

## CSRF Analysis: 'It's like a war of liberation.'

### Youth and the Green Transition in Juba, South Sudan

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#### Executive

This analysis explores how young people in Juba, South Sudan understand and engage with the green transition in a context marked by environmental degradation, economic precarity, extreme climatic shocks, and conflict. Drawing on participatory arts-based research with 25 youth, alongside key informant interviews, the study finds that environmental challenges are experienced as immediate, emotional, and deeply personal, driving strong youth interest in sustainability. While awareness is high, gaps in technical knowledge and training persist. Youth frame the green transition as closely linked to peacebuilding, gender equality, and social justice, and position themselves as central agents of change through everyday action, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Their visions emphasize clean energy, improved waste management, and circular economy solutions, while also grounding sustainability in cultural traditions of environmental stewardship. The analysis highlights the need for inclusive, youth-centered, and culturally rooted approaches to advancing the green transition in South Sudan.

Likikiri also produced a video, *Green in our Past, Present and Future*, that captures workshop highlights and accompanies this briefing. You can find the video on Likikiri Collective's YouTube channel here: <https://youtu.be/luhCNqCo6oo>

"I'm excited by the role of innovation and youth leadership. In South Sudan right now, most of the entrepreneurs in this area [of the environment and the green economy] are in their early 20s, and that is something that excites me more. With the right tools, technology and entrepreneurial support, they can develop solutions that are both environmentally sustainable and economically viable."<sup>1</sup>

"What I leave behind is not only words or works of art, but a commitment—a call to responsibility. I leave you a vision of a world powered by renewable energy, guided by innovation, and sustained by conscious choices. I leave you with the reminder that every generation must rise to its moment. Protect what has been restored. Improve what can be improved. Let the green world we envisioned continue to flourish in your care."<sup>2</sup>

#### Introduction

The two quotes that open this analysis together illustrate the immense sense of vision, purpose, and potential that drive youth engagement in the green transition in South Sudan. Even a cursory review of the narratives shared during this research points to youth's understanding that they are fulfilling the mission of their generation, this generation's "war of liberation", as spoken by one interviewee, and "rising to its moment", as a workshop participant put it.

Young people are particularly central to discussions about South Sudan's environmental and development future. Youth under the age of 30 constitute approximately 70% of the country's population, yet their perspectives, knowledge, and aspirations regarding environmental sustainability

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<sup>1</sup> Interview 8 March 2026

<sup>2</sup> Workshop participant, Letter to the Future Generations, 27 February 2026

and green transition remain poorly understood.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, young people face significant vulnerabilities related to climate change, limited economic opportunities, and restricted access to education and services. Globally, South Sudan ranks in the top ten among countries where children and young people face extremely high exposure to climate and environmental risks, including floods, heatwaves, water scarcity, and disease outbreaks.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these challenges, youth also represent an important potential driver of environmental innovation, social change, and community resilience. Understanding how young South Sudanese perceive the green transition—how it relates to livelihoods, gender norms, peace, and conflict dynamics—can therefore contribute to designing more context-appropriate and conflict-sensitive environmental policies and programmes.

The analysis that follows draws on preliminary research conducted by Likikiri Collective in collaboration with the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF), and is meant to answer questions about youth understandings, perceptions and aspirations around the green transition. The research design centred around a five-day participatory arts-based and creative methods (ABCM) workshop held in February 2026. The workshop invited 25 youth between the ages of 17 - 30, based in Juba and from a range of backgrounds, to engage in a series of creative activities designed to generate thoughts, ideas and feelings around the green transition. Each day also included a guest expert who presented some aspects of the green transition intended to surface the youth's tacit knowledge and provoke new ideas.

As a centre for the arts and humanities, Likikiri Collective frequently uses ABCM in teaching, research and public engagement. Arts-based methods in research include a range of artistic approaches to collecting, analysing and presenting data and can include collage, painting, music, photography, poetry, narrative writing, dance, theatre, film, and more.<sup>5</sup> Creative approaches can go beyond the arts, for instance by using technology, mixed methods, and transformative frameworks.<sup>6</sup> Researchers increasingly recognise that arts-based methods uniquely engage a diverse range of participants and capture knowledge that is emotional, cultural, or based on lived experiences, which traditional approaches might miss. Since the subject of the green transition involves not only technical knowledge but also people's imaginaries and affective lives, ABCM was a particularly apt approach. The sessions were co-facilitated by the Likikiri team of senior and youth researchers and included photo elicitation, photovoice, recycled plastic arts, drawing, drama production, and creative writing. Reflection, brainstorming, and discussion were integrated into each session.

