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## **The Role of Kuron Peace Village in Promoting Social Cohesion and Peaceful Co-existence in South Sudan**

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# The Role of Kuron Peace Village in Promoting Social Cohesion and Peaceful Co-existence in South Sudan

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## Abstract

Peace is a fundamental component of community development, personal growth, and survival of our planet. At the heart of every faith community, and culture, lies a need to advance peaceful co-existence to enhance productive, meaningful lives and sustainable societies; participation and inclusion can also start from the point of understanding a conflict, from conflict analysis. Since the independence of Sudan in 1956, South Sudan has been in war, till 2005 when the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed between Sudan government and Sudan People Liberation Army and Movement (SPLAM). Subsequently, that led to the independent of South Sudan from Sudan Government in 2011. However, the war broke again in 2013 within the SPLAM. Compounding the human tragedy and narrowing the prospects for its peaceful resolution, the government's military and security approach to the crisis has severely restricted space for civic engagement. South Sudan is one of the world's least-free countries, where overdue national elections have yet to be held, and the incumbent leadership has presided over rampant corruption, economic collapse, and atrocities against civilians, journalists and aid workers. Humanity desires a peaceful environment and mutual coexistence, but in South Sudan, this is not the case where people still experience conflicts, which drives thousands into exile in refugee camps in Kenya, Uganda, and around the globe. The purpose of this study was to determine the role of Kuron Peace Village in promoting social cohesion and peaceful co-existence in South Sudan. The study was a literature based, in which relevant literature was interrogated to derive study themes. The study found that Bishop Taban is a living example of promoter of coexistence in South Sudan through his efforts to unite the population in the area and set an example of peaceful coexistence in war-torn South Sudan. The study also found that the Kuron peace village built a culture of mutual respect among the warring communities in Kuron and by building a culture of mutual respect it was then possible to overcome tribal divisions and build a new national identity. It was also essential to foster a culture of dialogue to avoid cycles of revenge and animosity. There had been progress towards this before the current crisis, and now perhaps there is an opportunity to start building programmes for the future once more. The study therefore concluded that the establishment of Kuron peace village, brought with it opportunities for the local communities as a few dozen people from different origins were now able to work in the health centre and primary

school which were set up with the help of the Bishop. The study also concludes that the peace village was playing a big role in enabling the local communities to engage new modes of agricultural production, and were engaged in peace building, together with the local community which was not possible before the peace village was initiated.

**Keywords:** *Kuron, Peace, Village, Social, Cohesion, Peaceful, Co-existence, South Sudan.*

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Strengthening social cohesion has become an imperative of the 21st century (McLeigh, McDonell & Lavenda, 2018). In 2020s, widespread concern exists about worsening conditions of conflict that threaten respect for diversity, inclusivity and fundamental human rights; a sharpening of identity-based tensions, such as ethnic and religious enmity, xenophobia, and resurgent, exclusive nationalism, underlie these conflicts (Bubalo, 2019). In April 2019, United Nations (UN) Secretary-General António Guterres decried a disturbing groundswell of strife accelerated, in part, by hate speech and leading to intolerance and violence. According to Smidt (2020), violent armed conflicts such as civil wars, violent extremism and radicalization, including terror attacks, and armed violence including murder, kidnapping, and gender-based violence, pose grave threats to sustained peace worldwide. Such conflict, and the absence or erosion of social cohesion that follows in its wake, undermines development, increases insecurities and fears, and leaves countries and contexts vulnerable to further or escalating violence (Bubalo, 2019). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other development assistance partners are engaged globally in efforts to prevent conflict and sustain peace through integrated, conflict-sensitive development programming. UNDP's work on democratic governance and peacebuilding speaks directly to social cohesion and that agenda cuts across the organization's programmes and initiatives in conflict prevention, inclusive political processes, responsive and accountable government, rule of law and access to justice, combatting corruption, preventing violent extremism, working with youth, and HIV and health programmes.

A shared vision for a common future and responsive, legitimate governance institutions contribute to economic development in cohesive societies characterized by high levels of trust (Ospino, 2020). Social cohesion is reinforced by inclusive social policies and protection for minorities, disadvantaged groups and elements of society that have been marginalized historically. It can be sustainable in the long-term only if the principle of respect for diversity is integrated into the society (Ospino, 2020). Social cohesion is a complex, multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept; moreover, its underlying conceptual basis is contested (Ganugi, 2020). Cohesion may evolve in primarily historical-cultural terms; that is, norms of trust and belonging have evolved together over time through symbolic politics and patterns of long-term state and nation formation.

