Reporting on TRAC 2 Results

South Sudan - Youth and Women are empowered for meaningful participation in peace and development process in South Sudan

Project ID: 01002313, 01002496

About the Project

The project aims to empower youth and women as key contributors to peace, economic growth, and governance in South Sudan by promoting social cohesion and inclusive decision-making. It provides them with the necessary skills, resources, and platforms to actively engage in economic and social spheres, addressing their marginalization, strengthening their resilience, and unlocking their potential as change agents.

To enhance youth employment, the initiative offers vocational training, enterprise development, and financial inclusion, fostering entrepreneurship and boosting small business competitiveness under AfCFTA. It also expands savings groups and financial networks to improve economic resilience for both youth and women. Additionally, the Project strengthens civic participation by establishing South Sudan's first-ever National Youth Service (NYS) for structured civic engagement and advancing women's leadership through policy advocacy at national and subnational levels.

In parallel, the Project supports peacebuilding by promoting youth-led conflict resolution efforts, intergenerational dialogues, and community engagement. It leverages peace journalism and media training to reshape narratives and position youth as peacebuilders. Furthermore, through UNIPOD, the initiative enhances youth innovation capacity, enabling them to develop solutions for economic development and conflict resolution. These efforts collectively contribute to a more peaceful, resilient, and economically dynamic South Sudan.

Project Objectives and Expected results

The project aligns with Strategic Impact Area 2: Youth and Women's Employment and Empowerment under the UNDP Strategic Offer. This strategic focus aims to transform the large youth demographic into a driving force for economic, social, and political change. The project directly supports this goal by taking a holistic approach to youth and women's employment and empowerment, addressing key challenges such as:

- Youth Employment & Economic Inclusion: Creating opportunities for youth employment through skills development, business support, access to finance, and adherence to AfCFTA standards.
- Youth Participation in Governance & Peacebuilding: Strengthening youth engagement in political, peace, and decision-making processes.

- Challenging Age-Discriminatory Norms: Addressing cultural and social barriers that limit youth participation in society.
- Leveraging Innovation for Peacebuilding: Positioning youth as key stakeholders in the use of innovative technologies for peacebuilding through UNIPOD in South Sudan.

Results

1. Increased access to employment and self-employment for youth, along with enhanced participation in national service.
2. Strengthened national cohesion, identity, and integration through civic education and complementary action.
3. Empowered youth to actively engage in peacebuilding and decision-making at all levels.
4. Empowered women to effectively participate in peacebuilding and decision-making processes.
5. Effective project management, monitoring, and evaluation to ensure accountability and impact.

Link to the Strategic Plan and Africa Promise

The Project aligns with the UNDP Strategic Plan (2022-2025) by advancing signature solutions and leveraging strategic enablers to empower youth and women, contributing to sustainable development and peacebuilding in South Sudan. It tackles multidimensional poverty by equipping youth and women with skills, business development support, and financial access, fostering self-reliance and economic inclusion. Through the National Youth Service (NYS) and YouthConnekt, young people gain employment and national service opportunities, reinforcing **Signature Solution 1: Keeping People Out of Poverty**.

Additionally, the initiative enhances governance inclusion by strengthening youth and women's participation in peace and decision-making processes, aligning with **Signature Solution 2: Strengthening Effective, Accountable, and Inclusive Governance**. It also builds resilience to crises, in line with **Signature Solution 3, by fostering social cohesion, youth-led peacebuilding, intergenerational dialogues, and peace journalism to shift negative narratives**. By offering alternative economic and leadership pathways, the project reduces vulnerabilities to violent behaviors.

By integrating digital literacy and technological innovation through UNIPOD, the project advances **Signature Solution 5: Closing the Digital Divide, equipping youth with digital skills for employment and peacebuilding**. Moreover, it strategically incorporates key enablers such as **Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**, ensuring at least 30% of TRAC-2 funds support women's empowerment. Through the NYS and YouthConnekt initiatives, the project positions youth as key drivers of peacebuilding, governance, and economic transformation, reinforcing the

Youth as Agents of Change strategic enabler while strengthening youth-led conflict resolution and inclusive governance structures.

