



Step Up: Inspiring young minds

Season 1: Episode 2

Youth and peacebuilding in South Sudan

Transcript

Summary keywords

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Speakers

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Rosemary Wilfred

Hello, and welcome to *Step up* – a podcast series brought to you by Tearfund South Sudan – a Christian charity organisation that has been working in the country since the 1970s, tackling poverty through sustainable development and responding to the crisis with a vision to see people freed from poverty and living transformed lives.

Season one of this podcast is focused on the youth in South Sudan and throughout the season, we will be featuring inspiring conversations about the challenges and experiences of the South Sudanese youth so as to learn from each other and encourage young people to participate in transformative activities to improve their lives and that of their 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.

Soon after South Sudan's independence from Sudan in 2011, the young nation sunk into conflict in December 2013, and barely three years later, renewed fighting also broke out in July 2016. These two consecutive civil wars seriously impacted the new nation, resulting in the loss of lives and mass displacement which has broken the social fabric of the South Sudanese people.

The conflict also created disunity among some communities in the country, further eroding the love and peaceful co-existence the South Sudanese people once embraced. As a result, peacebuilding has become paramount in the Country's search for lasting peace and stability. In 2018, the parties to the conflict signed a revitalised peace agreement to end the conflict in South Sudan and currently, several programs and activities are ongoing toward addressing the root causes of the conflict and peacebuilding initiatives to ensure lasting peace in the country. But how can the youth in South Sudan be part of this process?

Well, this is one of the questions we will explore in this conversation where we will be talking about Peacebuilding in South Sudan and how young people can be engaged and inspired to be part of this process.

Joining me for this conversation is Benson Binya – a young self-motivated South Sudanese peacebuilding champion, working with about 10 youth groups in the capital Juba and the surrounding suburbs carrying out several activities to foster peaceful co-existence in his community.

He will be talking about what he does, some of the gains he and his group have made so far, and how other young South Sudanese can do similar activities in their respective communities.

Welcome, Benson. Could you tell our audience more about yourself and the peacebuilding activities that you are engaged in?

Benson Binya

My name is Benson Binya. I have now taken two and a half years in the peace building, both at the community level and at the national level, at the community level; I work with more than ten youth groups. That is my team. In addition, we are located at almost all the major residential areas in Juba involving ourselves in peace building in a way that we preach peaceful coexistence in our communities. We also promote the importance of youth in peacebuilding, both at the community and the national level. And we are also working to see that there is a relationship in leadership or linkage between youth and leaders. Therefore, at the community level, I have a team of ten youth groups in 18 peace clubs and at the National Level, I have one youth group that we are engaging with in the chapter six of the permanent constitution making process of South Sudan

At the community level, we do peace forums. I think between 2021, July until now, we did more than 34 peace forums where we talked about forgiveness and reconciliation. We also do football tournaments called Peace Tournament. It brought many youths from all the parts of Juba. We did intergenerational dialogues in communities like Gumbo and Gudele . We also use mobile cinema short films to promote peace, dialogue, forgiveness and reconciliation. We do indoor peace dialogues between young people and their leaders especially at the community level. So that is what my team and I do.

Rosemary Wilfred

What are some of the gains or positive impacts of your peacebuilding initiative within your community so far?

Benson Binya

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

From the way you speak, it looks like the initiative has been well received, are there some challenges at all?

Benson Binya

We cannot deny that we really face some challenges. Challenges are there, but sincerely people want peace. In addition, when we go to these communities, we only face challenges where we do not involve our community leaders, some of them say, this is the way I need to be included in this process. So go on first to hold a meeting with the chief, let him know the project that you are taking to the community and what is his or her role in that project. Everything was accepted and people came freely to attend the peace forums and we believe they learned. The messages we sent to them and also extended to those who didn't attend so sincerely, the communities in Juba really want peace and they are very happy of us taking these initiatives there. Even others are requesting that some of our activities, like the peace forums, should continue so that every person in that community is able to see those films on peace and dialogue and youth unity. However, of course, the limitation is sometimes in funding, but the community is willing to learn about peace and to be in peace.

