



Reintegration and
Peacebuilding Opportunities in
Gbudue State, South Sudan

A Rapid Assessment Report

October 2017

Introduction

This report presents key findings and analysis drawn following a five-days' rapid assessment study conducted by Amani Institute Uganda on behalf of Peace Direct-United Kingdom, on the relevance and viability of supporting two proposed projects on peacebuilding and reintegration in Gbudue State, South Sudan and other identifying peacebuilding opportunities.

The assessment was conducted in Yambio by Amani lead researcher Taban Romano and supported by Stephen Oola, both of Amani Institute Uganda. Overall, a total of 22 key informants were interviewed. 20 in Yambio and 02 in Juba.¹

A telephone conversation was held with officials within the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Political Affairs Division office in Yambio and additional literature were reviewed alongside the project proposals.

Overall, the assessment focused on the prevailing political and security situation in Gbudue State, relevance and potential impact on the implementation of the two proposed projects on reintegration and resilience building, and other peacebuilding opportunities within the State.

Limitation

Whereas, the conclusions here highlight our overall perception of the prevailing political and security situation in the state and opinion on the relevance and viability of the proposed projects, as well as capacity of the few organizations interacted with, it is based on a very few sample size and short time observation and interaction. It may not conclusively reflect the overall state of affairs in the entire state or accurately present the general view and situations of other actors not met or interacted with.

Background to the Study

Early this year, Peace Direct was approached by the Governor of Gbudue State to assist in the reintegration of ex-combatants and former militia members who are currently demobilized and awaiting support in Yambio. According to the Governor this would enable the fragile State to fulfil its commitment to consolidate peace in the State and contribute to sustainable peacebuilding in the war torn South Sudan. Pursuant to this request, the Office of the Gbudue State Governor submitted two project proposals to Peace Direct. The first proposal was for “the reintegration of children

¹. See Annex A, List of Participants.

youth and women returnees recruited and used by Arrow Boys (Home guards) and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Gbudue State back to society.

The second project proposed was for “peace, resilience building and reintegration of 3,700 South Sudan National Liberation Movement /Army (SSNLM/A) AND 868 Sudan People Liberation Army – In Opposition (SPLA-IO) ex-combatants back to their families and communities. Both projects were estimated to cost \$1,375,916 and \$75,000 USD respectively.

Responding to the is request, Peace Direct commissioned Amani Institute Uganda, a research think tank and local peacebuilding organization registered in Uganda to undertake a five days' rapid assessment scoping study to determine the feasibility of these proposals as well as other possible peacebuilding opportunities that may be supported in Gbudue State.

The overall objective of the scoping study is to enable Peace Direct to understand and appreciate the prevailing political and security situation in Gbudue and determine appropriate mechanisms for supporting any such interventions.

Specifically, the study seeks to; assess the political, security and conflict situation in Gbudue state whether it has deteriorated or improved since the proposals were submitted; Identify the key players in the prevailing conflict, if any, and how significant; assess the relevance of the proposed interventions and cost implications including local perceptions towards prospects for peace in the state; Identify key local actors (peacebuilding organizations, NGOs etc.) that Peace Direct could work with as implementing partners; assess the capacity of identified potential local partners for implementing such peacebuilding work in Gbudue; examine other bureaucratic and logistical infrastructures that can support or impede peacebuilding actions in the state; and determine if the local authorities' will support local organizations to implement some of the planned DDR and peacebuilding work, and potential for possible collaboration or impediments.

Methodology

The study was largely qualitative. Upon receipt of instruction from Peace Direct and prior to signing the Consultancy Agreement, the Amani researchers met and brainstormed on the nature of the assignment and developed an assessment guide. The assessment guide was shared with Peace Direct for concurrence. Peace Direct reviewed the guide and responded with comments which were integrated in the guide. Before dispatching a researcher to Yambio, the team conducted a range of literature review and made direct contact with the Office of the Governor and other local peace building organizations working in the State. A telephone interview was had with the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Office for Political Affairs based in the State who shared further information and contact of other local peacebuilding organizations. Preliminary interview was conducted in Juba with some of the identified local organizations Change Agency Association (CAA) and Peace and Collaborative Organisation (PDCO) whose representatives had visited Juba to regularize their national level registration and with the Gbudue State Coordinator.