We wish to acknowledge that this research took place in a workshop designed to positively engage participants in the green transition; therefore, this space was not completely neutral or objective. Consequently, the workshop engagement shaped the data that emerged. Far from a detriment to the research, we see this approach as one of its strengths. We understand ABCM as needing to be grounded in a constructivist and participatory epistemology, which assumes that knowledge is co-created,

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<sup>3</sup> Statistic cited in a 2021 UNFPA annual report [https://southsudan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2021\\_unfpa\\_annual\\_report\\_final\\_small.pdf](https://southsudan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2021_unfpa_annual_report_final_small.pdf); The South Sudan National Bureau of Statistics website cites 72% below the age of 30. <https://www.ssnbss.org/#:~:text=image/svg+xml,improved sources of drinking water>

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF. "The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index. August 2021. <https://www.unicef.org/reports/climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis>

<sup>5</sup> Barone, T. and Eisner, E. *Arts-based Research*. Sage Publications, Inc. June 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Kara, H. *Creative Research Methods: a practical guide*. Policy Press. September 2020.

contextual, and embodied, rather than universal or detached.<sup>7</sup> This aligns with feminist, decolonial, and critical research traditions, which challenge hierarchical knowledge production and emphasise voice, agency, and inclusivity.<sup>8</sup> The fact that our participants could share their impressions of the green transition through photographs, drawings, recycled objects, and poems meant that we could capture a broader range of insights than if we were limited to words alone.

The voices from the workshop were complemented by an additional 3 key informant interviews: 2 with youth who have founded an environmental initiative and one with a researcher specialising in environmental issues.

To highlight the importance of voice and agency to our approach, we organise our findings as a series of stories that foreground the voices of the youth. Each story encapsulates a theme that repeated itself over our several datasets, including the individual interviews, narrative writing in the form of letters to the ancestors and to the future generations, poetry, recycled art, photo elicitation, photovoice, and discussion sessions that were recorded and coded.

The following stories trace a narrative linking youth's lived experiences and encounters with environmental degradation to youth action and aspirations for innovation and transformation.

### **Story 1: Youth experience negative emotions around environmental degradation**

"Our beautiful mahogany trees are disappearing day by day."<sup>9</sup>

A major theme emerging from the workshop is the strong awareness among participants about environmental degradation and its local consequences. When asked about their feelings toward the environment in Juba, all the participants selected negative emotions such as sadness, anger, fear, or confusion, reflecting widespread anxiety.<sup>10</sup> During their presentations and reactions to photographs, young people spoke out about land, water, and air pollution as major causes of illness and shared their deep worries about ongoing heatwaves, unusual rainfall in Juba, and severe flooding in Jonglei, Upper Nile, and other areas of the country. The discussions during the workshop suggest that youth understand the environmental problems not only as an abstract global issue but also as a directly experienced local crisis, shaping how they conceptualise the need for a green transition.

Participants repeatedly returned to the topics of deforestation and pollution as two of the most visible signs of a degraded landscape. They frequently identified deforestation as a primary driver of environmental change, with participants associating the cutting of trees for agriculture, firewood, and construction with rising temperatures and loss of natural shade. One participant illustrated this concern during a photovoice exercise, sharing an image of his compound: "This is a picture of our home; as you can see, there are no trees. Normally, people stay inside the room by themselves during the daytime simply because the sun is too strong. We need a green transition."<sup>11</sup> Other participants expressed similar concerns in reflective writing exercises. In one letter to the ancestors, the writer described his setting as "a real Hell on earth", blaming charcoal production for the effects of deforestation, including

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<sup>7</sup> Knowles J. G. and Cole A. L. *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples and Issues*. Sage Publications, Inc. 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, L. T. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zed Books, 2012 and Escobar, A. *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy and the Making of Worlds*, Duke University Press, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Workshop participant, "Dear Ker-rol," a Letter to the Ancestor, 27 February 2026.

<sup>10</sup> Baseline survey, Youth and the Green Transition Workshop, 23 February 2026.

<sup>11</sup> Workshop participant, Photovoice exercise, 25 February 2026

the absence of shade and the gradual disappearance of wild animals from their forest homes. In another letter to the ancestors, the writer condemns those who “mercilessly massacre our beautiful forest in the name of development.”<sup>12</sup> These examples illustrate that youth value trees not only for their role in mitigating climate change or restoring biodiversity, but for their role as “social connectors”<sup>13</sup>

The youth described plastic waste, illegal dumping sites, and pollution of water as threats to environmental health and public well-being. In a letter to the ancestors, one participant wrote, “All the water points from ‘Wang-Leek’ to ‘Butic’ are used to wash piles of garments and automobiles—chemicals dripping into the waterways, polluting water and endangering aquatic animals.”<sup>14</sup> During a photo elicitation session, facilitators showed an image of a dumping site in Nesitu, evoking emotions of anger and shame from participants, with one stating, “There is no positive feeling about such a place.”<sup>15</sup> Such emotional expressions reflect research data on climate-related emotions among youth, suggesting that exposure to environmental degradation often produces “eco-anxiety” – feelings of anxiety, frustration, and urgency.<sup>16</sup>

The youth shared painful experiences highlighting challenges with garbage disposal, illegal dumping, lack of waste bins, delayed or non-existent garbage collection, and the high cost of garbage services. The youth view the green transition not only as a solution but also as a form of salvation, which triggers environmental responsibility and green transition practices.<sup>17</sup> Ojala documented this connection in his research on youth climate engagement, revealing that emotional responses like fear or sadness can drive increased environmental awareness and civic participation.<sup>18</sup> Further, based on the photographs and stories they shared—including children playing in a settlement in Konyokonyo and a residential area neighboring a dumpsite—some participants appeared conscious of differential exposure of residents to pollution and therefore the need for conflict-sensitive approaches to redress environmental harms.