Peace is a fundamental component of community development, personal growth, and survival of our planet (Blom, Bronk, Sullivan, McConchie, Ballesteros & Farello, 2020). Blom et al. (2020) argue that at the heart of every faith community, and culture, lies a need to advance peaceful co-existence to enhance productive, meaningful lives and sustainable societies; participation and inclusion can also start from the point of understanding a conflict, from conflict analysis. The analysis process should find ways to include perspectives of those who don't shout the loudest: women playing vital roles for peace beyond the spotlight of international negotiations; youth; displaced people; ethnic minorities; or those living in remote and unstable border regions, for example (Lee, 2021). Peaceful coexistence can be approached with a minimal-level effort of enforced application of existing instruments: international law not only on paper but used to

safeguard international security as well as internal peace (Edwards, 2019). Concerning all forms of conflict characterized by ethnic factors, structural prevention provides many options, it is best used to intervene at the stage of sleeping conflict which is where and when the obstacles are few but the choices of possible approaches are fairly broad (Edwards, 2019).

According to Langer, Stewart, Smedts and Demarest (2017), in various parts of Africa from the colonial era, Western intervention programs have brought about or contributed to the disruption of traditional social and political institutions and practices. Thus, in recent years, a number of scholars have pointed out that recognition of and respect for indigenous socio-political institutions can ameliorate some of the problems of poor governance and conflicts in Africa (Zartman, 2020). Religious leaders and societies have had a unique leverage for promoting peace and reconciliation among parties, including an ability to re-humanize situations that have been dehumanized over the course of protracted conflict (Langer et al., 2017). They hold credibility statures as trusted institutions and those with ability to respect set values. Religious societies are crowned with the capability to mobilize community, nation and international support for a peace process (David R. Smock, USIP 2004). According to Seppä (2019), South Sudan, like most other African countries, is ethnically very diverse. While inter-ethnic conflict was made subservient to the struggle against Khartoum during the fight for independence, violent confrontations between groups have now re-emerged and have become a major constraint to trade and investment, and the types of cultural exchanges that are critical for national integration (Seppä, 2019). Gettleman (2016) argued that although born in unity, South Sudan is plunging into a vortex of violence. Bitter ethnic tensions that had largely been shelved for the sake of achieving independence have ruptured into a cycle of massacre and revenge that neither the American-backed government nor the United Nations has been able to stop (Omoleye & Joshua, 2018).

Since independence, South Sudan has struggled with how to effectively manage the demands of the various competing and conflicting groups that exist within the country (Agensky, 2019). Since they were part of a Khartoum-dominated Sudan, the provinces that are now South Sudan have recognized the superiority of constitutional federalism as a model of government that can ensure peaceful coexistence and enhance the ability of each group to maximize its values without infringing the ability of others to do the same. Hence, when Sudan gained independence from Britain and Egypt in 1956, the southern provinces demanded a federal system of government, which they saw as enhancing local development and minimizing domination by the central government in Khartoum (Agensky, 2019). However, the Muslim-dominated Northern political parties, which had hijacked the decolonization project and now controlled the process of constitution making and institution building, opted for a unitary system of government with power concentrated in the center in Khartoum. In addition, the northerners wanted to establish an Islamic state, which would enhance their ability to force their Arabization and Islamization programs on southerners (Holt & Daly, 2015; Golub, 2016).

A decade ago the world looked at South Sudan with a lot of enthusiasm; on July 9, 2011, after decades of civil war, the country finally gained its independence from Khartoum (Rudincová, 2017). But the euphoria was followed by disillusionment, two years after the creation of the new state, a bloody civil war broke out again (Rudincová, 2017). A power struggle between President Salva Kiir and his former vice president Riek Machar created a divide between the different ethnic groups. The conflict rapidly escalated into a civil war between the Nuer and Dinka, which are the two main ethnic groups in South Sudan. But not all hope is gone; a remote village located in the extreme southeast of the country, wanted to show that things can be different (John, Wilmot &



Zaremba, 2018). Here Bishop Taban Paride established a peace village to reconcile feuding ethnic groups. Kuron is located in an area which has seen fierce battles for decades, for the people living here, cattle and land are the benchmark for wealth (John et al., 2018). In the past, conflicts were traditionally fought with spears, but the civil war that has been raging in South Sudan brought thousands of firearms into the country (Dennis, 2018). Hungry rebels and soldiers sold their weapons to the shepherds in return for food and livestock; thus, cattle rustling with spears and shields, turned into a bloody conflict (Dennis, 2018). Bishop Paride, however, believed that things could change and on several occasions, the 85 year-old personally risked his life to negotiate peace (Onapa, 2020).