Field Assessment

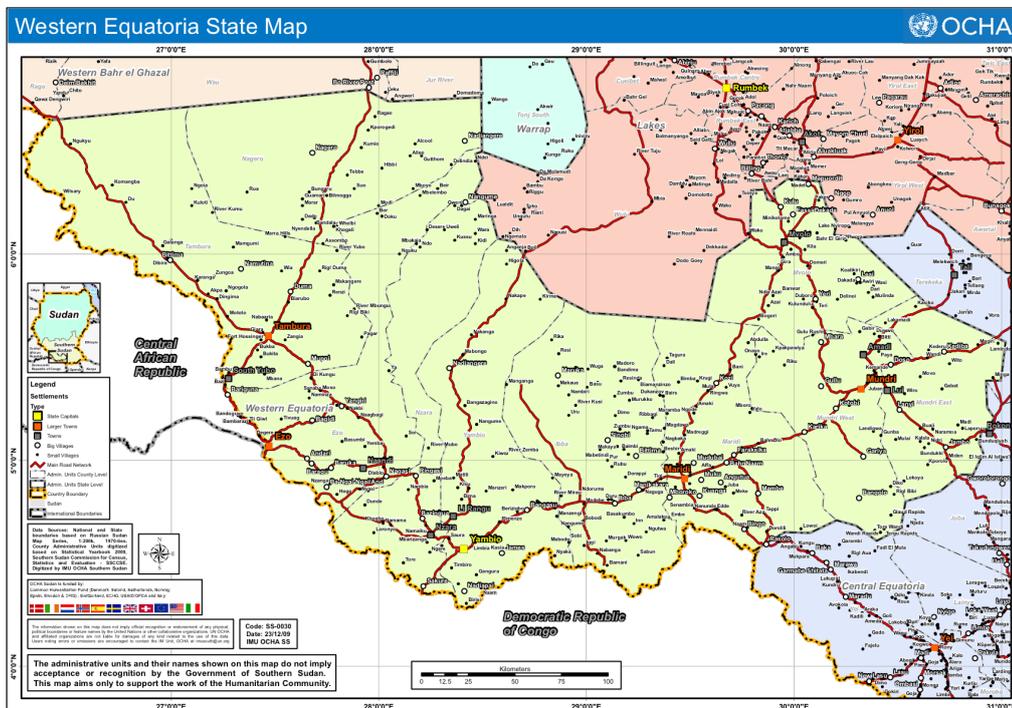
The researcher then traveled to Yambio on September 28 – 30th 2017, and met several actors, conducted interviews and held two focus group discussions. Within Yambio, interviews were conducted with Change Agency Association, Inter-faith Council, South Sudan Youth Peace, Justice and Reconciliation Initiative, Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), Association for PWDs, the State Governor and Minister.

Further focus group discussion was held with a consortium of organizations working with Change Agency Association in Yambio. Participants included men, women, young people involved. The respondents included officials within the Governor's office, civil society leaders, international NGOs, and local population.

Majority of the respondents were purposively selected based on their official position and knowledge of the state of affairs in Gbudue State, but some were randomly identified.

The key informant interviews and focus group discussions followed a semi –structured interview map (interview guide) with a set of guiding questions. This ensured consistency in responses but also allowed for open reflections.

Key Findings



Conflict Analysis

Overall, Yambio can be described as calm but not peaceful. Situated in Western Equatoria, Gbudue is one of the largest states with its capital Yambio. Prior to the South Sudan's independence in 2011, the region suffered regular incursion of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) from Uganda who used the region as its haven from which it routinely launched attacks into Uganda.² To repel the LRA notorious for looting their properties and abductions, communities in the Western Equatoria had mobilized themselves into militias known as Arrow Boys.

After 2011, the Western Equatoria region was largely peaceful. The LRA had been lured into a Peace Talks in 2006 convened in Juba Peace mediated by the then South Sudan's Vice President Dr. Riek Machar. It lasted until 2008.

