

Children's Perception of Conflict and Conflict Resolution and Impacts of Armed Conflict

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Abstract

This study examined the impacts of war in South Sudan on children's perception of conflict and conflict resolution. Data were secured from key informants, community representatives, parents, and children through FGDs, interviews and questionnaires. Synthesis of data from these different sources indicated that gender-related offences, conflict over grazing land, violence and communication problems were noted to predate or extend conflicts. Distinctive features of these conflicts included employing more violent methods in conflict management, group and tribal conflicts being common occurrences as an extension of past enmity, present individual/group discords, and even playful acts. The armed conflict seemed to impact on children become more violent, disobedient, and difficult to communicate with particularly compared to their parents as children and other children living in a war-free neighboring zone. These concerns were still more serious among former child soldiers than community children. Of course, children also tended to endorse non-violent methods of conflict resolution apparently promising a move towards recovery through time. Implications were drawn for interventions to scaffold these promising initiatives.

Keywords: *Armed conflict South Sudan; conflict resolution; peace building; violence; resilience*

Introduction

The war in Sudan, which culminated in the establishment of South Sudan as an independent African state in 2011, was one of the longest and bloodiest civil war recoded in African history [1]. Particularly, the last two decades of the SPLM/A led armed conflict has caused "tremendous atrocities and destructions" [2]. These atrocities involved "aerial bombardment and ground attacks on villages and SPLA-controlled towns" [3] resulting in the level of displacement and destruction that was "rarely seen anywhere in the world since World War II" [4]. Two and half million people have died of war-related causes between 1983 and 2005 with most South Sudanese being convinced that "Sudan had conducted genocide in the South" [4]. The war has also caused cross border migration and internal displacement of about 3,400,000 civilians [5] with only 49,160 children (51.65% boys) returning from refugee camps in the neighboring countries between 2006 and August 2008 [6].

As a result of these experiences, South Sudan registered the worst health [7], economic [8], and education records [9]. In fact, whenever there are such and related other malpractices, children are the ones to be affected most. Different estimates indicate, for example, that non-school going children in South Sudan were extremely the highest in the world: about 96.5% [10], 92.5% [28], 84.2% [9], and 80.31% [11]. The vast majority of learning spaces were found to provide insufficient cover for children and teachers [12]. Evidences also

¹The South-North Sudanese conflict is believed to be a cumulative effect of a number of lower scale conflicts that prevailed in the area over the turn of centuries. The war dates back to the early 19th c Egyptian invasion down the road to the Southerners' mutiny in 1955 in Torit, to the Anya Anya movement of the 1965, and the birth of SPLA in the 1980s (Belay, 2015, pp.3-5). Hence, there is neither a specific cause nor specific date that can be singled out to mark the beginning of the war.

indicate that child soldiering and abduction were major problems during the war [10]. At the household level, children expressed hard living conditions characterized by acute shortage of food, clothing, and school materials [11]. War-induced material deprivations and severe economic hardship had created a sense of frustration among parents that in turn resulted in domestic violence against children [11]. The war has also caused about 34,980 children join streets immediately after the CPA only in six cities alone [11].

Against a backdrop of these war-induced physical and material concerns, we may need to explore if such experiences would translate themselves into impacting on children's subjectivities as well; their notions, engagements, disengagements, and coping with conflicts [13] because acknowledging such understandings and sentiments in interventions had helped addressing the deep-seated factors escalating conflicts in Congo [14], Rwanda [15], Africa at large [13], and, of course, would do the same in South Sudan, too. In fact, existing theories and research underscore violence and aggression as antecedents, constituents, and/or consequents of armed conflicts. However, such cause-effect predictability has been put to debate [16,17] because cause-effect cycles are rather moderated by a number of factors that go beyond individual to cultural and social analysis. How far then violence and aggression characterize children's narratives of conflict and conflict management in societies, like South Sudan, that are replete with indigenous African methods of conflict resolution (29). Do children's voices embody an aura of traditional peaceful conflict resolution like appeal to mediation by the third party [18] or are they destined to articulating the 'violence begets violence' common ideology [19]? More importantly, given that armed conflicts would subject young people to negative impacts of one kind or another, how far then the South Sudanese children navigate through the journey of resiliency and recovery?

