



**International  
Growth Centre**

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## **South Sudanese Youth Leaders Forum**

**Nairobi, January 9-10, 2017**

### **Event Report**

The South Sudanese Young Leaders Forum (SSYLF) held its first conference in Nairobi on January 9-10, 2017. Under the support of the International Growth Centre (IGC) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and with technical support from the World Bank, about 55 young leaders from across South Sudan and the diaspora, reflecting South Sudan's diversity, came together to initiate a dialogue on South Sudan. The meeting coincided with the 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, which set Southern Sudan on the road to semi-autonomous governance and, later, independence, as well as the 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2011 referendum on South Sudan's independence. Gravely concerned about the current security, political, economic and humanitarian situation in South Sudan, the SSYLF engaged in in-depth discussions across these themes, and identified areas of immediate action to enable a return to peace and stability in South Sudan.

It was recognised that the SSYLF could have an important role to play in lobbying the South Sudan government to take action in the best interests of the people of South Sudan. This includes advocacy for government officials to focus on national development priorities, using government revenues for public service provision, and pushing for officials to re-connect with their constituencies. So, too, government needs to be pressured to properly implement the peace agreement, which will require a ceasefire and engagement with all relevant stakeholders, including armed groups who have not yet been involved in this process. A transitional government representative of all stakeholders is needed. Vital economic and security sector reforms must also be undertaken by the government.

### **Challenges and necessary reforms**

Notable challenges include the declining economy, lack of security, and rising inter-tribal animosities.

A session on South Sudan's key macroeconomic challenges was led by Nora Dihel of the World Bank. The key macroeconomic challenges facing South Sudan were identified as stemming from a decline in oil and non-oil revenues, which has led to significant pressure on the exchange rate and the risk of hyperinflation. This, in turn, has resulted in a large fiscal deficit and a steady accumulation of debt. Fiscal consolidation, by limiting expenditure and raising revenues, was identified as one important area for economic reform. The government budget presented in late 2016 makes an effort to do this by:

- Reviewing the civil servant payment system (potentially reducing the size of the civil service), increasing non-oil revenue,

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- Renegotiating the transitional financial arrangement with Sudan (which was, inexplicably, based on absolute values rather than percentage terms, which then became problematic after the steep decline in the global oil price),
- Increasing the transparency of oil revenues, and
- Rationalising the use of direct and indirect subsidies currently in force.

Other economic reforms include controlling inflation (government has made some progress in slowing the printing of money), deepening the exchange market to make it more liquid, channelling the available resources to true national priorities of peace and development, and improving public financial management (through increased oversight (including by civil society), greater transparency, and implementation of a procurement law). Ultimately, however, economic recovery is unlikely without peace.

Reform of the security sector will be an important component of maintaining, and possibly also achieving, peace in South Sudan. The size of the army needs to be drastically reduced in order to cut costly military expenditure, while disarmament and reintegration of ex-combatants is vital. However, the lack of alternative employment options complicates these efforts, as combatants are unlikely to leave the military and/or surrender their weapons if it means they lose their income or the means by which they generate income (e.g. through violence). Therefore, creation of non-military jobs for ex-combatants will be crucial, but is dependent on economic recovery.

More broadly, the proliferation of light weapons among the civilian population also needs to be addressed, with disarmament efforts extended beyond the formal military to informal militia groups and regular citizens. The military force that remains after reform must be representative of South Sudan's demographics, and SSYLF recommends that recruitment in the army and other security organs be based on merit, capacity and diversity, with soldiers undertaking continued training to international standards. Comprehensive security sector reform would assist with de-militarising politics and de-politicising the military in South Sudan. The SSYLF also recommends that reforms in the security sector be implemented with the aim of establishing a comprehensive national security architecture that streamlines mandates and functions of various security organs. This would ensure that security actors are properly coordinated with the aim of ensuring human security in South Sudan.

These reforms will be critical for building the confidence of the international community and South Sudanese citizens in the government and the peace process. The government wants the international community to provide direct budget support, but this is unlikely in the absence of good faith efforts by the government to demonstrate that proper public financial management procedures will be put in place and that the government will act in the best interests of the South Sudanese people. External assistance was not contingent on the mere signing of the peace agreement, but on its implementation, which has not yet happened. Yet, the SSYLF recognizes that a significant recovery of the economy is unlikely in absence of considerable donor funding.

