‘When the choice is either to kill or be killed’: Rethinking youth and violent conflict in post-conflict South Sudan

William Tsuma

When the choices are to kill or to be killed
Steal or be stolen from
Eat or be eaten
Then what can we do
When you are forced to sin to make a living.
Emmanuel Jal, former child soldier in South Sudan (Jal and Lloyd Davies, 2009)

Introduction

The subject of youth and their role in violent conflict continues to shape African social science research; hence the need to initiate sustainable preventive measures as youth violence permeates every policy discussion in conflict and post-conflict contexts. The research has focused primarily on the role of youth either as perpetrators or as victims of violence. Several projects have linked increased youth engagement in violence to growing levels of illiteracy, rising unemployment and poverty. These neo-classical perspectives present poverty as the root of the problems that face the global south. In some regions, youth participation in violence has also been perceived as an attempt to escape from heightened poverty levels. Policy recommendations emanating from the above hypotheses have pointed towards the need for increased education facilities, employment opportunities and income-creation possibilities.

Although youth constitute a considerable demographic poportion in most African societies, their role in conflict and post-conflict societies needs to be interrogated beyond meta-narratives such as theories of 'poverty' and 'unemployment'. It is not a coincidence that despite growing investment in youth programmes by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government initiatives on youth employment and other income-generation initiatives, youth violence is entrenched as a plague in most conflict-prone countries of Africa. Wealth and employment creation are vital development strategies and should be sustained. What requires further interrogation, however, are the political conditions under which education and other development strategies can serve the needs and interests of youth. In conflict or post-conflict contexts, for example, one key casualty is the social and political fabric, which gets destroyed during war or violent conflict, leaving behind remnants of disorder that only nurture and cultivate a prolonged culture of violence. Investing in traditional development programmes such as youth employment and modern education without addressing these complex socio-political disorders thus remains a waste of resources and time.

This paper initiates discussions on some of the socio-political factors that underpin youth participation in violence in conflict and post-conflict contexts. The paper uses the case of South Sudan to try and understand youth dynamics and how they interact with violence. The central question focuses on exploring why some youth in conflict or post-conflict contexts resort to violence. By asking this question, it was possible to distance any judgement towards the youth in terms of their involvement in violent conflict (voluntary or otherwise) by giving them an opportunity to provide their perspectives on the issue.

The title of this chapter, 'When the choice is either to kill or be killed', epitomises discussions with South Sudanese youth. While sounding disheartening, it was insightful to note that most of the young people reflected on their contexts and questioned the legitimacy of attempts to provide mainstream development solutions while their local realities threatened the sustainability of any 'semblance' of development. This paper links youth behaviour to contextual realities and the environment that such actors inhabit. It then raises questions on the effectiveness of development interventions that work towards strengthening

youth agency (i.e. income generation), when the surrounding socio-political structures threaten to destabilise capacity building. Effective strategies for integrating youth exposed to violent contexts or for preventive initiatives should address the socio-political and cultural issues that underpin and reinforce the culture of violence.

This chapter is structured into a brief background, setting the pace for delving into the environmental determinants of youth involvement in and vulnerability to conflict, and moving into the first section, which outlines a brief theoretical framework for conflict in general and conflict-prone countries such as South Sudan, and youth and analytical discussions that frame structure versus agency in understanding behaviour change. The second section of this study identifies significant environmental determinants that are, as it were, the sine qua non – necessary but not sufficient conditions – within which young people are forced to grow. The case of South Sudan is used to illustrate the interaction of youth with such contextual determinants. Finally, the third section draws some important reflections and conclusions, based on the analysis provided on the role of contextual determinants and choices available to young people in conflict situations.