The project also supports UNDP's Africa Promise, directly contributing to its three moonshots: creating 50 million jobs, enabling 400 million people to participate in elections, and lifting 100 million people out of multidimensional poverty. It expands economic opportunities for youth and women by promoting micro and small enterprise (MSE) development, skills training, and financial inclusion aligned with AfCFTA standards, advancing the 50 Million Jobs Moonshot. To support the 400 Million People in Elections Moonshot, the initiative enhances democratic participation by bridging the intergenerational gap and ensuring youth have a voice in peace and governance processes. Additionally, it strengthens women's leadership and advocacy in political and governance spaces. Finally, by fostering income-generating opportunities, cash-for-work initiatives, and economic self-reliance for youth and women, the project contributes to the 100 Million People Out of Poverty Moonshot, reducing economic marginalization and enhancing sustainable livelihoods.

Actual results achieved and Outputs

Output 1: Increased access by the youth to the labor market and self-employment opportunities and enhanced contribution to national service

Activity 1: Establishment of the National Youth Service Scheme, and decentralized structures (management and coordination structures)

UNDP supported the development of the National Youth Empowerment framework in consultation with key stakeholders from the Office of the Vice President Gender and Youth Cluster, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Labour and Human Resources Development, Ministry of General Education and Instructions, South Sudan National Youth Union, civil society, academia, and development partners. The collaborative consultations provided an in-depth understanding of the South Sudanese social, economic, political, and cultural context to develop and promote holistic empowerment and participation of the youth in socio-economic development, peace, democracy, good governance, and upholding the values of society by providing equal opportunities to maximize their potential, participate, and contribute to peaceful and sustainable development.

Activity 2: Review and adoption of the National Youth Service Scheme to include a civic engagement process

The National Youth Empowerment Initiative Framework was finalized and submitted for ministerial review and approval. This framework defines the youth engagement process aimed at promoting national integration and cohesion, fostering unity among diverse ethnic groups, and ensuring their active contribution to inclusive national development and shared prosperity. Once approved, it will serve as a strategic guide for empowering youth to play a pivotal role in nation-building and socio-economic progress.

Activity 3: Development and roll-out of Youth Portal and access to skills development using digital learning management system

UNDP has successfully developed and rolled out the 'Mahara South Sudan https://maharasouthsudan.com/' digital learning management system, empowering youth and women with essential skills in business communication, negotiation, startup fundamentals, E-commerce, and marketing strategy. This self-paced platform equips participants with practical knowledge, enabling them to drive local economic growth and entrepreneurial success.

Activity 4: Employment creation facilitation through capacity building of high potential and emerging youth-led micro and small enterprises (MSEs) on enterprise and business development; access to finance; and subscription to AfCFTA product safety, certification and standards.

To economically empower crisis-affected vulnerable individuals, UNDP provided 1,800 individuals (1,053 females and 747 males) with entrepreneurship skills training focusing on value chain development, business planning, financial literacy, budgeting, and business development management. The training equipped individuals with the skills and knowledge to engage in income-generating activities and make informed financial decisions.

Output 2: Improved national cohesion, identity and integration through civic education and complementary action

Activity 1: Conduct of the International Youth Conference to learn and create synergies with youth development and political bodies in the region

UNDP supported 111 youth (33 females, 78 males) from 24 AU Member States to participate in the IYC Summit, which served as a platform for sharing ideas, experiences, and solutions on climate change, youth peace and security, and entrepreneurship. The summit empowered youth to take action by strengthening their role in climate policies, including contributions to Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) across Africa. It also enhanced youth participation in decision-making, notably within the Africa Group of Negotiators (AGN), ensuring skill development and engagement in policy dialogues. Additionally, the summit promoted youth entrepreneurship, advocating for better access to financing and economic opportunities, ultimately fostering sustainable development across the continent.