The idea for a peace village came to the Bishop in the 1990s when he visited Neve Shalom in Israel, a place where Jews and Palestinians live together peacefully and in 2000 a bridge was built over the river Kuron (Dennis, 2018). The 2000 bridge was built with steal iron and cars and Lorries were using to connect the regions to supply aids. The years thereafter Holy Trinity Peace Village Kuron was founded; nowadays, a few dozen people from different origins are working in the health centre and primary school they set up with the Bishop (Dennis, 2018). Others are introducing new modes of agricultural production, and are engaged in peace building, together with the local community. Peace is promoted through dialogue, traditional conflict resolution and inclusive conflict transformation (Duffey, 2001). Sports and theatre are used to raise community awareness, while cross-border exchanges enable warriors and chiefs to learn from practices in peace building and local governance in Uganda and Kenya. Emeritus Bishop Paride Taban (1936) is the founder of Holy Trinity Peace Village Kuron. Kuron is a beacon of peace within the conflict-ridden country of South Sudan. The bishop has dedicated his whole life to the promotion of dialogue and development in South Sudan, as well as across the border in Uganda and Kenya (Duffey, 2001). In his struggle for peace he has not hesitated to tell the truth to political leaders and local warlords.

In 2013 the bishop received the UN Sergio Vieira de Mello-peace prize for his exceptional commitment to reconciling different communities in South Sudan. He has been closely involved in the peace agreement between the government of South Sudan and the David Yau Yau-rebel group signed in May 2014. On May 16th 2018 Bishop Paride Taban received the Freedom of Worship Award, one of the Roosevelt Four Freedoms Awards. The Four Freedoms Awards are presented each year to men and women whose achievements have demonstrated a commitment to US President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Four Freedoms: freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.

Kuron is synonymous with peace, it symbolizes peaceful coexistence and development for diverse communities who live in this remote part of South Sudan (Kabongo, 2020). Bishop Emeritus, Catholic Diocese of Torit in Eastern Equatoria, at a ceremony marking the handover of a secondary school block funded by the UNMISS Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) programme which is managed by the mission's Relief, Reintegration and Protection section. Since its inception in 2005, the Kuron peace village has fostered reconciliation and peace between the Jie, Murle and Toposa communities who previously fought over issues such as cattle-rustling and child abduction (Kabongo, 2020). Bishop Emeritus Taban is the founder of this remarkable village, his vision was to encourage different ethnic communities to live together as one people and years later, Kuron stands tall as an inspiration to many across the country (Kabongo, 2020).

Liaga and Wielenga (2020) contend that it is crucial for young people to have space to interact in and discuss matters that concern them. In particular it is essential that they are engaged in process of peace building, community cohesion and reconciliation. As all spheres of action, such as paying

for hospital services or market transactions, are determined by political decision-making, it is essential that youth engage with all political issues (Liaga & Wielenga, 2020). To encourage their incorporation into political decision-making, it is essential to design peace building and community cohesion programmes that are fascinating and inspiring for young people. If the activities are dull, they will become disinterested. At the same time, it is very important to foster a certain level of knowledge and confidence in young people to allow them to participate best in such processes (Aleu, 2020). There needs therefore to be parallel personal development programmes from them, whether as minors or adults. Encouraging effective and impactful youth engagement with politics requires the development of a space where young people can discuss issues directly with the government. This might be a forum similar to this meeting where members of parliament listen to their views on national issues, such a space does not exist currently in South Sudan. It is a particularly salient requirement considering the limited number of youth in decision-making positions in the government (Aleu, 2020).

According to Onapa (2020), unemployment is also a key issue for young people, evident in the many idle people in Juba's town centre. Without sufficient opportunities or skills, young people are prone to take any opportunity that comes along, whether it is good or bad. In the protection of civilians camps in particular, the enormous amount of idle young boys and girls has potentially explosive political ramifications (Onapa, 2020). Instead, young people can form the networks that bridge divides between communities, but for them to do so requires the right environment and necessary support. There also needs to be dissemination of a true understanding of the nation's history, and of whatever internal conflicts and interests that have driven armed conflict. Ashworth and Ryan (2013) believe youth engagement with the history of conflict in South Sudan will help foster an understanding of the problems faced today. The current dominant narrative is not necessarily true, which can mean that some grievances will remain unaddressed. It is essential to foster mutual understanding among the youth themselves and fuel a sense of brotherhood, sisterhood and togetherness.

