-ethnic community, with the majority of the population based in rural areas. The country needs to develop a value system based on South Sudanese culture and find ways to make use of this, but one that is also informed by regional and global understanding of what is going on around the country. It was similarly suggested that the South Sudanese have to fight the habit of mobilizing tribes for war. Ministers unhappy at being removed or reshuffled go crying back to the communities to which they are attached. Leaders should have more concern for the people and not use them as tools for keeping politicians in power through violence in rural and urban areas.

A question was asked about to what extent young people have real influence or decision-making capability in political parties or the government, or whether they are merely implementers of top-down decisions. It was also claimed that youth are not truly free or independent due to community constraints placed on them. It was argued by one speaker that youth are given leadership positions in political parties, and whether they then act as decision-makers depends on them because they are supposed to carry out their particular functions.

Young people need to do more to accept the authority granted to them as representatives. People used to controlling patronage for a long time will always want to take such decisions if others allow themselves to be marginalized. At the age of 18 a citizen can stand for elections, be voted into parliament and be capable of taking decisions that affect the country. People are never too young for politics if they are capable of delivering. However, there are also areas more important than politics for developing South Sudan – there are very few people in politics.

Addressing the key issues concerning youth, one participant cited employment and entrepreneurship. Unless they are economically equipped with the skills to set up businesses and support their own

livelihoods, they will remain vulnerable to political manipulation. All the money is controlled by a section of elders at the expense of young people, who are then beholden to influential politicians. They have to be educated in order to be independent. It was suggested that the definition of youth in South Sudan must be revised downwards, taking into consideration existing social structures, connected with responsibilities.

A question was asked about whether peace and reconciliation was possible without truth and accountability. It was argued that these issues are addressed in the peace agreement and the sooner the African Union Hybrid Court for South Sudan is established the better, in order to address impunity and stop the cycle of war. The question of corruption also needs to be addressed as a factor contributing to people's impoverishment and sense that they had nothing to lose by fighting. For example, the Nimule road is being built by USAID, but with the \$4 billion the president said the country lost to corruption the government could build 3,000 km of roads. What is needed to connect South Sudan is less than this. If that money was spent only to build those roads, then the war might not have taken place. Communities would have been interconnected and people would have access to social communications and markets that they would not want to lose by getting into war.

Session 2: What are youth perspectives on peacebuilding, reconciliation and community cohesion?

Speakers:

Agum Rin Mabeny, Undersecretary, Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports, Government of South Sudan
Paleki Matthew Obur, Executive Director, South Sudan Women's Empowerment Network (SSWEN)
Maal Maker, Directorate of Communications and PR, Office of the President, Government of South Sudan
Nicholas Aru, Co-Founder, South Sudan Youth for Peace and Development Organization (SSYPADO);
South Sudan Committee for National Healing, Peace and Reconciliation (CNHPR)
Edmund Yakani Berizilious, Executive Director, Community Empowerment for Progress Organisation (CEPO)
Chuol Dow, Youth Leader, Horn of Africa Leadership and Learning for Action (HOLLA), South Sudan

Chair:

Ahmed Soliman, Research Associate, Chatham House

Agum Rin Mabeny

The speaker began by stating that youth represent 72 per cent of the population of South Sudan and remain the backbone of the country. The ministry spells out youth policy, including how to assist development, peacebuilding and leadership. Its strategy is to encourage a youth empowerment process that allows men and women to act independently. This strategy is defined in a sequenced way to further empowerment in all aspects of young people's lives. This process is part of the wider social and economic development of the country. In particular, the Ministry of Youth supports youth associations and peacebuilding organizations that help young people participate in peaceful development.

Paleki Matthew Obur

The speaker began by arguing that it is crucial for young people to have space to interact in and discuss matters that concern them. In particular it is essential that they are engaged in process of peacebuilding, community cohesion and reconciliation. In fact, as all spheres of action, such as paying for hospital services or market transactions, are determined by political decision-making, it is essential that youth engage with all political issues.