Background

The consequence(s) of two brutal wars between Sudan's central government and the economically impoverished South Sudan, combined with protracted periods of civil war and inter-ethnic violence, facilitated the breakdown of economic, social and political systems in South Sudan. The 2005 signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) established the eventual secession of South Sudan from the North in January 2011, and subsequent independence in July of the same year. Independence was a monumental achievement for South Sudan, which had unsuccessfully fought for self-determination for several decades, leading to the loss of an estimated two million lives and destruction of properties estimated into billions of dollars. The Khartoum government had systematically marginalised South Sudan since independence in 1956, in which the North legislated Arabic as the national language and instituted Islam

as the state religion and Sharia law as the constitution, despite the presence of animist, Christian and dark-skinned South Sudanese. The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) then sought to magnify the position of the South Sudanese populations vis-à-vis the conditions of the Islamic North, in terms of government development and social policies.

The history of Sudan exists amidst more developed northern people, connected to world trade through the Red Sea and Egypt, besides less developed and more isolated southern Sudan (Call, 2012). These complex socio-economic challenges and structural imbalances have complicated decades of hostility, civil war and violence in South Sudan.[1] Some of these issues are unresolved and continue to influence the choices of South Sudan's youth. Structural factors underpinning the continued violence include an enduring culture of violence and a legacy of conflict; continued post-independence boundary disputes along the three transitional areas of Abyei, South Kordofan and Blue Nile; as well as persistent remnants of conflict characterised by piles of small arms and light weapons (SALW) that remain in the hands of many civilians. Integrating the youth into post-independence South Sudan consequently remains an integral component of all post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

As consequences of conflict are particular to certain populations, any historical account of conflict in South Sudan would be incomplete without discussing the links to youth and child soldiers. Most armed groups, militia and rebel groups in conflict-prone societies, including sub-Saharan Africa, comprise youth, with some perceived as children of varying ages, which then legitimises the study of youth and conflict in South Sudan. Efforts to prevent violence and initiate recovery in South Sudan would automatically call for the reintegration of demilitarised youth into society, or transforming those who have grown up within this violent environment. The above situation remains a dilemma and continues to influence development and early recovery programmes in

1 While it can be argued that this statement is generic, the decades of civil war in South Sudan present a different reality, which influences and shapes the social-economic and political landscape that emerges. Trying to understand such a complexity without grounding the context within those decades of 'lost' opportunity is a recipe for misplaced policy discourses (author's perspective).

post-conflict contexts. The next section tries to position the question of youth and violent conflict within the socialisation framework, which places the individual within their rightful context to interrogate how that socialisation then shapes behaviour and choices.

The nearly three decades of conflict in South Sudan has resulted in the militarisation of populations and widespread underdevelopment. Besides, the presence of SALW among communities continues to fuel conflicts, hence the need for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) as an important component of peacebuilding that would also prevent the reoccurrence of conflicts. With a population estimated at 8.26 million – with 70% under the age of 30, 83% living in rural areas and 27% of youth aged 15 years and above being literate (South Sudan Centre for Census, Statistics and Evaluation, 2011) – the presence of SALW poses a significant threat for peaceful coexistence among communities. For instance, it has been noted that the militia of Jonglei and Upper Nile states are armed civilians, often male youths, who seek livelihoods through cattle raiding and banditry. Studies (see for example Nichols, 2011) indicate that ex-combatants do not appreciate re-integration packages offered by DDR programmes given the lucrative incentives they enjoyed as combatants. DDR programmes have also failed to achieve desired goals due to scanty government presence insecurity in most pastoralist communities.

The Republic of South Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (RSSDDC) is a national initiative supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), among other funding partners. Accordingly, DDR is a key component of South Sudan's development plan (2011–2013) and is seen as a crucial component of the productive allocation of financial and human resources and broader peacebuilding structures and processes. South Sudan has 12 525 demobilised ex-combatants, and 8 542 participants received reintegration support in 2011, while 1 281 with disabilities were provided with special needs support. Besides that, 219 children were released from renegade militia and returned to their families and communities in 2010–2011 (Nichols, 2011). In spite of this, an assessment of DDR indicated grave deficiencies in the programme, including a lack of transparency in registration of the target group to be re-integrated. There is also a lack of broad-based consultation

seeking to ensure a long-term development strategy targeting security and peace consolidation. The main weakness is a minimal understanding of DDR among participants, due to an absence of substantial public information or a sensitisation campaign.