## Story 2: Youth desire to learn more about the green transition

“As I write this from Juba in 2026, the idea of the ‘green transition’ feels both urgent and fragile.”<sup>19</sup>

The young people who joined the workshop were all Juba-based and came from various backgrounds and educational levels: some were secondary school students, others university graduates or working in the informal sector. A few had participated in school or church-based environmental clubs; others were part of institutional projects in green energy at the University of Juba STEM Center or UNIPOD, and others had no prior exposure to the concept of green transition at all. In a baseline survey administered at the beginning of the workshop, respondents reported moderate levels of

<sup>12</sup> Workshop participant, “Dear Grandparents,” a Letter to the Ancestor, 27 February 2026; Male workshop participant, “Dear Ker-rol,” a Letter to the Ancestor, 27 February 2026.

<sup>13</sup> Wani James Henry, “Juba must plant trees or continue to sweat! A conflict sensitivity lens to Juba’s heat crisis,” CSRF blog, 26 February 2026

<sup>14</sup> Workshop participant, “Dear Ker-rol,” a Letter to the Ancestor, 27 February 2026

<sup>15</sup> Photo elicitation session, 23 February 2026

<sup>16</sup> Pihkala, P. “Anxiety and the ecological crisis: An analysis of eco-anxiety and climate anxiety.” *Sustainability*. 12 (19) (September 2020)

<sup>17</sup> James, J. and Nicola, B. “From Clicks to Cleanups: Juba’s Youth-Led Waste Revolution,” reasons to be cheerful (23 February 2026). <https://reasonstobecheerful.world/south-sudan-juba-youth-led-waste-revolution/>

<sup>18</sup> Ojala, M. “Young people and global climate change: Emotions, coping, and engagement in everyday life.” *Geographies of Global Issues: Change and Threat*. (2016)

<sup>19</sup> Workshop participant, “Dear Future,” a Letter to the Future Generation, 27 February 2026.

understanding of the green transition, with the total range falling between 3 and 10 out of 10, and the majority ranking their understanding at 5.5 out of 10.<sup>20</sup> These findings suggest that while youth are aware of environmental issues, many are new to the term ‘green transition’ as a technical terminology and comprehensive framework linking climate mitigation, sustainable development, economic opportunities, and environmental protection.

As we said in Story 1, the environmental crisis is primarily a lived experience for young people, so there is an important sense that what they ‘know’ comes out of what they live. One interviewee affirmed that his most important insights come from observation, not from reading: “You go to the ground and see. We believe in evidence-based arguments from our observations and lived experience.”<sup>21</sup> However, when asked where they acquire their knowledge about the green transition, workshop participants said it mainly comes from media, social media, and school, followed by friends, peer networks, and family members. This pattern highlights both the potential and the limitations of current environmental education pathways: as education transforms through media and digitisation, youth are actively seeking knowledge and connecting to resources and networks online, in some cases bypassing or supplementing what they can access in formal educational spaces. Notably, several of our participants who were also environmental entrepreneurs had a background in computer science and software engineering, signaling the link between digital technology and innovation, including within the environmental space. Still, schools and in-person peer networks remain vital for learning about the green transition, acting as hubs for fostering environmental values, sustainability skills, and practical action-orientated knowledge, with some participants studying subjects such as geology, and some schools and churches offering environmental clubs. Our findings suggest, however, that neither social media nor formal educational spaces are sufficiently meeting the youth's demand for knowledge and training. UNESCO's 2025 baseline report on greening Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), shows this gap. The document underscores that skills development systems in the country are not yet adequately aligned with the needs of the green transition, and that training programmes addressing climate change and sustainable practices remain limited.<sup>22</sup>

In the end, young people are more interested in the green transition than they are knowledgeable about it. The young urban participants in our workshop were motivated to engage with environmental issues and desired greater access to training, mentorship, and educational programmes that translate environmental awareness into practical knowledge, skills and employment. However, urban and educated youth are often among the first to gain access to educational opportunities. Therefore, for environmental educational interventions to be truly conflict-sensitive and responsive to South Sudanese youth, they must cast a wider net that accounts for the needs of rural youth, including language, livelihoods and culturally relevant knowledge systems.

### **Story 3: Youth associate decarbonization with peace and gender equality**

“Here is what I am imagining: energy that serves people first.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Baseline survey administered during workshop. The question on the Baseline Survey stated, “On a scale from 1 - 10, rate your understanding of the ‘green transition’ with 1= I know nothing at all; 5 = I have heard about it and 10 = I have learned about the green transition and understand it well.