Although war undeniably subjects humans to myriad negative consequences and despite all the efforts made at theorizing conflicts and a plethora of empirical investigations, there has been a narrow focus on problems of conflicts among young people involved in and exposed to armed conflicts [19]. For example, in a survey research conducted to examine the prevalence of "child/youth armed conflict" in a social science database of articles from 1983 through 2008, it was found that 65 percent of the relevant citations portrayed children and young persons in terms of war-related damage and concerns about 'cycles of violence' [19]. Researchers have explained that negative outcomes are inevitable corollaries of war [20] but search for negatives has been over emphasized [21] and exclusionary; suggesting that there is a need to broaden our inquiry [19,22] with the hope to unveil levels of recovery, adjustment, resilience, and development [16,23]. According to Daiute [19], there is a need to shift the focus from young subjects to subjectivities for creating analyses of violence that integrate individual and societal development (p.2).

In tune with this view, the present study attempts to explore the impacts of the war in South Sudan on children's perceptions of conflict and conflict resolution mechanisms. It attempts to sketch out the distinctive features of conflicts and resolutions, how these features were impacted on by the armed conflict, if there are trends towards recovery from impacts, and critical issues worth considering in pursuit of an ultimate peace building in the area.

Methods

Data Sources: The research was conducted in 11 different bomas sampled from seven counties of South Sudan: Maridi (Zandi, Avokaya, MoruKodu), Bor Dinka (Nyarweang, Kongor), Nyal (Nuer), Rumbek, Cueibet, Meluakon (Awil East, Awil west), and Yirol. Some data were also secured for comparative purposes from one adjacent county in Ethiopia apparently having similar tribe and socio-cultural context but little exposed to armed conflicts and, therefore, can be considered a 'war-free zone'. In South Sudan, data were collected from key informants, community representatives, parents, and children using focus group discussions (FGDs), interviews, and questionnaires. Children, parents, and teachers were used from the Ethiopian side; but in the interest of space only limited data are borrowed from this group and included in our present discussion.

Key Informants were interviewed for making a general assessment of the impact of the war in South Sudan. They were composed of five informed adults recommended for inclusion by gatekeepers. Community representatives consisting of the elderly were also involved in generating data about types, causes, and strategies of conflicts in the communities of Southern Sudan before, during, and after the war.

Children (aged 14 to 20 years) were used to secure data regarding engagements, causes and strategies of conflict and resolution. One FGD was conducted in each of the 11 centers or bomas to examine impacts of the war on perceptions of conflict and its management. The FGDs were conducted based on three assumptions to be considered one at a time; i.e. 'assume that a serious conflict has occurred between two friends, a child and a parent, and two children of different ethnic groups'. Each of these three assumptions was followed by nine questions: What factors led these children to the conflict? What are these children going to do next? Why? What were they supposed to do to stop this conflict? What should they do so that the problem may not escalate any further in the future? Is it possible for these groups not to fight this conflict? How? What is the role of the child who won the conflict? What about the one losing the conflict?

Furthermore, some of the participants were also interviewed in each FGD group (19 girls, 43 boys, and 37 former child soldiers) for more information. Finally, these questions were presented in a form of self-administered questionnaire to a sample of 48 students in Deng Nyal Primary School, Rumbek Town (16 were former child soldiers and 32 were community children). The questionnaire consisted of 8 open-ended items, four of which were suppositional. The other four were experiential types. The suppositional questions were: What do you do if you have a problem with another child? What do you do if another student insults you? What do you do if another student beats you? And what do you do if another student steals your exercise book? The experiential questions were of a sort "consider the most recent serious conflict you had with someone (friend, brother, parent, and teacher)" one at a time. What was it and what did you do to solve it?

In order to get more information on disciplinary behaviors of children, a questionnaire was administered to a sample of (24 South Sudanese and 64 Ethiopian) teachers so that they would compare former child soldiers and community students (South Sudan) as well as present and past students (both groups of teachers). Parents were also contacted from both sides to secure comparative data on types, causes and strategies of conflict before the war and at present. It is assumed that parents were children themselves before the war. Now having their own children with them, they are in a better position to compare children of their period with their own children in terms of conflict and conflict resolution. FGDs were conducted in each of the 11 centers (and one more in Ethiopia) to learn about types, causes and methods of conflict and conflict resolutions among children in the past and the present day children. Nearly half of these participants were interviewed separately in each center about the most unforgettable conflicts they had with their own parents as children, and the most unforgettable conflicts their children had with them as parents, they themselves had with their parents, how the conflicts were managed, and if they were resolved/ unresolved, and why.