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These reforms are necessary in themselves, but are also required to ensure that peace can be maintained once it is achieved. Threats to peace in South Sudan include the country's poor economic performance (both low income per capita and low GDP growth), high dependence on natural resource revenues, proliferation of weapons, ineffective rule of law, and lack of revenue transparency. Policies that promote economic growth and diversification away from natural resource revenues will be vital, as will disarmament and efforts to promote revenue transparency, the rule of law, access to justice, freedom of expression, and respect for diversity.

### **Lessons from other conflict and post-conflict situations**

The forum included a session on what South Sudan could learn from the experiences of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Rwanda in ending the conflict and addressing the atrocities that have occurred, led by Sarah Logan of the International Growth Centre. The end of Sierra Leone's civil war was achieved by the efforts of multiple parties, including ECOWAS, supported by British soldiers, which sent a military force to separate warring groups and re-take Freetown for the government, and the United Nations' passing of a resolution barring Liberia from continuing to support the rebels, the Revolutionary United Front, or engaging in the illicit trade of Sierra Leonean diamonds. Peacekeeping was vital in Sierra Leone. Indeed, studies have shown that peacekeeping can not only be effective in significantly reducing the risk of a relapse into conflict, but also good value for money in that benefits outweigh costs by roughly four to one [Collier: Wars, Guns & Votes]. This is important to bear in mind when considering the many criticisms the UN peacekeepers have faced in South Sudan over their effectiveness. While some improvements can be made, it is likely that peacekeepers are better than no peacekeepers, despite the challenges.

Liberia's conflict relapsed within three years of peace being achieved, demonstrating how fragile peace is – that it is as hard (if not harder) to maintain peace as it is to achieve it. Half of all African civil wars relapse within ten years of achieving peace, higher than the global average of 31% [Collier: Policies For Building Post-Conflict Peace]. Vulnerability to relapsing conflict decreases with time, making investments in maintaining peace in the early post-conflict days most effective. This would include aid, efforts to boost economic growth, peacekeeping efforts, institutional strengthening, etc. *Sustainable* peace must be therefore be the key objective, as it should also be in South Sudan. Rwanda's experience shows the importance of peace and reconciliation process at a grassroots level, through the use of some 12,000 Gacaca courts that implemented justice between victims and perpetrators on a local village level. Rwanda also had to forge a new national identity after the genocide, which will similarly be important for South Sudan.

Sierra Leone, Liberia and Rwanda, as well as many other post-conflict countries, have also undertaken a variety of truth, justice and reconciliation processes, as well as prosecution of those considered most responsible for atrocities that occurred. It is not clear what would be ideal for South Sudan in this regard, but it is important that those

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with relevant contextual knowledge consider this issue and plan for the eventuality of peace so that the people of South Sudan can address what has happened in South Sudan and obtain some resolution in the most appropriate way.

### **Drivers of fragility and conflict, fragility traps, and how countries exit fragility**

Diego Garrido Martin, of the World Bank's Fragility, Conflict and Violence group, presented a session on the drivers of fragility and conflict, which include:

- There's a link between youth and violence, particularly the proportion of young men in the population (Collier) – association works through different routes, including unemployment, marginalisation, demographics and inter-generational tensions.
- There's a strong link between lagging regions and conflict – lagging regions often experience geographic challenges and depressed economies.
- Many conflicts have land-related aspects (usually aggravated by conflict rather than being the direct cause of the conflict).
- There's a link between extractives and the incidence, intensity and duration of conflict (usually not the cause of the conflict though) – associations work through different routes, including extractives presenting loot for armed rebels (Collier & Hoeffler), the emergence of predatory and unaccountable rentier states (Moore), and links with grievances at the local level (Ross). Poor institutions, weak states, undiversified economies, lack of social cohesion and horizontal inequalities all increase the risk of conflict around extractives.
- Rapidity of urbanisation aggravates conflict – urban conflict tends to be more violent, unplanned urbanisation leads to increased inequalities, etc.
- Democratisation can increase violence in the medium-term as political competition increases – seen in elections in West Africa, for example.