<sup>21</sup> Interview, 19 February 2026

<sup>22</sup> UNESCO 2025. *Strengthening TVET in South Sudan through greening and gender transformation: Report of the baseline study.*

<sup>23</sup> Workshop participant, “Dear Future,” a Letter to the Future Generation, 27 February 2026

In general, the youth participants frame the green transition as a social justice issue. Some participants drew, on one side, clear links between ‘dirty energy’, conflict, and deepening systems of gender inequality and, on the other, between green energy, peace and gender equality.

One interviewee, who transitioned from human rights activist to climate activist and founded an advocacy initiative, argued that resolving conflict-related issues requires addressing the climate crisis. He connected conflict to climate change—particularly flooding, drought, and resultant displacement—stating, “Cultivation is not happening, there’s no food, and issues of criminality are coming in because people want to grab from someone. Climate change forces pastoralists to move and then conflicts arise. Therefore, we cannot solve conflicts without reference to climate change.”<sup>24</sup>

Participants generally described the relationship between the environment and conflict in two distinct ways: first, they recalled how war and conflict have historically contributed to environmental destruction; for example, one participant shared a song to illustrate memories of how war destroys the environment. In the song, community members describe how upon returning home to their previously fertile land after displacement, they encounter a severely damaged ecosystem. The song ends with a call to restore the land. On the other hand, participants reflected on the ways routine environmental practices—particularly those linked to resource extraction—can create situations of risk, tension, and conflict. For example, poorly managed natural resources were identified as a major driver of conflict in Juba and beyond. Participants perceived South Sudan’s dependence on oil and the widespread cutting of trees as important drivers of conflict at different levels and scales.

Reflecting on the effects of the country’s reliance on oil, several participants spoke of oil pollution and conflict in several areas in South Sudan.<sup>25</sup> In response to an image of the JEDCO logo, several participants expressed ambivalence—grateful for the relatively recent electrification of Juba city, but concerned over exclusionary costs and frequent outages, reminding them of the limitations of fossil fuels.<sup>26</sup> They also narrated stories of preventable deaths due to power outages and faulty generators at hospitals in Bor and Juba, with one interviewee stating, “I have come to realise that if we rely on diesel, then we shall face many maternal deaths in the hospitals.”<sup>27</sup> His experience led him to endorse Dr. John Garang’s proposal to limit the government’s use of oil to the agricultural sector—ideally resulting in food production, revenues and civil servant salaries—with the regulated adoption of solar in all other areas. The widespread adoption of solar energy as an avenue for not only development but also as a “building block for peace” was recommended in a 2019 report by USIP.<sup>28</sup>

Participants also cited tree cutting as a practice with the potential to drive conflict at multiple levels, with disparate effects according to gender and social position. One example participants cited was the cutting of trees for timber with machines, pitting what they identified as “foreigners” against villagers, with chiefs and other elders positioning themselves as go-betweens allied with business interests.<sup>29</sup> In particular, the letters to the ancestors surfaced feelings of disgruntlement among youth who perceive

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<sup>24</sup> Interview, 19 February 2026. The initiative is called the Youth Advocacy for Climate Change Adaptation Initiative.

<sup>25</sup> Workshop discussion, 24 February 2026

<sup>26</sup> Photo elicitation session, Youth and the Green Transition Workshop, 23 February 2026

<sup>27</sup> Interview, 19 February 2026

<sup>28</sup> Mozernsky, D and Kammen, D. “South Sudan’s Renewable Energy Potential: A Building Block for Peace,” USIP Special Report 418, 18 January 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Interview, 19 February 2026

the indiscriminate and unregulated cutting of trees as a threat to the forests they embrace as both their natural inheritance and national investment.<sup>30</sup>

Tree-cutting also highlighted youth's perceptions of the intersection of environmental practice, gender roles, and social inequalities, particularly in relation to household energy use. Participants frequently noted that rural communities widely regard the responsibility for collecting firewood, the dominant household fuel source, as women's work. When a photo of a woman cooking on a wood-burning stove was shown during the photo elicitation session, a few participants mentioned the contribution of firewood to deforestation, but most concentrated on the gendered risks and dangers, including respiratory ailments from inhaling smoke while cooking, and especially the exposure to harassment and sexual assault when travelling long distances to collect firewood.<sup>31</sup>

The workshop contributions also suggest that youth are already challenging traditional gender norms in environmental activities. For example, an image shared by a participant during a photovoice exercise showed a young woman performing solar installation, reflecting emerging shifts in gendered expectations around technology, skills and environmental leadership. Participants paid less attention to how the green transition might have the potential to reproduce or create new inequalities. For example, participants did not mention how industrial or technological inventions could create grievances by disrupting existing labor distribution or social arrangements.

Instead, the youth demonstrated great openness and optimism toward alternative energy solutions. They proposed possible interventions and were especially keen on the perceived cost-effectiveness of solar, with one interviewee explaining that he encouraged community members to adopt solar by contrasting the recurring costs of generators with the 'fuel from God' provided by the sun.<sup>32</sup> Green transition initiatives are seen not only to promote environmental sustainability but also as a means of reducing resource-related tensions, reducing gendered labour burdens, and promoting gender equality.<sup>33</sup>

#### **Story 4: Youth become agents of environmental change.**

"If I am remembered, let it be as part of a generation that chose courage over comfort, and action over indifference."<sup>34</sup>

A strong theme emerging from the discussions was the perception that young people themselves should play a central role in advancing environmental protection and green transition initiatives. With 95% of participants ranking the green transition as "the most important issue facing my generation", they appear ready to step into the role of lead author, rewriting South Sudan's environmental story toward clean energy and sustainability.

