WOMEN, PEACE, & SECURITY: SOUTH SUDAN SNAPSHOT

SEARCH'S APPROACH TO WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY

1. To empower women to engage in peacebuilding and civil society leadership,
2. To prevent sexual and gender-based violence, and
3. To engage both men and women for gender equality.

Throughout our programming we mainstream gender equality and ensure that we follow "Do No Harm" principles to - at all times - avoid reinforcing gender inequality and discrimination against women and girls, seek to be gender transformative, and create enduring change. To achieve this, we use tools such as gender analyses and gender-sensitive monitoring and strive for gender parity within our program delivery teams. Although the approaches Search utilizes vary depending on the country and field context, our projects often employ the following strategies and tools: gender analysis and reporting; capacity building; media, communications and outreach; network and alliance building; and gender mainstreaming.

SEARCH'S WPS WORK IN SOUTH SUDAN

BACKGROUND

After South Sudan's devastating civil war, there has been a lack of women representation in participation as attempts at peace, falling below the original quota of 25% women's participation in government institutions set in 2011.[1] Women are common victims of violence and are connected to prominent drivers of inter-communal conflict (including cattle raiding to pay for high dowries, sexual and gender-based violence, and land disputes around inheritance laws). The R-ARCSS was signed in September 2018, ending the five year-long civil war and responded to this issue by setting a 35% requirement for women's representation in all institutions created by the R-ARCSS. On February 21, 2020, the Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU) in South Sudan was formed.[2] Less than a month later, on March 12th, President Salva Kiir appointed the 35-minister transition government, but fell short of the 35% women's quota in the unity cabinet.[3]

Search for Common Ground began working in South Sudan in June 2014, using research to inform its conflict transformation programming. Search's overall objective in South Sudan to promote social cohesion, resilience, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts among individuals and communities. We work across all levels of society to support diverse and constructive dialogue, positive peace-focused media, and access to justice mechanisms. We partner with and engage local actors including civil society organizations, women's groups, youth, media professionals, and others through conflict transformation and conflict-sensitive journalism training, participatory theater, radio programming, ongoing conflict analysis, community-led dialogues, and local peace initiatives. Search then connects local-level initiatives and expertise with national and international policymakers and experts to ensure that local voices and local solutions are at the forefront of decision-making.

[1] Lopidia, R. (2019) "South Sudanese Women at the Peace Table: Violence, Advocacy, Achievement and Beyond. "The Zambakari Advisory: Special Issue. <https://www.zambakari.org/uploads/8/4/8/9/84899028/11_south-sudanese-women-at-the-peace-table.pdf >.

[2] UN News (2019) "UN chief welcomes South Sudan's Unity government, lauds parties for 'significant achievement.'" <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/02/1057941 >

[3] Sudan Tribune (2020) "South Sudan's new cabinet does not meet the 35% women's quota: UN Guterres." <https://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article69101 >

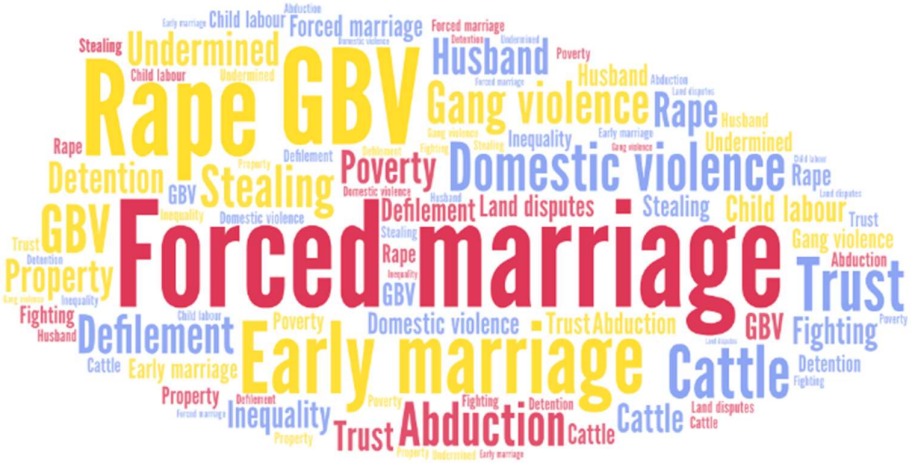
WOMEN IN THE SOUTH SUDAN PEACE PROCESS AND CONFLICT DYNAMICS

"We women and our children are the major group affected by any conflict in South Sudan."[4]

