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Local Perceptions and Meaning of Peace building in South Sudan: A Case of Terekeka State

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Abstract:
In South Sudan, aspirations for peace are high, at the grassroots. This study was designed to investigate the local perceptions and meanings of peace building in Terekeka state in South Sudan. The study embraced qualitative approaches, and a sample population of 60 participants from the two cases of Community Development Projects were chosen for study. In addition, 32 key informants were interviewed and 8 focus group discussions were conducted. The qualitative methods used to obtained data were: Focus Group Discussions, In-depth interviews with key informants and individual participants, participant observations and informal conversations. However, secondary data was obtained using documentary review. The key peace building understandings from the findings relate to; fostering unity across the diversity; disarmament and controlling use of guns; proper land tenure system; and cultivating unifying leaders and healing post war trauma among others. In analyzing the local meaning of the concept of peace building, the study has established that there is a difficulty in developing a precise definition and meaning of term peace building. There exists no generally acceptable meaning of the concept. From the study, the term presently means different things to different people at the grassroots in Terekeka state in South Sudan.

Keywords: Peace building, community development, poverty and livelihood

1. Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher findings on perceptions and meanings of peace building by the actors of those two-community development project – South Sudan Livelihood and Development project and Food Security and Livelihood project in Terekeka state in South Sudan. Next, the selected project actors' motivations and core philosophies are identified.

2. The Descriptions of Two Case Study Projects in Terekeka State

This study focuses on two communities Development projects —South Sudan Livelihood and Development Project and Food Security and Livelihood Project — located in Terekeka state in the Counties of Terekeka and Jemeza respectively.

A number of reasons prompted the researcher to purposively select the two abovementioned community development projects; (a) they respectively belong to the major sectors of livelihood in South Sudan, generally, and in Terekeka state, particularly, namely agriculture and fishing; (b) they were created soon after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed that ended the civil war between North and South, in 2005, when the wounds were still fresh; (c) they were initiated and run from below by the nationals; and (d) they are open to all South Sudanese irrespective of the community they belong to.

2.1. South Sudan Livelihoods and Development (SSLD) Project

This is a community development project started in February 2009 by the Ministry of Agriculture, Cooperative, Forestry and Wildlife conservation, with help of the Netherlands government that funded the project.

This project focuses on social mobilization and community empowerment. The entry point has been to support, enhance and stimulate economic activities through micro projects undertaken by community interest groups of Terekeka State, to increase farm and off-farm production and sales, identify as well as mainstream the poor and vulnerable in social and economic development activities with emphasis on women, youth and the vulnerable.

The researcher chose this Project as a case study because it focuses on complete agricultural production system in fertile Wetlands of Terekeka State, including locally specific interventions that support peace-building and conflict resolution, as well as equity of opportunity for women and youth.

2.2. Food Security and Livelihoods (FLS) Project

It is a project located in Wetlands of Terekeka County supported by ZOA (Meaning in Dutch South East, where the organization first began). The researcher chose this project because the kinds of productive community collaborations facilitated by this project are aimed at creating a peace dividend among the communities in and around Terekeka state.

It aims to transform local conflicts by providing agricultural production support such as improving farming techniques, water management and irrigation, feeder road rehabilitation, increasing access to land, natural resource management, and the formation and strengthening of capacity among people at the grassroots. This project was started in 2005. In supporting agricultural production, the project focuses on sustainable and climate smart crop production systems. This is pursued by providing high level technical advice and capacity building for farmers, local NGOs and government rural extension services on integrated soil fertility management and improved seed supply systems, among others. To further enhance economic development livelihood, support is provided through vocational skills training, business development, promoting functional adult literacy based, village savings and loans associations, and market support such as linking producer groups to value chains, food processing, and marketing – central to building sustainable peace.

3. Methodology

The study adopted mainly qualitative research strategy with elements of a case study to study the experiences and perceptions by various stakeholders (top, middle and grassroots level stakeholders) of the contributions of community development projects in peace building process in Terekeka State in South Sudan.

