



## **Public Policy Paper: Empowering Grassroots Peacebuilding Through Strategic Collaboration**

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## **Abstract**

This paper analyzes Sudanese youth-led peacebuilding efforts, using data from research interviews with various youth groups . The analysis classifies youth initiatives into two categories, reflecting how they navigate current conflict dynamics and security constraints. It points out that despite the challenges, grassroots groups have mitigated local conflicts, but this efforts are often overshadowed by the international community's focus on high-level negotiations. The paper recommends policies that enhance international support for youth-led peacebuilding, focusing on using mapping tools and strategic collaboration between the various groups.



## **Introduction:**

Since the outbreak of conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces on April 15, 2023, Sudanese youth have responded with urgency, providing vital emergency humanitarian aid and actively advocating for political efforts to end the war. However, as the conflict escalated and triggered social fragmentation and tribal clashes, young people became involved in community peacebuilding on grassroots level successfully stopping multiple conflicts and supporting peaceful coexistence.

The urgency of halting the war has led the international community to adopt an approach focused on specific groups, often overlooking these grassroots initiatives. Furthermore, reaching these grassroots groups is challenging due to the complexities imposed by the war's impact. This policy paper seeks to amplify the impact of these grassroots peacebuilding efforts by uniquely leveraging the current context through policies that enhance collaboration and coordination between youth initiatives and groups. Pointing that the international community must support grassroots groups, as their focus on peacebuilding activities and efforts are essential for sustaining any peace.

This paper analyzes the current youth efforts in peacebuilding, using data from research interviews with various youth groups and experts in the field. The analysis classified these youth groups' efforts in two categories based on their dynamics and adaptation to the current context. Then, it critically examines the current challenges and barriers facing the international community in its efforts of peacebuilding in Sudan. This resulted in practical policy recommendations that will help the international community to strategically support the peacebuilding efforts at the grassroots level.

## **Dynamics of Youth efforts in peacebuilding after the war:**

Post-war Youth engagement in peacebuilding efforts has manifested through various initiatives by multiple groups. Most of these groups identify as grassroots, but the paper delves into the nature of their on-the-ground activities. The security situation, shaped by military control over different regions, has posed major challenges for the activities of youth in peace building. These groups reacted differently to these challenges, Consequently, the distinction between these groups lies in the nature of their activities and adaptation, resulting in two major categories:

- **Youth Organizations:** These groups have struggled to adapt to the security constraints and challenges imposed by the war, limiting their presence as organized entities at the grassroots level. Their activities are primarily focused on high-level engagement with political forces and the international community to stop the war, concentrating on advocacy and participation. They strive to champion youth agendas, support their efforts in peace processes, and ensure youth representation in decision-making through participation in negotiations and political processes. They use tools like social media to communicate

their messages and visions. They also engage in coordinated alliances to help them advocate and empower themselves. In addition, their members often resort to individual efforts within their geographical areas or join entities that have adapted to the restrictions imposed by security threats. The experience of The Youth Rights Movement illustrates these threats. As their members were actively engaged in coordinated community outreach to support peace and fight hatred speech in Sennar state, but they found themselves facing direct threats to their safety from the local security apparatus which forced them to stop their activities. Another example from this category is The Sudanese Youth Network for Ending the War and Establishing a Democratic Civil Transformation.

### **The Sudanese Youth Network for Ending the War and Establishing a Democratic Civil Transformation:**

This initiative originated as an idea among Sudanese youth abroad in September 2023. It aims to create a youth-led entity capable of playing an active role in ending the war, and promoting peacebuilding. The network is currently finalizing its organizational structure and has begun networking with other youth initiatives to secure a presence in the political arena concerned with ending the war in Sudan, facilitating humanitarian aid delivery, and addressing the needs of refugees.

While the network has not yet launched grassroots actions directly contributing to community peace, it has established seven offices in refugee-hosting countries and five offices within Sudan. Its members often join other grassroots organizations involved in promoting community peace and providing humanitarian assistance. Notably, the network played a role in resolving residency issues for Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia.

- **Grassroots Initiatives:** These groups have successfully adapted to security constraints and developed innovative mechanisms and approaches to foster community peace within their localities. Their grassroots activities, which take on the characteristics of peacebuilding activities, vary based on the security conditions in each region. However, these initiatives are largely oriented to grassroots-level work and rarely extend their efforts beyond local communities to engage in external political processes. Due to their cultural and social composition, their political influence, external communication and organizations capacities are limited, often rendering them less prioritized by multiple actors, especially as influential

actors tend to postpone community peacebuilding until after the war. An illustrative Example from this category is the Samah initiative.