To encourage their incorporation into political decision-making, it is essential to design peacebuilding and community cohesion programmes that are fascinating and inspiring for young people. If the activities are dull, they will become disinterested. At the same time, it is very important to foster a certain level of knowledge and confidence in young people to allow them to participate best in such processes. There needs therefore to be parallel personal development programmes from them, whether as minors or adults.

Encouraging effective and impactful youth engagement with politics requires the development of a space where young people can discuss issues directly with the government. This might be a forum similar to this meeting where members of parliament listen to their views on national issues. Such a space does not exist currently in South Sudan. It is a particularly salient requirement considering the limited number of youth in decision-making positions in the government.

Guiding positive youth development trajectories requires that young people have appropriate role models and mentors, but there are very few such figures in South Sudan. There is no Nelson Mandela of the country that they can look up to as a figure to emulate. There are in fact very few mentoring programmes that could help give youth a greater sense of direction.

Women and girls should not be forgotten in the design of youth policy and programmes. There remains a widespread and misguided perception that youth means young men. Yet young women are often deeply involved in and affected by dynamics of conflict and violence, and their concerns must be addressed in peacebuilding programmes.

Young people's opinions on matters that are not strictly youth issues also need to be respected and heard, whether it be on the economy or wider social issues. Youth across South Sudan have shown a marked capacity to mobilize quickly on local and global issues, such as climate change and ISIS. There is therefore a great potential for political engagement and mobilization among them, but this has to be harnessed towards peacebuilding and reconciliation rather than instrumentalized by politicians for their own ends.

Unemployment is also a key issue for young people, evident in the many idle people in Juba's town centre. Without sufficient opportunities or skills, young people are prone to take any opportunity that comes along, whether it is good or bad. In the 'protection of civilians' camps in particular, the enormous amount of idle young boys and girls has potentially explosive political ramifications. Instead, young people can form the networks that bridge divides between communities, but for them to do so requires the right environment and necessary support.

There also needs to be dissemination of a true understanding of the nation's history, and of whatever internal conflicts and interests that have driven armed conflict. Youth engagement with the history of conflict in South Sudan will help foster an understanding of the problems faced today. The current dominant narrative is not necessarily true, which can mean that some grievances will remain unaddressed. Once the guns fall silent, there needs to be an honest discussion in the form of a national

dialogue in which people can decide what the future of South Sudan should look like. This should be led by young people as representatives of future generations, perhaps through a truly independent youth union. Social media is becoming more accessible, and this presents an opportunity to foster community reconciliation, despite the limitations of technology.

The key to ensuring these changes are enacted will be ensuring intergenerational dialogue between those aged above 40 years and youth in order to enable a transition towards dialogue and partnership. On the part of young people, it is important they should be extremely open-minded and ready to engage with new initiatives. The process of achieving mutual understanding and a national perception for peaceful coexistence must begin now.

Maal Maker

The speaker said that the current political situation is very precarious and that much of the youth has responded by resorting to tribalism. Peace, however, is fundamentally about being free and cultivating unity and harmony in which future generations benefit from the dividends of peace. To achieve this goal requires the following actions.

It is essential to foster mutual understanding among the youth themselves and fuel a sense of brotherhood, sisterhood and togetherness. By building a culture of mutual respect it should be possible to overcome tribal divisions and build a new national identity. It will also be essential to foster a culture of dialogue to avoid cycles of revenge and animosity. There had been progress towards this before the current crisis, and now perhaps there is an opportunity to start building programmes for the future once more. Essential to this will be developing effective programmes of civic education, with the particular aim of enabling free and informed discussion in the media, which is often co-opted for negative messages. This would follow efforts after the CPA to teach people about the importance of peace and the content of the CPA, so they could understand how best to work towards it and become involved in the process. The same has to happen in teaching youth about leadership and governance, by giving exposing them to multiple viewpoints and allowing them to counter negative media narratives.

Another key priority will be bringing different communities together in various activities and facilitating cross-cultural marriage, such as HOLLA is doing. The involvement of religious groups in this process will be essential as reconciliation and forgiveness are very complex concepts, and requires religious understanding to achieve. It is deeply concerning that some pastors have been fuelling ethnic hatred and have disseminated negative information in the media. This must change to bring them in line with the many exemplary religious leaders in the country.