An ethnographic approach was taken on to further provide for an utmost openness towards the subject matter under study (Crang, M & Cook, L (2007). It helped the researcher to establish the experiences and a perception of various stakeholders (top, middle and grassroots level stakeholders) towards community development projects in relation its contribution towards sustainable peace building in Terekeka State. It made possible participation in people's daily lives, watching what happened, listening to what was being said, asking questions and collecting whatever data was available that could provide a comprehensive understanding of the extent to which community development projects have led to sustainable peace building.

Qualitative methods of data collection were adopted, and they included Focus Group Discussion, Participant Observation, Documentary Review, In depth Interviews with key informants and Informal conversation.

4. Literature Reviews

Peace building has no universally accepted definition and, subsequently, there is no universal approach to building peace in societies affected by protracted conflict (MacGinty and Williams 2009: 99). Voca points to the case of Namibia as the recognition of peace building as a distinctive area of policy and operations (2009:2). In discourse, the term first made an appearance in the 'Agenda for Peace' report by Boutros-Boutros Ghali in 1992. Distancing this new concept from previous generations of peace work, Boutros-Ghali emphasized the need to create a 'new environment' rather than merely bringing an end to violence (Diehl 2006: 108). In its most generic sense, peace building is defined as 'action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid relapse into conflict' (Boutros-Ghali 1992 para. 21). This definition, of course, presupposes that there is peace to build upon (Darby and MacGinty 2009: 195).Nevertheless, from this definition of peace building one can deduce that other forms of conflict intervention like peace-making, peacekeeping and conflict prevention all, to some degree or another, involve some form of peace building. This, for example, may take the form of confidence building measures as part of a peace process. Indeed, some scholars use peace building interchangeably with these concepts (Barnett et al. 2009, Diehl 2006, MacGinty and Williams 2009). This is particularly true of conflict prevention and peace building as post-conflict societies is extremely prone to falling back into cycles of violence, therefore the same technologies can be used for conflict prevention and peace building (Barnett et al 2009). Furthermore, Lederach (1997) adds to this by suggesting that peace building occurs simultaneously with peace-making and peacekeeping. Peace building complements peace-making in the sense that it underpins the elite brokered and manipulated agreements and seeks to empower the communities which have been affected by war (Rams botham et al 1997: 215). However, peace building is distanced from other concepts by virtue of the fact that in its original use the words 'post conflict' were added (Barnett et al 2009: 42). Overall, it is agreed that measures geared towards building peace can take place at any stage in a conflict. Peace building, therefore, can take place at any phase of conflict, but usually gains momentum in the post-conflict setting (Francis, 2010). Voca emphasizes this point by saying that the absence of violence is a prerequisite to the transformation of inter-communal relationships and reconciliation (2009:3).Besides its timing, peace building is separated from these other concepts by virtue of the fact it seeks to achieve something much deeper than merely bringing an end to violence or managing conflict. Instead, peace building seeks to remedy the sources of conflict, preventing its recurrence by fostering the social, economic, and political institutions and attitudes that will stop the inevitable conflicts that occur in a plural society from developing into violence (Fisher, 2009). Contributing to this line of thought, MacGinty and Williams put forward this definition of peace building: Peace building is the attempt to overcome the structural, relational and cultural contradictions which lie at the root of conflict in order to underpin the processes of peace-making and peacekeeping (2009: 107).

The definition above gives a relatively clear idea about what needs to be done, but questions remain. Who should participate in peace building? How should it be done? The debate surrounding this question is what my study seeks clarifies.

5. Findings on the Local Perceptions and Meanings of Peace Building in Terekeka State

In order to provide an understanding of the perspectives of sustainable peace building, field respondents were requested to provide their views of sustainable peace building and finding indicates various responses.

However, as the researcher inquired into the local meaning and perception of sustainable peace building, it was found out that one definition or understanding may not properly satisfy or shed enough light on the term. A close study of these definitions reveals great diversity of opinion and understanding of the term. The study also reveals that there is great and ongoing complexity and confusion involved in precisely defining the local meaning of peace building.

Respondents at the grassroots define peace building based on their daily experiences living in contexts of armed and social conflict. This section provides insights into how peace building concept is understood by the people at the grassroots in Terekeka State of South Sudan.

