



Public Policy Paper: Evaluating the Impact of Grassroots Youth Organizations on Peacebuilding in Sudan

Authors: Tesneem Hamed & Raduan Abdellah M. Ali

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- **Email:** sudandemocracy@amelproject.org
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Abstract

This paper assesses the role of grassroots youth organizations in peacebuilding efforts in Sudan. It highlights their contributions to enhancing community resilience through conflict resolution initiatives and humanitarian assistance, despite facing challenges such as lack of resources, political repression, and security threats. By examining specific grassroots organizations, the paper illustrates their impact on fostering social cohesion and addressing ethnic tensions. It also provides policy recommendations aimed at strengthening the effectiveness of these organizations, including establishing sustainable funding mechanisms, improving legal protection, investing in capacity building, and strengthening support networks. These strategies aim to empower these organizations to promote peace and stability in Sudan.

Executive Summary: This paper evaluates the role of grassroots youth organizations (GYOs) in peacebuilding in Sudan, highlighting their contributions to community resilience. Focusing on specific GYOs, the paper illustrates their impacts on conflict resolution and humanitarian aid. However, they face challenges such as limited resources, political repression, and security threats. Recommendations include establishing sustainable funding mechanisms, enhancing security and legal protections, investing in capacity building, and strengthening support networks. These measures aim to improve GYOs effectiveness and sustainability in promoting peace and stability in Sudan.

● Introduction

Peacebuilding is a multi-layered process that integrates strategies for community resilience and development¹, especially at the grassroots level. This approach involves a range of processes aimed at enhancing local capacities and fostering cooperative decision-making. By emphasizing resilience-building and participatory development, peacebuilding initiatives enhance sustainability and responsiveness to conflicts, thereby strengthening communities' abilities to manage, mitigate, and recover from crises, contributing to long-term peace (Zolondek,2010).

In Sudan, which has a history of prolonged conflict, political instability, and economic crises, grassroots youth organizations(GYOs) emerged as critical actors in peacebuilding processes. They play critical roles in promoting community resilience. They have been instrumental in delivering humanitarian aid, facilitating community dialogues(Dawn,2023), and advocating for human rights(SHRH,2024). Despite their contributions, GYOs face significant challenges, including limited resources and political repression(Saferworld,2023;CMI,2016). This paper aims to provide policy recommendations to enhance GYOs effectiveness and sustainability in contributing to Sudan's long-term peace.

Methodology: This paper uses qualitative methods to evaluate the impact of GYOs on peacebuilding in Sudan. Primary data were collected through interviews with representatives from four GYOs. The selection criteria ensured that GYOs were directly involved in peacebuilding, had a proven track record, represented diverse regions, varied in size, and actively engaged with local communities. The findings can be generalized to the entire country because these organizations were chosen to represent different regions and scales of operations. This selection captured a range of perspectives and challenges faced by GYOs in various contexts. The similarities in challenges and successes among these GYOs provide a representative picture of grassroots peacebuilding efforts in Sudan, making the insights applicable to other regions and organizations within the country.

Shortcomings: data was primarily sourced from organization members, with limited verification from beneficiaries and community members. Access to internal GYO documents was restricted, constraining the analysis. These limitations may introduce a degree of bias, thus impacting the evaluation's comprehensiveness and accuracy.

● Cases from similar contexts:

¹ In this policy paper, community resilience and community development are treated as interchangeable concepts, given their interconnected roles in strengthening communities (Cavaye and Ross,2019). Community development focuses on capacity building and long-term improvements, while community resilience emphasizes the ability to withstand and recover from crises. This paper specifically addresses grassroots-level interventions in Sudan's current conflict context. The integration of development and resilience-building is crucial for enhancing local capacities and fostering sustainable peace.

South Sudan: The UN Peacebuilding Fund's project involved youth in peace education and community development. Despite funding and infrastructure challenges, informal peace infrastructures, such as community peace committees and women's peace committees, integrated traditional methods with modern strategies to build trust and resilience (UNPBF,2021). Which highlight the importance of inclusivity and local capacities in peacebuilding.

Nigeria - Ojoo community: grassroots peacebuilding through informal infrastructures like mediation committees has effectively managed local disputes. The flexibility and adaptability of these initiatives are critical in volatile contexts. However, resource dependency and weak state mechanisms pose challenges to their sustainability(ACCORD,2023).