There are great disparities in the provision of education between the various regions of South Sudan, and significant numbers of youth and adults have completely missed out on education. Moreover, the available schools lack the capacity to absorb large numbers of returnees and internally displaced people (IDPs), since most of the facilities are temporary structures, frequently under trees. More worryingly, many teachers never completed their primary education, while the process of setting up a specific education curriculum for South Sudan has been slow, and led to the adaptation of education curricula from other countries – without proper localisation within the South Sudan context. Although English is to be the official language of instruction in the South Sudan education system, many youth have only been taught in Arabic, and those returning from neighbouring Francophone states know little English. There are few secondary schools and post-primary or technical institutions in South Sudan, although Southern universities that relocated to Khartoum during the civil war are due to return.

Youth socialisation and conflict contexts

For socio-cultural reasons, many young/child soldiers grow up to become men and women unaware of other existing realities of life. Most, if not all, have witnessed brutal murders, rape or the maiming of their loved ones, or have themselves participated in committing those acts. These generations are left with very bleak memories of what it means to lead a normal and peaceful human life. Normal becomes defined based on whose reality one believes in. Without making any generalisations, the process of engaging in violence could be informed by choice: there are those who are forcibly recruited, as well as those who join voluntarily – albeit with background socialisation into conflict, as is the case of some youth in South Sudan. Thus, a contextual analysis is needed before

branding youth in conflict or post-conflict situation areas as 'killing machines' or 'future combatants'.

The analysis of human behaviour and subsequent identification of particular factors that contribute to one course of action rather than another is inevitably a complex and somewhat unsatisfactory process. Seldom is any reality straightforward so as to warrant a distinct explanation. The implication is that several explanations, perhaps, are necessary to describe a certain reality. Moreover, different aspects of this reality could take on varying dimensions among populations, leading to a lack of consolidated perspective among target beneficiaries. Even though testimonies gathered in this study are complex and diverse, their voices paint a picture of the underlying and immediate factors that contributed to their joining an armed force or militia group.

The quote at the beginning of this chapter is adopted from a poem by Emmanuel Jal – a reformed South Sudanese child soldier – to help realise the harsh realities that youth living in violence-prone areas face. Significant tension exists between the 'praise' and the 'fear' of youth in sub-Saharan Africa, both in theory and in the way in which they are perceived by government institutions and international organisations (Auerbach, 2010:11). Youth, as a population category, are habitually framed in an indistinguishable 'black and white' dichotomy, and in conflict situations either as perpetrators or victims of violence and its aftermath. The tone and agency of the youth in negotiating their allegiances and socio-political citizenship in complex and nuanced ways is thus often overlooked or ignored altogether; the context that shapes their choices and action is often not reflected.

Various theoretical perspectives have been put forward to explain the linkages between youth and conflict. The 'youth bulge theory' is founded on the premise that there exists a strong correlation between countries prone to civil conflicts and those with burgeoning youthful populations. Societies with rapidly increasing youth populations are said to end up frequently with rampant unemployment, and thus large pools of disaffected youth are more susceptible to recruitment into rebel or terrorist groups. This presents a direct and positive relationship between burgeoning youth populations and unemployment – and

since it is said that an 'idle mind is the devil's workshop', youth become more susceptible to socially unacceptable behaviour in the absence of productive employment opportunities.

Antony Giddens' (1984) structuration theory opposes the perspectives espoused by proponents of the 'youth bulge'. This theory establishes the agency of individuals, defined as the ability to deploy a range of causal powers in decision-making, while structure is objectified as the rules, norms, resources and patterns of choice and power in society. Giddens argues that structure has the power to give rise to people's social practices, which are the activities that make and transform the world we live in (referred to as behaviour). Social practices are then defined by the structure (rules, norms, resources and patterns of choice) within any given context. In this case, the heuristics of collective lifestyles define the social, political and cultural factors that determine how people interact and relate to their context.