Rosemary Wilfred

The progress you are making with your team is a very impressive one, so how can other young people become peace ambassadors and engage in similar activities to bring peace and social cohesion to their respective communities? What would be your advice in this regard?

Benson Binya

My fellow young people, peacebuilding is not something difficult. It is not even what I studied. However, it is what I am doing because I want to see peace in my community. Therefore, if you also want to see peace in your community, which we really need, it is very simple. Just learn what peace is. Learn what forgiveness is, learn what reconciliation is and how do you take this knowledge to your fellow peers where you sit with your brothers and sisters, talk about peace, talk about peacebuilding its importance in the community, and also, take the courage to understand your community, and the problems facing your people in the community? We believe it is social disunity among the people. But there are several other problems that are facing you in your community. And you have to learn about those problems. You have to be able to see that there is a problem and you have an important role in resolving that problem and then do not work alone. Create a team in your community and visit your chief. Visit your block leaders, your women leaders, visit them and let them know that you want to build peace and you are capable of seeing problems in your community and coming up with solutions. peace-building is as simple as that. It begins with understanding what peacebuilding is.

Already there are so many youth groups that are existing at the community level join them and become part of those groups. Build peace together. Those that are doing peace building, those that are doing trauma healing, which is still peace building, there are those in agriculture, you know, just find that group, that peace club that you can positively contribute to your community. There is nothing good about joining gang groups. Nothing good there. You might even end up losing your life. However, building peace is, you know, is very important both for you in your community.

Rosemary Wilfred

What kind of support do young people engaged in peacebuilding activities require from the government and non-governmental organisations?

Benson Binya

To the government, We need the space to be able to also contribute positively. You know, there are so many youth initiatives in Juba doing many activities, but these activities are not being recognised a lot, as the efforts of young people in building peace are not so much considered as important. And to me, there should be a linkage between community level peace building and national level peace building. For example, the ongoing implementation of the peace agreement should consider all those young people as groups at the community level that are doing well in peace building and see how they can incorporate the activities at the national level to see that young people feel included and doing something positive for the country. Yes. To the national NGOs, you know, a lot of them are really doing well with the youth. They are giving us training. Several workshops are ongoing on how to, you know, to understand your role in the community as a young person. I am a beneficiary of NGOs, workshops and training. However, I want to see the young people are so included from the beginning of project initiation too, until the project ends, so that we are not simply sent to the community to implement a project, but we are capable of, you know, initiating the project, writing it, and even seeking funds to implement this project.

So that is what we demand as young people, because if you look around Juba, you realise that there are so many youth groups, but they are not funded. Again, they are unable to come up with programs or writing project proposals that really resolve the problem and the problems in their community. Therefore, to me, it is a challenge that can be resolved by involving them, train us, train the young people, involve them in project initiation until the end of the project and funding, give them seed grants to do their own initiatives at the community level. Give them all the financial support and technical support and all these. In addition, after learning these things, it should not end there. Let us be able to implement this knowledge. If you teach me trauma, give me the opportunity to teach my fellow people in my community about trauma at the community level. That is what I think the NGOs can do.

Rosemary Wilfred

That was Benson Binya - a self-motivated peacebuilding champion working with 10 youth groups in the capital Juba and the surrounding suburbs carrying out several activities to foster peaceful co-existence in his community. As a young person, have you been inspired by this? Well, you should, actually, think of ways you can contribute to peacebuilding activities in your community. Peacebuilding is a long-term process of encouraging people to talk, repairing relationships, and reforming institutions. For positive change to last, everyone affected by a destructive conflict has to be involved in the process of building peace.