In December 2013, fresh civil war broke out in Juba within the top leadership of the ruling Sudan's Peoples Liberation Movement between Dr. Riek Machar a Nuer, who was earlier sacked from his position as Vice President against President Salva Kiir, a Dinka. The political disagreement immediately turned confrontational with the army, the SPLA taking sides and fighting against for or against the two sides, one being in government and the other in Opposition.

2. See Akim Mugisa, South Sudan's Western Equatoria State lives in fear of LRA attack, The Niles 11 February 2012.

Joseph Bakasoro, then Governor of the State (currently based in United States) defected from President Kiir's SPLM but retained his position as governor until he was sacked in late 2015 following the Addis Ababa peace talks. Following his sacking, three (03) key armed groups emerged in and around Yambio: one in Mundri led by Wesley Welebe, the other, was under Alfred Futuyo both declaring allegiance to the SPLM/A-IO led by Dr. Machar. The third group, rejected the SPLM/A-IO and signed a peace deal with SPLM/A-In Government. Notably, all the three groups were part of the former Arrow Boys, a network of community defense militias mobilized to combat the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in the past.

After the 2013 crisis and dismissal of Joseph Bakasoro, a group of disgruntled officers defected and with support of local Arrow Boys and formed a new armed group South Sudan National Liberation Movement (SSNLM) led by Victor Wanga. A series of peace negotiation brokered by an Inter-faith group known as Faith Based Council (Interfaith Council) and local Governors, the SSNLM signed a peace agreement with the Juba regime in April 2016.³ A further split of the Arrow Boys resulted into the formation another armed group, South Sudan National People Patriotic Party (SSNPPP) under leadership of Charles Kisanga but never gained ground.

After a short lull of stability following the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS), conflicts have escalated with renewed violence across the Equatorias. This followed clashes in Juba between forces loyal to the President Salva Kiir and his former First Vice President Dr. Riek Machar Teny in July 2016. The renewed hostilities have compounded long standing grievances and unaddressed legacy of past conflicts, including lack of DDR of ex-combatants from past conflicts.

Ethnic grievances

Home of the Azande, Avukaya, Baka, Moru, Mundu and Balanda ethnic groups, the State is evidently an opposition stronghold due to widespread resentment towards perceived Dinka domination in the reigning SPLM/A government under Salva Kiir.

The communities are aggrieved by the creation of new states which they perceive as a ploy by the Dinka dominated government to consolidate itself in power and disenfranchised other, as well as grab land. The actors in multi-layered conflicts within the State can therefore be categorized as state vs citizens, communities' verses communities, local government verses central government and non-state actors verses the state and many others. A cycle of violence and unaddressed legacy compounded by bad governance and mismanagement of resources and ethnic grievances combine and manifests itself in varying conflicts at all levels. The only difference being the intensity of violence and social disruption, with the worst being cattle raids and government counter-insurgency which causes death, loss of property and population displacement and humanitarian.

3. See Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities between the Government of the Republic of South Sudan (RSS) and the South Sudan National Liberation Movement/Army (SSNLM/A, 2nd April 2016.

Cattle raids, which has been a long cause of inter-communal conflict in the region, occurs frequently and has polarized neighboring communities. Most recently, however, a brutal counter-insurgency approach by the Juba based government has meted untold suffering on the population, further dwindled its support amongst the population and forced many people to flee into Uganda seeking refuge.

The Juba regime is accused of undertaking earth-scorched policy of bombarding villages suspected of harboring rebels and meting out retaliatory attacks against civilians. Sexual and gender based violence has been pervasive.⁴

Further accusation has levied against the government for using food as a weapon of war by denying relief assistance to civilians in opposition infested areas.⁵ These counter-insurgency operations have however subsided in the rainy season.

Many conflict analyst fears resumption of violence in the dry season unless the new IGAD led revitalization peace process gain traction with all armed groups.

Unending cantonments

Whereas, there has been no recent confrontation between the various armed groups in Yambio since February 2016, respondents unanimously pointed out that the perennial instability is linked to prevalence of guns in the community and the failure to effectively demobilize, disarm and reintegrate ex-combatants. The SSLM/A signed an agreement with the government but are still waiting for reintegration. 80% of the fighters refused to join the SPLA.