By building a culture of mutual respect it should be possible to overcome tribal divisions and build a new national identity (Ashworth & Ryan, 2013). It will also be essential to foster a culture of dialogue to avoid cycles of revenge and animosity. There had been progress towards this before the current crisis, and now perhaps there is an opportunity to start building programmes for the future once more. Essential to this will be developing effective programmes of civic education, with the particular aim of enabling free and informed discussion in the media, which is often co-opted for negative messages; this would follow efforts after the CPA to teach people about the importance of peace and the content of the CPA, so they could understand how best to work towards it and become involved in the process (Tshibangu, 2020). The same has to happen in teaching youth about leadership and governance, by giving exposing them to multiple viewpoints and allowing them to counter negative media narratives.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Globally, the numbers of those forced to leave their homes due to war, persecution or natural disaster have reached staggering heights: at the end of 2014, United Nations estimated 19.5 million of these are people who have fled their country as refugees and half of them are children. Seen in economic terms, the impact is also huge; the Global Peace Index calculated the cost of conflict to the global economy last year to be 9.21 trillion pounds (\$13.7 trillion) as a result of increased military spending by states and more people driven from their jobs. More than 1.5 billion people live in countries affected by violent conflict, and the gap between those countries enjoying relative

peace and those afflicted by conflict is growing. The newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals respond to the fact that no low-income conflict-affected country achieved a single one of the framework's predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals (Abu-El-noor & Abu-El-noor, 2020). Peace building approaches, including mediation and diplomacy, dialogue and participation, are an essential part of the toolkit we need to meet Goal 16: to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development.

Since 2013, South Sudan has been seized by brutal violent conflict that has created one of the worst humanitarian crises in modern times (Agensky, 2019). Compounding the human tragedy and narrowing the prospects for its peaceful resolution, the government's military and security approach to the crisis has severely restricted space for civic engagement. According to Freedom House's 2018 rankings, South Sudan is one of the world's least-free countries, where "overdue national elections have yet to be held, and the incumbent leadership has presided over rampant corruption, economic collapse, and atrocities against civilians, journalists, and aid workers (Agensky, 2019). As a result, citizens' ability to constructively voice grievances related to the conflict and to pursue nonviolent solutions has been persistently challenged and frequently attacked outright.

Yet amid the constant threat of war-related violence and humanitarian disaster, examples of nonviolent action being used to successfully achieve certain limited goals can still be found in South Sudan (Strohmeier, Scholte & Ager, 2019). These examples involving tactics such as vigils, marches, radio programming, public murals, and music hold the promise for South Sudanese to build larger and more broad-based nonviolent movements and provide the citizens of the country with the means to reclaim the civic space necessary for asserting their demands. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, over 4.3 million South Sudanese are displaced as of mid-2018. The World Food Programme reports that at the same time approximately 6.1 million people about half the country's population are at risk of severe food insecurity. Firearms are employed in inter-communal conflicts, cattle raiding, and revenge killing. Armed groups are still committing violence, criminality is prevalent, and ethnic discrimination and violence is becoming normalized.

Humanity desires a peaceful environment and mutual coexistence, but in South Sudan, this is not the case where people still experience conflicts, which drives thousands into exile in refugee camps in Kenya, Uganda, and around the globe. Over decades, the people in this country have experienced many conflicts even at the present time and never-ending crises, which give slight opportunity for peace in the country. The different types of conflict such as conflict related to power, resources, cattle rustling, and property among others. Ethnic differences have torn the country apart, and people are treated in their ethnic backgrounds. The long civil war and many conflicts are major challenges to a peaceful coexistence. This study therefore sought to determine the role of Kuron Peace Village in promoting social cohesion and peaceful co-existence in South Sudan.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

To determine the role of Kuron Peace Village in promoting social cohesion and peaceful co-existence in South Sudan.

## **1.4 Research Question**

What is the role of Kuron Peace Village in promoting social cohesion and peaceful co-existence in South Sudan?

## **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

There are a number of theoretical explanations for the onset of violent conflicts among communities. The most prominent of these are; primordial's approach, Institutional Approach, Political Entrepreneurs Approach and Competition over Resources Approach. The primordial's approach asserts the existence of ancient hatreds among ethnic and cultural groups: the urge to define and reject the other goes back to our remotest human ancestors and indeed beyond them to our animal predecessors (Chataignier & Krämer, 2021). According to this view, "tendencies toward xenophobia and intolerance are more natural to human societies than liberal politics of interest." ethnic conflict and the conflict potential of ethnicity. While ethnic emotions appear to be primordial, they are a socially and politically constructed reality drawn from the historical memories of past injustices and grievances (Suny, 2001). Suny (2001) illustrates this by stating that, National identities are saturated with emotions that have been created through teaching, repetition, and daily reproduction until they become common sense. These tropes betrayal, treachery, threats from others, and survival are embedded in familiar emotions anxiety, fear, insecurity, and pride. Group history is socially constructed. Confining explanations of ethnic conflict solely to primordial causes also implies a degree of ignorance and prejudice towards the societies affected by conflict (Chataignier & Krämer, 2021). As Akbar describes, "Ideas and arguments about ethnicity are usually based on the assumption that ethnic identity is a characteristic of primordial and tribal societies. Only backward societies cling to the past (Rothschild, 1998).