Colombia: GYOs like the Foundation for Reconciliation and Soy Paz used educational and reconciliation programs to sustain peace. Their focus on forgiveness and youth engagement addresses both social and psychological dimensions of conflict. This comprehensive approach fosters long-term peace but faces challenges in achieving widespread impact and ensuring sustainability(Hunt,2019)

Overall, these cases illustrate the role of GYOs in peacebuilding in conflict contexts, highlighting common challenges such as limited resources, political instability, and cultural barriers. Successful strategies include local ownership, community engagement, and combining traditional and modern methods. For example, in Sudan and South Sudan, youth-led dialogues and informal peace infrastructures have fostered trust and resilience despite significant challenges(USIP,2023). Similarly, Nigeria's community-based initiatives and Colombia's focus on reconciliation and youth involvement highlight the effectiveness of inclusive approaches(ACCORD,2023;Hunt,2019). However, sustainability issues and external dependencies remain significant challenges. These insights emphasize the need for tailored, locally-driven peacebuilding strategies that integrate educational and community elements to address both immediate and long-term conflict dynamics.

● Overview of GYOs in Sudan

GYOs have facilitated community dialogues to address ethnic tensions and promote social cohesion. Initiatives like peace caravans and community education programs have reduced violence and fostered resilience despite political instability and limited resources (USIP,2023;NDI,2023). These efforts emphasize local knowledge and inclusivity, which have been effective in improving inter-ethnic relations and empowering youth as peace advocates (Saferworld,2023). During the 15th April war, there has been various initiatives aimed at fostering peace and stability. These initiatives addressed various aspects of community needs, this paper focuses on studying four of these GYOs and their key initiatives:

Network for Dialogue Civic Education – Kassala State (NDCE-KS): active in Kassala, Port-Sudan, and Qadarif states, focuses on civic education, youth capacity-building, and community resilience. initiatives include:

Kassala's Sons Initiative (KSI): addressed ethnic-conflicts in Kassala through community outreach and education, resulting in conflict de-escalation.

Peaceful March to Port-Sudan: aimed to promote social unity in response to ethnic tensions.

Emergency Response Efforts: NDCE-KS established Kassala Emergency Room (KER) to provide humanitarian aid and support for internally displaced persons (IDPs).



Kassala's High Schools' Union (KHSU): focuses on advocating for students' rights and engaging in civic initiatives. It supports educational environments and provides emergency relief to vulnerable groups, including IDPs. initiatives include:

Safe Spaces for Kids: supported IDPs children through educational activities and psychological support.

Psychological First Aid Workshops: designed for IDPs youth to address their psychological needs and to enable them to provide psychological support to other IDPs.

Collaboration with KER: KHSU works with KER to support IDPs.

Anonymous – Blue Nile State (ABNS): focuses on fostering mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence. With initiatives as "We Are All Family (WAF)" which aimed to bridge divides between different ethnic groups and promote social cohesion.

Gedarif Students and Women Association (GSAWA): engages in public awareness campaigns and art projects to combat ethnic-conflicts and promote social unity.

- **GYOs Contributions**

These GYOs have made significant contributions to peacebuilding efforts, particularly in enhancing community resilience amidst ongoing conflict. Their work has been critical in addressing the immediate needs of affected communities through two channels:

Ethnic-Conflict Resolution: NDCE-KS has effectively addressed ethnic-conflicts in Kassala and surrounding regions through its KSI, which has successfully mediated disputes between conflicting ethnic groups, such as Hausa and Noba tribes. By organizing community dialogues and educational outreach, NDCE-KS has contributed to reducing tensions and promoting mutual understanding(Interview 3). Moreover, WAF initiative has fostered social cohesion and mutual understanding among different ethnic groups in Blue Nile State. WAF focus on bridging divides and promoting peaceful coexistence, it contributed to reducing ethnic tensions and enhancing community solidarity(Interview 1). Furthermore, GSAWA's and NDCE-KS use of public awareness campaigns and art initiatives has effectively addressed ethnic conflicts and promoted social unity. By leveraging local dialects and cultural expressions, GSAWA and NDCE-KS reached diverse groups of community and facilitated discussions on critical issues such as mosquito-borne diseases child marriages, and FGM, which contributed to increasing community awareness and fostering a sense of shared identity(Interview 2, 3).

Humanitarian Aid and Emergency Responses: KER provided IDPs with essential services, such as food, medical care, and shelter. NDCE-KS's ability to mobilize resources and provide immediate relief has been a key factor in supporting vulnerable groups (Interview 3). Moreover, KHSU's "Safe Spaces for Kids" has supported IDPs children in coping with the trauma of displacement and the disruption of their education(Interview 4).

