



# Step Up: Inspiring young minds

## Season 1: Episode 3

# Youth and climate change in South Sudan

## Transcript

### Summary keywords

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### Speakers

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## Episode 3: Youth and climate change in South Sudan

### Rosemary Wilfred

Hello, and welcome to *Step up* – a podcast series brought to you by Tearfund South Sudan – featuring inspiring conversations about the youth and for the youth in South Sudan, to encourage and engage them to transform their lives and that of their communities.

This is episode three of *Step up* and in this two-part edition, we shall be highlighting the impact of Climate Change in the context of South Sudan and what some young people are doing about it in terms of adaptation, mitigation, and climate resilience. We shall also talk about what you, and as a young person can do to contribute to this course. Part two of this conversation, shall be talking about waste management and environmental care, and what young people can do to improve hygiene and sanitation in their homes and communities.

My name is Rosemary Wilfred – I am the Media and Communication Manager at Tearfund South Sudan. I will be your host for this conversation.

So, to begin with, let's talk about Climate Change in South Sudan and the role of young people in adaptation, mitigation, and building climate resilience among affected communities. Climate change is one

of the most critical global challenges of our times. Recent events have insistently demonstrated our growing vulnerability to climate change. The impacts range from affecting agriculture, and further endangering food security, to sea-level rise and the accelerated erosion of coastal zones increasing the intensity of natural disasters, species extinction, and the spread of vector-borne diseases. This issue is of immense importance for every global citizen. Hence, it requires an initiative against it globally. In South Sudan, the vulnerability to climate-related disasters has increased considerably in the past few years, manifesting in extreme weather conditions such as increased temperatures, droughts, and flooding. For instance, since mid-2019, South Sudan has experienced what experts described as the worst floods in the country's history, affecting more than one million people from all ten states, according to official statistics from the United Nations. People lost homes, livelihoods, and shelter and got exposed to deadly diseases. Schools, roads, health centres, and other useful forms of infrastructure have been destroyed. This has aggravated an already precarious situation of the country as it battles conflict, food insecurity, poverty, and a high rate of malnutrition among children under five. Climate change has increased levels of uncertainty about the future and globally, young people are increasingly aware of the challenges and risks presented by this climate crisis because young people are not only victims of climate change, but they are also valuable contributors to climate action. So, how can South Sudanese Youths contribute to stopping or at least minimising the effects of climate change in the country? Definitely, a lot needs to be done, however, I came across a group of young people who have taken it upon themselves to help their community in Bentiu, Unity State. This is one of the worst-hit states in the country when the floods started, and today, we would like to hear that amazing story from their team leader and what we can learn from them.

Welcome Yuanes, it's a pleasure to have you on our podcast today. Tell me briefly about yourself and your campaign group.

## **Thor Yuanes**

Thank you so much, Rosemary. My name is Yuanes. I'm the Executive Director for Climate Change, Adaptation, and Smart Action. It's a civil society organisation, and it's a youth-led organisation based in Unity State with our head office here in Juba. Climate Change Adaptation and Smart Action work with the community affected by disasters to build resilience and adaptation and to make them self-reliant and able to respond to climate change or climate effects.

## **Rosemary Wilfred**

Thank you very much. I understand that in the context of South Sudan, many of the places in the country have really been severely impacted by climate change, and it's reasonable for you and your team to think about an action like this. But can you tell me one thing that really inspired you to create a working group to advocate for the mitigation of the impact of climate change?

## **Thor Yuanes**

One is there is a close relationship between the youths in the community and their community leaders. All the peace forums we conducted in the community involved the community leaders in mobilising the people and even facilitating it. Now it's very easy to mobilise people for peace forums because we simply connect

the youth leaders at the community level and the local leaders, sometimes the block leaders or the chiefs and even women leaders so they now work together to bring people to peace forums. We also saw an increasing number of youths participating in the peacebuilding arena. We now have like 18 peace clubs that we created because of the initiatives we did in July last where we gave young people seed grants to do their own activities at the community level. However, we also saw a group of young people, especially the former gang group members and even current gang members in Gudele and Gumbo they can freely attend an intergenerational dialogue on ending gang violence in Gudele, and they agreed to be part of this short film on ending gang violence that was produced by the youth. In Nyakuron we had an initiative with a youth group there. In addition, we also saw people talking about hate speech, a short film on hate speech was produced and it was shown to several schools in that area there. So those are what we believe are the positive outcomes of all of our initiatives. However, the linkage between youth and community leaders is what we take as very important because to us that's the beginning. That is the beginning of working together to create peace in the community.