It can be bringing different groups together to discuss the issues or using film and media to help people understand the viewpoints of others. This can also be done by providing support to formal processes of negotiation between conflicting groups or by ensuring marginalised groups can have a say. Peace is built when we break down stereotypes and when different groups work together. So as a young person, take this as a challenge and do something to make a difference in your community and the country at large.

Following the signing of the 2018 revitalised peace agreement to end the conflict in South Sudan, the government created the national and state ministries of peacebuilding to spearhead peacebuilding processes and initiatives as well as enhance social cohesion. Leone Lemeru George is the Director General of the State Ministry of Peacebuilding in Central Equatoria. I asked him earlier how the state ministry of peacebuilding is engaging and supporting the youth in the country.

Leone Lemeru George

For the ministry of peace building and as a person, I believe that there is power in youth into the process of peacebuilding.

We believe that the state and nation building process where viable institutions of government are established, fair laws are enacted and ideal law enforcement is undertaken will shape and build a coherent honest and responsive citizenry who are the youth who we are targeting in the peace building process. As a ministry we have a mandate to map out conflicts, what are the issues that the youth feel is a threat to their progress? We need to map out the available peace instruments like the youth Organisations, Women Organisations and then after knowing them, their roles and responsibilities, as a ministry we look into initiating inspiring policies to motivate youth to reach their full potential. Youth as of now, we look at them as firewood of which we want to turn them from firewood into fire extinguishers. Youth should become

potential enough to say we are not for destruction, yes for development, that is where we shall realise the south Sudan we wanted.

We want the youth to interact with the Government, to understand what the Government is planning for them, the youth themselves should have a plan or a vision of what they want to be in the future so that these two plans are brought together to produce the plan that we want to use for developing the youth to their full potential. So that some of us will not sit in the offices until 65 years. For youths to realise that, I think the youths should start creating platforms where they reach themselves in the whole country, not necessarily limiting themselves in the Central Equatoria State because they are Central Equatoria State youths the country is for all of you and you must know yourselves so that one day when you sit on the table as council of ministers you already know yourselves and you know the directions where you will take your country.

The other thing is that youth must be holding some constructive conversations with the government. Sometimes the youth might think that this Government is not serving them no it's your Government, it is only that the communication between you and the government has not been there or it hasn't be healthy, so it needs to be strengthen so that you know what the Government is planning for you, so that the Government will also know what you think you want that is not included in this plans so that the plan for the country because a plan for all of us. Not only for the leaders, but also for all of us. I would urge the youth to dices' from the sense of belonging to agrou6, belonging to tribe and belonging to a political party, because the country belongs to the tribe, the different groups and the different political parties so why do you want to choose the small ones instead of being alone who thinks for whole country. So think bigger instead of limiting yourselves to your tribes and your groups. Through your organisations, you develop a common goal for yourselves. This goal may guide you and may guide the government in Policy design so that our policies become inclusive enough. Otherwise, a country without young people is a dead county.

Rosemary Wilfred

That was Leone Lemeru George - the Director General of the State Ministry of Peacebuilding in Central Equatoria speaking about youth and peacebuilding, particularly how the ministry is working with the youth in the state and why he thinks the youth can play an important role to achieve lasting peace in South Sudan.

As a Christian organisation, Tearfund South Sudan is working to see people freed from poverty and injustice, and living transformed lives. As part of its holistic approach to achieve this, Tearfund is undertaking peacebuilding initiatives such as addressing the root causes of conflict and restoring broken relationships.

Lam Cosmas Oryem is the Peacebuilding and Recovery Specialist at Tearfund South Sudan. He now explains the concept of peacebuilding in general, why it is important in a post-conflict era, and how young people can take part in the country's peacebuilding processes.

Lam Cosmas Oryem

My name is Lam Oryem Cosmas, I am the Peace Building and Recovery Specialist here at the Tearfund South Sudan program.