The existence of these groups that have not be reintegrated provides ready recruits and have resulted into occasional clashes with the SPLA protecting them. One example was an incident recently were one “Kabila” a commander with the SSLM/A within the cantonment site had a disagreement with his colleague in the army and he was shot and killed causing a lot of tension in the town.

Participants lamented the slow pace of implementation of the peace agreement and escalating conflicts within the country threatens a renewal of fighting. According to the respondents, one year since the peace agreement was signed with the SSNLM, nothing have been done for the ex-combatants. This has led to growing frustration, fear, hopelessness, and risks of further instability.

The Need for DDR Intervention

Majority of the key informants and focus group participants described the situation in Yambio as a powder keg waiting to explode. Even though none of the ex-combatants were interviewed, some of the respondents interviewed had family members who were former militias. They pointed out that,

4. See “Soldiers Assume We Are Rebels, Escalating Violence in South Sudan’s Equatorias” Human Rights Watch, South Sudan Report, 01 August 2017.

5. See The New York Times, Exclusive: South Sudan’s Government Using Food as a Weapon of War-U.N Report, Reuters, 10 November 2017.

alongside the former Arrow Boys, even the former SPLA-IO loyalists who have returned home risks rejoining the rebellion, since Machar forces have been pushed out of the August 2015 Peace Agreement.

According to the authorities, both former SPLA-IO and SSNLM/A forces are now co-existing allegedly with caches of arms, hidden in the forests during growing conflict in all parts of the country and across the Equatorias.

Already, there is a notable increase in the rate and incidents of criminality like armed robbery at night and general lawlessness. The population and the authorities fear that as the economic situation continues to bite, these former combatants, may opt out of the accord and join fighting groups.

The assessment therefore concluded that there is a dire need for reintegration intervention and efforts within the State to deal with some of the ex-combatants and complement government programmes if it ever comes. Some of the immediate intervention proposed includes skill training, documentation, provision of seeds, implements and agricultural supplies.

Relevance of the proposed interventions

As elaborated above, conflict remains prevalent and there is a huge number of ex-SSNLA combatants and former militias awaiting government fulfilment of its promises for DDR which is never yielding. Any effort to address such gap or contain the situation is therefore timely, relevant and much needed. There exists a national Commission for DDR in South Sudan but its capacity is limited. It's record in undertaking DDR has been tested in the post-Comprehensive Peace Agreement and 2011 Referendum in South Sudan and according to an evaluation undertaken jointly with the UNDP, it scored some successes which underlines the importance of DDR. Similar efforts at state level, utilizing state level mechanisms of the national commission would thus be critical.

The two proposals are therefore prima facie relevant. However, given the time lag and rapidly changing facts on the grounds, the need for amendment and adaption is inevitable. For example, the numbers of target beneficiaries quoted in the proposals appears over exaggerated or has since significantly dwindled due to the delayed intervention. This might require revision as a recent verification of some of the SSNLA ex-combatants in one cantonment site was less than 300 but the proposal state the figure at approximately 800.

Finally, evaluation of past DDR experience in independent South Sudan offers valuable lessons which were not all incorporated into the current proposals. Even though past programmes were implemented at national levels and with international partners, some of the key findings like question of sustainability and connecting DDR programming to wider post-conflict recovery strategy including community security, social cohesion, reconstruction and respect for human rights and rule of law appears indispensable for South Sudan and appropriate revision is recommended.⁶

6. See Ghebremedhin Haile and Tiberious Bara, Final Evaluation of DDR Programme, Individual Reintegration Project Component (2009-2012), South Sudan DDR Commission and UNDP, 23 September 2013.

Budgeting

On the budget, given the fast deteriorating economic and security situation, estimation of project activity and item costs is very challenging. Nonetheless, both proposals appear to be over budgeted even when one considers the hyper-inflation. Some cost estimates were reasonable but there is still room for significant budget adjustment of many line budgets given that the costing is in dollars not South Sudanese Pounds.

Also, the sets of intervention and activities will be implemented within a community burdened by conflict and well living below the poverty line. All projects and interventions must therefore be conflict –sensitive.