Borrowing from Giddens' theory, it is plausible to argue that countries with weak political institutions, laden with remnants of civil war or recovering from political disputes are most vulnerable to regressing into violence. If such countries simultaneously experience a growing youth bulge (which has been socialised within the same violence), there is a high probability that these youth would be manipulated by ideologies of war and thus become agents of violence and insurgency. The central argument is the way in which the youth are socialised. So, the argument that suggests that a huge youth population in post-conflict states increases the likelihood of continued conflict, does not necessarily point towards the concept of 'youth bulge'; rather, it suggests that the youth's context defines their choices and actions (Kagwanja, 2005:6; Simonse, 2005:243). If the country concerned has a history in which youth often served in the armed forces, militias or the military, then they are not only likely to be involved in violence, but also have the technical know-how required to 'ignite' war once again threatening the polity, the nation and order itself.

In the foregoing case, the youth are not necessarily a dormant demographic factor waiting to become active agents in violence; for the youth, conflict becomes "part and parcel of their identity and unfortunately, that identity shapes and

refines their actions and choices" (in this specific case, Liberian youth during the long civil war) (Utas, 2008:117). Acknowledging contextual factors takes away generalisations of 'good' versus 'evil' and demonstrates that youth in conflict are complex agents negotiating a wide assortment of social, economic and ethical decisions (Ibid.). It is necessary to grapple further with this grey area and think through the ways that the youth adapt to various mindsets. These adaptations should not be conceived in a vacuum, but instead contextualised to understand better the ways in which conflicts affect youth psyche. Rather than assuming a paradigm of good or evil, or moral or immoral, the youth should be perceived to be constantly changing and negotiating their positions in society as means to survive within these underlying spaces. Constant change is essential to help individualise youth and make their engagement with social change a reality in a post-conflict society.

In South Sudan, those youth who become part of the militia, armed groups and rebel leaders felt victimised and humiliated during an earlier period of their growth and development. The majority had been exposed to armed violence at very early stages – either directly as prisoners or indirectly by witnessing the loss of loved ones. Such victimised youth could have also experienced repression, human rights violations, deprivation of basic resources and societal alienation. The resulting aggression from previously victimised youth appears to be a form of retaliation, deriving from feelings of past indignity and degradation. In this case, there is a causal relationship between the socialisation of the youth and the choices they make when placed in situations where decisions have to be negotiated. Within militarised conditions, there is also an absence of recognition and respect, which then creates divisions of 'masters' and 'underlings' in addition to feelings of humiliation and the abuse of core rights.[2]

As underlings rebel against oppressive systems in desperate attempts to rise to power through militia, and armed groups, they engage in extreme acts of violence, committing tremendous indignities and perpetuating the same cycle of humiliation to which they had been subjected. Revenge, even if not defined in those exact words, is present throughout hierarchical societies that have endured

2 Focus group discussion (June 2011 in Juba, South Sudan) – with six youth who were former combatants and are currently unemployed.

violence, been subjected to civil war or even experienced genocide. When rebel leaders are in positions to vent their feelings of victimisation through violent actions, the majority of the population suffers as many are killed, wounded or exploited in ensuing conflicts.

After speaking to a former child soldier (identity withheld), it became apparent that many child soldiers grow up within an armed movement. The notion that children are captured from normal families and forced into the military does not tell the full story; rather, it blinds the realities of children whose parents are at the core of the rebel community and are thus raised in the movement. Of course, this does not negate the reality that child solders may have joined the rebel movements for protection, or were perhaps faced with a situation where joining an armed group seemed to be the only available choice. Emmanuel Jal's quote shows that the moral line of right and wrong erodes for many of these young people. The overarching story is of young children who are forced to commit atrocious acts against loved ones or face the threat of being killed, maimed or displaced. Child soldiers perform a range of tasks, such as participating in active combat; laying mines and explosives; scouting, spying, acting as decoys, couriers or guards; training, drill or other preparations; and logistics, as well as support functions like pottery cooking and domestic labour. While some of these chores might be forced, evidence from South Sudan reveals that, in some cases, it is a strategy for negotiating their own core interests, which includes preserving their very existence (HRW, 2008:12).

