

Youth Participation in Peace Building and Development in Northern Uganda

Authors : Eric Awich Ochen

Abstract : The end of the conflict in Northern Uganda in 2006 brought about an opportunity for the youth to return to their original home and contribute to the peace building and development process of their communities. Post-conflict is used here to refer to the post-armed conflict situation and activities of rebels of Joseph Kony in northern Uganda. While the rebels remain very much active in the Sudan and Central African Republic, in Uganda the last confrontations occurred around 2006 or earlier, and communities have returned to their homes and began the process of rebuilding their lives. It is argued that socio-economic reconstruction is at the heart of peacebuilding and sustenance of positive peace in the aftermath of conflict, as it has a bearing on post-conflict stability and good governance. We recognize that several post-conflict interventions within Northern Uganda have targeted women and children with a strong emphasis on family socio-economic empowerment and capacity building, including access to micro finance. The aim of this study was to examine the participation of the youth in post-conflict peace building and development in Northern Uganda by assessing the breadth and width of their engagement and the stages of programming cycle that they are involved in, interrogating the space for participation and how they are facilitating or constraining participation. It was further aimed at examining the various dimensions of participation at play in Northern Uganda and where this fits within the conceptual debates on peace building and development in the region. Supporting young people emerging out of protracted conflict to re-establish meaningful socio-economic engagements and livelihoods is fundamental to their participation in the affairs of the community. The study suggests that in the post-conflict development context of Northern Uganda, participation has rarely been disaggregated or differentiated by sectors or groups. Where some disaggregation occurs, then the main emphasis has always been on either women or children. It appears therefore that little meaningful space has thus been created for young people to engage and participate in peace building initiatives within the region. In other cases where some space is created for youth participation, this has been in pre-conceived programs or interventions conceived by the development organizations with the youth or young people only invited to participate at particular stages of the project implementation cycle. Still within the implementation of the intervention, the extent to which young people participate is bounded, with little power to influence the course of the interventions or make major decisions. It is thus visible that even here young people mainly validate and legitimize what are predetermined processes only act as pawns in the major chess games played by development actors (dominant peace building partners). This paper, therefore, concludes that the engagement of the youth in post-conflict peace building has been quite problematic and tokenistic and has not given the adequate youth space within which they could ably participate and express themselves in the ensuing interventions.

Keywords : youth, conflict, peace building, participation

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