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<sup>30</sup> Workshop participant, "Dear Ker-rol," a Letter to the Ancestors, 27 February 2026

<sup>31</sup> Photo elicitation exercise, Youth and the Green Transition Workshop, 23 February 2026. Only one participant reported positive feelings in response to the image of the firewood stove, saying it brought up good memories of his mother preparing meals for the family. There has been more work recently on the role of "imaginaries" in shaping public opinion toward energy transitions. See Lechowicz, K. And Kuchler, M. "Bounded imaginaries of coal: Local meanings, materiality and visions of the good life in Upper Silesia. *EPE: Nature and Space* 0 (0) (2025). The urban youth we engaged tended to embrace discourses of progress where green energy figured prominently, and carbon symbolized an underdeveloped and hazardous past.

<sup>32</sup> Interview, 19 February 2026

<sup>33</sup> Discussions and exercises, Youth and the Green Transition Workshop, 23 - 27 February 2026

<sup>34</sup> Male workshop participant, "Dear Future Generation," a Letter to the Future Generation, 27 February 2026

Participants repeatedly shared their belief in the importance of personal choice, responsibility, and individual agency for an effective green transition, and emphasized that it was “youth themselves” that are most responsible.<sup>35</sup> One youth entrepreneur observed that most of the actors he knows in the environmental sector are in their early to mid-20s, and it is the youth leadership characterising the movement that excites him most.<sup>36</sup> A researcher in the environmental field agrees: the green transition is a youth-led movement, and this youth leadership is reshaping social norms around sustainability.<sup>37</sup> Our interviews with environmental entrepreneurs—youth who founded an environmental or eco-friendly initiative—further confirmed the fervour with which youth are taking on a leadership role in the environmental movement.

Workshop activities both highlighted and reinforced this sense of agency through creative expression. The letters, poetry, and drama produced by the youth all feature a protagonist who can make choices, act on them, and make a difference in the world. In a poem written from the point of view of the ubiquitous *kavera* (pastic bag), the discarded bag dreams of better choices: *But there is another ending / I dream about / A world where I am refused / Replaced by woven baskets / Cloth bags carried with pride / Strong hands choosing what can be used / again and again.*<sup>38</sup> During the final day of the workshop, six participants devised a forum theatre play to instigate dialogue, calling it “Our Choice,” the title itself encapsulating the way many participants frame the dilemma of environmental change by emphasising personal choice and individual responsibility.<sup>39</sup> Most of the youth put a heavy emphasis on small acts of environmental civic action, such as refusing single-use plastic at the local shop; cleaning one’s compound; disposing of waste in a responsible manner; taking part in organised clean-ups; purchasing solar, and planting trees.<sup>40</sup>

They also highlighted the ways their actions could have ripple effects and influence others, including fellow citizens and the government. A scene in the play showing random waste disposal in the street sparked a conversation among workshop participants about citizen policing of waste disposal, with some saying they had witnessed more involvement by citizens in other countries enforcing better behaviour around littering. The discussion evolved into calls to encourage youth to act as role models in their communities.<sup>41</sup> Another interviewee suggested that environmental champions needed to “infect people with the ideology.”<sup>42</sup> These discussions indicate that youth view the green transition not only as a policy shift but also as a behavioral and cultural transformation in everyday environmental practices.

However, some of the participants also acknowledged the need for the involvement of a wider array of actors for a green transition to take effect. Several participants cited the responsibility of government for waste management and service delivery in Juba, noting the failures of the authorities after the collapse of the municipal garbage collection in March 2023. Despite government apathy, indifference, and a stagnant economy, the youth are not ready or willing to give up. As one of our participants said in another interview with an online publication, the environmental movement’s “true currency” is

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<sup>35</sup> Final survey, 27 February 2026. An interviewee qualified this idea by stating that it is “concerned citizens” who are most responsible for ensuring that the green transition advances. Interview, 19 February 2026

<sup>36</sup> Interview, 8 March 2026

<sup>37</sup> Interview, 7 March 2026

<sup>38</sup> Workshop participant, “Into the Unknown, Known Destiny,” Poetry exercise, 26 February 2026

<sup>39</sup> Drama session, Youth and the Green Transition Workshop, 27 February 2026

<sup>40</sup> Discussions, Youth and the Green Transition Workshop, 23 - 27 February 2026

<sup>41</sup> Drama session, Youth and the Green Transition Workshop, 27 February 2026

<sup>42</sup> Interview, 08 March 2026

“collective frustration transformed into action.”<sup>43</sup> One of our interviewees compared the government to the policy-making arm of a movement, calling the private sector the “army” that must implement those policies by innovating and bringing alternative products to the market. In the final survey, only one respondent cited international organizations and development partners as responsible for the green transition. Most of the youth we engaged view individuals, and particularly young people, as agents of change. They see themselves as ultimately responsible for making the green transition happen, through personal choice, and most especially, through advocacy to push for change and make influential decision-makers understand its importance.