It is important to nuance the discussion on youth and violence and note that, in many instances, youth do have agency in becoming insurgents – but what occurs is that the entire value and social systems become deconstructed and a militant psyche develops in their place to ensure continued survival. As noted in a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report on child soldiers, youth in conflict experience a process of asocialisation into "a polarized existence of hostility" and are denied the normal cultural, moral and value socialisation usually gained from family and community set-ups. Most societies have markers that determine the end of youth, whether through voting, graduation, marriage, bearing children or other rites (Van Gennep, 1960:65). Nevertheless, during civil war, social transitions are profoundly disrupted (Eyber and Ager, 2004).

Incapable of establishing these transitions in the normal societal manner, youth in conflict situations therefore miss the opportunity for societal reincorporation as full adults. As noted by Honwana (2006:53), when faced with a gun, adults always tend to surrender to the demands of youth, thereby relinquishing their claims to authority. Lessons learned during official DDR processes about the priorities and needs of children are often ignored by planners and implementers. The fear of stigmatisation and other obstacles prevent numerous children from registering for DDR programmes (HRW, 2008).

The South Sudan context in which youth are socialised

The previous section highlighted some crucial theoretical and empirical perspectives on the complexities of youth socialisation in conflict-prone contexts. That discussion shows the relevance of theory in explaining socio-political behaviour, but also highlights the need for deeper analysis of causal relationships between certain key actors and violent conflicts. Actions are triggered, not inspired or nurtured. The popular assumptions made by most development-type institutions that the eradication of poverty would make the world a happy place need further interrogation; everyday actors are subjected to situations of negotiating their interests, which involves manoeuvring and outmanoeuvring existing social political and cultural norms or structures.

Through focus group discussions (FGDs), youths from various backgrounds engaged in mapping the social and political contexts in which they have been socialised. Some also described how these contexts affected their lives.

Civil war and the collapse of socio-cultural fabric

The most important psychosocial cause of armed conflicts is the repeated marginalisation of particular persons or groups of people. As populations are excluded from the social, economic and political spheres, tension increases and marginalisation of any kind makes it easier for contending parties to cause individuals and groups to engage in extreme actions and become perpetrators.

During incidences of violence or protracted civil war, key casualties are the disintegration of the social and political structures of governance, decision-making and dispute resolution. Conflict thus implies that vulnerable groups are left to devise their own strategies of navigating difficult decisions or seeking redress when their rights are abused. In South Sudan, the choice to engage in cattle raiding and counter-cattle raiding has been attributed to the absence of any form of security, mode of socialisation or livelihood strategy. Therefore, the bottom line is that communities arm themselves as a strategy to guarantee their interests – one being their own security – while they choose to seek any form of revenge in the likelihood of an attack.

The collapse of customary socio-economic systems creates a decision-making vacuum and reduces the possibilities of addressing issues in a non-violent manner. The choice to respond violently to any perceived threat becomes a common occurrence, and youth therefore become the custodians of security. So, while the arguments of rationality and choice can be raised to question the decisions of youth, the other side is that rising insecurity, caused by disintegrated governance and security mechanisms, will always be a recipe for more violence.

Destruction of democracy and increased political instability

The notions of democracy and political stability are tied to aspects of the destruction of justice and decision-making systems. The two [democracy and political stability] are closely associated with maintaining peace and preventing the eruption of violent conflict. The continued fragility of states is linked to the application of non-democratic tactics in governance, which marginalises groups and contributes to the inequitable distribution of resources. Non-transparent parties withhold or alter information on basic rights to serve special interests and, in the process, breach human rights laws. Such environments have the potential to serve as breeding grounds for violence.[3] The risk is that this exposes the most vulnerable sections of society – notably, the youth.