All multi-ethnic societies, when subject to a convergence of a particular set of factors and conditions, carry the potential of ethnic conflict (Reddock, 2019). Under the stress of a major structural change that brings a sense of chaos and uncertainty, the consciousness of historically rooted ethnic-identities and emotions are employed as vehicles to ethnic violence for political purposes. Viewing historically rooted ethnic animosities as the only cause of conflict is insufficient, institutions play an important role in regulating the level of the conflict potential of ethnicity (Reddock, 2019). They define inter-ethnic relationships by either facilitating or obstructing intergroup cooperation. Crawford notes that institutions "both constrain behavior and provide incentives for cooperation and compliance in norms, rules, and procedures for allocation, participation, representation, and accountability. According to her, whether or not identity politics turns into violent conflict depends on the functioning of state institutions: Where identity politics is practiced, states can channel it in peaceful political competition as long as they can make credible commitments to shape and uphold agreements made among culturally defined political actors.

Communist, colonial and democratic political arrangements have various institutional effects on inter-ethnic relations and thus on conflict potential (Taye, 2017). For example, communism is sometimes blamed for creating or reinforcing ethnic/national divisions but suppressing the expression of ethnic conflicts, and consequently, for recent outbursts of ethnic violence in the post-communist regions of the world following the system collapse. In the words of Georg Brunner, in the communist systems, nationality ethnicity conflicts were suppressed, compulsorily canalized or even consciously instrumentalized ethnic intolerance to take place (Crowe, 2008). In the context



of a major structural change within an ethnically diverse society, political entrepreneurs attribute their ethnic group's have-nots to the exploitation and denial of access to resources and rights by the other "groups." Advantaged groups, on the other hand, begin to see the "others" as those who will take away their "haves" should they gain a position of power within the society. Institutional factors fuel inter-ethnic competition by facilitating politics of exclusion (Asal, Findley, Piazza & Walsh, 2016).

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

The violent conflicts in South Sudan have had very negative and severe impacts on the communities that are involved in these conflicts and the entire country at large. A study conducted by McGuirk and Burke (2020) in the assessment of the social and economic impact of conflict on pastoral and semi-pastoral economies in Kenya and Uganda, highlighted several consequences of violent conflicts, including loss of human life, property, displacements of large segments of the communities, disruption of socio-economic activities and livelihoods, increased hatred between communities and environmental degradation. The threat to water catchments areas, increased economic hardships as a result of loss of livelihoods, high levels of starvation and malnutrition among the displaced groups and unprecedented dependency syndrome are the impacts of the increasing and severe inter-ethnic armed conflicts in northern Kenya.

Bishop Taban, as a living example once said, unite the population in the area and set an example of peaceful coexistence in war-torn South Sudan. In 1998, Bishop Taban constructed a bridge on Kuron River to connect the regions, that is, Kuron with Boma, Kacipho and Pachala. NB: The 1998 bridge was built with the wood only for people and animals to pass over; cars could not pass through because it was weak with local wooden material. After the construction of the bridge, eighty-one families of different pastoralist ethnic groups from Toposa, Jiye, Murle, Nyangatom and Kacipho decided on their own, to settle around the bridge in order to protect it. Although these communities trace their origin to a common ancestry, they view themselves as traditional enemies due to cattle raiding, competition for control and access to natural resources, mainly water sources and grazing land. The bridge became a blessing and a uniting factor to them because after settling around the bridge, they used it to communicate for peace and reconciliation. At present there are representatives from six nationalities and twelve ethnic tribes working in Kuron. The six different nationalities: Kenyan, Ugandan, Ethiopian, American, Norwegian and South Sudanese and the Twelve different ethnic tribes: Madi, Acholi, Lotuho, Nuer, Kakuwa, Toposa, Jie, Murle, Nyangatom, Lango, Dinka and Kuku are working and their children are studying in Kuron.

The Peace Village's intervention by bringing the twelve ethnic tribes together for school, hospital, peace training, agricultural training, among others. These activities aim at improving the livelihood of the community through promoting greater socialization, opportunities for multicultural equitable development, formal education, peace education and stable co-existence for self-reliance, unity and trust. Agriculture, education which is holistic in nature. Cultural, sports and theatre for the youth are used to raise community awareness. Peace is promoted through dialogue, traditional conflict resolution and inclusive conflict transformation.