A reintegration programme perceived to be disproportionately benefiting or enriching ex-combatants' risks stirring resentment and could breed more conflict with the community. If community members resent ex-combatants on accounts of benefiting with blood money then it defeats the whole purpose of reintegration.

Much care should therefore be put in budgeting and sets of activities to ensure that it benefits both recipient communities and ex-combatants.

Local partners and peacebuilding organizations

There are some very credible and proactive local peacebuilding organizations in South Sudan generally and Yambio, Gbadue State who have historically played critical roles in conflict resolutions and peacebuilding.

Some of these local organizations have brokers peace locally through mediation at communal level. Others were very instrumental in persuading armed groups to renounce violence and pursue peaceful path.

A key example, already documented here, is the Inter faith groups who played facilitative role in brokering the peace deal between SSLMA and the Government in Juba very recently in April 2016, working closely with the State Governor.

That said, there are also severe challenges facing local peace actors in the country. The continuation of conflict is one obvious challenge but also, a general lack of capacity raise funds, to manage large grants, to utilize grants accordingly and accountability appears a recurring challenge.

Within Yambio alone, we were still able to identify a couple of very reputable local organizations with good track record of partnership and project implementation and with vast experience in DDR and peacebuilding programming that Peace Direct can explore partnership with, provide support and build their capacity to implement relevant intervention.

The three key local organizations we visited and talked to include: Inter-Faith Council, South Sudan

Youth Peace Justice and Reconciliation Initiative (SSYPJRI) and Change Action Association (CAA) all appeared credible, dedicated, enthusiastic and already implementing complementary peacebuilding programmes. In addition, we met with YWCA and YMCA both influential organizations but not necessarily in engaging in reintegration initiatives. We also met a group of PWDs who have formed support groups.

The Change Agency Association is the leading organization with wide membership already working in partnership with international NGO like Safer World. It has a reputable management with large staffing and financial management system. It has received and executed several grants and process with partners, local and international.

The Inter-Faith Council embedded in the Catholic Diocese, enjoys wide support, outreach, coverage and with a long track record of peacebuilding initiatives. It is a faith based group with clear leadership structure and organizational system in place.

The SSYPRI is a youth led organization with strong backing from the State Governor. SSYPRI was already piloting some reintegration activities.

Even though we did not meet with them, the Justice and Peace Commission was another widely recommended local organization.

All these organizations are potential partners and could be engaged by Peace Direct to explore internal dynamics and partnership policy in a bid to implement some of the proposed interventions.

Overall, those interviewed were responsive and eager for partnership and support. They all cited lack of financial resources as the key limitation for engaging in comprehensive DDR programmes. Some were implementing peace messages geared at preparing the community to welcome and co-exist with ex-combatants.

Majority of the local peacebuilding organizations, are donor dependent and currently have very meagre resources due to challenging funding environment, making their programming and own sustainability at risks.

Bureaucratic and Logistic impediments

The operating environment for NGOs in South Sudan is generally a challenge. Being a conflict context there are security risks and attendant layers of security clearances required which sometimes affects flexibility of many agencies. Participants in the focus group discussions cited the requirement for routine permission from the national security for planned activities gathering many people as prohibitive.⁷

7. FGD with members of Change Agency Association, Yambio.

Specifically, at a national level, the government of South Sudan is implementing an NGO Act 2016 criticized by many for imposing severe limitation on NGO operation. Inter-alia the Act imposes levies on NGOs and give the government power to determine areas in which an NGO can operate including yearly registration and renewal of certificate.

Under the ARCSS, the NGO Bill was supposed to be subjected to public consultation before enactment into law but this was not adhered to. At the State level, there are certainly other bureaucratic requirements for NGO operation but according to the organizations we talked to, they consider them reasonable and not prohibitive.

Of course, there are logistical challenges attributable to effect of the war leading to poor infrastructures like roads and absence of essential efficient services like banks and internet which remains a problem. There are only two local commercial banks Ivory Bank and Eden Commercial Bank. Whether they receive international transfer is unclear but most likely.

