Youth Parliament- Sudan

Brief on the Status of Youth in Sudan:
A Story of Resilience and the Will to Build

A comprehensive report reviewing the challenges and achievements of youth amid the April 15, 2023 war

August 2025

With Technical Support From:

Public Policy Institute – Sudan

An In-depth Study on the Role of Youth in Building Sustainable Peace and Democratic Transition

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Parliament Foreword

Dear Heroic Youth,

In this difficult historical moment that our beloved country is going through, the Youth Parliament – Sudan stands today, one year after its founding, to tip its hat in respect and honor to you: the ones who made a difference, who turned pain into action, chaos into order, and despair into hope.

The April 15, 2023 war was a catastrophe by any measure, yet it revealed the true character of our generation. While flames were consuming our cities, your hands were building the **Youth Parliament**, **Emergency Rooms**, and **Community Kitchens "Al-Takaya"**, creating a picture of grassroots relief that does not wait for support but generates it from the womb of suffering.

You proved that you are not mere numbers in disaster statistics, but a real force on the ground. Your role did not stop at relief; it extended to building social cohesion amidst the harshest fragmentations. You overcame tribal and ethnic rifts to become the voice of the people that the world tried to forget — the voice of Alfasher, Kadugli, and Dilling.

At a time when international initiatives attempted to ignore your civil efforts in conflict resolution and documenting violations, you were the vigilant eyes, demonstrating to the world that peace has civilians who observe, analyze, and build.

You have left an indelible mark on the history of our nation and proved that Sudan will not break as long as it has youth like you. On behalf of your Parliament, you have our deepest respect and appreciation. We must all continue the journey to build a Sudan worthy of your sacrifices.

Munzer Mustafa
Secretary-General | Youth Parliament – Sudan
Tuesday, 13 August 2025

Public Policy Institute Foreword

What you hold today is not just a report, but a testimony to the resilience and determination of an entire generation in the face of one of the fiercest wars Sudan has ever witnessed. The **"Brief on the Status of Youth in Sudan"** is an attempt to document the historic moment our youth are experiencing, a moment in which the pain of displacement and unemployment intertwines with an unwavering determination to build a future.

We have all witnessed how infrastructure was destroyed, basic services collapsed, and millions of young people were thrown into the conflict. But, amidst this devastation, inspiring stories emerged of young people who did not give in to despair.

They innovated in establishing "emergency response rooms" as a hybrid relief system, and established the "Youth Parliament" as a political platform defending their rights and their national and youth-focused aspirations. These models are not merely a reaction to the crisis; they embody the "December Revolution Values" system, which has proven to be the true compass for this generation.

This report clearly outlines the major challenges facing youth, from unprecedented unemployment and the collapse of services to political marginalization and restrictions imposed on them. It also offers an in-depth analysis of the structures and systems that youth have formed, from "fragile structures" influenced by donor agendas, to innovative "hybrid systems" that reflect their resilience, to "strong structures" such as the Youth Parliament, which represents a model of independence and effectiveness.

We, at the Public Policy Institute- Sudan, are proud to provide technical support for this brief, and we hope it will be a key reference for all those concerned with building sustainable peace in Sudan. It is a call to all—political actors, international institutions, and friends of Sudan—to recognize the role of youth, support their strong structures, and listen to their clear negotiating positions, because they are the key to the future.

Let this brief be the beginning of a constructive, never-ending dialogue toward a Sudan that enjoys peace and justice.

Chief Researcher

Public Policy Institute - Sudan

Tuesday, August 12, 2025

1| Introduction

This paper explores the unique efforts and resilience of Sudanese youth during the April 15, 2023 war. It highlights their active participation in anti-war civil initiatives, while noting the sharp decline in youth development indicators and the challenges that have prevented full integration with older political actors.

2| Current Context

The period following the April 15, 2023 war witnessed a sharp deterioration in youth development indicators. The educational infrastructure was almost completely destroyed, unemployment rates doubled to unprecedented levels, health services collapsed, and millions of young people were plunged into violent conflict. Furthermore, the warring parties and their allies sought to undermine their independence and exclude them from political processes.