The Holy Trinity Peace Village in Kuron was to improve the otherwise volatile peace and reduce tensions and divisions among the communities living in this area, and thus, has made significant progress in addressing the situation of the conflict. Hence, the establishment of Kuron Peace Village has brought together all the warring parties in understanding cohesion. One can clearly see the tools for measuring cohesion: social trust, life satisfaction, participation in village governance

and social behavior. Kuron used to be a raiding ground but due to the efforts of Bishop Taban's peace initiatives, the place is having school, hospital, agriculture, peace school and transformation of livelihoods. Hence, by the involvement of community leaders through dialogue, deepening their understanding to alleviate the situation, manage ongoing situation to promote social cohesion and lasting peace in the community (Haile & Juba, 2016). In Kenya, peace committees are very critical in resolving issues and challenges facing security at grass root levels (Kioko, 2017). This is because it is extensively admitted that communities are better placed and informed in making decisions that affect their own lives and should therefore be facilitated (Kabelo & Gakuu, 2019). Peace committees have provided the best practices in mitigating against potential conflicts and promoting dialogue, national healing, reconciliation and social cohesion among communities.

Nevertheless, the success story of peace committee model in South Africa indicated that the peace committee model of operation accounted for its success. First and foremost, the peace committee operated on agreed set of procedures and interested partners to help understand and resolve the disputes. The peace committee members were governed by code of good practice by ensuring that they worked within the law, never took sides in disputes and never gossiped about their work (Shearing, Cartwright & Jenneker, 2006). Furthermore, Van Tongeren, (2011), stressed that success of peace committees in peace building can be borrowed from the South Africa model in which he observed that peace committee managed to bring an end to political violence by implementing the National Peace Accord of 1991 at both regional and local levels when institutions of the state were unable for a variety of reasons to find nonviolent solutions to inter group conflicts. The grass roots peace communities in Kapoeta county revealed that the district peace committees at community level were weak and still evolving needed more strengthening. This consequently calls for more research, which the study seeks so as to establish dwindling effectiveness of the committee in peace building and conflict resolution so as to pave way for peaceful co-existence and social cohesion in the pastoralist communities.

Social cohesion is process of increasingly harmonious coexistence in a given society between individuals, groups and the institutions. Essential qualities of cohesive societies include high levels of trust, a shared vision for a common future, and responsive and legitimate governance institutions, which actively support inclusive economic development. Social cohesion helps prevent socio-political polarization by tapping into the local peace building networks which can manage and interrupt conflict forming dynamics, and provide space for new forms of political consensus. Reconciliation is the process of restoring social cohesion in societies damaged by conflict and investing in local and national capacities to heal past wrongs. It involves leveraging the full range of socio-psychological, economic and political assets required to address the root causes of grievance, which drives the conflict cycle. We work with partners in conflict situations to identify the most effective community resources for strengthening resilience against conflict forming dynamics and proposing measures, based on evidence that can interrupt processes which have the potential to trigger violent conflict. This helps create conditions for nurturing social cohesion both as a means to prevent conflict and to consolidate a durable peace.

In efforts to build peace in countries emerging from civil war or internal strife, even the most well-intentioned (and ostensibly neutral) international interveners face challenging choices regarding how to meet urgent humanitarian needs and jumpstart economic recovery and development in conflict-affected countries. Often, during the course of war, the state has lost its legitimacy, its capacity as a service provider is compromised or eviscerated, or the state been captured by a party to the conflict. In the immediate aftermath of conflict, interveners understandably work with what

exists, and they often conclude that meeting urgent needs is best furthered by channeling aid through informal institutions such as faith-based civil society groups and on-the-ground religious or identity-based institutions. In light of such processes, critics argue that external intervention in countries affected by identity-based conflict often leads to unintended consequences. It can strengthen nationalistic or exclusive social forces at the expense of building cross-cutting, conflict-ameliorating ties, undermine social cohesion across religious, ethnic, or other identity lines, and at times, limit the capacity of the state to expand its authority and recover its legitimacy. Strengthening clientelism and ethnic or faith-based service delivery may weaken the state, and the inclusion of presumed leaders of such groups in national dialogue does not automatically lead to more cohesive societies or to state building. Supporting religious institutions in peace or development efforts, for example, may create “bonding” social capital (strengthening within group ties) at the expense of supporting a state and a civil society that is based on “bridging” social capital (strengthening between-group ties). Moreover, the “illiberal” nature of some religious institutions and actors can undermine the advancement of certain global norms, particularly on key global agendas such as women’s participation and empowerment.

### **3.0 Research Methodology**

The study was a literature based. Comprehensive review of literature on role of Kuron Peace Village in promoting social cohesion and peaceful co-existence in South Sudan was conducted to obtain study themes.