The fundamental goal is to open up a political space for deliberation and decision-making on all issues in which people of different cultures and opinions can participate freely and fully. The youth must be a key participant in this.

Nicholas Aru

The speaker said that peace is very difficult to define. It is useful to think of it as an expensive commodity, because most people cannot say sorry if they have offended someone. Youth are central to peace because they are the current manifestation of history, and they must face the problems caused by previous generations.

It is essential to mentor youth and provide them with civic awareness. Short training programmes are insufficient, and as much as possible should be replaced by guidance and mentoring initiatives to ensure young people can maintain direction. Sustainable change will also come if youth are trained in advocacy and are therefore able to influence decision-making and become effective leaders themselves.

Youth trained in vocational skills and leadership will be able to make effective decisions for their own benefit. Governance initiatives need to be enacted towards peacebuilding. This will involve raising civic awareness and dissemination about the current peace agreement, about which few people are knowledgeable. The work of youth should be synchronized outside of South Sudan and across the region. There needs to be the creation of a regional network in which ideas can be shared and support from the international community can be made to impact most effectively.

There need to be specific donor programmes for those who are in rural areas and are illiterate. This is a huge barrier to political engagement. Solutions must be found to contribute positively to resolving cattle raiding. Moreover an effective educational programme in schools can provide the path to national unity, enabling people to act outside of the interests of local communities or tribes.

The CNHPR has conducted various initiatives towards these ends, including a Social Youth Forum visit to Rwanda to visit the genocide archives and memorials with youth and chiefs in order to see the reconciliation process at work there. There have also been efforts to encourage community dialogue on consultation, with a prominent role for youth. The recommendations made were initially implemented but not anymore. There have to be renewed efforts to help young people mobilize towards peace and participate in governance.

Edmund Yakani Berizilious

The speaker said it is easy to make generalizations about youth in South Sudan, but it is more accurate to identify three distinct layers within this demographic. The top one consists of the SPLM Youth League, which plays a similar role to comparable movements in Ethiopia and Sudan. This is a privileged minority that is extremely influential and backed by the state machinery. It normally acts on behalf of the state clandestinely and as a result this is the most dangerous layer to engage.

The next layer consists of educated youth who are seeking to become leaders in their own right, whether as academics or religious leaders. While they wield some authority, they are also subjected to the upper layer.

Then there is the vast majority consisting of 'normal' youth. They spend most of their time on the streets, and are often unemployed and illiterate. They are prone to being manipulated by the political elite and by the leaders of official youth movements, which are designed by the ruling party to make sure youth are under their control. This is apparent in Sudan and exactly the same thing is happening in South Sudan. Whatever aspirations there might have been for change and for inaugurating a 'one country, two systems' approach, the result has been 'two countries, one system.'

It is necessary to remain engaged, realistic and focused in seeking to address these problems. A key priority must be engaging with the politically affiliated youth who are ultimately driving the agenda. It is the same in Ethiopia and Tanzania. Though these youth are very influential in decision-making, they are often already co-opted into the dominant political mind-set. In response there is a need to design youth programmes that are inclusive and conciliatory.

This is in stark contrast to the prevailing mode of politics in Africa where, rather than adhering to formal government institutions, politicians politicize and militarize ethnicity to control the state. This occurs alongside a dual tendency to militarize politics and politicize the military. Peacebuilding occurs in this context, which often affects whether there is an empowering or disempowering peace, and whose interest it serves. To find political accommodation outside of these ways of acting, the next generation of youth has to fight these concepts in order to overcome generational struggle. Unfortunately the most recent generation in South Sudan has been brought up during wartime, which has increased schisms between it and older generations. Equally problematic is the impact of educated South Sudanese who have travelled abroad and returned to create a Council of Elders across the country. The problem at hand is not that the youth are illiterate or uneducated, but that these highly educated South Sudanese who return make poor decisions by supporting elders and creating more divisions. Education will help youth challenge the leadership, but the key issue remains an elite, young and old, that remains unresponsive to this sort of action.