Activity 2: Establishment of the Youth Connekt Chapter

To accelerate Agenda 2063, UNDP supported nine South Sudanese youth (3 females, 6 males) in engaging with entrepreneurs, policymakers, and global leaders at a high-level summit focused on socio-economic transformation. Over three days, they participated in dialogues, networking, and workshops, enhancing their skills, visibility, and contributions to national and continental development. The summit advanced discussions on establishing a local chapter, strengthening youth-led initiatives, policy advocacy, and leadership. It also forged strategic partnerships, unlocking opportunities for mentorship, funding, and collaboration, ensuring South Sudanese youth play a pivotal role in shaping policies and driving sustainable development.

Activity 3: Conduct of workshops on youth civic education training programme

UNDP has forged a strategic partnership with the South Sudan Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Youth Union, and other key stakeholders to develop the South Sudan UN Youth Strategy. This strategy will be a cornerstone for the youth civic education training program.

Output 3: Youth are empowered to effectively engage in peace- and decision-making at all levels

Activity 1: Youth are empowered to leverage innovative solutions via the UNIPOD to address local conflict drivers. Activity 2: Digital literacy awareness sessions provided by UNIPOD

During the reporting period, the project completed key procurement activities essential for the UniPod's full functionality, including a milling machine, workbenches, and biometric access control equipment. These investments enabled the UniPod to become fully operational, accelerating efforts to leverage innovation for development purposes. The UniPod collaborated with the University of Juba's School of Fine Arts, Drama, and Music to design traditionally inspired art pieces that foster creativity and innovation. The dynamic workshop engaged 50 students and facility members in shaping the UniPod's creative spaces, marking the start of a deeper collaboration. In 2025, the project will build on this by organizing innovation challenges with other faculties at the University, expanding its academic connectivity and leveraging the expertise of the different faculties to create durable solutions to challenges like climate change, food systems and peace and community cohesion. Beyond academia, the UniPod expanded partnerships with UNESCO, the South Sudan National Communication Authority, and the Internet Society of South Sudan. These partnerships contribute to the positioning of UniPod as the innovation hub of South Sudan. The UniPod management team participated in a regional retreat organized by the UniPod regional program and AFRI Labs, facilitating cross-continental knowledge exchange as well as stimulating South-South cooperation. Lessons learned from the retreat were shared with the wider UniPod South Sudan team, strengthening capacity and operational strategies.

Activity 3: Intergenerational dialogues, with a component on awareness of youth's rights for elders, at the grassroot level in seven different locations.

The project facilitated intergenerational dialogues across seven locations in South Sudan, engaging 339 participants (123 women), including youth and elders. These dialogues brought together community members from the grassroots level to State-level government officials. Each session began with an awareness-raising session on intergenerational dynamics, fostering mutual understanding and respect as a foundation for meaningful exchange. The structured dialogues created a safe space for youth and elders to openly discuss their concerns, guided by local peace committee members serving as facilitators. As a result, participants developed concrete

recommendations outlining actionable steps that youth and elders will jointly implement to strengthen peace and social cohesion within their communities.

Activity 4: Usage of media and peace journalism to address the negative stigma regarding youth and change the narrative in a positive manner.

The project trained 33 youth (21 women) in media and peace journalism, equipping them with essential skills for conflict-sensitive and youth-sensitive reporting. Facilitated by experienced media professionals from South Sudan, the training enhanced participants' ability to report responsibly on conflict dynamics while actively reshaping the negative narrative surrounding youth in the country. To further reinforce their learning and impact, the project will engage these young journalists in mentorship activities during the first quarter of 2025, ensuring sustained growth and practical application of their skills.

Activity 5: Support to the international conference on youth's transformational leadership

During the proposal writing phase of the TRAC-2 project, there was strong momentum to organize an International Conference on Youth's Transformational Leadership in South Sudan. However, shifting priorities led to the conference being removed from the host government's agenda. In response, the allocated funds were redirected to organize three youth-led peace dialogues, ensuring meaningful youth engagement in peacebuilding efforts. These dialogues, facilitated by youth trained and mentored in transformational leadership, brought together 150 participants (70 women). They created safe spaces for diverse youth groups and clans to openly discuss and resolve conflicts among themselves, fostering dialogue and social cohesion.