Search's previous research shows that localized violence in South Sudan has been intricately linked to drivers related to the role of women within the family and community. Criminal activity, like cattle raiding, are often connected to acquiring necessary funds to meet the cultural practice of bride prices and dowries. In other cases, familial disputes over marriage turn violent or divide communities. Domestic violence against women is the most recent experience with violence that 43% of people in Awerial, Lakes State have experienced. These conflicts represent the most common exposure to violence for most South Sudanese; however, when these local communal conflicts intersect with national trends of ethnic and political division they tend to cycle and expand beyond the original conflict.[5] Despite their centrality to many of these issues, women are unlikely to bring forward their cases to customary or statutory courts. Nearly 30% of women responded they "do nothing" when they have experienced human rights violations.[6] [7]

When it comes to participating in peace processes, several barriers have been identified including gender norms, decision-making, power, and authority. Gender roles and responsibilities strongly influence time use for women, who are expected to focus on activities in the home, which prevents participation in peace processes and other activities such as local governance initiatives, trainings, work, etc. The gender norms were said to be culturally enforced and reinforced by men and women: **"as a woman I would ensure that my house is in order before I can leave home, and this affects us from attending local and national level peace efforts.**" A young woman active in peace efforts said that, "We have some women engaging in the peace process, but their voices are still not being heard because of the number of men to women." Another limitation on women's time use is that it's culturally taboo for women, especially married women, to go out at night, which some reported is often when important political meetings take place. It is important to consider the intersection of gender identities as well as the barriers different groups face.

FOUR COMMON CONFLICT COMMUNITY DYNAMICS



[4] FGD with a women's organization in Jonglei State, February 2020. Robinson, Michael. (2020). Baseline Report, Strengthening Young Women's Participation in Local and National Peace Processes in South Sudan.

[5] Search for Common Ground, and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, (April 2015).

[6] This reflects the overall percentage for women surveyed across 5 counties (Juba, Bor, Wau, Pageri, Rumbek Central). Search for Common Ground, (4 August 2017). Iyaa, D and Smith, K. (2018). Women and the Future of South Sudan: Local Insight on Building Inclusive Constituencies for Peace, 1st ed. Washington DC: Search for Common Ground.

[7] Quantitative surveys with 216 participants. Forcier Consulting, Search for Common Ground Endline Evaluation: Facilitating Access to Justice in South Sudan 2018.

1. ***Gender-based violence:*** Domestic violence is the type of violence most commonly reported by women: nearly one quarter of women in South Sudan report that the last conflict they experienced was violence in the home.[8] These cases of sexual or physical abuse often go unreported and unaddressed. Local customs and attitudes on gender have perpetuated abuses toward women and precluded them from accessing justice. Victims of gender-based violence often face stigmatization by community members and are sometimes discouraged from reporting these cases by the police, who may tell them to go home and settle the issue with their families.[9] Women also report early and forced marriages as key gender-based conflicts they face in the community. COVID-19[10] has put women and girls at an increased risk of gender-based violence. Quarantine measures, reduced access to external support such as legal interventions, and stress associated with economic and social disruption are all factors which increase the risk of gender-based violence in the home.[11]

2. ***Dowry price:*** In the traditional dowry system in South Sudan, male family members arrange marriages and set the bride price for their female relatives. The most popular form of dowry compensation is the exchange of cattle from the bridegroom to the woman's father/family for permission to marry. The deteriorating economy has left many men unable to pay for the traditional dowry. This accounts for some, though not all, of the cattle raiding in South Sudan, as men seek to add cattle to their dowry payment in order to marry. Cattle raids are linked with cycles of revenge attacks between and among communities.[12] A surge in the availability of weapons due to the conflict has increased the lethality of cattle raids, leading to an increased number of deaths that can trigger cycles of revenge killings.[13]