Civic education is the key answer to overcoming these tensions, and this needs to be facilitated by the Ministry of Youth. Moreover there cannot be a resort to the concept of 'African Solution for African Problems' as this more often than not is a ruse for African leaders to maintain their power. Truly African solutions will be the ones that put the aspirations of citizens above those of the leaders

Chuo Dow

The speaker said that youth should be the foundation and pillars of nation building. They have a capacity to make a positive impact on South Sudanese society and participate in decision-making at various levels. He said that John Luc Jok's presentation on youth in peace processes revealed the continued manipulation of youth that goes against their interests. For them to be the foundations and pillars of nation building, it is of foremost importance to train youth in advocacy.

The speaker added that it is the role of youth to promote and share experiences on peacebuilding, reconciliation and community cohesion. Dialogues such as the one at this meeting, with delegates from many different countries, are a very positive development and can foster a change in the environment. This progress should be sustained to develop a regional network across the Horn of Africa.

He said that some speakers have argued that politicians and leaders have been manipulated toward the wrong direction. As long as ethnicity drives political mobilization, genuine peace and reconciliation will be extremely difficult to achieve. Ethnic politics also inhibits young people from having genuine freedom of expression or a voice in designing policy. Education is also a key concern. The majority of the population is illiterate and without effective public schooling there will still be ongoing privileging of certain classes of youth.

Summary of discussion

The chair of the session talked about the three classes of youth institutions discussed and the need for a national agenda and dialogue to discuss the issues youth are facing in South Sudan. It was made clear that this should be led by young people rather than politicians. He asked through what body or structure this could be done, and whether it could be through a truly independent youth union or alternative mechanism.

One speaker argued that any dialogue must elicit public trust and be beyond manipulation. Political parties can infiltrate neutral non-governmental initiatives and this must be stopped for such an effort to

succeed. The speaker added that it is impossible to avoid politics, but it is necessary to avoid parties pressing their ideologies on what should be neutral spaces.

Another speaker commented that such meetings that bring so many voices together are really useful, and that it is hoped it will be a continuous process and it is encouraging to see the development of safe forums for youth to come together and discuss issues of peace. South Sudan's understanding of youth corresponds to the AU Charter's definition – those aged between 15 and 35 years. There are both social and psychological definitions of youth; indeed social status may define one's generational position. A focus on youth highlights the need to address wider issues of education and creativity among over 70 per cent of the population. Youth is therefore at centre of any policy, regardless of its explicit agenda. The vision of South Sudan's youth development policy envisages a future free from discrimination, and with all young men and women participating and contributing to development. The problems faced today are not the fault of the policy, but of those who refuse to abide by it. The youth must mobilize and stand for their rights.

One participant responded that some policies are potentially divisive and can marginalize the youth that matter most. It is worth tolerating difference, rather than endlessly attempting to homogenize. Given the factionalism within the ruling party alone, it is clear that attempting to impose consensus is futile. There needs to be unity in diversity. Seeking to marginalize elders is equivalent to excluding women or any other part of society. Instead it is essential to engage all sectors of society so as to incorporate them into solutions and making them more politically conscious; doing otherwise will lead to more conflict.

One participant said that the situation is getting worse. The SPLM Youth League dominates and enacts the agenda of the government. It needs to be made clear to elders that the future is dependent on youth. The participant asked whether it is possible for elders to let the youth progress and how the Ministry of Youth disseminated their plans to the youth. Another participant claimed that peacebuilding requires a holistic approach, which is why youth are so integral to it. But this also requires them to be a priority, which they are not in practice. A representative of the SPLM-IO Youth League and member of parliament spoke about representing the views of young people. Peace and security are of utmost importance, and must be achieved before reconciliation. The participant discussed a new law that has been passed restricting NGOs that are not in the humanitarian sphere.

In response to the comment of an earlier participant, one panellist clarified that the SPLM youth members are crucial intermediaries and it is necessary to work with them. There is a difference between theory and practice, and in this case projects to empower youth are not functioning. For example, the government claims that there is peace, but this conflicts with the presence of the Arrow Boys, the White Army and other armed youth groups. It is essential to translate policy from paper into reality.