The energy and determination of the youth we engaged is palpable, and this energy can be harnessed for just and lasting change; however, applying a conflict-sensitive lens highlights the way an overemphasis on individual action can mask structural inequalities. It is important that any interventions take into account the barriers to individual agency in activism or behavior change, integrate whole community approaches where appropriate, and foreground the collective as well as the personal or individual benefits of any given intervention.

### **Story 5: Youth aspire to a prosperous and innovative future**

“As for my legacy, I hope to be remembered as someone who used his voice, creativity and influence to champion a greener future.”<sup>44</sup>

Youth largely believe that a green future is inevitable and desirable, and that society is moving steadily toward it. When participants envisioned this green future through the innovation wall, plastic arts, drawing, and creative writing, they generally envisioned cleaner cities, improved waste management systems, expanded use of renewable energy, and greener urban planning that could reduce pollution and enhance quality of life. During an innovation wall activity, a young woman participant from the University of Juba’s Stem Center suggested ways of transforming small-scale farming using robots. Another female participant suggested planting trees along all the main roads in Juba city, stating that this would reduce heat, lower carbon dioxide levels and stabilize rainfall patterns. Other ideas for transforming urban life and reducing pollution included reducing the number of vehicles on the roads, introducing car-free days, promoting walking and cycling, and supporting urban planning to manage flooding and waste and regulating chemical disposal to prevent environmental contamination.<sup>45</sup>

The workshop participants reported that the recycled arts session was one of their favourites, as it allowed them to materialise their ideas and visions and repurpose plastic waste. Many of the created objects also embodied the changes people wished to see on a larger scale: a small truck that could be used as a child’s toy doubled as a teaching tool for waste management and a model for more garbage trucks in Juba; a small table out of plastic bottle caps served as a prototype for eco-friendly furniture; a plastic bottle turned into a water bottle carrier signaled the need to refuse single-use plastic; a plastic flower pot demonstrated creative uses of existing plastic to beautify a room; a tiny briquette stove symbolised the need for alternative cooking fuels; and a plastic dress nodded toward innovative eco-fashion while sending a message about the danger of microplastics to the human body and ecosystem.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> James, J and Nicola, B. “From Clicks to Cleanups: Juba’s Youth-led Waste Revolution,” 23 February 2026 <https://reasonstobecheerful.world/?s=Juba>

<sup>44</sup> Workshop participant, “Dear Future Generation,” a Letter to the Future Generation, 27 February 2026

<sup>45</sup> Discussion, Youth and the Green Transition Workshop, 26 February 2026

<sup>46</sup> Recycled arts session, Youth and the Green Transition Workshop, 24 February 2026

In fact, the potential of the green transition to drive innovation and economic development while engaging in social transformation is what motivates youth most. Currently, waste is a major area of concentration for youth innovation and problem-solving, with several entrepreneurs having launched partnerships with international organizations and attracted funds: One workshop participant represented Save the Nile—a youth-led initiative funded by the National Geographic Society and the Nature Conservancy’s externship programme—which has mobilized 150 volunteers for clean-up campaigns around Juba city; an interviewee founded Nile Green Packaging, Ltd, an eco-friendly packaging production, recycling, and waste management company that received a monetary award from the African Leadership University Centre and distributes its products to international hotels such as Pyramid and Radisson Blu. The company now has its eyes on launching its environmental intelligence system designed to monitor waste nationwide and provide data-driven insights to relevant authorities; another interviewee cited a Juba-based initiative supported by UNMISS that transforms plastic to bricks for constructing houses; and fashion house Shem Africa received funding from the IGAD Secretariat and the African Development Bank to develop an upcycling and eco-fashion initiative to combat textile waste.

One of the interviewees shared his excitement about the possibility of building a “circular system,” in South Sudan, where waste is viewed as a resource. He stated, "For a long time, people viewed issues like plastic pollution, waste, and environmental degradation solely as problems. The green economy has changed that mindset by showing that these challenges can become new industries, new technologies, and new sources of employment."<sup>47</sup> A workshop participant echoed this vision, wondering aloud, “What if we increase the value of plastic waste? We could deplete plastics, annihilate littering, and protect the environment.”<sup>48</sup> In fact, South Sudanese youth are part of a wider movement: according to a recent youth-led research report, there is a growing recognition among youth across Africa of green jobs and eco-innovations as viable entrepreneurial avenues.<sup>49</sup>

South Sudanese youth entrepreneurs embrace global discourses of innovation and entrepreneurship as they map onto the environmental space. One explained that the green economy is a compelling idea for South Sudan, as many sectors are still developing, and there is a unique opportunity to build them in a sustainable and responsible way from the very beginning.<sup>50</sup> The wholesale celebration of innovation and technology often eclipses conflict-sensitive considerations—such as unequal access to capital, uneven gaps in youth skills and training, urban bias in entrepreneurial support and potential job losses. Realising the potential of a just green economy will require inclusive financing mechanisms, decentralized innovation ecosystems, and enabling policies to ensure that all young people can actively participate in and benefit from the emerging green economy.