Despite these obstacles, young people have been able to overcome them by utilizing their quantitative and qualitative density and the diversity of their participation. They have devised inspiring methods to save lives and strengthen social cohesion. "Emergency response rooms" have formed the nucleus of a hybrid relief system, particularly in Alfasher, Kadugli, and Dilling, where young people face multiple challenges: insecurity, food

and medicine shortages, and the collapse of basic services. However, they stand out as a pivotal force in crisis interactions, carrying out rescue and relief missions, managing social networks to exchange information, and actively participating in community resilience-building initiatives. Young opinion and thought leaders have also worked to break the deadlock and reduce polarization by opening channels for a Youth-Youth dialogue, thanks to the "December Revolution Values" they embrace.

Despite their crucial importance in conflict resolution and their pivotal role in dialogue and negotiation initiatives (such as the Youth Parliament), they face significant challenges that prevent them from fully realizing their potential. They are viewed as competitors to older political actors rather than as partners. This marginalization was clearly evident in international ceasefire initiatives, which completely ignored the involvement of youth forces despite their effective field role in monitoring truces (such as the Youth Citizens Observers Network - YCON), which provided objective and accurate reports. This highlights the contradiction between the effective efforts of youth and the disregard of official initiatives.

Their voices were silenced by international organizations operating in Sudan, which adopted a flexible and ill-considered approach immediately after the war broke out, delegating responsibility for developing interventions and allocating resources to their local staff. However, this policy quickly led to a conflict of interest that severely harmed the youth and society as a whole. Resources allocated to support Sudanese people were transformed into tools for conflict and polarization, hindering efforts to create a conducive environment for joint action among youth.

The organizational patterns of today's youth are unique compared to previous revolutions (1964 and 1985), and their youth-focused agenda became more pronounced during the December Revolution. This is due

to the socialization of this generation, which was undermined by the Muslim Brotherhood before it came to power in 1989. This was achieved through the "Sudanese Human Formation Project," which tampered with socialization indicators and narrowed the scope for pluralism, leading to a loss of confidence in local political content and openness to the global system.

3| Key Challenges

The country is witnessing a significant increase in unemployment rates to 47% after the April 15, 2023 war (World Bank: 2024), leading to growing frustration. 3.9 million young people have joined the military operations as soldiers (Public Policy Institute: 2024), increasing the likelihood that millions more will join the ranks of informal soldiers due to the collapse of education systems and growing frustration (International Monetary Fund: 2025). Moreover, the warring parties impose severe restrictions on the civil and political activities of young people, while political actors compete to attract them as subordinate groups, rather than viewing them as active partners in peacebuilding (Public Policy Institute: 2025).

Youth unemployment, already high before the war, has worsened to 55.7% this year, making it the highest rate in the world. The war has resulted in the forced displacement of more than 8.7 million internally displaced persons and 3.2 million refugees (UNHCR: 2024). The economy has also been severely devastated, with the agricultural sector losing vast tracts of land and industrial, banking, and telecommunications activity halted in most affected areas, leading to the layoff of millions of workers and the loss of a significant portion of the country's income.

The concentration of health services and medical supplies in the capital, Khartoum, led to the complete collapse of the health system, with 80% of

health facilities out of service. The health care crisis expanded to include other states, especially after the destruction of medical supplies in Gezira State, leaving more than 20 million people in dire need of health services and leading to the spread of multiple outbreaks of diseases such as cholera and measles (WHO: 2025).

More than 70% of the educational infrastructure has been damaged, leaving more than 17 million children out of school (UNESCO: 2025). Young people face difficulty accessing education and training opportunities, in addition to a significant gap between their skills and labor market requirements. This situation highlights the urgent need to expand vocational and technical education and entrepreneurship to enable young people to integrate into economic development.

4| Agenda

Young actors have played a pivotal role in political interactions, transcending their youth-focused issues to contribute to shaping the features of the political system. They draw inspiration from their experiences in building constitutional institutions during previous transitional periods and leverage their pivotal role in saving the lives of millions of Sudanese after the April 15, 2023 war.

The youth agenda focuses on two tracks: the first is youth-focused, aiming to align policies with their priorities in education, employment, and health, to prevent the militarization of their peers and their involvement in the conflict. The second is national, expressing their moral commitment to their communities by formulating a clear vision that guarantees their participation in building a sustainable democratic political system and empowering them to play a decisive role in ending the war, providing relief, and rebuilding.