Data collection went through a lengthy procedure of security checks from the army and ethical clearance from the Ministry of Gender, Social Welfare and Religious Affairs. Once consent was granted, these offices communicated through telephone calls to the respective county and boma chiefs so that they would facilitate the work. Required participants were finally contacted with the help of boma chiefs, given orientation about the purpose of the work and then asked for oral consent to appear for FGDs and interviews. Participation was absolutely based on oral consent. Some didn't appear the next day for the FGDs and interviews possibly implying for us that they were not consenting.

Results and Discussions

We begin analysis with conflicts (types, causes, and mechanisms) to identify their characterizing features. Then attempts are made to examine if the identified features are attributable to the armed conflict. Two separate analyses are triangulated to show how these features have been induced by the armed conflict. First, conflicts and mechanisms are compared between groups of children. This analysis yielding that the present children are generally more violent, then further line of inquiry is pursued to see to it that these changes are not mere generation changes but are rather impacted by the armed conflict. Finally, attempts are made to discuss children's narratives to identifying instances of resilience.

Nature of conflicts: types, causes, measures

A total of 79 unforgettable conflicts were identified through interview with adults; 57% were conflicts that occurred in more recent years and the remaining were conflicts in the past. Among the major problems mentioned were adultery, dowry issues, abduction of girls,

rape, love affairs before marriage, and dispute over grazing land. In the FGDs and interviews, adultery and related problems emerged as recurrent themes.

The distinct feature of marriage in South Sudan is that there is no limit to the number of wives a man can marry as far as he affords the dowry. According to key Informant 2 (Veteran teacher), adultery is highly condemned because it entails infringing someone to whom a husband has made material investment on. This being the case, there were those who were in the army and lacked resources and time for marriage. There were also those persons whose material resources were devastated by the war. These problems led to acts of sexual violence like adultery, rape and abduction of girls. Love affair before marriage was again a common non-violent but still "serious offence" because it meant that a girl was to marry to a man without dowry being provided to parents and relatives. Adultery and related acts usually lead to group disputes in South Sudan because the dowry issue affects the interest of a group; not just an individual. Parents and relatives are obliged to contribute cattle for the dowry of a marrying boy and have in return the right to share incoming dowries of a marrying daughter.

Disputes between tribes over grazing land were the other common problems reported in South Sudan. That is, children of one tribe may extend cattle grazing to the territory of another tribe, eventually causing group disputes of a tribal nature as noted from interviewees and FGDs. This was reported to result in conflicts between: *two tribes over drinking water, a conflict of young people of two tribes over fishing area, Dinka – Arab conflict over grazing land, youth conflict and killing between two tribes because of cattle grazing, youth conflict of two tribes over land border, a conflict of four tribes over grazing land, killings in a fight of two tribes over grazing land, and open fight between Nuer and Dinka youth over grazing land.* In addition, agro-pastoralism is characterized by absence of a sedentary life style and, hence, can generate conflicts. Such life style would obviously become more vulnerable during armed conflicts.

Another characteristic feature of conflicts mentioned by interviewees was that they involved violence (killings, fights, rebelliousness, displacement, abduction...) either before or after they occur, or even both in about 76% of the conflicts reported. A number of other evidences emerging from key informant interviews also indicated that children have come violent in many ways: "involved in criminal acts of conduct" (Key Informant 4, Police Officer), "were reluctant in what they do, disrespecting people, involving in robbery, and indifferent during community social work projects" (Key Informant 5, Community Mobilizer in Rumbek Town), and "just want to fight than going to school".

Similar views emerged from children's FGDs on the suppositional question, 'What factors are likely to lead the children to conflict?' Violence was indicated as a major factor between children of different tribal groups taking such acts as *disrespect, abuse, suppression, proud, mistreatment, abducting things, calling someone by ethnic name;* just to use children's own terms. In conflicts between children of the same tribe, this violence seems to take a form of verbal abuse that violates the rights of others. *Insult, harsh words, disrespect, abuse, misbehavior, mistreatment, right not respected, disobedience...* were the words used to describe the causes.