## **Rosemary Wilfred**

So, what are some of the activities at the moment that you're carrying out with this advocacy group? As an advocacy group, we mostly advocate for policy-making. For now, we engage with the Ministry of Environment. We are engaging with the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management to create awareness, especially during the days of disaster risk reduction every year, and environmental awareness every year in June. And also, we are engaging youth on livelihood to build their resilience like businesses, like artisans' skills, so that they are able to be resilient and self-reliant. We also work with community leaders and women and school children and community leaders. We formed what we call a community disaster management committee. This Community Disaster Management Committee is able to identify risks through participatory meetings after identifying the risks. Then they inform the authority about the risk and what needs to be done. And this is helping the community a lot because we are using local knowledge. You also mentioned that you work a lot in schools. What do you exactly tell the schoolchildren?

## **Thor Yuanes**

In schools, we have what is called integrated risk management. This integrated risk management is where schoolchildren are able to identify the risk in the school. And mostly we work on issues of ecosystem restoration and management in schools where schoolchildren will come up with how they can preserve their soil in their schools. Maybe they would come up with a plan of planting trees or a school and may come up with a plan to have a school garden. We are also engaging them in some drama activities where they talk about climate change and also counselling children that are affected in Unity State.

## **Rosemary Wilfred**

How do you engage the youth to carry out this activity and have a shared objective and a shared vision?

## **Thor Yuanes**

We engage youth through the Ministry of Youth, Culture, and Sport, and also through the local structures that are existing and we organise them. They came up with a kind of body, a platform where the youth are able to develop their adaptation plans. And this adaptation plan is a way of involving other people like women and children and their views, and thereafter they engage with their policymakers, the MPs, the ministers, when they engage, they will tell their policymakers decision makers. And of course, it's been helpful because we have seen that now youths are being put in the centre of decision making and centre of learning because they have to engage their leaders locally and everybody is benefiting and they are happy. So far you mentioned a number of activities which are really very impressive. And I think that if carried out at a larger scale, can even support many other areas that are prone to these climate related disasters. But what major success can you talk about at this point? At this point, I want to tell you one thing. Through our engagement with the community leaders, where community leaders are able to identify the risk around their villages and inform any actor or the county leaders or the county commission, up to now, you will find some people are still in the area because the community leaders involved youth after identifying the risk of flooding and they were able to construct a dyke around the place before the actual flooding, and you find people that are still in their surrounding carrying out their activities normally though they are surrounded by water, but still they are in their houses. And this is very helpful because they identified the areas early on before it hit hard.

## **Rosemary Wilfred**

Right. Can you tell me one story of a person or a family that has been severely affected that you personally witnessed? What was it like and what was the scale of this climate disaster on that person or the household?

## **Thor Yuanes**

Thank you. It is heart-breaking and may be for people who have not seen how flooding is. It is something that comes just abruptly. People are not prepared because there is no early warning system in place. People who are most affected are women and I will tell you one story about a certain woman who was affected in her village. She lost her husband some years back. She has five children and ten goats. When the flooding swept her village. Other people were able to evacuate. She was stranded for two days in a house with the children and she could not move. She doesn't have a canoe because people were evacuating using a canoe. Other women who had plastic sheets folded them, put all their belongings, household belongings on the plastic sheet, the children, the dogs, the goats. And they push until they get to a dry area to settle in. But this woman could not get a plastic sheet. She could not get help except The Relief and Rehabilitation Commission staff in the county who then informed one of our volunteers who was trained on disaster management. Some youth were then organised to go and rescue the woman and her children. They took to her some food, some biscuits, but they found that most of her goats had already died. So this is very heart-breaking. And it clearly shows the severity of flooding in these areas and also lack of early warning and lack of corresponding strategies from the authorities.

## **Rosemary Wilfred**

Right. You talked about how you are collaborating with the ministry. How far have you discussed the issue of early warning and the importance of having a structure or a policy like that in place?

## **Thor Yuanes**

Currently, I'm glad we have policies in place, you know, in South Sudan. We have not by the national adaptation plan for action if implemented would be helpful. The government also has disaster management policies in place and if implemented, would be helpful. So we are engaging with these respective ministries, line ministries, to see to it that the policies are implemented and to see to it that we create awareness to our mass population. And I want to tell you that South Sudan is one of the signatories to the SENDAI framework about disaster risk reduction. And when we talk of disaster risk reduction, we want to put forward an early warning system, which of course we don't have. Most of the focus that we get from the region is not holistic enough. We want to see to it that we have a functioning meteorological department that has concrete climate information and is feeding our people with information so that all actors that are designing projects will design them based on the context of South Sudan and that place. So we use these days like the International Disaster Risk Reduction Day, which is carried out every October to create this awareness, to engage with the Ministry of Environment, to see to it that disaster risk reduction or standard policy is implemented. Again, the South Sudan government also is a signatory to the Paris Agreement on climate change. So, all these are international policies and they are also backing up our National policies on climate change. But of course, we've to see to it that implementing this policy or creating action is not about the government alone. You can contribute individually.