### **4.0 Findings and Discussions**

Based on the reviewed literature, the study found that the violent conflicts in South Sudan have had very negative and severe impacts on the communities that are involved in these conflicts and the entire country at large. Several consequences of violent conflicts, including loss of human life, property, displacements of large segments of the communities, disruption of socio-economic activities and livelihoods, increased hatred between communities and environmental degradation. The threat to water catchments areas, increased economic hardships as a result of loss of livelihoods, high levels of starvation and malnutrition among the displaced groups and unprecedented dependency syndrome are the impacts of the increasing and severe inter-ethnic armed conflicts in northern Kenya.

Social cohesion is the state of a society’s convergence, or the common bonds that unify different people and groups that share space and territory. It comes about when people buy into and interact with each other based on a common set of political, economic and social institutions. The quality of coexistence between the multiple groups that operate within a society. Groups can be distinguished in terms of ethnic and socio-cultural origin, religious, and political beliefs, social class or economic sector or on the basis of interpersonal characteristics such as gender and age. Quality of coexistence between the groups can be evaluated along the dimensions of mutual respect and trust, shared values and social participation, life satisfaction and happiness as well as structural equality and social justice.

Based on the studies, Bishop Taban is a living example of promoter of coexistence in South Sudan through his efforts to unite the population in the area and set an example of peaceful coexistence in war-torn South Sudan. After the construction of a bridge on Kuron River to connect the regions (Kuron with Boma, Kacipho and Pachala) eighty-one families of different pastoralist ethnic groups from Toposa, Jiye, Murle, Nyangatom and Kacipho decided on their own, to settle around the bridge in order to protect it. Although these communities trace their origin to a common ancestry,

they view themselves as traditional enemies due to cattle raiding, competition for control and access to natural resources, mainly water sources and grazing land. The bridge became a blessing and a uniting factor to them because after settling around the bridge, they used it to communicate for peace and reconciliation. At present there are representatives from six nationalities and twelve ethnic tribes. However, the bridge. However, the bridge also became a curse as the same Toposa, Jiye, Murle, Nyangatom, and Kacipho used it as highway during the rainy seasons to intensify cattle raids because it facilitated the crossing of the river with raided animals.

Based on literature, the Holy Trinity Peace Village in Kuron was to improve the otherwise volatile peace and reduce tensions and divisions among the communities living in this area, and thus, has made significant progress in addressing the situation of the conflict. Hence, the establishment of Kuron Peace Village has brought together all the warring parties in understanding cohesion. One can clearly see the tools for measuring cohesion: social trust, life satisfaction, participation in village governance and social behavior. Kuron used to be a raiding ground but due to the efforts of Bishop Taban's peace initiatives, the place is having school, hospital, agriculture, peace school and transformation of livelihoods. Hence, by the involvement of community leaders through dialogue, deepening their understanding to alleviate the situation, manage ongoing situation to promote social cohesion and lasting peace in the community.

The study found that the idea for a peace village came to the Bishop in the 1990s when he visited Neve Shalom in Israel, a place where Jews and Palestinians live together peacefully and in 2000 a bridge was built over the river Kuron with help from the Netherlands. The years thereafter Holy Trinity Peace Village Kuron was founded; nowadays, a few dozen people from different origins (USA, Norway, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and South Sudan) are working in the health centre and primary school they set up with the Bishop (Dennis, 2018). Others are introducing new modes of agricultural production, and are engaged in peace building, together with the local community. Peace is promoted through dialogue, traditional conflict resolution and inclusive conflict transformation. Sports and theatre are used to raise community awareness, while cross-border exchanges enable warriors and chiefs to learn from practices in peace building and local governance in Uganda and Kenya. Emeritus Bishop Paride Taban is the founder of Holy Trinity Peace Village Kuron. Kuron is a beacon of peace within the conflict-ridden country of South Sudan. The bishop has dedicated his whole life to the promotion of dialogue and development in South Sudan, as well as across the border in Uganda and Kenya. In his struggle for peace he has not hesitated to tell the truth to political leaders and local warlords.

The study also found that the Kuron a peace village built a culture of mutual respect among the warring communities in Kuron and by building a culture of mutual respect it was then possible to overcome tribal divisions and build a new national identity. It was also essential to foster a culture of dialogue to avoid cycles of revenge and animosity. There had been progress towards this before the current crisis, and now perhaps there is an opportunity to start building programmes for the future once more. Essential to this will be developing effective programmes of civic education, with the particular aim of enabling free and informed discussion in the media, which is often co-opted for negative messages; this would follow efforts after the CPA to teach people about the importance of peace and the content of the CPA, so they could understand how best to work towards it and become involved in the process. The same has to happen in teaching youth about leadership and governance, by giving exposing them to multiple viewpoints and allowing them to counter negative media narratives.