In May 2025, the Youth Parliament – Sudan announced a clear negotiating position centered on several core principles: recognizing the Parliament as a human, social, and political representative of youth; ensuring accountability and preventing impunity for serious violations; and affirming that peace must be an inclusive process, not merely a deal between conflicting parties. The Parliament also outlined youth demands, which include: allocating 34% of government and parliamentary seats to youth; recognizing the Youth Parliament as an independent negotiating entity; incorporating transitional justice processes and establishing an independent accountability mechanism; launching a national fund to support youth; allocating 40% of revenues to education, training, and employment; disarming militias and demobilizing child soldiers; and affirming the Youth Parliament's legitimacy in monitoring and verification of the implementation of the peace agreement.

5| Structures and Systems

Restructuring political processes and interactions, particularly alliances, is crucial to creating integration between youth leaders and higher-level political leaders. This process helps connect anti-war political forces with youth actors (civil, political, and humanitarian) and local communities across Sudan. To understand how this integration can be achieved, one must understand the nature of the various youth systems and structures, the most prominent of which are:

A) **Fragile Structures:** Fragile structures are a prominent feature of most youth organizations and networks directly linked to political alliances or their extensions within international community institutions. The reason for their fragility lies in these groups'

lack of decision-making independence; they are heavily influenced by the political orientations of their sponsors and often turn into arenas of conflict between disparate projects. They also lack integration between hard elements (strategy, administrative system, organizational structure) and soft elements (management style, cohesive work team, skill set). These structures are subject to the traditional value system of political alliances, which serves their own agendas.

The "**Youth Citizens Observers Network (YCON Sudan)**" is a prime example of the "fragile structures" that are influenced by external funding and lack decision-making independence. Although it is defined as a platform bringing together youth organizations and entities to monitor political and humanitarian situations, its administrative structure and the source of its agenda reveal its fragility.

It becomes evident that the network's agenda aligns with the objectives of a project funded by The Carter Center in 2020, which aimed to support youth and women in monitoring democratic transition. This indicates that the agenda did not originate from the independent needs of youth but was imposed by the donor.

The network's organizational structure consists of an executive office headed by a Secretary-General, all of whose members are employees of the funded project and do not necessarily represent the actual stakeholders. In contrast, there is an "Administrative Council" that represents stakeholders but lacks authority and influence, effectively stripping youth of their agency over decision-making.

The **"Sudanese Youth Network (SYN) for Ending the War and Establishing a Democratic Civil Transformation"** is another example of a fragile structure. It faced significant challenges due to a mismatch between the agenda, organizational structure, and core values of the founders. The founding statement declared an intention to rise above "youth-focused issues" and focus on "national issues" (the agenda of the Immature Kids Party), with the goal of ending the war and pursuing constitutional reform. This approach clashed with the founders' value system, which favored youth-focused issues, creating internal conflict that affected the network's organizational discipline.

The network's constitution contained ambiguous structures and overlapping lines of authority, which hindered its work. Article 3 of the constitution included explicit provisions for "guidance," which reduced accountability and weakened the organizational structure.

Pressure from donors and the presence of their staff in executive structures exacerbated the frustration of actors. The focus on the national agenda without attention to youth-focused issues led to weak skills among members, making them unable to meet project requirements.

Recognizing these challenges, the network began consultations in March 2025 to develop its agenda, adopting the "Youth Parliament" approach to developing positions. It called for support for its structures as an anti-war youth group and began developing a new agenda aligned with the international agenda for youth, peace, and security, as well as addressing cross-cutting issues. However, it still requires constitutional amendments to be implemented.

The **"Sudanese Youth Forces Coordination (SYFC)"** demonstrates a different kind of "fragile structure." It has not succeeded in overcoming traditional challenges, and has been accompanied by new challenges related to vision and organizational structure. This is despite receiving early international support and gaining observer status in the **"TAGADOM"** alliance under international pressure. However, it failed to formulate a clear vision that was synchronized with its establishment, creating a gap in its agenda and weakening its internal compass.

The Coordination Committee designed its structures similar to those of the **"TAGADOM"** alliance, without taking into account their complexities or the lack of the necessary capabilities to effectively implement them. This imitation has become an obstacle to its growth and development.

The Coordination Committee continues to struggle with traditional constraints related to the compatibility of visions and structures with those imposed by donors, such as their continued presence in communication groups and organizational structures, which has affected its independence and decision-making ability.