Certain developments are needed to break the fragility cycle that traps fragile states in low-level equilibrium of functioning:

- Peace pact needs to be inclusive enough to break conflict cycle and commit to reform;
- Immediate actions to show return of security and immediate addressing of basic needs;
- Longer-term confidence building measures to address grievances;
- Institutional reform in security and justice sectors;
- Job creation to build resilience against future shocks;
- Work through government, strengthen partnerships, and address risk;

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## The way forward

The proposed national dialogue is generally seen as the strongest existing mechanism for solving disputes. The SSYLF recommends that this process be convened and led by the South Sudan Council of Churches, with the assistance of the African Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches. South Sudan's churches have long been a bastion of support for the people of South Sudan and sufficient collaboration exists across denominations and ethnic divides for the church in South Sudan to be viewed as both impartial and representative of the best interests of the peoples of South Sudan.

In addition to advocating the necessary reforms outlined above, SSYLF participants undertook to refrain from perpetuating hate speech on social media and to encourage other youth also to stop furthering hate speech. Similarly, SSYLF participants undertook to cease hostile political propaganda against South Sudan's partners, particularly the US, the UN, IGAD and the Troika. It is acknowledged that the (often unjustified) South Sudanese hostility towards these bodies has not been helpful in the current situation. Instead, SSYLF participants will pursue engagement with regional bodies to encourage political and economic assistance for South Sudan. Specifically, the SSYLF participants agreed to undertake following actions immediately:

- Embark on immediate briefings campaigns targeting the leadership in South Sudan, including the President, senior members of the cabinet, and commanders of the organized forces. The briefings will also include the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC), the members of the Steering Committee of the proposed national dialogue. These briefings will focus on the resolutions the SSYLF adopted at its recent meeting and the plans it has to engage youth in the resolution of conflict in the country.
- Briefing of the regional and the international bodies engaged in South Sudan peace process. Specifically, the SSYLF will brief officials at IGAD, African Union, UNMISS, Joint-Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC), and the diplomatic community in South Sudan. The briefings will focus on the resolutions the SSYLF adopted and other plans the SSYLF has for moving South Sudan's peace process forward.
- Establishment of a database of all South Sudanese youth organizations in the country and in the diaspora. Through this process, the SSYLF seek to collate these youth organizations, their leaders and objectives, and work with them to discourage hate speech and involve youth in the resolution of the conflict in South Sudan.
- Development of position papers that would inform policies for jump-starting economic activities in various sectors of the economy as well as for reviewing approaches to decentralization and governance of the country.

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- Dispatch delegations to states in Greater Equatoria, Greater Upper Nile, and Greater Bhar El Ghazal to brief youths of the resolutions the SSYLF adopted and urge youth to refrain from hate speech and ethnic conflicts. Other delegations will be sent to do the same with the South Sudanese in the diaspora, including those in the refugee camps, specifically those in Australia, Canada, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, United Kingdom, and the United States of America. The SSYLF will work with youth organizations in these to organize briefings meeting in advance of planned visits.

South Sudanese are currently in an extremely distressing situation, facing displacement, hunger and violence. It is imperative that the government not only allows NGOs to deliver adequate and uninterrupted humanitarian services to those in need but also facilitates this by securing relevant transport routes.

There is currently a paradox regarding the achievement of peace in South Sudan: South Sudanese are looking externally for assistance, but they also desire a South Sudanese solution to a South Sudanese problem. There was a realisation that external assistance may not be generous as, apart from being discouraged by the South Sudanese government's apparent lack of political will to change their behaviour, Europe is facing many of its own challenges and the US is dealing with the start of a Trump presidency (President Trump did not mention Africa during his campaign and so it is unclear what his stance toward the continent will be, but this lack of attention is a concern). The AU and IGAD have been unsuccessful in making progress with South Sudan thus far. Given this situation, it is likely that South Sudan will need to address many of its challenges without much external assistance.

It was generally felt that SSYLF participants should be included in consultations between South Sudan and partners, including by organisations such as the World Bank, IGAD and African Union, and that they should push for the government to report back to them about issues under discussion and agreements reached. Currently, only those in government know of relevant discussions, despite such discussions being of interest to all. Following the completion of the five items listed above, the SSYLF participant resolved to meet again towards the end of April 2017 to review the progress of activities undertaken and chart additional course of actions.

SSYLF participants now face the challenge of finding ways, where others have failed, to resolve the current conflict and move South Sudan forward.

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