5.1. Peace building as Fostering Unity across Diversity

The researcher found out participants from the selected community development project in Terekeka expressed belief that ending the culture of ethnic identity and rivalry and fostering unity across ethnic divide in Terekeka state is peace building. A participant from Food Security and Livelihood project stated that people should stop believing that the government is dominated by another tribe and instead begin to see each other in the light of oneness without any distinction in terms of tribe. He stated:

"But we civilians should not define national identity based on ethnicity but on values that foster unity for all. The problem in our state is not problem of language differences between tribes and communities, the point is that nobody wants to dominate because we all fight for freedom".

Another participant from South Sudan Livelihood and Development (SSLD) project expressed that:

"Distributing resources fairly without placing any preference for your tribe, while in a position of power is peace building to me. Because beginning to identify with your tribe while in power will make others feel dominated, and that can lead to conflict. Nowadays, the reason why there is conflict all over South Sudan is because people from other tribes feel dominated by Dinka. Therefore, peace building means not looking at members from other tribes one, but one people in one Country".

Another participant from a Focus Group Discussion of FSL project in Jemeza stated that peace building means having access to government job without any discrimination. To avoid rebellion and conflict, power in the country should be balanced across the diversity and one ethnic group should not be seen to be dominating the government, which is related to the previous participant's view. He stated,

"Yes, if all diversity in South Sudan are represented in government, there will always be peace because the government will be seen as serving the interest of all people. For instance, the reason why there is conflict everywhere in South Sudan is that the government is dominated by one ethnic group called Dinka tribe, for that reason other tribes consider the government system as that of the Dinka tribe. For other tribes, anything that comes from the government dominate by Dinka is always interpreted as Dinka domination agendas and therefore triggers mass rebellion against the government. Therefore, there is no peace building when government is not balanced".

Another participant from a Focus Group Discussion for SSLD in Terekeka stated, peace building means inculcating positive values in citizens such as tolerance, love, respect for the each other's cultures and making sure that diversity should unite us rather divide us. She expressed that,

"People should avoid bullying each for belonging to the other tribe. To me Peace building means acknowledging and appreciating each other's difference in terms of culture. We must love each other and tolerate our differences, and there we can have peace"

Participant from South Sudan Livelihood and Development project believed that peace building is respecting minority views through a fair system of governance. He stated,

Majority ethnic groups should value views or participation of the minority members and therefore, power control should not be based on ethnic dominance, and but qualification, and that is of course peace building.

Another participant from FSL project believed that peace building means ensuring that system should be controlled by the elected leaders who are always conscious of people demands and interest and promote a fair system whereby all voices are accepted.

5.2. Peace building as Disarmament of Civilians and Ex- Combatants for Safety and Security of All

Some participants believed that use of guns in South Sudan is not controlled and citizens use gun to defense themselves and their land, hence leading to cycle of social conflict. Thus, participants in their own words define peace building as controlling use of guns and ensuring that the army is professionalized to provide security for all the citizens. Participant from Food Security and Livelihood project stated:

"The availability and use of guns in the hands of local people in the villages has more disadvantages than advantages because people in the village are uneducated and don't know the proper handling of guns. Therefore, since guns fuel inter-communal violence as well as tribal violence in Terekeka State, controlling their use is peace building. When the government ensures that guns are in the hands of only soldiers for the security of all people in the country, then that is part of peace building".

Another participant from SSLD project stated that peace building is helping to remove guns from the hands of civilians to hinder people whose minds are addicted to use guns from causing further violence and chaos. He stated,

Conflict is simple to escalate due to the misunderstanding of the use of gun in the country. People shoot anything they want and anything they see. Removing guns from their hands ensures peace building.

Again, participant from South Sudan Livelihood and Development project stated that;

Yeah peace building comes after the end of war and guns should only be used professionally to protect our sovereignty and deter criminals and ensure that there is security for all in Terekeka here.