Activity 6: Training on political skills for chairpersons of the state-level youth unions (Clingendael)

The extension of South Sudan's transitional period heightened political tensions, also around the country's youth unions. In response to the evolving political sensitivities, funds initially allocated for youth political skills training were redirected toward strengthening the mediation capacities of key government officials and high-level mediators. A total of 13 Ministers (1 woman) and 13 Director-Generals (1 woman) from the State-level Ministries of Peacebuilding, representing the ten States and three Administrative Areas, along with 10 high-level mediators (5 women), received training. Conducted in collaboration with the Clingendael Institute, these sessions enhanced participants' mediation skills, equipping them to effectively engage in conflict prevention and resolution at both national and state levels.

Activity 7: Activities that foster socioeconomic cohesion amongst youth, and provide employment opportunities

The project commenced the preparatory work for cash-for-work activities for youth. These activities are scheduled to be completed by the 31st of March 2025. The activities will engage 50 of the most fragile and marginalized youth in activities that enhance both their social inclusion and access to economic means.

Indicator of success:

# of youth involved in peacebuilding activities, including UNIPOD. Disaggregated by sex (target of 769 youth).

A total of 622 youth (239F) were involved in peacebuilding activities.

Output 4: Women are empowered to effectively engage in peace- and decision-making at all levels

Activity 1: Startup funding for the gender equality fund

UNDP has provided support for the development of the Women's Empowerment Bill, which initially included provisions for establishing a Gender Equality Fund and a Gender Equality Authority. However, following a review by the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, it was recommended that these elements be addressed in separate bills. In response, the project facilitated the review process and engaged a consultant to develop a comprehensive strategy for the Gender Equality Fund. While the bills are still undergoing finalization and legislative review, the funds initially allocated for startup funding were redirected to support the development of the Women's Empowerment Bill and the Gender Equality Fund strategy. These legislative frameworks are critical to advancing the 35% affirmative action commitment and strengthening women's empowerment in South Sudan.

Activity 2: Follow-up on action points deriving from the International Conference on Women's Transformational Leadership

As a key action point from the International Conference on Women's Transformational Leadership, State-level conferences were organized to share the conference outcomes with women at the subnational level and strengthen advocacy efforts. These conferences took place across the ten States and three Administrative Areas, engaging 325 women in discussions on women's political participation during the extended transitional period. The resolutions developed at the State level were later reviewed and consolidated during a national conference in Juba, which brought together 67 women from both subnational and national levels. This process resulted in a unified resolution that amplified women's voices in lobby and advocacy efforts. Moreover, the resolution serves as a critical document, informing future policy development and project design across government institutions and the UN Country Team by outlining women's priorities for political participation during the two-year extension of the transitional period.

Activity 3: Training on political skills for women political leaders (Clingendael)

This activity was implemented jointly with Output 3, activity 6. The reasoning behind the shift from training on political skills toward insider mediation is captured under Output 3, activity 6. Around 20% of the overall beneficiaries were women mediators and politicians. The curricula developed by Clingendael emphasized the unique strengths and contributions of female mediators in peace processes, reflecting the gender-sensitivity component of the training.

Activity 4: Activities that foster socioeconomic cohesion and provide employment opportunities for women.

The project commenced the preparatory work for cash-for-work activities for women. These activities are scheduled to be completed by the 31st of March 2025. The activities will engage 50 of the most fragile and marginalized women in activities that enhance both their social inclusion and access to economic means.

Indicator of success: # of women engaged in transformational leadership and socioeconomic empowerment activities (targeting 623 women). A total of 444 women were engaged in transformational leadership and socioeconomic empowerment activities.

Challenges and Lessons

The implementation of the project has faced significant challenges due to the increasingly complex situation in South Sudan, driven by heightened political tensions, economic instability, and worsening humanitarian conditions. The two-year extension of the transitional period has deepened political uncertainty, exacerbating public frustration over delays in democratic processes and governance reforms. At the same time, the country's economic crisis, characterized by rising inflation and a lack of employment opportunities, has increased reliance on humanitarian aid.

Compounding these challenges, South Sudan is experiencing a large-scale influx of returnees and refugees fleeing the conflict in Sudan, placing additional strain on already scarce resources, basic services, and local governance structures. This demographic shift risks fueling intercommunal tensions and intensifying competition over livelihoods, making efforts to promote youth employment, peacebuilding, and social cohesion even more complex. Additionally, climate change has worsened the situation, with prolonged droughts and severe floods disrupting livelihoods, deepening food insecurity, and driving internal displacement, further stretching community resilience.