Several participants said that youth should be made a priority by the government. They must develop their potential and help achieve peace. There is no priority given to youth, especially by the ministry. For example the South Sudan Youth Union is functionless as it is undermined by the tensions with the ministry. Setting up various youth unions was a good idea, but there is no concrete understanding between them. It will be a long time before youth will be able to overcome such obstacles and be identified as one people. It is essential to identify the problematic youth groups, such as the Arrow Boys, and consider what it is that they are fighting for.

The chair asked about how to create a more representative Youth Union in South Sudan. One speaker commented that it may be necessary to start the process of creating the Youth Union again, as many youth are put off by the problems within it. The new process should be inclusive and transcend political

affiliation. On the question of the NGO Act, it was argued that the transitional parliament may be able to review this but for the moment there will be efforts by NGOs to continue to exist as non-humanitarian ones. Fundamentally, making youth a priority will be a long process. One panellist articulated that the priority of the youth is to learn to trust each other and interact in a non-violent way. This needs the support of all other stakeholders. The NGO bill may have a negative impact on youth and civil society as a whole and will require revision by the transitional government.

Session 3: How to engage youth in peacebuilding, reconciliation and community cohesion?

Speakers:

Alfred Lokuji, Associate Professor in Development Studies, University of Juba

Ferdinand von Habsburg-Lothringen, Advisor to the South Sudan Council of Churches

Peter Biar Ajak, Director, Center for Strategic Analysis and Research

Casie Copeland, Senior Analyst South Sudan, International Crisis Group

Chair:

Rosalind Marsden, Associate Fellow, Chatham House

Alfred Lokuji

The speaker began by saying that strategic planning and innovative prioritization of key problems is crucial to the development work discussed. Youth constitute the absolute majority of the population in South Sudan, regardless of the precise definition used. They make up close to 65 per cent of the electorate and this means that, if they are not adequately represented in public decision-making, efforts to build a democratic system have failed.

He said that traditional systems offer youth a significant degree of unity and cohesion. Peacebuilding must work with these traditional systems in building a national political community. The majority of the population consists of women. It is evident that, while young men are able to indulge in significant study and leisure time, women must attend to their homes and family, and are given few opportunities to study. This cultural division of gender roles runs counter to ambitions for gender equality.

The speaker asked what should youth be doing to change the status quo. It is essential that they attain a full understanding of the system they operate in. For example, the Dinka are extremely well trained in sustaining their own society. This commitment is particularly evident among those whose teeth have been removed or those who have been scarified. This level of group cohesion needs to be translated into a national vision for South Sudan as a whole. Currently, in each community youth are trained and ready to defend it, making it very easy for leaders to mobilize them and drag them into conflict with other communities. Recent cycles of conflict between the Lou Nuer and the Murle are not inhibited by the usual obstacles to mobilizing military personnel, such as ensuring sufficient amounts of transport, food and water. Rather these conflicts occur as reactive movements to defend the community.

According to the speaker, the question is then how to transform these fragmented and divided communities into a nation of South Sudan. Traditional political mobilization and economic life revolve around family, clan and tribe. Senior officials are obliged to give positions to extended family and clan

members. Institutions such as state governments are disconnected from these networks of kinship. This makes it very difficult for anyone to imagine themselves as South Sudanese. It is necessary to challenge the thinking that kinship groups take precedence over public institutions and the nation. This in essence is a project to build a new social contract and to create a common sense of citizenship and camaraderie through the constitution and legislation.

Ferdinand von Habsburg-Lothringen

The speaker said that in South Sudan long-standing structural issues needed to be dealt with outside of a focus on technical detail. First, it is essential to deal with the past or it will come back to haunt the country. Current conflicts have very deep roots and it is essential to address these in order to move towards the future. During the CPA period, conversations on the past were conducted quickly and in such a way that it felt like underlying problems were not addressed at all. Too often, national strategy documents do not address problems in their historical context.

He added that another problem is the way violent behaviour is transferred to young people for the security and wellbeing of the community, but to the exclusion of other groups. Education is extremely important, but the reality is that labour in a household is often divided between education, wage-earning and agricultural activities. Typical primary school education is simply not applicable in a cattle camp. Education has to be provided in innovative forms that match how people live and work in the harsh reality of such settings.