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<sup>47</sup> Interview, 8 March 2026

<sup>48</sup> Male workshop participant, February 2026

<sup>49</sup> Ashangwa, H., Longole, L.A., Nyamurge, Z, Silas H. Supported by Manenji, S. M. “Beyond Hustle: Youth Entrepreneurship and the Green Jobs Future in Africa.” AU-EU Youth Voices Lab, 2025. <https://restlessdevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Report-3-Entrepreneurship.pdf>. The founder of Nile Green Packaging has already been scoping markets in Gabon and Ethiopia and estimates the market for eco-friendly packaging across Africa could reach \$40 billion. Interview, 8 March 2026.

<sup>50</sup> Interview, 8 March 2026

## Story 6: The green transition is also restoration

“I do not see green as something tied to the future. It is not futuristic. I believe it has been with us for long.”<sup>51</sup>

Many participants emphasised that the green transition is not entirely new. Instead, they understood the concept as deeply rooted in South Sudanese ancestral heritage and part of the culture for centuries.

A few young environmental entrepreneurs traced the origins of their interest in the field to early childhood experiences raising livestock. They saw the way communities protected and respected animals as reflecting principles of environmental stewardship. One interviewee suggested that a relevant entry point for awareness raising around pollution and waste management could be the livestock that are culturally and economically important to the community. He described learning from elders about the dangers plastic bags pose to goats who eat them while grazing.<sup>52</sup> An Avokaya cultural troupe that performed on the final day of the workshop shared a song about protecting animals as well as a harvesting song that they said also strengthens community unity and responsibility for the land. Other participants recalled cultural songs that promote recognition and respect for the ecosystem, with one participant singing, “Our land Yirol is surrounded by lakes, and if you go there, you will find natural resources.”<sup>53</sup> The Avokaya troupe shared another song praising the “big trees” that cannot be cut down, and an interviewee told a story of an elder who lived in a forest he cultivated himself, teaching that the secret of life was caring for the earth and planting trees, saying, “If you give life a donation, it will give you life too.”<sup>54</sup> These few examples highlight the need for a conflict-sensitive approach to environmental interventions and energy transitions that remain conscious of culturally significant geographies.

Participants shared several other examples of traditional practices tied to sustainability. For example, one interviewee cited the practice of rotational grazing cattle keepers, who do so even without formal training, to restore and maintain the ecosystem rather than depleting it. Similarly, he cited traditional fishing practices as involving not overfishing the same pond two days in a row.<sup>55</sup> Some workshop participants cited communal eating as a South Sudanese practice that protects resources and supports sustainability.<sup>56</sup>

The potential to innovate existing resources for a more just, culturally sensitive, and equitable green transition also inspired participants. After viewing a photo of a young boy in a cattle camp, a participant emphasised the importance of encouraging the community to “value what they have,” and to seek ways to utilise and innovate existing resources and materials, such as cow dung, to create new products and systems.<sup>57</sup> Other participants echoed the same idea, with one writing in his letter to the ancestor,

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<sup>51</sup> Interview, 8 March 2026

<sup>52</sup> Interview, 8 March 2026

<sup>53</sup> Discussion, Youth and the Green Transition Workshop, 27 February 2026

<sup>54</sup> Interview, 8 March 2026. In the CSRF blog, the authors talk about communities’ perception of greater co-existence with nature and wildlife in the past, characterized by a reverence for trees, and taboos around killing animals. CSRF blog, June 2025.

<sup>55</sup> Interview, 8 March 2026

<sup>56</sup> Discussion, Youth and the Green Transition Workshop, 27 February 2026

<sup>57</sup> Photo elicitation session, Youth and the Green Transition Workshop, 23 February 2026

“I want us to use cow dung for clean cooking energy instead of cutting down trees.”<sup>58</sup> Linking green transition initiatives to local cultural values and practices was considered an important pathway for strengthening community engagement, with one entrepreneur sharing that he had directed his marketing officer to explore cultural aspects of their work to determine how to best market their vision to the public.<sup>59</sup>

Overall, interviews and workshop discussions revealed that although youth embrace the global discourse of the green transition as a future-orientated transformation powered by innovation and new ideas, they also recognise it as a restoration of cultural environmental values. A conflict-sensitive approach to the green transition would need to not just honor but meaningfully integrate indigenous knowledge systems and mechanisms.

## Conclusion

This analysis demonstrates that young people in Juba are not passive observers of environmental change but active interpreters and agents of transformation within the green transition. The workshop introduced the possibility of environmental dystopia through the reading of a science fiction story, but the participants generally dismissed this negative view in favor of the vision of a greener future. The promise of the green transition captures their imaginations, and their perspectives reveal a powerful convergence of lived experience, emotional engagement, and forward-looking ambition. Environmental degradation is understood not as a distant or abstract issue, but as a daily reality that shapes health, livelihoods, and social stability. These experiences, in turn, fuel a strong desire among youth to learn, innovate, and act.