## **Rosemary Wilfred**

What are some of the lessons you feel other youth groups in other areas can learn to be able to minimise the impact of these disasters?

## **Thor Yuanes**

Thank you so much. In South Sudan right now, because of the complexity of the risk, we want to see everybody getting involved. Advocating in his own way or her own way to make sure that risks are minimised. The Youth are the tool of change and the process of creating a healthy environment starts with this youth right here, right now. And with this reason, I want to see youth get involved, advocate for their community. Don't wait until somebody comes with a project. Please. We want to see more youth engaging their communities, explaining to them what is happening. I know it is not our fault in South Sudan because we contribute the least amount of carbon-dioxide, but we are much hit because we don't have the capacity.

Once you don't have the capacity, there is a vulnerability. So, in other locations, I know in Eastern Equatoria we have drought and I want to see youth getting innovative enough to initiate some activities locally using local knowledge and local resources. In Jonglei, now the effect of climate change has caused sideline effects related to climate change. Nowadays, there's conflict, gender inequality, hunger, and livelihoods are lost. With this, we need to work right now, and it starts with youth, before you engage policymakers. Youth in the

village need to be innovative, engage entrepreneurship, you know climate challenges can be turned into opportunities. For example, during the dry season, if you get a canoe during flooding, you will use this canoe to transport people in the process. You are saving lives. And again, you are getting money to evacuate people. So, you use this challenge as an opportunity and to save lives. We also want to see youth engaging in smart agriculture. Even if you don't have a larger piece of land, could you just have a vegetable garden? This can support your family.

We also want to see youth to be peace builders because peace itself is the blood of everything. We can do development. We can have hospitals. We can have roads. We can have everything, but if there is no peace, just in one minute we can bring down this hospital. In 2 minutes, you can destroy these roads. It is just like the body. Once in your body, you don't have blood. That's enough reason for you to die. So, we want the youth to engage in peace building. We want to see productive youth, useful youth in their communities.

## **Rosemary Wilfred**

Thank you very much. Is there anything else you would like to add as a general comment just to conclude this conversation?

## **Thor Yuanes**

For now, South Sudan is at risk. That is a conflict that is drought, variability of rainfall, there is flooding. And above all, there is hunger and all this has created scarcity of resources because people are scrambling over the little resources that we have. So, we want to send a message to policymakers that please involve the community in decision making. Please put the youth in the centre of policy making and again, create opportunities for people to engage. Maybe the policymakers can engage with their community leaders in their village, and we want to see an established early warning system. This time, South Sudan is part of the world and technology is being used all over the world. So, technology can be used, like our telecommunication system here, to educate our mass population and give them the right information about climate. And also, to address conflict, there should be Youth empowerment so that young people are engaged in productive activities rather than fighting. And my last message. We have been experiencing flooding for the last four years now and I know there is nothing much done to rescue the people that are living in most of the affected areas. Now it's dry season, there is a need to send in support before the flooding gets worse. From January to May, maybe there must be prepositioning of lifesaving equipment and supplies, for example, the government or the actors can now send in medicines to higher grounds where people are stranded. There should be speed boats in those places put in place by county authorities so that people who are stranded can be rescued, and the people who are stranded in higher grounds are able to receive medicine because they get stranded with their loved ones and livestock and they don't have the means to rescue them and save their lives. So we want to send this message so that from January to March, it is a preparatory season where now the authorities can prepare and save lives before things get worse.

## Rosemary Wilfred

Well, that was Thor Yuanes, the team leader of a youth advocacy group, Climate Change Adaptation and Smart Action. Now from our conversation, you may have gathered that, indeed, Young people can help to stop this global crisis or at least minimise its impact. in their own simple yet purposeful ways, just the way Yuanes and his peers are doing in Bentiu -Unity State. And as a young person, you can do the same. You can also support this noble cause through many other ways such as joining environmental organisations or groups; participating in various school or community programs and projects against climate change. For instance, joining clean-up drives at school or in the community; participating in tree planting and go-green activities; garbage picking and recycling initiatives; getting involved in environmental campaigns; using social media like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram in promoting climate change and environmental awareness to the public; limiting the use of plastics; helping report illegal activities to authorities; teaching our families about segregating garbage at home and also encouraging our friends, schoolmates, and our family to do what we are doing. Today, we should realise that we have a moral responsibility towards our environment and our planet. Stopping climate change is not easy. But if we work together as one, our micro-efforts will have a macro effect on our environment and our planet, so let us act now. Let us be involved in this fight. As a young generation, let us stand together in stopping climate change.

With that, we have come to the end of this edition of episode 3 of the *Step Up* podcast on climate change, adaptation, mitigation, and climate resilience. Part two of this episode will focus on waste management and environmental care. My name is Rosemary Wilfred – Media and Communication Manager for Tearfund South Sudan. Thanks for listening and I hope you join us again in the next episode.

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