### The “*Samah*” Initiative between the Bani Halba and Al-Salamat tribes:

Led by youth of the tribes, This initiative was launched in Kass following a tribal conflict that raged from August to November 2023. They successfully ended the conflict through A reconciliation conference aimed at halting hostilities was held in the Abalda region in May 2024. With the consensus of 100 individuals from each tribe, a council was established to address grievances, outlining the human, material, and livestock losses incurred.

The achieved community peace process was supported through multiple activities, the use of widespread social media platforms like WhatsApp and TikTok, as well as the organization of seminars, theatrical performances, and the involvement of influential women “Hakamat” to advocate for and promote peace.

The interviews revealed contrasting approaches between youth organizations and grassroots initiatives in their efforts amidst the Sudanese conflict. Youth organizations, burdened by formal structures and security risks, often find it challenging to maintain an active presence on the ground. Their diverse political views can also clash with those of the controlling military factions, pushing members towards individual efforts in humanitarian response.

In contrast, grassroots initiatives demonstrate a remarkable ability to adapt to the challenges of conflict, including security risks and communication hardships. They use innovative mechanisms to promote community peace and remain engaged at the grassroots level, despite lacking organized structures. This adaptability translates into more sustainable and impactful peacebuilding activities. Grassroots groups employ accessible tools and approaches, increasing engagement and successfully deescalating conflict at the community level. While external support is valuable for capacity-building, their activities continue



even when such assistance is not available, highlighting their self-reliance and commitment. The Kolana Ahal initiative in Blue Nile exemplifies this resilience. Despite losing international funding, their peacebuilding efforts have continued, highlighting the enduring commitment of grassroots organizations even when faced with the withdrawal of external support. Additionally, the influence of military control in certain areas poses a significant challenge. Attempts to leverage these peacebuilding efforts for political gain raise concerns about the potential for further mobilization and conflict. Despite these obstacles, grassroots youth groups do their best to navigate through these influences and continue their activities.

Supporting grassroots initiatives is a complex endeavor, intertwined with the complexities of the social, political, and civil society landscape. Navigating these challenges necessitates a better understanding of the context and a commitment to empowering grassroots youth as key actors in Sudan's peacebuilding efforts. These dynamics underscore the urgent need for increased support and coordination with grassroots initiatives to mitigate risks and increase their impact.

### **The International Community: Structural Barriers and Shifting Priorities:**

The international community, while well-intentioned in its efforts to support youth efforts in peacebuilding as illustrated by the many UN and other main actors' resolutions and declared policies , often faces structural challenges that hinder its ability to effectively engage with and support grassroots initiatives. Bureaucratic procedures, complicated funding requirements, and a preference for working with established organizations often create barriers for smaller, less formalized groups. Additionally, language and communication barriers can further hinder collaboration, especially in conflict zones where access and communication infrastructure may be limited.

Furthermore, the outbreak of war in Sudan has exacerbated these challenges. The focus of international efforts has shifted towards immediate humanitarian response and ceasefire negotiations, often overshadowing the crucial work of grassroots peacebuilding initiatives. The urgency of addressing the acute humanitarian needs and halting the violence has led to a prioritization of interventions that can deliver quick and visible results, leaving grassroots groups, with their focus on long-term social healing and reconciliation, struggling to secure the recognition and support they deserve. This shift in priorities has further marginalized grassroots initiatives, limiting their access to resources and decision-making platforms. The dominant narrative often focuses on high-level political negotiations and top-down peacebuilding approaches, while the vital role of grassroots actors in fostering community resilience and building sustainable peace remains largely overlooked. This not only undermines the potential for inclusive and locally-driven peacebuilding but also risks exacerbating existing inequalities and grievances that can fuel further conflict.

## **The Way Forward:**

Undoubtedly, stopping the war and providing humanitarian aid remain crucial priorities that demand unwavering focus and effort from the international community. However, as our analysis has revealed, the current approach often overlooks the critical role of grassroots initiatives in peacebuilding. This neglect stems partly from their limited access to international actors and resources. Yet, within this challenging landscape lies a unique opportunity. Several youth organizations in Sudan possess a dual advantage: they maintain strong communication channels with the international community while also having a better understanding of the context and established networks with grassroots initiatives. These organizations occupy a strategic position that can be leveraged to bridge the gap between international community and grassroots initiatives.

By fostering a collaborative relationship between these two groups, powerful synergy could be unlocked. Organized youth organizations can gain valuable insights into the realities on the ground, amplify the voices of marginalized communities, and enhance their peacebuilding efforts inclusivity. In turn, grassroots initiatives can access much-needed resources, capacity-building support, and international recognition, enabling them to increase their impact and contribute more effectively to sustainable peace.