At the same time, the findings highlight a critical gap between youth motivation and access to technical knowledge, skills development, and institutional support. While young people are eager to participate in and lead the green transition, existing education systems, training opportunities, and policy frameworks are not yet adequately aligned with their aspirations. Addressing this gap will be essential to unlocking the full potential of youth as drivers of sustainable development.

The analysis also emphasises the value of understanding the green transition as a multidimensional process that intersects with peacebuilding, gender dynamics, and economic opportunity. Youth narratives clearly link environmental sustainability with reduced conflict, improved social equity, and expanded livelihoods. Their emphasis on innovation—particularly in waste management and green entrepreneurship—points to tangible pathways for both environmental and economic transformation.

Finally, youth perspectives challenge purely technocratic or externally driven approaches by grounding the green transition in local cultural values and practices. They present a vision of sustainability that is both forward-looking and deeply rooted in South Sudanese culture by framing it as both innovation and restoration.

For policymakers, practitioners, and development partners, these insights point to the urgent need for youth-centred, context-sensitive, and culturally informed strategies. Supporting youth leadership,

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<sup>58</sup> Workshop participant, “Dear Grandfather,” a Letter to the Ancestors, 27 February 2026. More researchers are writing about the importance of integrating traditional ecological knowledge into modern programming. See Leakey, L.M and Kakukwena, M. “Integrating Indigenous Ecological Knowledge into Modern Education: A Study of its Impact on Environmental Conservation in Zambia. 13 October 2025.

<sup>59</sup> Discussions, Youth and the Green Transition Workshop, 27 February 2026; Interview, 8 March 2026

investing in green skills and entrepreneurship, and strengthening enabling environments will be key to ensuring that the green transition in South Sudan is inclusive, equitable, and sustainable.

### **Conflict-sensitive Recommendations**

These recommendations apply a conflict-sensitive lens to youth engagement in the green transition in South Sudan, recognizing that environmental action is deeply intertwined with inequality, resource access, and social cohesion. They translate the six key “stories” into practical actions that promote inclusion, reduce tensions, and strengthen pathways for youth to contribute to both sustainability and peace.

#### **From story 1: Youth, Pollution & Environmental Degradation**

- Invest in inclusive, youth-led environmental restoration (reforestation, waste management) that brings together different communities.
- Pair environmental action with livelihood opportunities to reduce economic grievances.
- Prioritize pollution mitigation in marginalized areas to address unequal exposure and prevent resentment.
- Conduct conflict-sensitive environmental assessments and mapping before interventions in high-risk areas.
- Include youth in policy dialogues and decision-making processes around environmental protection.

#### **From story 2: Youth, Education & Skills for the Green Transition**

- Expand equitable access to green skills training in renewable energy, waste management, sustainable agriculture, and green entrepreneurship, to all youth.
- Prioritise partnerships with existing educational pathways, such as TVET, Universities and innovation hubs.
- Use decentralized and mobile training models to avoid geographic exclusion.
- Strengthen TVET programmes and link training directly to employment and entrepreneurship pathways.
- Integrate peacebuilding, civic engagement, and conflict resolution skills into green curricula.
- Leverage participatory arts-based and creative methods in research and community programming to ensure interventions are inclusive and responsive to local realities and grounded in lived experiences.

#### **From story 3: Energy, Conflict, Gender & Peacebuilding**

- Prioritize community consultation and participatory planning for all energy projects.
- Ensure fair benefit-sharing (jobs, access, revenues) for local youth and communities.
- Invest in decentralized renewable energy solutions to reduce conflict risks to large infrastructure.
- Address gender-specific dimensions of the energy transition and implement mechanisms to encourage women’s participation.
- Use energy initiatives as platforms for cross-community cooperation and peacebuilding.

#### **From story 4: Youth as Agents of Environmental Change**

- Support youth ambassadors, while framing environmental action as both individual and collective responsibility.
- Provide practical resources and support so all youth can act—not just those with means.
- Use youth-led inclusive and creative communication campaigns and messaging that recognizes structural constraints and avoids blame.
- Promote community-based initiatives that translate personal action into shared impact.

- Facilitate intergenerational dialogue to align youth-led change with community realities and policy frameworks.

**From story 5: Youth Innovation & Green Entrepreneurship**

- Provide targeted support (finance, mentorship, incubation) to marginalized and underrepresented youth.
- Ensure transparent and inclusive selection processes for opportunities.
- Promote collaborative, cross-community business models rather than zero-sum competition.
- Align innovation support with local market realities to avoid frustration and disillusionment.
- Thoroughly assess new technological interventions for unintended disruption to existing employment and networks.

**From story 6: Cultural Heritage & the Green Transition**

- Integrate traditional ecological knowledge and cultural practices into environmental solutions.
- Engage elders and cultural custodians alongside youth in program design.
- Protect culturally significant sites and practices in green interventions.
- Use heritage-based initiatives to strengthen social cohesion and intergenerational dialogue.