Another Participant from Food Security and Livelihood project said that citizens use guns for economic empowerments and to control and protect their ethnic land from others. Peace building means putting in place proper land tenure system that ensures that people don't feel insecure about their lands. He stated:

"People use guns to defense their territory, once proper policies about land are in place, you will hardly see any violence. Most of the violence in Terekeka here are land related. Therefore, peace building means ensuring that their proper land policy that does not make people insecure about their territories"

Participant from Food Security and Livelihood project stressed that land as a major factor is one of the greatest causes of tribal conflicts; resolving land issue means peace building. The bigger the portion of land owned by a particular community, the higher the chances of it being respected. He stated:

Resources mould up people's way of living. An African man is upright and respected when in possession of natural resources and livestock. Once policies are in place to protect their land resource, violence will drastically reduce and that to me means peace building.

All in all, given the degree of conflict, most of the respondents defined peace building as actions that identify and support structures for personal safety and security. As one respondent said, peace building is "action that guarantees the right of every human to live in safety and without fear." Another interviewee mentioned that peace building requires "that the killing and destruction stop and security and safety return to our country."

Answers showed that safety and security include disarmament, ending the fighting, as well as freedom from political oppression, cattle raid, kidnapping and robbery by armed actors. A respondent from Food Security and Livelihood project in Jemeza said that "civilian peace building means engaging in productive activities that promote coexistence between people based on freedom of expression and thinking." It also implies a certain guarantee of non-recurrence. As one interviewee in Terekeka put it, "sustainable peace building was perceived as actions that represent construction of a house that we build to safely live under its roof and within its walls, pledging to each other to reinforce its foundation whenever it weakens, and committing not to use weapons among its inhabitants no matter what happens."

5.3. Peace building as Fair System of the Distribution of Resources

Data revealed that participants believed that peace building means building of trust in the system ensuring there is fair distribution of resources among people in Terekeka state. Jobs, education, land; infrastructure and so on should be made to equally benefit everybody without any discrimination. A participant from SSLD project stated:

"Transparency in the system of resource distribution is part of peace building, when people hold government post, they should not prefer to hire those members close or related to them and therefore the system filled up with related individuals or one ethnic group populated the government post, but they ensure that people are recruited based on merit. People should not be made to think that one tribe is dominating the job market".

A Participant from FSL project expressed similar to previous respondent peace building means trust building in the system of governance and the system should provide security for all so that people don't choose to hold on to guns to cause chaos. He stated,

"The system should ensure that people are not intimidated by use of guns; guns should only be intended for right purpose. People need protection and if the system fails to provide security then civilians will continue securing themselves".

Again, another Participant from Food Security and Livelihood project stressed that in Terekeka state, citizens defense themselves and not the system, which is also related to the view of other participants. This is the case especially when it's come to children abduction and properties destruction. He stated,

"Kids are your life, they are everything and when they are being killed or abducted by others, you must go after them and get them back by yourself because there is no justice or system fighting for you. If there is a good system in place, death or killing can decrease and that is of course peace building".

Participant from SSLD project articulated that issues between ethnic groups in Terekeka are also caused by lack of justice in the country. Peace building means justice for all. He stated,

"There must be justice for the families who fall victims of abduction of children, women and killings of family members caused revenge. Here in Terekeka, abductors steal animals, abduct children and women from other tribes. Peace building means the system must ensure that families are protected from such ordeals and justice must be accorded to the victims of such practices".

Participant from SSLD project believed that whenever conflict occurs between ethnic groups the system must take major intervention to find people that should be hold accountable for the damages so that the cycle of such practice should end to ensure there is peace building. He stated,

"The authorities must ensure that people who engage in practices of causing chaos, killing, cattle raiding and abduction of children and women among others are punished based on law to deter such practices. This is significantly peace building step".

Another Participant FSL project from expressed that peace building means empowering people to have capacity to meet their basic need such as food, education and medication among others. He stated,

"The roles of Ethnic base on cultures to identities create violent when leaders become greedy, corrupted cause hunger and then bring war to society or either tribal war. Or when leaders empower and deliver service to people that of course promote peace and harmony or unity and love among the tribes".