In response to these challenges, the Project has reinforced the need for flexible and adaptive programming in crisis settings. The evolving political, economic, and social landscape has demonstrated that rigid approaches are ineffective, highlighting the importance of continuous context analysis and conflict-sensitive implementation to ensure sustainability. A key lesson learned is that youth empowerment cannot happen in isolation; it requires engagement with traditional leaders, elders, and policymakers to foster intergenerational dialogue and build broader societal acceptance of youth-led initiatives.

The diversity of youth demographics, including disparities in education, skills, and socioeconomic backgrounds, makes it difficult to design inclusive programs that cater to all reducing the long-

term impact of the program. Addressing these issues requires stronger governance, sustainable funding, and tailored programs that meet the diverse needs of South Sudanese youth.

Lesson Learned

1. **Adequate Funding & Resource Allocation**: Sufficient financial and material resources are essential for delivering meaningful training, employment opportunities, and tangible community impact.
2. **Inclusive Program Design:** Programs must address the diverse needs of youth, considering factors such as gender, education levels, and regional disparities to ensure no group is left behind.
3. **Strong Governance & Accountability**: Effective implementation requires robust governance frameworks to minimize corruption, inefficiency, and political interference in program execution.
4. **Multi-Sectoral Partnerships**: Collaboration with the private sector, civil society, and other stakeholders is crucial for creating sustainable employment and entrepreneurship pathways for youth.
5. **Community Engagement:** Involving local communities fosters trust, relevance, and ownership, ensuring that initiatives align with local priorities and challenges.
6. **Integration of Life Skills & Civic Education**: Embedding leadership, life skills, and civic education into programs like NYS enhances participants' ability to engage meaningfully in society and contribute to national development.

Notable Innovation(s) in the Project

The project supported the development of the UNIPOD in South Sudan. The UNIPOD initiative at Juba University enables young women and men to use creative skills through rigorous training and enhances their digital fabrication skills for delivering innovative solutions to various challenges in their communities.

Impact of the project including partnerships forged

The project has strengthened its impact through key partnerships, notably deepening collaboration with the Clingendael Institute and maintaining a strong working relationship with the Government of South Sudan. TRAC2 funding has played a vital role in driving project activities, complementing bilateral donor partnerships and reinforcing efforts in peacebuilding and governance.

Additionally, the project has facilitated strategic collaborations with the Office of the Vice President (Gender and Youth Cluster), Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Labour and Human Resources Development, Ministry of General Education and Instructions, and the South Sudan National Youth Union. These partnerships have been instrumental in ensuring project activities align with national priorities and policies, fostering a supportive environment for effective implementation.

Key Achievements

Youth Empowerment in Peace & Decision-Making

- Created safe spaces for youth to engage in intergenerational dialogue, fostering social cohesion and bridging generational divides.
- Contributed to the development of the 'Peacebuilding and Prevention of Violent Extremism in East Africa' project, funded by KOICA.
- Provided media and peace journalism training to young journalists to reshape negative narratives about youth.
- Launched cash-for-work initiatives to support vulnerable youth and reduce their risk of involvement in conflict.

Women's Empowerment in Peace & Decision-Making

- Supported progress on the Women's Empowerment Bill and Gender Equality Fund, reinforcing the 35% affirmative action commitment for women's participation.
- Captured the voices of 392 women in a key resolution to guide future programs on women's political participation.
- Enabled vulnerable women to engage in decision-making through cash-for-work initiatives, enhancing their role in society.

Through these efforts, the project continues to strengthen youth and women's participation in governance, peacebuilding, and economic development, reinforcing South Sudan's path toward inclusive and sustainable progress.

About the Funding and Resource Mobilization

- Budget for 2024 ($) : USD 1,800,000
- Initial Resources Requested ($) _____
- Amount allocated ($): USD 1,800,000
- Actual delivery by end 2024 ($): 898,194.23
- Additional resources leveraged ($):