The "Youth Sector" within the **"TAGADOM"** alliance illustrates a structure suffering from weak influence and effectiveness due to its complex organizational framework and the absence of a clear agenda. The Youth Sector was one of seven executive sectors under the General Secretariat of the broader alliance, which in turn oversees four critical domains. This complex structure made communication extremely difficult and led to the marginalization of the sector. The Youth Sector lacked a clear agenda, resulting in its activities being frozen for an extended period. It only resumed operations a few weeks before the dissolution of the "**TAGADOM**" alliance and had little to no impact on youth forces. The challenges of "placement" within the General Secretariat's structures, coupled with the freezing of resistance committees' activities, caused further disruption, preventing the Youth Sector from effectively performing its role or influencing the youth landscape.

The **"Youth Sector"** within the **"SOMOUD"** alliance illustrates how a youth structure can be transformed into a tool for limiting their influence. After the split of the **"TAGADOM"** alliance, **SOMOUD** retained the same old structures, which undermined youth influence. Although youth members attained high-ranking positions within the alliance's leadership body, the youth wing fully adheres to the alliance's national agenda and pays no attention to youth-focused issues. The sector's internal structures are subjected to a process of "political weighting" and role-sharing agreed upon within the alliance, which undermines youth autonomy in decision-making and prevents them from expressing their own interests. Consequently, they have effectively become a tool for diminishing the influence of certain political groups within the alliance.

The **"Sudanese Initiative to Stop War and Build Peace"** represents another example of a "fragile structure" suffering from a lack of transparency and organizational documents, making it closer to an "Immature Kids Party" that relies on the personal values of its founders rather than a solid institutional framework. The initiative does not have publicly available documents defining its organizational structures, lines of authority, or management style.

This lack of transparency makes it vulnerable to individual decisions and the influence of the founders' personal values and skills. Although the initiative includes youth actors from resistance committees and civil society organizations, its agenda is limited to major national issues such as ending the war and achieving justice, while completely neglecting youth-focused issues related to education, employment, and health.

Due to the absence of a clear institutional structure and the focus on a national agenda without linking it to the actual needs of youth, the initiative remains a model of a "fragile structure" that does not enable youth to perform their role effectively and diminishes their ability to exercise authority over their own decisions.

The **"Sudanese Youth Forum,"** organized through a joint initiative by the European Union, the African Union, and IGAD, serves as an example of how an effort intended to support youth was transformed into a platform for political competition and the undermining of existing youth institutions. The participating group did not publish the forum's final statement, and the forum lacks clear structures or formal communication channels. This absence of transparency allowed the forum to serve hidden agendas. The final statement was published on the **"SOMOUD"** alliance page as an internal activity of the alliance, revealing that the forum functioned as a tool to strengthen the influence of a particular faction within the alliance and to signal alignment with left-wing groups in Port Sudan, rather than as a genuine platform for youth empowerment.

The forum exposed the deterioration of the relationship between the **Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue** and influential youth institutions, stemming from the biases of local staff who sought to enhance the influence of their own political institutions at the expense of youth groups, thereby undermining the future mediation role of those institutions. The forum ignited political conflict and international competition, as some factions within **SOMOUD**, supported by international actors, attempted to hold another Y**outh Conference** under the same hidden agenda. These attempts were not welcomed by influential youth groups and were considered efforts to dissipate resources and dismantle established youth coalitions for the benefit of conflict parties.

B) **Hybrid systems:** The "hybrid systems" adopted by the **Resistance Committees** and **Emergency Response Rooms** represent an innovative model of youth engagement, despite lacking broad recognition from democratic forces. These systems are characterized by high flexibility and resilience, enabling them to fill gaps that formal aid structures could not address. The hybrid systems enjoy wide reach and rapid responsiveness, carrying agendas that range from youth-focused to national, highlighting their capacity to exert effective influence during crises.

The "**Resistance Committees**" adopted simple and flexible structures, which enabled them to integrate with the Transitional Government in supporting basic services and containing the COVID-19 pandemic. Although their agenda was primarily focused on national issues (such as constitutional and economic reform) before the war, they expanded their scope of work after the April conflict to include efforts in "ceasefire initiatives and humanitarian relief."

The "**Emergency Response Rooms**" successfully absorbed the shock caused by the collapse of the formal aid system following the outbreak of the April 2023 war. Their work was limited to procedural levels, providing basic services and saving lives, yet they gained strong local legitimacy that could enable them to play a pivotal political role after the war.