The speaker said individualism and confidence in decision-making will be essential to designing creative solutions. Another key issue is that budgets and plans are not expressed using real concrete narratives to underpin their action. Instead the international community relies on implanting external models in the mind of the people.

Peter Biar Ajak

The speaker said this is a critical time for South Sudan, which faces major political and economic crises. Young people will be essential to overcome this and moving the country towards peacebuilding, reconciliation and national cohesion. To understand how this can be done, it is essential to recognize that even before this current crisis South Sudan was not really at peace, but disrupted by significant conflicts, such as that between the Murle and the Lou Nuer. Building national cohesion must address the deeper structural problems that cause insecurity, rather than just the immediate crisis.

He added that a key issue after the initial peace in 2005 was a crisis of expectation. Young people were expecting a 'peace dividend', and when this did not materialize they hoped that independence would bring new opportunities. Yet the situation deteriorated after independence with the shutdown of oil production, the threat of war with Sudan and the rise of inter-tribal conflict.

According to the speaker, the lack of education, training and employment opportunities available to young people must be overcome to sustain peace. Currently the only sector that offers employment to young people is the security sector, which is a force for destruction. To make matters worse, the civil service remains dominated by older generations.

The speaker said that a vision of unity for South Sudan must be promoted, but currently the political leadership is unable to collaborate in good faith, while the economic crisis looks set to continue. Young people must therefore foster unity by mobilizing youth networks that cut across ethnic boundaries. This

will empower them to create their own vision for the future of the country. South Sudan wrestling entertainment is a good example of how youth from many different ethnicities can come together. A public works programme would also be very useful in providing opportunity for them. Fundamentally peace can only be sustained if people have access to food and jobs.

Casie Copeland

The speaker began by saying that, while there were stipulations in the recent peace agreement concerning youth, there was some controversy over to what extent they were engaged in the negotiations. Crucially a large number of young men who have fought in the latest war are unlikely to be reintegrated into the armed forces. There is no money to pay them or for an effective and inclusive disarmament demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programme, leaving many mobilized armed men unaccounted for. It will be essential to engage the youth in dialogue, given the fact that effective DDR has never been implemented in South Sudan. Moreover traditional programmes often train ex-combatants in skills that are inappropriate and therefore they return to armed conflict. Armed youth expect very good treatment, and when this does not materialize they will become the biggest threat to the peace agreement.

She said that since the end of September there had been no major conflict. However the groundwork is clearly being laid for a return to war, including devastating inter-communal violence in Jonglei and the huge potential for instability in Shilluk areas. Conflict in Western Equatoria has even escalated. Unless the scope of the peace agreement is widened to address the issues above, this instability will continue. The international community is often better equipped to deal with political conflict, but is unable to engage with 'communal' violence, which can be just as devastating. While many South Sudanese are happy that there is a lull in violence, the number of armed youth unincorporated into the agreement is alarming.

The speaker continued to say that, while the tribe is often seen as the source of division in South Sudan, it is also the root of significant strength and pride. South Sudan needs to harness these powerful forces to build unity. This might involve a public works programme, or incorporating militia members into community policing groups, giving them employment opportunities, and keeping them under control and making them accountable. Denying the reality of life in South Sudan will lead to the failed application of European models. During this period of constitutional design, there needs to be work to see how to build unity through existing strengths. Involving the youth in this process will be key to innovation as they are less committed to previous logics.

Summary of discussion

It was argued that chieftaincies remain crucial to effective government across large parts of the country. While they have they have no international recognition, these traditional institutions often behave with the unity and cohesiveness of nationalities, and South Sudan should be careful about abandoning them. Transposing models from the abroad will be problematic; instead these communities and their existing cultures must form the building block of peace. On top of traditional communities, faith groups have an essential role in peacebuilding. At the moment, however, the leading SPLM groups are dividing the nation, in the same way colonial powers divided Africa.

Participants reiterated the need for a platform for youth to discuss their own issues. There also needs to be work to overcome the disconnect between generations and to ensure elders mentor youth appropriately so they can best develop the country. Even though only three per cent of the population is over 64, elders are leading the country. It is essential that the agenda they have for the country is given appropriate scrutiny by youth. There needs to be a national vision that can actually be put into action.