Serious conflicts also emerged in the playground while children were engaged in games; mainly traditional wrestling. Winning and losing games, violations of the rules of the games and breaking associated promises were the most commonly mentioned causes of conflicts between two children. These disagreements tended to grow into serious group fights of a tribal nature as it was also noted from adults talking about causes of conflicts: *Fighting among children in a dancing place, wrestling game of boys leading to tribal conflict, youth fight because of defeat in wrestling game, children playing with gun and one shooting another, youth conflict between two tribes each needing to sing one's song in a gathering place, wrestling of two boys growing into tribal conflict and killing.* According to the Community Mobilizer in Rumbek Town (Key Informant 5), no one really tells for sure when children play and when they fight. Conflicts arise anytime during play. And, any single incident initiated between two children would immediately turn up to serious group violence in many cases taking a tribal divide.

"Discussions occur only if third parties are involved and this usually happens after the fights. You don't see boys in conflict coming to terms before fights. I think talking before fights is considered 'womanish' while fighting before talking is 'manly'. They fight and then mediation follows only to stop further escalation of conflicts" (Key Informant 5). Interview results with adults have yielded that in almost 95% of the conflicts, negotiations occurred after serious fights, killings, or destructions. Furthermore, while 82.27% were group-based, only 17% were individual conflicts. Children's FGDs suggested that 'enmity between children because of hostilities in the past' were the causes of subsequent conflicts particularly among children of different tribes.

Children's violations of family and communal rules, lack of discipline and misbehavior, big crimes (e.g. selling cattle without the permission of parents), disobedience and refusal to parental advice, and lack of respect for adults were mentioned to cause conflicts between them and parents. Parents' violence against children was also commonly mentioned using such expressions as "*failure to respect rights, mistreatment, mismanagement, poor method of child handling, and toughness*".

In all the three types of conflicts, children mentioned that violation of rights is a major source of conflict; suggesting that today's children are aware of issues of child rights. Other problems not raised during interviews with adults but emerged from children's FGDs included communication problems, misunderstanding, and arguments as major causes of conflicts: *preempting attitudes and biases, intolerance to others, difficulties to appreciate others, feelings of suspiciousness of the intentions of others*.

Children's responses to the other three suppositional questions still suggested that violence is likely to follow from conflicts among children. However, children's responses to the more reflective question, 'what children were supposed to do next', was perceived to be contradicting to what they think it is customarily practiced; suggesting that they are aware of the fact that violence is inappropriate and yet used as a conflict mechanism for different reasons. Note that in all the three types of conflicts, children suggested the need to take such non-violent measure as *reporting to others (parent, teacher, elderly council, relatives) for mediation, discussing or negotiating directly with the person in conflict, forgiving and reconciling*. In fact, a more preventive measure was even suggested particularly in child-parent (i.e. *let parents teach the child, send the child to school*) and child-child conflicts (i.e. *cooperate, support and respect each other*). Similar responses also came from experiential questions, what is your most recent conflict with a friend, sibling, parent, and teacher. Violence (or fight) was rarely mentioned both as a cause as well as effect of conflicts. Major factors in the conflicts with all the four groups were rather non-violent: *Stealing property, taking my property without permission, communication problems, misunderstanding, and gossips*. While problems related to games were also included in conflicts with friends and siblings, disobedience to parents and teachers were other causes sparingly mentioned. Measures taken were still non-violent mechanisms: *discussion, negotiation, and then forgiveness; report to parents, relatives, teachers, office*.

The last issue pertains to the role of the winner and the loser in the three types of conflicts. The most important understanding for dissolving a conflict (i.e. the view that the two parties should forget the idea of winning and losing) was mentioned least. Of course, revenge by the loser was not mentioned but can be implied from all other responses. For example, the winner was given the merit of playing a dominant role: *teach the loser, tell the loser to forget, reconcile with the loser, respect the loser* etc. These views communicate a message that the loser is somehow powerless, dependent, and inferior. This could make the loser to fight to reverse one's position. A more direct implication of revenge is implied from the that ascribed positive feelings, values and even incentives to winning and opposite feelings to losing: *winner feels happy, proud, and take rest from school work; loser will always have a fight, get enslaved, become victim*. In an extreme case, some discussants even took the position that the winner is entitled to receive apologies from the loser. Those arguing that '*the winner should not intimidate the loser*' were in fact more visible as a group in the discussions. Though this position seems reasonable, it, however, suggests that losing a fight can result in intimidation and, hence, one has to die fighting rather than submitting to losing.

Conflicts and mechanisms compared between groups of children

In order to understand the impacts of the war on children, we need to examine if groups of children assumed to be more vulnerable are likely to exhibit more war-related problems. It is hypothesized in this regard that the effect of the war is envisaged to be more cumbersome

some among the former child soldiers than non-soldiers or community children; the present children of South Sudan than children in the past (or children before the war), and children in South Sudan than those from a similar neighboring culture but least exposed to armed conflicts (a bordering region in Ethiopia).