5.4. Peace Building as Healing Post War Trauma

Most respondents acknowledged that past conflicts are still affecting current ethnic relationship. To them, peace building means healing those traumas. Participant from Food Security and Livelihood project in Jemeza stated, when people meet or see other ethnic members who are in conflict with them in the past, they think of their stolen animals, destroyed properties, killed beloved family members and that feelings affect present feelings and thus will be pass it over to next generation. Meanwhile another participant from SSLD expressed,

 "To me, peace building means heal traumas through establishment of rehabilitation and psychosocial support centers for counseling and emotion supports. Why? We need to understand that past war events have been stored in the heart of ethnic members, and its bother feeling when victims meet with other ethnic members who killed their beloved family members and destroyed their properties".

Another respondent from SSLD project responded that since past conflicts push people into constant revenge, in which they don't care about lives, peace building would mean establishing institutions that will provide support and care for those victims affected by conflicts in the past. He stated,

"Peace building means providing repairing broken hearts and minds caused by the past conflicts. The people are traumatized by the past experience thus making pure hate part of their DNA. With the massive losses from warring parties, they tend to be emotionally depressed and whenever they see each other they tend to be motivated towards revenging by their nerves that drives on the hate on the enemy. Though they fear losing their lives in the process, they have no other option but to do it to revenge their losses and appease their community spirit. With a third party aimed at positivity interfering, the communities are able to unite not because they love it but are tired of the same old thing (loss of lives) repeating itself again and again".

Participant from FSL project articulated that past conflicts still affect interethnic relationships up to now. And only peaceful environment can only be restored through faithful reconciliation and psychosocial supports between different members' ethnic groups affected by conflict in one way or another. He stated, Past war creates hatred and mistrust between ethnic members. In addition, past war creates war related psychological illnesses that trigger people to go back to war over and over again. Healing those psychological illness means peace building

Participant from FSL stated that it's hard to forgive each other where violence is constant between ethnic communities. But psycho social support can take as far as healing those mental problems created by war. He stated,

If the healing process through psychosocial supports has work in Rwanda, then why not in South Sudan. People in Terekeka here are good people they can forget easily the traumatic past.

Overall, their voices and their responses indicated that past war events have had a big negative impact when it comes to current communal relationship, so healing those trauma means a lot to peace building in Terekeka.

Overall, research has explored issues from the heart of these participants. In their understanding, they presented components that are associated with peace building in Terekeka. These common themes identified from the data collected: fostering unity across the diversity in South Sudan; Participants' views revealed that all issues or violence in the remote areas are related to national politics.

6. Local versus International Perspective of Peace Building in South Sudan

6.1. Peace Building Shifts to Development

As I pointed out earlier, interpretations of peace building have shifted over time. Whilst above I examined this shift from the perspective of hope to one of disillusionment and contamination, here I present another dimension: the shift from 'peace as physical security' to 'peace as development' and the dilemmas that accompany this.

Before and after the war, peace building for all citizens was overwhelmingly linked to ensuring security (feeling safe), the absence of physical violence, and the protection of human rights. Yet as time passed, in South Sudan, particularly, peace as security became the less salient interpretation, as citizens felt safer day to day. This led to, as pointed out above, criticism of the international community regarding the 'frozen peace building' which had descended on South Sudan, aimed only at maintaining stability, whilst failing to facilitate long-term development or positive peace. UNMISS was mocked for being a 'preventative mission' (Kurti 2011: 90) rather than one seeking to affect prosperity and long-term change; whilst Noel Malcolm (2010) commentedin 2010 that, 'stagnation' is by far the biggest factor affecting South Sudan, both now and in the future.

Within the literature review the researcher identified a rift between scholars who call for more fluid interpretations peace building concerned not only with addressing direct drivers of the conflict (i.e. "fire-fighting"), but tackling the deeper issues at stake (Fisher and Ziminer 2009; Francis 2010); and those critics who argue that approaches to peace building should be clearly tied to the conflict, to prevent the boundaries of peace building become too blurred, rendering the term meaningless or indivisible from development (Chigas & Woodrow 2009; Lund 2005; LLamarezaes 2003).