This approach is not only beneficial for Sudanese youth but also for the international community itself. As evidenced by multiple reports on direct peacebuilding projects, the international community has often struggled to directly engage with and support grassroots efforts. By partnering with organized youth groups, international actors can gain a deeper understanding of local contexts, tailor their interventions more effectively, and ensure that their support reaches those who make crucial peacebuilding efforts.

However, it is important to recognize that gatekeeping tendencies within certain established structures and even within some youth organizations themselves could pose a challenge to this approach. Ensuring transparency, inclusivity, and equitable access to resources will be critical to overcoming this potential Obstacle.

**Mapping as a tool to enhance collaboration:** We propose a strategic policy that empowers Sudanese youth organizations to become the vital link between international actors and grassroots peacebuilding initiatives. By strategically utilizing mapping of grassroots initiatives as a tool, these youth organizations can better collaborate with grassroots groups. This approach is practical and strategic in addressing the urgent need for collaboration highlighted in this paper.

Youth organizations, with their established connections to both the international community and local communities, are uniquely positioned to facilitate this crucial bridge. Using mapping tools will help them actively engage with grassroots initiatives and their peacebuilding activities. These mappings will serve as a tangible representation of the impact and reach of grassroots efforts, providing evidence-based insights



to inform both local and international peacebuilding strategies. Moreover, mapping activities fosters a culture of knowledge and experiences sharing that will help the youth groups adapt well to the new challenges of the conflict as well as sharing lessons learned with a wider audience. This exchange of information strengthens the bonds between youth organizations and grassroots initiatives, helping in gradually building and expanding a collaborative network.

Adopting mapping effectively in the current context undoubtedly faces challenges, such as security concerns, limited funding, a lack of mapping culture, The Potential Tendency for Gatekeeping and communication barriers.

**To overcome these barriers and ensure successful implementation, we recommend the following:**

Firstly, capacity-building is crucial. By providing training programs that equip youth organizations with essential skills in data collection, archiving, digital security, and safe mapping practices, we empower them to navigate the complexities of the current environment and conduct their work effectively and securely.

Secondly, fostering open communication and knowledge exchange is essential. Youth organizations should be actively encouraged to share their mapping findings with both local and international stakeholders. leveraging the diverse platforms supported by the international community to showcase their mapping efforts and outcomes. Transparency and open communication will help prevent gatekeeping and build trust between youth organizations, grassroots initiatives, and international actors.

Finally, to sustain and institutionalize these efforts, adopting mapping practices should be gradually integrated into the criteria for providing support for youth organizations. This incentivizes them to prioritize and invest in mapping.

**Conclusion:**

This paper underscores the valuable role of grassroots initiatives in building peace amidst the complexities of the Sudanese conflict. Despite facing significant challenges, these initiatives have demonstrated remarkable adaptability and resilience in promoting community cohesion and conflict resolution. However, their impact is often hindered by limited access to resources and recognition from the international community.

Our analysis highlights a unique opportunity to empower Sudanese youth organizations to bridge this gap. By leveraging their established networks and contextual understanding, these organizations can serve as vital conduits between grassroots peacebuilders and international actors.





While challenges persist, the recommendations outlined in this paper offer a practical guide for strategically increasing support and collaboration with grassroots initiatives. The strategic use of mapping as a tool suits the context and helps strategically building the collaboration. By investing in capacity-building, promoting open communication, and integrating mapping into the supporting criteria, the international community can contribute to increasing the impact of these crucial peacebuilding efforts. Empowering Sudanese youth to lead this process not only strengthens grassroots initiatives but also paves the way for a more inclusive, locally-driven, and sustainable peace in Sudan.

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## Appendix:

Table 1: The interviewed Youth Groups

	Entity	Group Contact
1	Delang Youth Platform for Peace and Development	<a href="#">منصة شباب الدلنج للسلام والتنمية</a>
2	Samah Initiative between Bani Halba and Salamat tribes	Contacted through Whatsapp. they use a locality group to spread the awareness
3	Adeela	<a href="#">عديلة</a>
4	Youth Network for Civilian Monitoring	<a href="#">الشبكة الشبابية للمراقبة المدنية</a>
5	Sudanese Youth network (SYN) for ending the war and Establishing a Democratic Civil Transformation	<a href="#">الشبكة الشبابية لدعم الانتقال الديمقراطي وإيقاف الحرب</a>
6	Kolna ahal	<a href="#">كلنا أهل ميديا</a>
7	Youth Rights Movement	<a href="#">حركة الحقوق الشبابية</a>
8	Tribal Reconciliation Conference (AL-Majaneen)	<p>The area was not affected by war and was not under the control of any military party. A tribal fight occurred between two branches of the same tribe, the "Majaneen". The youth of Al-Mazroub intervened and a reconciliation took place between the civil administrations of the tribe.</p> <p>The results of the reconciliation were published on a young man's Facebook page.</p>