Former child soldiers-community children: Child soldiers are likely to be more affected because they were actors themselves during the war. The experience of the notorious "Goat Army" can be cited as an example. These are groups of child soldiers who have been using their weapons to looting goats from the community during the war [24]. The Head Master of Deng Nyal Primary School (Key Informant 2) also explained that *the demobilized child soldiers joining the school were difficult to handle at the time they begun schooling* because they were very aggressive. They used to fight among themselves, with the community children, and teachers all the time. Some were even refusing to get into classrooms to learn. Teachers had to collect them to class. The teachers were willing to work with and gradually managed to socialize them. That is, in the dormitories where these children were sleeping in a group of about 30, one teacher was assigned to stay with them in the night, visit them regularly and talk to them in the process.

More evident data emerges from teachers' comparative ratings of the disciplinary behaviors of the two groups of children along 13 items. Statistical test of ratings shows that former child soldiers ($P_1=56.15\%$) were misbehaving significantly higher ($Z_{24}=5.543$, $P<.000$) than the community students ($P_2=43.85\%$).

Present-Past children: The same teachers were required to compare school misbehaviors of their present students ($P_1=89.85\%$) with students of their time ($P_2=10.15\%$). Test of mean proportions of misbehaviors shows that the proportion of misbehaving present students is significantly higher ($Z_{24}=14.586$, $P<.000$) than past students. The difference in the proportion of students' school misbehaviors in the two generations ($P_{d1}=80\%$) was nearly twice the differences between the proportion of misbehaving former child soldiers and non-soldiers ($P_{d2}=46\%$) and this difference is statistically significant ($Z_{48}=2841$, $P<.00$).

Furthermore, the FGD conducted with parents to compare conflict and resolutions among past and present children also yielded that present children were more violent than those in the past. Children in the past were indicated to have less serious or minor conflicts, which could hardly extend into other forms of conflicts. The conflicts occurring among children of the present generation were described to be serious enough to trigger not only familial but also tribal conflicts. It was also indicated that unlike children in the past, the present children are *disobedient and disrespecting authority of one kind or another, difficult to communicate with, lacking in respect to traditional norms and customs, demanding materially (asking for clothing, education etc.), and resenting rural life in favor of life in towns*. In all the discussions, these problems were attributed to the war resulting in normlessness and exposure to fights, and giving them the leverage to run away from parents. With respect to methods of handling conflicts, it was indicated that children in the past were discussing problems among themselves and solve them. They did not take their problems elsewhere even home for fear of parents. When they had problems with their parents, they used to go to relatives and/ or persons closer to their parents and then seek reconciliation through this third party. Present children, on the other hand, were depicted to engaging in group fights that easily extend to parents and tribes. Adults were involved either to side or resolve conflicts. In fact, it was found from in the interview with community representatives that the majority of group conflicts were youth-initiated.

Parents were also asked about the most unforgettable conflicts they had with their own parents as children, and the most unforgettable conflicts their children had with them as parents. Responding to this question, parents didn't display "I am okay, you are not" attitude. They were fair enough to indicate not only the problems of their children; they equally reported their own problems as a child. In fact, there are clear differences in the problems they mentioned. While they saw their children as disobedient, disrespectful, and difficult to communicate with, they found themselves as neglectful of duties and responsibilities because their parents were "demanding, mistreating, and unfair in their expectations". We generally note that while Sudanese parents were caught between demanding children and demanding parents, the Ethiopian parents contacted for comparative data were themselves demanding as children. This implies that whereas Sudanese parents relate to their children in ways they were not relating with their own parents, Ethiopian parents replicate

their childhood experiences as parents. That is, they seem to rear their children the way they were reared up by their parents. The truth in these responses seemed that the changes in parenthood seemed sharp in South Sudan. That is, they were neglectful (mild or nonviolent form of disobedience) as children, but their children have come more than being neglectful (i.e., disobedient more violent form of a neglectful reaction).