As seen earlier, in the case of South Sudan, there was an initial visionary idea about peace building, which was shared across the South Sudanese and international community alike. Yet, this gave way to disillusionment and cynicism, as expectations were not met. This was seen to cut both ways: both in terms of internationals not delivering on promises leading to concrete tangible improvements; and South Sudanese being perceived as 'letting themselves down' following another conflict that started in 2013. Whilst amongst the masses in South Sudan, it would be untrue to say that no idealized and utopian ideas about peace building persist today (for example, particularly amongst the older generation, peace building does retain an idealized quality linked to bring freedom; particularly amongst those who fought for a 'Free South Sudan); however actors at the grassroots argue that it is essentially the international community who have been most idealistic and least realistic when it has come to approaching peace and peace building. This idealism is blamed on external actors failing to understand the local context; being driven by a desire to impose external values onto the population to fulfil 'liberal agendas'; and on an unrealistic idea of what can be achieved within very short timeframes.

One long-term observer of peace building in South Sudan, herself international, gave the following analysis of peace building in South Sudan in an attempt to convey the lack of direction observed amongst external actors,

"I'll tell you a story which helps to characterize general peace building efforts in South Sudan. You recall the moment in Alice in Wonderland where Alice is going along a path and she encounters a fork in the road? The Cheshire Cat is up above and so she stops and, after marveling at this fantastic cat she asks, "Which road should I take?" The cat says, "Well that depends where you want to end up?" And she says, "Well, I don't really know," and the cat says, "Well, it doesn't much matter which road you take." So that is what one sees happening in South Sudan. They [the peace builders] don't really know where they are going. They seem to be going towards something illusionary, and at best illusive…and at worst hypocritical."[1]

This respondent's analysis reflects the fact that once peace building is no longer linked to the absence of physical violence the term fails to provide tangible concrete goals to work towards. Whilst multi-ethnicity and reconciliation have been the prime targets of international efforts in South Sudan at the grassroots, these are amongst the illusionary and illusive goals to which the interviewee above and others have referred.

Before concluding this section, it should also be emphasized that the same shift - from peace building as ensuring security to peace as making development - has not taken place throughout South Sudan, particularly not in where the threat of violence is an everyday reality. Thus, the notions of peace building, reconciliation, and even of multi-ethnicity have greater currency in these areas as people are living fearfully in close proximity to one another.

6.2. Motivations of the Actors of the Selected Community Development Project to Engage in Peace Building

It was observed that organizational vision of actors of the community development projects often inspires people to work for peaceful change and the project actors believe in the interconnectivity of humanity and perceive the world as a "global village." Project leaders' reliance in interconnectedness, and in ensuring the wellbeing of one individual can make incremental changes for all, is the ultimate foundation for prosperity. For example, a project official from Food Security and Livelihood Project mentioned that their mandate to improve peoples' lives motivated him to undertake peace-building work:

> Our motivation comes from my conviction that we are interconnected. We work in the business sector and we believe that if we can work hard to improve upon people's lives in terms of their economic prosperity, it will eventually do well and reduce social and ethnic tension that we see now.

> Ensuring sustainable economic growth remains to be an important aspect in improving people lives in Terekeka state.

Another peace building actor from South Sudan Livelihood and Development project explained that a certain social issue triggers a desire to get into activism as she explained in the following quote: So, I started getting involved, in getting to know the people in the community that are doing these things. It was a good start. But looking in deeper what is being done and what is not being done, and using practical analysis, I am disheartened that other actors such as government are impotent in ensuring that there is peace among the local population in Terekeka state.

As seen from the data above, peace building actors from the selected projects are motivated partially due to the societal context and their organizational mission statements.

7. Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher presented participants perceptions and meanings of peace building in Terekeka. The key peace building understanding relate to; fostering unity across the diversity; disarmament and controlling use of guns; proper land tenure system; and cultivating unifying leaders and healing post war trauma among others.

The term peace building as an emerging concept has become very popular today. It has generated a big debate concerning both its meaning and application. In analyzing the local meaning of the concept of peace building, the study has established that

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[1] Interview, 2016, Respondent 8

there is a difficulty in developing a precise definition and meaning of term peace building. This is because the term has undergone a remarkable transformation in relations to its meaning and application. There exists no generally acceptable meaning of the concept. From the study, the term presently means different things to different people at the grassroots in Terekeka state.

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