3 Focus group discussion 2 (June 2011 in Juba, South Sudan) – discussing post-conflict democracy with five South Sudan youth who had dropped out of university.

In addition, corruption, extortion and human rights abuses are woven into the fabric of most failed political systems. The greatest misappropriations, however, occur in areas where the government feels no accountability towards its subjects. In South Sudan, a key effect of the protracted violence during the civil war was the destruction of established social safety nets. The outcome of this was that the struggle for survival turned dangerous as youth set out on desperate searches for food and resources.[4] In such instances, youth often received severe penalties for petty infractions, while no measures exist to challenge inappropriate judicial decisions, resulting in further marginalisation of young people. Mistrust is bred when neither the legal nor the traditional justice system can offer adequate means of settling disputes. Extrajudicial violence then becomes commonplace as armed groups and other rebel organisations illicitly control some security and justice officials to help protect their threatened interests.

Structural consequences of incomplete families [5]

In the first two points directly above, the implications of violence on governance and democratic structures were discussed, and how these then create breeding grounds for violence. The family plays a significant role as an accountability structure for young people, and its absence increases the risk of youth to indulge or get absorbed into crime and other unlawful activities.[6] In most African societies, the family unit largely shapes one's identity. It also becomes a key casualty of violence if children and women are abducted and recruited as child soldiers or play other roles while the men are forced into armed combat. In some

4 Focus group discussion 1 (June 2011 in Juba, South Sudan) – with youth between the ages of 18 and 25 years. Mostly unemployed, three had just dropped out of University of Juba, four had previously served in SPLA and four were reformed combatants engaged in small-scale informal economy activities.

5 I do realise the difficulty of defining what a complete family constitutes from an African context. However, my conceptualisation of this is leaning towards a 'complete' nuclear family, which comprises two parents (mother and father) and siblings. The simplicity of this conceptualisation is largely for reflection in the paper.

6 Focus group discussion 3 (June 2011 in Juba, South Sudan) – discussions on the social consequences of war, with a focus on the family (with six youths who currently head their families due to the loss of their parents).

cases throughout South Sudan, the well and able youth are recruited as militia, and because of the lack of accountability measures at family level, there is no wise counsel that exists especially for the younger generation.

Another dimension raised was that of identity. While tribal linkages have been politicised, their influence in shaping one's identity remains true in most African societies. People are identified according to their tribal and family lines. One can, therefore, argue that combined with the collapse or distortion of the family as a key unit of identity, the youth have adopted other means of shaping their own identity. Joining a famous rebel group of vigilante becomes their new identity and instils a sense of pride. The family also plays a central role in governing the behaviour of youth and, in most cases, provides accountability measures that then determine their choices and actions. When the family unit is destroyed, most young people then align themselves with armed groups and militias, among other conflict-seeking groups. While joining militias might not be their choice, the disintegration of the family unit made recruitment into armed groupings easier. Emmanuel Jal (Jal and Lloyd Davies, 2009) states that when you watch your entire family murdered in war, you lose the value of life.

Gun culture as a remnant of war in South Sudan

A United Nations (UN) document on DDR warns: "If the possession of weapons is of cultural significance to the population and has been considered a habit that existed before violent conflict broke out, weapons collection programs are likely to fail" (cited in Brewer, 2010:9). Reducing the demand for weapons in post-conflict societies is difficult, especially if weapons are part of the civilian culture or are important for self- or collective defence in the absence of a trustworthy and competent police force and criminal justice system. Even if there is popular support for weapons collection, the way it is done determines its chances of success. Governments often respond to pastoral violence, such as cattle raiding, through politically driven, coercive measures of weapons collection. Yet, a community's weapons may perhaps be a deterrent to likely attacks by a neighbouring community, and removing them may invite violence on that community.