The study further found that, through the establishment of Kuron peace village, nowadays, a few dozen people from different origins are working in the health centre and primary school they set up with the Bishop. Others are introducing new modes of agricultural production, and are engaged in peace building, together with the local community which was not possible before the peace village was initiated. Peace is promoted through dialogue, traditional conflict resolution and inclusive conflict transformation. Sports and theatre are used to raise community awareness, while cross-border exchanges enable warriors and chiefs to learn from practices in peace building and local governance in Uganda and Kenya.

Further, the study found that Kuron peace village also promotes peace and development through the use of sports and theatre. Sports and theatre form creative means for raising awareness and opening discussion about local problems, such as gender-based violence, cattle raiding and alcoholism. In addition, sports unite former enemies and offer young warriors a non-violent alternative and an organized form of competition to prove their valour. PAX supports Kuron Peace Village in facilitating dialogue between communities. Kuron has established local peace committees and is training them to monitor peace and security in the region and discuss and tackle cause and consequences of inter-communal and gender-related violence. Also, aside to dialogue with the local population, Kuron peace village has strived to engage in dialogue with authorities, with assistance from PAX. A good example of a dialogue on a higher level is the 2014 peace agreement between the rebel faction of David Yau Yau in Jonglei province and the South Sudanese government.

## **5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations**

Based on the existing literature, the study concludes the establishment of Kuron peace village, brought with it opportunities for the local communities as a few dozen people from different origins (USA, Norway, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and South Sudan) were now able to work in the health centre and primary school which were set up with the help of the Bishop. The study also concludes that the peace village was playing a big role in enabling the local communities to engage new modes of agricultural production, and were engaged in peace building, together with the local community which was not possible before the peace village was initiated. Peace is promoted through dialogue, traditional conflict resolution and inclusive conflict transformation. Sports and theatre are used to raise community awareness, while cross-border exchanges enable warriors and chiefs to learn from practices in peace building and local governance in Uganda and Kenya.

The study also concludes that Peace is promoted through dialogue, traditional conflict resolution and inclusive conflict transformation. Sports and theatre are used to raise community awareness, while cross-border exchanges enable warriors and chiefs to learn from practices in peace building and local governance in Uganda and Kenya. Emeritus Bishop Paride Taban is the founder of Holy Trinity Peace Village Kuron. Kuron is a beacon of peace within the conflict-ridden country of South Sudan. The bishop has dedicated his whole life to the promotion of dialogue and development in South Sudan, as well as across the border in Uganda and Kenya. In his struggle for peace he has not hesitated to tell the truth to political leaders and local warlords. Strengthening social cohesion has become an imperative of the 21st century. The study also concludes that violent armed conflicts such as civil wars, violent extremism and radicalization, including terror attacks, and armed violence including murder, kidnapping, and gender-based violence, posed grave threats to sustained peace in Kuron village, South Sudan before the emergence of Kuron peace village. Such conflict, and the absence or erosion of social cohesion that follows in its wake, undermined

development, increased insecurities and fears, and left many locals and contexts vulnerable to further or escalating violence.

The communities share the experiences of the existing tensions that may lead to conflicts. This leads community members to hear views from each other and together define best strategies for preventing potential conflict through dialogue. The basic element of community dialogue is the creation of a safe space where community members feel confident enough to acknowledge and take responsibility to prevent conflict that may have hurt members of the community. The community members such as elders, chiefs and women have special role to play in decision making particularly pertaining to cattle rustling, either it's favorable time or not. Nevertheless, their role in cattle rustling is undecided. The community usually gets a share of the acquired livestock, particularly after a successful cattle rustling. Hence, the community suffers from the negative effects of the conflict.

Peace enriches our communities and individual lives, as it directs us to embrace diversity and support one another to the fullest extent possible. Through caring, generosity, and fairness we provide a cornerstone for attaining a sustainable, just, meaningful, vibrant, and fulfilling personal and community life. With the multiplication and escalation of conflicts at various levels, the need for conflict resolution has become more urgent than ever before. There has been a realization among governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations that more resources and time need to be set apart for managing conflicts and that the work for peace has to take place by harnessing the cooperation of several agencies at different levels. Apart from creating a congenial atmosphere for negotiations, where the prospects for such negotiations are not visible at the level of the conflicting actors, peace organizations can play a key role in many intractable conflicts. Peace building is now seen as a part of sustaining agreements reached, no peace organization is perhaps more equipped than non-governmental and religious groups in undertaking this task of promoting social cohesion and peaceful co-existence among warring communities. However, in order to play a more effective role in conflict management, religious and peace communities should reorient themselves with the requisite attitude and skills, which of course should be seen as an additional element of their development work.

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