Parents also indicated that as children they used to runaway to relatives so that relatives can bring them back, help them ask apology, and then reconcile with their parents. On the other hand, they did not mention, like the Ethiopian parents, apology coming from children when doing wrong. This could suggest that as children these parents used to see themselves as a person taking share in the conflicts that occurred; that they have an obligation to perform duties assigned by their parents, and hence feel guilty for failing to do them and ask for apology in different ways. This is a tendency to internalize conflicts. On the other hand, their children were considered falling short of this practice; that they are not taking part in the conflict or that they have the right to behave the way they do, and need to be apologized for all wrong doing; a tendency to externalize problems. This is clearly seen in the responses of almost all parents indicating that they take the initiative to talk to their children rather than their children initiating talk about conflicts.

Sudanese children and children in the neighboring area: Teachers in the neighboring area of Ethiopia were asked to rate their students as in the South Sudanese teachers. Comparison of mean proportions yielded that the South Sudanese group ($P_1=89.85$) was significantly more violent ($Z_{92}= 3.055$, $P<.00$) than its counterpart ($P_2=53.43$); gap in the two generations is significantly more in South Sudan possibly because of the war. Furthermore, children's responses to suppositional questions from the Ethiopian side have shown that conflicts with others will lead to direct discussions and negotiations for minor conflicts and a third party arbitration (that goes from a friend then to a teacher, a parent, and then court) for more serious ones. However, measures like serious fights particularly in groups, and other forms of violence were less frequently mentioned.

Differences between children: Impacts of the war or Generation change?

The responses of children, key informant interviewees, teachers and parents seem to generally converge to an understanding that present children have become violent in many ways. The question is then "would this be a normal 'generation change' or the effect of the armed conflict per se?" Of course, we would hardly rule out the transformation of a society across historical period due in part to its own internal dynamics as well as the pull and push effects of external factors interacting with the internal forces. We still admit that the kind of social and cultural transformation witnessed in more recent days is even far reaching than at any moment in history. Yet, we can't down play the net effect of the armed conflict casting its shadows on the socio-cultural and psychological life of the people in South Sudan. In fact, we believe that the armed conflict is rather a variable that takes even much more space structuring the South Sudanese socio-cultural profile than any other variable. For one thing, the armed conflict had cut off South Sudan from the rest of the world for decades ultimately making the revolutionizing effect of globalization, urbanization, and technological innovations less feasible to the South Sudanese reality. For another, war changes society dramatically; it clouds on the social, cultural, economic, and political environs; thus making everyday discourse center around it [19]. Leaving such bigger arguments for a separate socio-political and structural analysis, we only focus on specific instances to support our claims at the moment.

To begin with, some humanitarian agencies, for example, attempted during the war to keep some children in a place called "school" at least in relatively peaceful areas. Yet, this turned out to be a difficult exercise not only because schools were successively targeted and children run away from schools in search of safe places, with an unfortunate outcome that some of them were trapped in the process into joining the armed conflict themselves. It was, more importantly, because the prevailing social and political climate being war-related, children were also found demotivated for any schooling activity (Save the Children Sweden, 2002, P.10).

Second, whatever infrastructures put in place were nearly demolished [4] and witnessing these destructions would in itself trigger such feelings of uneasiness as 'indignation and revenge' one time and 'frustration and powerlessness' another time. In the eyes of the Key Informant 1, the conflict has caused massive displacement of people; killings of innocent civilians; many homeless people; parents sepa-

rated from children resulting in many orphan children; starvation, disease, injury; disruption and under-development of social services. The war has widened the gap between the two provinces and this has caused discontent among the southerners.

Third, because the war has demolished resources and impoverished South Sudan [1,2,25], people were supposed to use anything at their disposal to sustain their life (Key Informant 4, Police Officer). The notorious "Goat Army", first noted in 2000 [24], is a story that portrays poverty-violence nexus particularly during armed conflicts, "During SCS work with child soldiers in 1998, it was established that more than 60 percent of the 288 children in the Leer ... district. Joined the military out of their own volition ... Their main reason.... was because they could find food easily. By using their guns, they were able to feed themselves..." (P.9). Explaining the malevolent impacts of the war on children, the County Judge (Key Informant 3) has also acknowledged that children were involved in criminal acts because this is the way for them to sustain their life, "*In my experience as a judge, I have come to see that many children involve in theft to feed themselves*". According to the Community Mobilizer in Rumbek Town, acts of violence were not into the South Sudanese culture; they were learned from soldiers. According to him, 'feelings of indifference to life' he noted in some children during the implementation of the community social work project was possibly because "children were encountering many people dying in front of their eyes" (Key Informant 5).