Collecting weapons without also reducing the levels of insecurity, crime and the roots of conflict at the same time can consequently disarm individuals of their means of self-defence in conflict situations. Legitimate security guarantees, or disarmament programmes in which arms are collected by an authority figure for safekeeping, are potential solutions. From a statistical point of view, the amounts of illegal arms possessed by civilians are quite astronomical. There are an estimated 1.9 to 3.2 million small arms in circulation, of which about 67% are held by civilians (Sudan Human Security Baseline Project, 2011) in a conflict that saw the arming of almost half of the current population in some areas, drawing a line between a combatant and a civilian is no simple task. For most youth in South Sudan, the gun is an easy weapon of choice, and violence is the 'preferred' means of resolving disputes of any kind.

Militarisation of public spaces in South Sudan

The militarisation of public spaces of governance is closely linked to both the gun culture and the South Sudanese political system. The influence and role of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) in the liberation of South Sudan has meant that the new dispensation is led by a hybrid military–political regime. The table below demonstrates how the military has preoccupied the public space. Research conducted by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS, 2011) indicates that close to 90% of the governors in South Sudanese states are former military commanders. This therefore implies that the leadership process has created little space for civilian engagement. For youth, being in the military or being part of an armed group becomes a prestigious goal, as that guarantees one entry to the high office. In a country where role models are associated with political leadership, this then becomes an inspiration in the wrong direction.

Table 2: State governors and their occupations in South Sudan

State	Name	Rank/occupation
Central Equatoria	Clement Wani Konga	Major General
Eastern Equatoria	Louis Lobong	Brigadier General
Jonglei	Kuol Manyang Juuk	Lieutenant General
Lakes	Chol Tong Mayay Jang	Engineer
Northern Bahr el Ghazal	Nor Paul Malong Awan	Lieutenant General
Unity	Taban Deng Gai	Brigadier General
Upper Nile	Simon Kun Brigadier	Brigadier
Warrap	(Ms) Nyandeng Malek Deliech	-
Western Equatoria	Joseph Bakosoro	Colonel
Western Bahr el Ghazal	Rizik Zackaria Hassan	Brigadier General

Source: ISS 2011 and field work verification, June, 2011

Conclusion: Rethinking youth integration in post-conflict contexts

This study has sought to generate investigative and practical knowledge on youth integration in post-conflict contexts, as well as to bring back the value of theory in shaping peacebuilding practice in the field. The case of South Sudan has been used to demonstrate that the environment or habitus in which these youth are socialised largely shapes the actions and choices they make. This chapter draws the conclusion that interventions seeking the prevention of violence have failed to yield the much-expected results – not because of design of the programmes, but rather because of the point of departure when these programmes are conceptualised. In terms of planning and shaping a way forward, there is the need for systematic synergies and links to be drawn between conflict and context analysis, as the basis upon which the structural and operational prevention of

youth-related violence can be instituted. These links would also determine the strategies for the effective reintegration of youth in conflict contexts. The main outcome of this study, which is consistent with many findings in behavioural analysis (Hart, 2010), is that young people throughout the world exercise choices in the formulation of both their identities and their actions, which often change according to their personal and socio-political contexts.

The effects of violent conflict are devastating to all members of a society – but for youth who are residing in conflict prone areas, the impacts can be even greater. Youth in post-conflict settings and those who have lived in 'peaceful' environments are almost incomparable. The psychological and physical trauma that these young people are exposed to is extensive, and can be felt in all areas of their lives. As opposed to viewing these youth as misfits, it would be more helpful to view them as active agents, constantly negotiating the spaces in which they live. Young people within conflict situations have much at stake, yet they have little say in the policies and activities that pertain to their lives, as these are often prescriptive and seen through the lens of outside stakeholders. The survival of the youth in conflict situations becomes a challenge, as they face the dangers of violence on a regular basis and develop coping strategies – which have been under-researched and misunderstood within policy discourses. Responsive programmes should bring the youth to the table in dealing with the effects of violent conflict, so that such programmes can be implemented with effective outcomes. The time has come for a complete deconstruction of the ways we have come to view youth who are involved in conflict. Rather, we need to contextualise the realities of their experiences through better engagement with them, to understand fully the profound psychological effects that war has on their development.

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