There is no clear philosophy of education in the country that could help further the creation of engaged citizens.

One participant discussed the difficulty of implementing programmes designed in conferences such as the present one, or more generally in Juba. Youth in cattle camps are remote and disconnected, and they run their own programmes, integrated into local systems that NGOs do not have the means to transform. It is for the country's leaders, from elders to politicians, to engage the wider population in dialogue and foster collaboration for the sake of peace. For example, when the political leadership signed the peace agreement in 2013 between the South Sudan Democratic Movement/Army (SSDM/A) Cobra faction and the government, this also led to the cessation of raiding between the Lou Nuer and the Murle. Fighting ended on account of high-level communications between David Yau Yau and the SPLM/A, not as the result of international donor programmes. Similarly, conflict is emerging again in Jonglei, not due to failed development programmes, but a shift in the political situation.

One of the speakers talked about efforts to create youth platforms in 2005–06. Plans were made in Juba and then funds were disbursed to the periphery, but this centralized mode of operation was problematic. Instead representatives from the payam and county levels should come together to discuss issues, whether past grievances or a detailed strategy for future action. Centralized initiatives often end in failure, particularly as many people simply do not experience government in their everyday lives. Navigating between the priorities of the international community and those of communities in South Sudan can be quite problematic. The New Deal in 2012 was the first signal that international agencies realized that their efforts were failing. After supporting a consultation across all 10 states in 2013, it was clear that the priority of the population was reconciliation, but the international community did not recognize this and instead continued with its programmes of security sector reform. Sovereign states such as South Sudan must be more expressive and insistent in asserting their agency. Among the international community there must be recognition that a lot of economic or political life in South Sudan occurs in a pastoralist or agro-pastoralist context, and that this needs to be engaged with and respected.

Another panellist argued that it is possible to learn from other models of development. South Sudan has long been historically influenced by external forces and moulded in their image. By definition, striving to be a nation-state is an imitation of a model. It is therefore imperative that people in South Sudan become ready for real change. Rules and regulations have to be promulgated so as to have all citizens on an equal footing and working together, and these must be respected. Doing this must involve the South Sudanese questioning their existing modes of behaviour.

Several participants said that youth can contribute to implementing the current peace agreement. There is however a need to revise youth policy to take into account the fact that the majority of the youth are in rural areas. Programmes must be designed to give youth real opportunity, rather than give them inappropriate skill-sets that are not relevant to their everyday life. There needs to be more work on their socio-economic integration. A youth enterprise must be established to ensure they participate in social and economic development in the country. There needs to be work to foster sustainable livelihoods and youth employment, rather than employing foreigners. Sport and culture can also play a central role in unifying the nation. Communities must also ensure cohesiveness and civilized behaviour, in order to transcend boundaries between groups. Remaining civilized within communities will help transcend regional boundaries. It should also be noted that South Sudan has rejected funding from the African Union, due to a clause in the latter's Youth Charter ensuring youth realize their reproductive potential. This is unacceptable given the current situation.

One panellist argued that there is a strong possibility that the current peace agreement might fall apart and that young people should identify the top three priorities to prevent a return to a cycle of war. There also have to be development approaches that respect specific contexts. In particular, the difference between working with youth in rural and urban areas is huge.

A participant commented that the local context is incredibly important. Rather than designing one abstract national programme, efforts should be channelled towards interlinking and coordinating many diverse projects. Successful projects in Kuron Peace Village have worked because they are owned by the people in that area, but the model cannot necessarily be transferred to other regions. It is also all well and good to search for policy recommendations, but without sufficient funds it will be impossible to implement grand plans for education, vocational training and building platforms. The focus needs to be shifted from the national level to local areas. Perhaps the concept of family and tribe can be expanded to include a wider group of people.

Several participants commented that the most concrete action that can be taken is continued dialogue and reaching out to donors to support another similar event in order to maintain momentum and dialogue.

It was argued that there had been very little mention of youth in the rural areas. It is extremely easy to marginalize segments among the youth, whether of different ages, backgrounds or education. In making policy recommendations, there needs to be a platform to reach all of these groups and capture all the issues they are facing through dialogue. Crucially this platform should engage youth in the rural area in such a way that their concerns are listened to and then influence government decision-making.