Fourth, the armed conflict was noted to bring about changes in the practices of conflict resolution. For example, in almost all the conflicts that participants reported to have occurred during the war, the military was involved in the mediation/ arbitration process. According to Key Informant 3, the military was handling disputes referring to the SPLA Act, which was purely a military law, rather than applying the traditional methods that the elderly were practicing. According to this Informant, army officials were interfering with the functions of courts even after the establishment of the judiciary. In the same way that the military assumed a changed role, the elderly people and community chiefs also experienced changes in their civic responsibilities of settling disputes in the community. In many parts of Southern Sudan, "... *chiefs explained that they often recruited children into the army since they (children) did not pay taxes. Chiefs had to contribute taxes in the form of good and cash to the local administration and to the war efforts. Since adult males were the principal sources of taxes, recruiting them would mean a drop in resources. Less tax meant that a chief was inefficient and he would lose his position. The chiefs met their quota of soldiers by recruiting children*" [24]. The chiefs' attempt to force children to go to war to fight would definitely undermine their credibility among the community. The present researcher have also come across with an experience in one FGD that even the elderly have plaid a role other than settling disputes during the war. It was said that the elderly were the ones who were giving blessings to the newly recruited soldiers. It is also these same people who were making sure that the soldier who is returning back home is going through some rituals such as killing a goat and make him wash hands with the blood to cleanse the sin committed during the war.

South Sudanese children beyond vulnerabilities: Instances of resilience

It may leave our curiosity wide open to know if the children are all victims of the armed conflict in general. Evidences suggest in this regard that, contrary to the portrayal of children as victims of the armed conflict, there are signs of resiliency and recovery amidst all the oddities operating to detour the developmental land scape. The story of the 'Lost Boys' and the 'Goat Army' were two instances that were raised during FGDs as well as verified latter through the works of SCS [24].

The armed conflict was believed to have exposed a sizeable proportion of South Sudanese young boys to multiple displacement filled with hardships, as in 'The 'Lost Boys' of South Sudan, and yet specific encounters with the surviving boys suggest an amazing resilience. Some of these boys were not only moving forward for their own sake; they were still engaged in projects that promote the wellbeing of their fellowmen back home. A case in point was the founder of the Sudanese American Orphaned Rehabilitation Organization (SAORO); an organization working on education, rehabilitation, water (borehole) drilling, planting trees, gardening, and related other community development activities (Key Informant 5). This organization is located in Pariang County and its principal office is in the State of Colorado, USA. It was founded in 2006 by one of the lost boys who parted from their parents forcibly during the Sudanese civil war in 1980s and went first to Ethiopia, then to Kenya, and finally to USA in 2001. Another boy, met in a field work for research on street children in Juba, was also found with an amazing stamina as noted from the remarks of the researchers, "we have observed these children developing a very clear vision of transforming themselves from street vendors to business tycoons. For example, we have met a street boy managing

to gradually own 3 motorbikes for rent, a state of the art cell phone, and, above all, a strong sense of optimism to emerge as a self-made businessman in few years" [11]. In fact, one of the assistants of the research team on street children was a lost boy who managed to travel to USA, earned an undergraduate degree in education and finally got back home for a visit.

In the same way, children met during FGDs expressed that the former "Goat Army" members, were, after demobilization, able to establish a family of their own and leading an entirely different life style. In fact, Informant 2 (Head Master of Deng Nyal Primary School) also commented that although demobilized child soldiers were very difficult to manage at the beginning, they gradually improved and many of them continued their education, while of course only few left out the school. Teachers' ratings of misbehaviors of children indicated that the difference between child-soldiers and community children was only 12% compared to the 80 % difference in ratings of the present and past children of South Sudan.

Findings that have wider and more promising implications for resilience were, however, those related to differences in responses to suppositional and experiential questions. Children indicated that violence is what is being practiced and realize that this shouldn't be the case and, hence, indicated that they were not personally involved in such inappropriate courses of actions. Although children may fall short of practicing non-violent mechanisms of conflict resolution, it seems that they understand violence as a course of action that shouldn't be dealt with. Children's experiences with cultural methods of conflict resolution by parents and the elderly might help gauging their own behaviors against this peaceful practice; thereby creating a desire to go for rather than against it.