- **Success Factors**

The success of GYOs efforts – same as of GYOs in cases from similar contexts discussed – is driven by their ability to address ethnic conflicts, mobilize humanitarian aid, and foster social cohesion. Initiatives such as

KSI and WAF illustrate how GYOs have effectively mediated disputes and promoted mutual understanding among diverse ethnic groups. Moreover, Community engagement has been a cornerstone of GYOs' success, with a focus on inclusivity and local ownership. Sudanese GYOs have facilitated dialogues and educational outreach that involve various community groups, including youth, women, and ethnic minorities. GYOs like NDCE-KS which use local dialects and cultural expressions to resonate with the community, are proved efficient at promoting a sense of shared identity. This deep-rooted community involvement has enabled GYOs to build trust and resilience within their communities, further enhancing their impact on peacebuilding and social stability.

● Challenges

Despite their contributions, Sudanese GYOs – similar to GYOs in other conflict contexts as discussed – face several challenges that impact their effectiveness:

Limited Resources: GYOs such as NDCE-KS and KHSU face significant funding constraints that impact their ability to sustain and expand their initiatives. NDCE-KS has struggled with securing consistent financial support for its programs, while KHSU has depended heavily on community fundraising and external donations(Interviews 3 & 4). Moreover, GYOs often face significant obstacles due to the conditions and requirements attached to international funding, the application process for these funds is lengthy and complex, requiring GYO members to have advanced skills in proposal writing. Moreover, many international donors impose structural requirements that exclude organizations with effective but less formal structures. Additionally, funding is often restricted to specific goals or focus areas, forcing GYOs to modify their original objectives to secure these funds. This deviation can disrupt or even undermine their long-term impact(Interviews 1,2,3,4).

Political Repression and Security Threats: NDCE-KS, ABNS, and KHSU have encountered harassment and legal challenges such as arbitrary arrests, office closures, and licenses withdrawal, which hindered their activities and restricted their reach, especially after 25th October coup, and again when the government issued a decree banning all civil society groups that have been established during the revolution(ReliefWeb,2024), as a result, many emergency rooms were terminated. Moreover, GYOs operating in states affected by ethnic induced conflicts – such as NDCE-KS – struggles with life threatening situations (Interview 3).

● Policy Recommendations and Implementation Strategies

1. **Establish Sustainable Funding Mechanisms:** International community should develop long-term funding strategies to provide consistent financial support to GYOs, including creating flexible funding opportunities. Implementation can start with establishing dedicated funding channels for GYOs with proven high impact, which can then support smaller GYOs. These channels should be carefully monitored to ensure transparency and effectiveness. National GYOs should also create specific channels to engage with international donors and local philanthropists, securing diverse funding pools gradually.
2. **Enhance Security and Legal Protections:** National organizations should implement mechanisms to ensure the safety and legal protection of GYOs, including advocating for legal frameworks that protect volunteers from political repression. Practical steps include advocating for the development of national policies that protect volunteers. Collaboration with legal experts and human rights organizations can

help draft and implement these frameworks, beginning with most Vulnerable regions and expanding based on success and political feasibility.

3. **Invest in Capacity-Building:** Both international and national organizations should increase investment in training and capacity-building programs for GYOs. Implementation can begin by collaborating with educational institutions and professional organizations to design and deliver tailored training programs based on GYOs needs. These programs should be rolled out in phases, starting with GYOs with higher impacts, and regularly evaluated to address emerging challenges and gaps.
4. **Strengthen Support Networks:** Foster collaborations between GYOs and international organizations to build strong support networks, which will facilitate resources mobilization and provide GYOs with the tools they need to succeed. To make this feasible, GYOs with higher impacts can initially facilitate networking events and create regional hubs, bringing together smaller GYOs, policymakers, and international organizations. These events can focus on sharing best practices, discussing challenges, and exploring collaborative opportunities on regional level, gradually scaling-up to a national network as more GYOs gain the capacity to participate.

Conclusion: This paper evaluates the impact of grassroots youth organizations (GYOs) on peacebuilding in Sudan, highlighting role in promoting community resilience and stability despite challenges. GYOs have made significant contributions through ethnic-conflict resolution, humanitarian aid, and emergency response initiatives. However, they face obstacles including limited resources, political repression, and security threats, which hinder their effectiveness and sustainability. To enhance their impact, this paper recommends establishing sustainable funding mechanisms, improving security and legal protections, investing in capacity building, and strengthening support networks. Implementing these strategies will require coordinated efforts from both international and national stakeholders to support and sustain GYOs' critical work in fostering peace and stability in Sudan.

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