However, local banks in South Sudan generally have monetary restrictions. The only international bank, Kenya Commercial Bank (KCB) which had a branch in Yambio was recently closed. Another bank, Co-operative Bank is opening soon. The Air transportation from the State to Juba is irregular and this can affect potential monitoring and visitation.

Potential for Partnership

The State Governor and Ministry officials interviewed had no objection to local peacebuilding organizations taking lead in implementing some of the DDR activities and expressed great support and willingness to collaborate.⁸

The local organizations also alluded to a good working relationship with State Governor and local authorities, and pointed out that they continually work very closely with them on all projects given the prevailing security situation and the fact that they often need security clearance to travel and access parts of the State.⁹ It follows therefore, that such critical interventions like DDR would inevitable require a collaborative approach with the authorities.

Of course, the local authorities would inevitably prefer specific organizations to implement a project like this one first conceived by them, but this is a discussion that can be accommodated and funding could be spread across several organizations to avoid concentration of resources in one hand and subject of much pressure.¹⁰

8. Interview with State Governor and Minister, Yambio.

9. FGDs with Interfaith Council, Yambio.

10. Interview with State Governor ibid.

Other peacebuilding opportunities

Besides DDR and supporting reintegration and resilience building initiatives in Gbadue State, there are several peacebuilding opportunities which could contribute to ending the prevalence of conflict, reducing a culture of violence, restoration of livelihoods, nurturing the rule of law and strengthening social structures to deal with recurring conflicts.¹¹ These includes training and facilitating traditional leaders and cultural institutions whose voices are diminishing due to displacement and armed violence to mediate local conflicts and resolve local disputes.

Also, training of paralegals to mediate social conflicts and sensitise the population on land laws and human rights generally. Equally, promoting inter-communal dialogues and local level reconciliation initiatives in the State would promote harmonious relationships and restore broken social fabric. There is also need for civic education, psychosocial support services, awareness raising, peace bridges, economic empowerment and education all critical foundations for building sustainable peace.

¹¹. See Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment, Issue Brief No 17 May 2011

Conclusion and Recommendation

Our final assessment is that the conflict situation in Gbadue State has not changed significantly from the time the proposal was developed.

Since April 2016, there has been no sustained armed confrontation between armed groups now but occasional incursions by negative forces, and government counter offensives.

There is a huge backlog of ex-militias from the Arrow Boys and forces of the SSNLA in need of urgent comprehensive DDR programme which continues to pose a threat to sustainable peace within the State and the region.

The two proposed interventions are both relevant and timely but require some budgetary adjustments and implementation strategy adaptation to ensure value for money, be conflict sensitive and foster a collaborative framework involving a few reputable local peacebuilding organizations, working closely with State authorities.

There are many potential local peacebuilding partners within Yambio and in the Gbadue State with whom Peace Direct can work, but all will require proactive partnership, and some a significant capacity building as part of the project implementation strategy.

In the end, we recommend that Peace Direct considers supporting these proposed interventions if possible by adapting the proposal to involve implementation through several local peace actors to work together with the State authorities with a significantly revised budget and in phases.

Bibliography

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Human Rights Watch, South Sudan: Events of 2016, World Report 2017.

Human Rights Watch, South Sudan Report, 01 August 2017

Rens Willems and Hans Rouw, Security Promotion Seen from Below: Experiences from South Sudan, Peace Security and Development Network, September 2011.

Annex (A)

List of Respondents

1. Mborikinaho Kenneth and 9 Others, Change Agency Association, members
2. Peace and Development Collaborative Organization (PDCO)
3. Solidarity with Christian Action for Democracy and Development Organisation
4. Justina Grace, Young Women Christian Association (YWCA)
5. Peter Pascal, Young Men Christian Association (YMCA)
6. PWD Support group
7. Hon. Philip Micheal, State Minister of Education and 3 Officials
8. State Governor, Gbadue State
9. Mr. Kumbabeyo Robert, Executive Director- South Sudan Youth Peace Justice and Reconciliation Initiative (SSYPJRI)
10. Political Affairs Division, UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)
11. Rev. Charles Bandasi – Inter Faith Council
12. Anthony Mungua, Justice and Peace Commission