We believe that these in congruencies of perceptions, ideal images, and practices would ultimately serve as a foundation towards social and cultural transformation of South Sudan. It is believed that with this experience of dissonance as a foundation for change, a number of upcoming inputs would operate hand in glove rebuilding the soft and hardware of South Sudan. The bottom line is the termination of the armed conflict itself giving ample space for citizens to start rebuilding their own life. Furthermore, the South Sudanese Government's efforts in implementing the various policies² would contribute a lot undoing the effects of the war. The multitude of humanitarian agencies operating in South Sudan to scaffolding particularly more vulnerable children is again another source of impetus for reconstructing the new South Sudan. We would generally say that given concerted efforts from stakeholders, the promising responses of the children would structure their developmental landscape in the time to come. As noted from their responses, 'negotiations', 'forgiveness', 'engaging a third part arbitration' and many other non-violent mechanisms would serve as an entry point to effect further development along this direction.

Conclusions

Analysis of the nature of conflicts indicated that gender-related offences (adultery, dowry issues, abduction of girls, rape, love affairs before marriage...) and disputes over grazing land were the most common (forms, causes, or effects) conflicts observed. The distinctive features of conflicts were that they have increasingly become more frequent, serious, violent, and group based mainly along tribal lines. Non-violent methods usually followed conflicts that were primarily dealt through violent means and caused destructions that need to be stopped from further escalation.

The war in South Sudan seemed to be the major factor leading children to violence, aggression, and bullying one another as a mechanism of problem solving. The growth of the young witnessing the culture of war (intolerance, disrespect of authorities, fighting before talking and the norm of normlessness) has made violence to emerge as a recurrent theme in children's notions of conflicts either as an antecedent, concurrent, or consequent action. The armed conflict was considered to bear these impacts mainly because:

²as in formulation of the policy framework for Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, (MCYS, 2006/7) stating the needs, aspirations and empowerment of young persons (15 to 30 years) in Southern Sudan so that they can develop their potential to the maximum possible, and more importantly, the Southern Sudan War Disabled, Widows and Orphans Commission Policy Framework (SSDWOC, 2006) specifically addresses how to mainstream the needs of war affected children.

- Children who were born and grew up during the war (present day) were more violent (aggressive, disobedient, difficult to communicate with, lacked interest in schooling, and were demanding) than their parents as children,
- Demobilized/former child soldiers who were directly involved in the armed conflict as an actor were found to be more violent than community children, and
- Children in South Sudan were more violent than those brought up in the neighboring war-free zone in Ethiopia.

Children's reported mechanisms of conflict management were not in tune with what they practiced. That is, while evidences indicated that they were violent in many cases, their self-perceptions tended, however, to portray that they were in favor of non-violence. This mixed attitude could be because of exposure to mixed practices. On the one hand, there are the practices of war teaching violence. There are, on the other hand, the south Sudanese traditional cultural practice teaching children peaceful methods of conflict resolution. Children's tendency to frequently cling to reconciliation and forgiveness, as observed in this study, may also indicate a compulsive desire to avoid conflicts altogether because of daily observations of the destructive effects of the ongoing war that they witnessed. In any case, this appears to be a positive move towards resiliency.

It may then be legitimate to ask how to intervene to support these signs of resiliency and eventually appropriate the South Sudanese's future. While this article was under writing, the teams of the president and vice president of South Sudan were in a series of peace talks (to settle the dispute that erupted in 2013) with all the promising signs that time has come for peace. Appreciative of both parties for letting the intellect back on track, it seems, however, that time alone has not probably let the "cat out of the cage"; as some individuals hold it. Of course, we can't afford to ignore external agents who are usually behind the peace talks. The advent of peace is obviously an end to the war casting its shadows. But what about undoing the done effects? Will peace heal the wounds of the war by itself? We can't afford to adopt a "wait-and-see" policy in search of an affirmative answer here. A "do it and see" policy is rather a viable, exclusive and ethical action to choose from. Part of this "do it and see" policy package that is expected to work hand-in-glove with the peace talks already taking shape involves prevention of violence through such measures as enabling children to take part in solving problems than helping fellowmen in a fight, encouraging children to learn to identify themselves with national rather than tribal identity etc. However, peace building actually goes beyond prevention of violence [26]. It is also about creating conditions that are conducive to lasting peaceful relations among individuals, communities and society at large [27]. We would, in this connection, recommend Mahatma Gandhi's time honored maxim, "If we start to build peace in this world, it should start with children and it should be very early...." [27]. Our recommendation is then to infuse peace education in early childhood care and education programs for an ultimate goal of peace building in South Sudan.

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