C) **Strong Structures:** Anti-war forces face difficulties in integrating with strong youth structures, particularly since existing structures do not align with the needs and capacities of young people. Moreover, anti-war forces do not take the initiative to develop flexible structures that respond to the needs of

prominent youth groups. This became even more evident after the April 15, 2023 war, as political alliances structures lacked effectiveness and organizational discipline. Their key roles were disrupted due to overlapping authorities between the executive leadership and legislative bodies, as well as the absence of accountability systems, creating a state of organizational fluidity. Additionally, there are no clear criteria to determine the minimum knowledge and skills required for appointment in different positions, which hinders the placement of youth within these structures.

The "**Youth Parliament – Sudan**" is considered a unique example of "strong structures" that have managed to overcome traditional challenges due to their unconventional approach. It was established with support from the "Public Policy Institute – Sudan," which shouldered the initial responsibilities but immediately transferred authority to an "Independent Elections Committee," granting the parliament full autonomy.

The election experience, supervised by a unique committee and praised by monitoring bodies, represents the first-of-its-kind electoral process for youth initiatives since the April 15, 2023 conflict. The challenge of setting the agenda was addressed from the outset, with both a youth-focused and national agenda developed at urgent and strategic levels, reflecting the priorities of youth and society as a whole.

The founders introduced a modern approach to representative democracy by "weighting" (allocating seats to) active youth blocs across five domains: emergency response rooms, youth-led organizations, women-led organizations, student unions, and youth wings within political parties. In addition, a sixth geographic domain was included to address imbalances in representation.

The parliament conducts a comprehensive annual evaluation of its structures, involving feedback from 67 youth organizations as well as feedback from political and international actors, highlighting its commitment to continuous improvement and accountability. In the most recent evaluation, 63% of participants expressed clarity about its vision, while 62% called for improving the precision of sub-goals and performance indicators. 57% considered the structure flexible, whereas 53% emphasized the need for greater clarity in operational mechanisms and authorities. Additionally, 57% reported clarity in regulations, while 52% recommended enhancing the governance system and clarifying the relationship between the executive and legislative branches. 67% affirmed alignment between the parliament's positions and its adopted values, while 49% pointed to the need to improve the quality of executive performance.

However, the parliament faced a resource challenge as it was the first youth initiative with participatory funding, which granted it independence, yet it faced competition from local staff within international institutions. Despite this, it succeeded in breaking the stereotype of youth weakness and established a Youth-Youth dialogue that brought together different factions.

6| Recommendations

A) **At the political and governance level:** Anti-war forces and the international community should recognize strong and effective youth structures, such as the "Youth Parliament – Sudan," and involve them as an independent entity in any negotiation or political dialogue. They should also develop clear governance systems and effective accountability mechanisms, while preventing overlaps in authority between the executive leadership and legislative bodies. National political platforms must integrate youth-focused issues, such as education, employment, and health, to ensure policies are inclusive and responsive to youth needs, thereby reducing frustration and preventing their engagement in armed conflicts. Any future peace agreements should include the core demands of youth regarding the disarmament of militias, the demobilization of child soldiers, and the provision of comprehensive rehabilitation programs.

B) **At the youth organizational level:** Leveraging hybrid systems – Youth institutions should develop their capacity to integrate "hybrid systems" (such as emergency response rooms) with "strong structures" (such as the Youth Parliament) to enhance flexibility and effectiveness, particularly during crises. Youth structures, especially the Youth Parliament, should continue improving their strategic and operational performance by refining sub-goals and developing more coherent operational plans, increasing clarity in work mechanisms and authorities to reduce overlaps, enhancing governance systems, and improving the relationship between the executive and legislative bodies. Capacity-building for members should be pursued through comprehensive and consistent training programs. Additionally,

youth structures should strive to diversify funding sources to ensure independence while developing mechanisms to address competition and unjustified polarization from staff within international institutions.

C) **At the international community and donor level:** International organizations and donors should direct their financial and technical support toward strong and independent youth structures, avoiding funding fragile structures that could be exploited as tools for conflict and polarization. Local staff within international organizations should refrain from turning resources into instruments of competition and should work to foster a conducive environment for collaboration among youth groups. The international community should also help address key challenges faced by youth by supporting the reconstruction of education and health infrastructure, expanding vocational, technical, and entrepreneurship programs to combat unemployment and reduce factors driving youth involvement in conflict. Furthermore, international and regional organizations (such as IGAD and the African Union) should recognize the youth's negotiating role and formally acknowledge the legitimacy of the "Youth Parliament – Sudan" in monitoring and implementing future peace agreements.

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