One speaker responded that all projects have to be adapted to contexts. Constitutions are useful, but they have to fit the context. There needs to be a move away from 'best practice' and towards 'problem-driven iterative adaptation'. There are not three neat and simple priorities that will avoid a return to war. There is nothing that can be done to prevent youth from returning to conflict, as they are often leading the war. It is the elders who drive national warfare and they will ultimately determine whether there is a return to conflict. Young people must instead take a long-term view and gradually expand the impact of their individual agency by organizing and forging a common vision of the future. There are many fantastic documents, whether Vision 2040 and the South Sudan developmental plan, but they are not being implemented. It is very easy to hire experts to design excellent policy, but if these do not fit the context they will fail. The fact is that elders used to have a vision of liberation, but once they achieved that they jettisoned any visionary programme. Since liberation, they have agonized over past wars and have used their actions during the war to determine government positions. Their ability to build a credible vision of the future is minimal. In fact the youth who have been well educated and travelled abroad are far better equipped to do this. The elite have only succeeded by building a patronage system in which young people search for patrons rather than collaborate towards new futures. The leadership's lack of vision is being reproduced by the youth. This is all the more dangerous at the moment when South Sudan must be able to adjust to larger global challenges, such as global warming or shifts in oil prices.

Another panellist urged youth to focus their engagement on the key issues that could trigger a new round of conflict. They must scrutinize the entire peace agreement and gain an understanding of what the triggers might be. For example, it might be considered that youth participation in the cantonment process is an issue, in which case it will be essential to reconfigure the strategic defence and security review. This is currently being led by the military, whose primary interest is to build a strong army, not how to ensure that youth are engaged effectively in the process. Broader youth forums can play a role in opening up such a project. In developing youth platforms, it is perhaps worth starting with youth networks in Juba to address the very visible impact of the current economic crisis in an urban setting, while also thinking

about expanding efforts into the often marginalized rural communities. This regime, if it maintains peace, will provide new space for conversations among activists and youth.

It was argued by one speaker that various interest groups need to clarify their specific agendas and work to advocate them. A well-organized youth movement, representing 72 per cent of the population, would have the power to determinate candidates for political positions. It is possible to create pockets of power to put forward agendas and priorities and use this demographic advantage to advocate for change.

Focusing on church-led efforts it was noted that there are three priorities the council of churches is pursuing to guide its actions in going forward. These have been heavily influenced by reflections on political developments in Rwanda. There is a need to create neutral spaces, with no political interference, that allows people of similar interests to come together and generate sustained dialogue. It is also important to focus on the exact significance of reconciliation as a process. There is a further need for advocacy, to help people influence those in positions of power and influence. The peace agreement must go beyond power-sharing and building the central government to engaging with the grassroots that are desperate to be heard.

Recommendations and action points

- A new social contract is needed between the government and people of South Sudan. This should be articulated in a national vision and nation building agenda, providing for a common citizenship that promotes diversity and inclusion among local communities, and binds the South Sudanese together as one people. This should be incorporated in the national curriculum.
- A National Youth Service is required. This would be an instrument of nation building through education and a network of civic action involving young people. It would include a public works programme, which would be very useful in providing opportunities for young people to volunteer and develop their skills in projects not limited to infrastructure, agriculture, teaching, technical and vocational capacities. Rural and armed youth would particularly benefit from such a service, but so would urban youth.
- Establish an independent and representative National Youth Union. The new process should be inclusive, be led by young people and transcend political affiliation. Encouraging effective and impactful youth engagement with politics requires the development of a space in which young people can discuss issues directly with the government. This forum could enable members of parliament to listen to young people's views on national issues.
- The creation of mentoring programmes in rural and urban areas to provide guidance and counselling for young people. This would include nationally respected individuals who could help give youth in South Sudan a greater sense of direction.
- When the national constitutional review commission is reconstituted, youth and civil society participation should be broadened.
- The government should develop a Youth Enterprise Fund to encourage the participation of young people in economic development and entrepreneurship in different sectors of society.