Well, you know, we cannot talk about peacebuilding without first understanding the concept of peace from which it is being derived from. What then is peace? My best definition or description of peace is the Hebrew word shalom. In addition, you know that shalom is the language spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ the Prince of Peace. Shalom refers to a state of being in or having the right relationship at four levels. The first level is the right relationship with God, right relation from itself, right relationship with neighbours. That is the third level. In addition, the fourth level is the right relationship with the environment. That's Mother Earth, including the soil, waters, vegetation, animals and all creatures. It is the same word peace use in Islam. Shalom literally means peace. In addition, use in greeting as salaam Alaikum peace be with you. Therefore, this is the foundation of peace building that we shall use. Therefore, what is peace building? Peace building is an array of processes, approaches and stages of activities needed to transform conflict towards a more sustainable and peaceful relationship. You see, it takes us back to the things that we do to build relationships. Because when you are in a good relationship, that is really the bare minimum of understanding peace. It is a process of changing just structures to the right relationship. It aims at transforming the way people, communities and societies live. It heals and structures their relationship to promote justice and peace. We have already described peace. What is justice? Justice. Doing the right thing. Doing what is right, you see.

Then creating a space in which mutual trust underlines that mutual trust, respect, interdependence is fostered. You remember what Desmond Tutu said, something that unites us, ubuntu. "I am because we are, since we are, therefore I am". interdependent. We exist, but because of others. Peace and peace building is therefore a long term, deliberate, sustained community engagement. That is what peace building is.

In the context of South Sudan, it should be number one. Because it is a post. You remember we said it was deliberate. Because peacebuilding seeks to address underlying problems or causes of conflict? So what are the underlying causes of conflicts? Why did we reach in this way? We should understand it so that we can move it. It is important because it helps us as the people of South Sudan to resolve our differences peacefully and lay the foundation to prevent future violence. You know how the violence has created chaos in this country, creating an environment that will support self-sustaining, durable peace, reconciling opponents and preventing violence from reoccurring. This is why peacebuilding is very important. In the context of post-conflict South Sudan.

Now why and how can young people be involved?

My emphasis and encouragement to young people is that youth or being young is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. This comes with responsibilities for today and for the future. Therefore because of who they are. A transition now means that they are taking the role for today and the future. Young people must champion the cause for peace and peacebuilding. Understanding peace and taking part in the action for creating it. That's peace building. And so how can young people do this? Young people need to change their trajectory. Again, it is a task for young people to understand why we respond with violence. Why is there chaos? Why is there corruption? Young people should change this trajectory of the current violent responses. I would suggest four areas.

Number one is social. Cultural. Let us look, understand the context through analysis, and take our place to transform existing structures in supporting dialogue, including an intergenerational dialog about the structures and the future. You should take it. Do not wait! Young people should not wait; they should be

proactive. That is the peacebuilding. Can we be proactive, not reactive? Reactive being firefighters no! Preventing the fire. So be proactive. Number two, social, political, as part of civil society. Young people should connect and participate actively in public life through mobilising, organising and training.

I know young people in the world; they love Obama, Obama started by mobilising and organising local communities. So let us do that, young people. Thirdly, economic. Where do we get money? There are many areas of making money.

Young people should position themselves for local resources and see how to get money because money is needed and the last important aspect is promotion and respect for human rights, the dignity of each person. So young people must be custodians of life in this country.

Then in that way, the country is in the hands of young people. Not tomorrow. Today. If you don't have it today, then what would we have tomorrow? You should have it now. Then you keep it tomorrow.

Rosemary Wilfred

That was Lam Cosmas Oryem - the Peacebuilding and Recovery Specialist at Tearfund South Sudan explaining the concept of peacebuilding in general, why it is important in a post-conflict era, and how young people can take part in the country's peacebuilding processes.

That brings us to the end of this episode of *Step up* on Youth and peacebuilding in South Sudan. I am Rosemary Wilfred, Media and Communication Manager at Tearfund South Sudan. Thanks for listening, and I hope you join us again next time.

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