



South Sudan Democratic Engagement Monitoring and Observation Programme (SSuDEMOP)

Report on Further Consensus Building Meeting for Civil Society and Leaders from Various Academia Institutions on Constitution Making Process in South Sudan

Held on 16th Feb 2023 at The Tukul

Introduction

In January 2023, civil society representative and other non-political stakeholder held consensus building meetings to deliberate on their engagement in the anticipated constitution making process as well as enhancing coordination among non-political stakeholders. During the consensus building meetings, there was a general agreement on the need and importance of working together and building stronger synergies as non-political stakeholders. However, the big question was “what are the best modalities for non-political stakeholders to work in collaboration and meaningfully engage in the constitution making process?” This question was raised in regards to the two major groups – faith-based institutions/groups and the academia.

Following the consensus building meeting held on 1st and 2nd February 2023, SSuDEMOP offered to seek support and host further conversation with leaders from the academia. Considering that these institutions are well established and have existent structures, it was suggested that civil society actors need to further build consensus so as to understand how these institutions intend to engage in the constitution making process and agree on modalities of engagement with civil society to facilitate effective participation of non-political stakeholders in the constitution making process.

The half-day meeting was designed to achieve the following objectives:

1. Bring together representatives from different academia to discuss modalities of engagement with civil society actors in the constitution making process.
2. Strengthen working relationship between civil society actors and academia.

Groups present were:

University of Juba (UOJ), Upper Nile University (UNU), John Garang University (JGU) and Rumbek University of Science and Technology (RUST) and other civil society representatives.

Welcoming Remarks by Merekaje Lorna,

Merekaje Lorna welcomed the leaders from academia and thanked them for their positive response to the meeting invitation. She then shared the meeting objectives with the participants and emphasized that the meeting was designed to bring together representatives from Universities to discuss ways to effectively contribute in the constitution making process (CMP). She reminded the participants that, the constitution making process requires collective engagement of all non-political actors such as faith-based group, women, youth and persons with disabilities (PWD) among others. Therefore, there’s need to discuss ways of sustained collective engagement among non-political stakeholders.

She underscored the fact that academia represents the expertise, staff and students who play a vital role in development of the country. However, the big question is how can coordination and existing working relations between the civil society organizations and the academia be enhanced?

She recalled that in 2010 the civil society and other stakeholders played a significant role in awakening the nation ahead of the Referendum for self-determination by campaigning in various state capitals under the slogan “**yes for separation**” which was a civic education effort and helped to mobilize the citizens. This later resulted in South Sudan attaining independence.

Rapporteur: Kirinya

Session One:

Recap of the previous stakeholder meeting **by Bojo Gloria Albert**

She welcomed the representatives and provided a brief highlight from the previous consensus building meetings which established the need for the non-political stakeholders to collectively engage and find synergy so as to work together during the constitution making process. She informed the participants that a similar meeting was held with the faith-based leaders. The idea is that after this, the leaders from the academia will agree on mechanisms of communication between them and the other non-political stakeholders. The meeting agreed to maintain Abraham Deng as the focal person until suggested otherwise.

Plenary session

This session gave the representatives opportunity to share their thoughts and comments on the issues raised in the previous consensus building meetings. The following points were raised during the special session with representatives from the academia.

1. Civil society and academia plays a vital role in influencing important national issues/process. For example, in Kenya and other countries; the non-political actors had a strong voice. Therefore, there's a need for the CSOs and academia to collectively work together in a coordinated manner.
2. The Constitution Making Process Act 2022 provides opportunity for academia to effectively participate as one of the non-political stakeholder groups as provided for by the agreement. Therefore, it is prudent for the academia to agree on how best they intend to contribute to the constitution making process.
3. The constitution is a social contract between the citizens and the government; it provides a mechanism for checks and balances. Therefore, it's important to ensure the process is people driven and centered.
4. Academia possess skills and expertise to greatly contribute in the CMP. Nevertheless, more involvement from all the stakeholders is required to bring about a constitution which will last for the next 100 years or beyond.
5. It was noted, that University of Juba has been aware of the constitution making process. However, other academic institutions may not have full information or access to the document relating to the constitution making process. This poses a challenge in their effective participation in the process. Therefore, it's important to engage other academic institutions to realize participation of all.
6. Academia play an important role in conducting fact based research on constitutional issues. This can be hosted through seminars and develop advocacy papers to inform the constitution making process. Therefore, academia should provide space for conversation and strategize on best way to contribute in constitution making process.

Session Two:

Discussion on modalities for engagement in the constitution making process **by Abraham Deng**

This session was designed to explore best modalities of engagement between civil society and academia/institutions of higher learning and facilitate further collective engagement with other stakeholders in the constitution making process. After the 2013 conflict, the academia and institutions of higher learning played a vital role in negotiation of the peace agreement until the signing of the agreement. This highlight the importance of academic as one of the stakeholder groups in different mechanisms. Likewise, in the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS)

Below were questions raised to the academia and was answered during the session

1. What specific role can the academia play in the CMP?
 - Conduct fact-based research on different constitutional issues and develop advocacy/position papers on the same.
 - Provide space for engagement in their various university facilities.
2. What are the specific mechanisms for internal engagement within academic institutions and other non-political stakeholder?
 - WhatsApp group can be used for easy communication between academia and non-political stakeholder.
 - Emails and official letters will be used to communicate major decisions that require action from leadership of the institutions of higher learning.
3. What are the opportunities for academic institutions in the CMP and how can they overcome existing challenges?
 - The academia has access to the community in and especially the student population and academic staff. This is a reservoir of knowledge and can make meaningful contribution in the constitution making process
 - There's need to establish a clear amendment formula as part of the process. The constitution needs to be a legal document and there's a need for each university to pick an area of interest and contribute based on subject mater expertise.

Recommendations:

1. There's a need to organize more consultative meetings on constitution making process within the academic institutions. So as to enable utilization of expertise and skills required for the constitution process.
2. A need to provide universities with copies of constitution making process act 2022, R-ARCSS, Road Map and Memorandum for the Implementation of constitution making process act 2022 This effort will help generate more interest and clarity among the academia on the role they can play in the constitution making.

Way Forward

1. Three focal point from each institution to be identified to represent their institutions and serve as the contact persons with in the universities. SSuDEMOP and Abraham Deng were asked to develop TOR for the team.
2. Share the link of repository along with the report.
3. It was agreed that a letters be sent to vice chancellors of different universities on coordination mechanisms and explanation on proposal for structuring the coordination body within the university.
4. A TOR to be developed for the representatives of the coordination body within each institution.
5. Accredited universities to be included in future conversation.
6. Couple members of the academia will be invited to the meeting with the Security and that with the development partners.

Closing Remarks

Merekaje thanked the participants for a fruitful and enlightening conversation. She stated that, this meeting was informative and the other participants will inform their constituencies of the discussions and hope this will strengthen working relations and coordination between academia and other non-political stakeholders. She reminded the participants of the importance of the constitution making process and the need for collaboration among the non-political stakeholders. She committed to inform the rest of the colleagues who did not attend the meeting and hope to engage them in future processes. She also mentioned that SSuDEMOP will reach out to other civil society colleagues/organizations and development partners to explore the possibility of responding to some of the challenges identified above.

Merekaje indicated to the academia that the non-political stakeholders are making efforts to engage with development partners and the security agencies so as to coordinate support and efforts towards the constitution making process. The academia leaders will be involved and represented in the future conversations. She thanked the Swiss for providing the space and snacks for the half-day meeting. She also thanked Abraham Deng as being the entry point to get all the leaders from different academic institutions which resulted in hosting the half-day meeting.