3. ***Familial and inter-tribal disputes***: Family disputes are often associated with marriage, including issues of inter-tribal marriage, rape, divorce, and abducted women for marriage. In marriage arrangements, women are often treated as property and the arrangement treated as a transaction. Conflicts also arise when the traditional/cultural marriages procedures are not followed. "Taking girls for marriage" is reported as a major conflict trigger in South Sudan.[14] When this occurs, it often results in violent conflict between the two families, who demand compensation for "theft."[15] Other sources of localized violence, such as competition for resources and land ownership disputes have led to cycles of revenge attacks and inter-communal violence. Massive inflation and economic decline as well as easy access to small arms have exacerbated the severity of the conflict and brought violence into everyday spaces of normal life. Tribal identities are highly valued, interaction between tribes is limited, and violence against other tribes is generally accepted.[16]

4. ***Economic and livelihoods constraints:*** Political instability, ongoing violence, and reduced international investment have created a rapidly deteriorating economic environment, characterized by volatile

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[8] In addition to the 24.3% of women that identified their most recently experienced conflict as "violence in the home," 15.1% responded the most recent form of violence they experienced was "Other" and these most often were identified as disputes related to women, such as forced marriage and unwanted pregnancy. Search for Common Ground, and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, (April 2015).

[9] Forcier Consulting, Search for Common Ground Endline Evaluation: Facilitating Access to Justice in South Sudan 2018.

[10] See Search's Gender & COVID-19 in Conflict-Affected Contexts: http://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Gender_and_the_COVID-19_Crisis_in-Conflict-Affected_Contexts-Search_for_Common_Ground.pdf

[11] "UN chief calls for domestic violence 'ceasefire' amid 'horrifying global surge'", UN News, April 5 2020 (https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061052).

[12] Search for Common Ground, and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, (April/May 2016).

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] Interviews with civil society in Juba (May 2018). Iyaa, D and Smith, K. (2018). Women and the Future of South Sudan: Local Insight on Building Inclusive Constituencies for Peace, 1st ed. Washington DC: Search for Common Ground.

[16] Search for Common Ground. "Baseline Assessment Communicating for Peace in South Sudan: A Social and Behavior Change Communication Initiative." April 2015.

currency fluctuations and limited employment opportunities.[17] Yet, even as they head households, they face significant constraints including frequent denial of formal ownership of property, even in instances where husbands or male relatives have passed away. Only 13% of women in Juba, Bor, Wau, Pageri, and Rumbek Central were aware of their legal and constitutional right to own property.[18]

ENGAGING IN INCLUSIVE WOMEN, PEACE & SECURITY

There is a general perception that because women are disproportionately affected by violence in South Sudan, that they will be natural advocates for peaceful resolution. Despite the unique challenges and conflict dynamics facing women in South Sudan, women are just as likely as their male counterparts to believe that violence against another tribe is justified and to respond to conflict by fighting or yelling and they are disproportionately absent from local and national peace programming and processes.[19] Women are less likely to engage in discussion around issues of peace and conflict with others within and outside their community than their male counterparts.[20] Nevertheless, women are also perceived by civil society members to have a unique role influencing attitudes towards peace, particularly because of their potential role in teaching non-violent values to their children or coaxing their male family members out of violence.[21] These findings suggest a need for more initiatives designed to promote tolerance and peaceful dispute resolution targeted at women to engage them as a constituency for peace within their communities.

OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE

- ***Peace Processes***: Research from 2020 suggests there is a great level of discrepancy between those who believe there are opportunities to engage in peace efforts and those who currently participate in these efforts across locations. Respondents from Juba and Bor shared that peace is often discussed, one young woman peacebuilder joked that **"even the newborns talk about peace,"** and churches were often specified as a place where people talk about peace. For more young women to engage in peace processes, there needs to be some consideration for the time limits that childcare requires of them. Capacity building and mentorship from older women were frequently mentioned as necessary to support the inclusion of young women in peacebuilding. Additionally, women's inclusion in peace efforts can be supported through:
    - Accountability measures for peace networks so that exclusion (e.g. based on one's tribe or clan) can be systematically addressed;
    - Working with existing networks supporting young people or women's inclusion in peace efforts and expand the network's access in rural areas;
    - Using local languages to convey messages; and
    - Making networks more accessible through promotion on more commonly available media platforms (e.g. radio)

- ***Elevate Women's Voices***: Most respondents from the research in 2020 felt women were listened to as valued contributors **but were more likely to be listened to if she was married[22], older, and educated**. **"Some will tell me in rural areas, "If you want to be listened to in the community, get married and have cows."[23]** This reflected the intersection of marriage, age, wealth, and gender in a way that would increase the ability to be heard in one's community. Amplifying women's and young women's

[17] KPMG, "South Sudan Economic Snapshot H2, 2017," (2017) https://home.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/za/pdf/2017/12/KPMG_South%20Sudan_2017_V2.pdf.

[18] Search for Common Ground, (4 August 2017). Iyaa, D and Smith, K. (2018).

[19] Search for Common Ground and Forcier, Combined Final Evaluation, (2017).

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] 34 Interviews with civil society in Juba, (May 2018). Iyaa, D and Smith, K. (2018).

[22] Being married may also require husband's approval to participate.

[23] Young woman in Bor, February 2020. Robinson, Michael. (2020).

perspectives, stories, and voices in media or informal settings (like radio listening clubs) can be an accessible approach to enable women to feel comfortable to share.

- ***Coalesce Around Shared Interests:*** Respondents emphasized the need for inclusion and unity between women and young people, as youth and women are strong potential unifying forces. Although youth are often seen as being the source of conflict, they are the most likely group to identify as South Sudanese – an identity that crosses tribal divisions.[24] **"We women need to collaborate, when we do there is nothing stopping us !"**[25] said a young woman peacebuilder responding to women's exclusion from dialogues on issues of peace and conflict. Some noted women are not united and that is part of what prevents them from having their voice heard. This includes inclusion at the grassroots level, "You cannot tell me that you are serving your community and yet at the end of the day when we go to the grassroots, people down there do not know you." This notion of work at the grassroots level was also where many focus groups in Juba and Bor felt the level of women's participation in peace efforts could significantly change, specifically through awareness raising, education, and providing access to information. These actions corresponded to what was said of how young women and men could collaborate – peace advocacy and civic education at a community or grassroots level.

- ***Address GBV:*** In order to address GBV, there needs to be a shift in social norms regarding the acceptance of domestic violence and GBV, an increase in reporting and justice/accountability mechanisms in place, and opportunities to participate in trauma healing. When asked how women should respond to cases of GBV, some community members suggested that women should seek justice on GBV cases through chiefs or the police, others insisted that elders, heads of clan, family members or neighbors are the more appropriate actors to approach. The family courts and other customary systems still appear to be the first mechanism through which victims are expected to report cases, some community members do acknowledge that cases which are not adequately resolved should then be reported to the police or to organizations which are equipped to handle GBV cases. Radio listeners from Bor explain that women should report cases of GBV to heads of clan because they are closest, but that if the head of clan is unable to offer a solution, the case should be forwarded to the police. These results suggest that local attitudes about GBV are changing, and knowledge around the legal avenues women have for addressing it are increasing.[26]

- ***Economic Activity:*** Economic spaces such as markets are critical areas to engage women. As noted above, inter-tribal tensions are a major conflict driver and as inter-tribal relationships deteriorate, women often retreat from engaging in trade and other economic activities with groups other than their own, reducing opportunities for constructive inter-group collaboration and exchange. Efforts to expand economic empowerment can be connected with social cohesion work to improve interactions, promote collaboration, and develop relationships between divided groups. There is a strong correlation between the number of interactions between tribes and levels of inter-communal trust.[27] The more often that communities interact, the more likely there will be higher trust between the groups. Economic and livelihood interventions can be a unifying force.[28] Livelihoods opportunities, such as crafting and farming, can help reduce economic constraints and food constraints.

- ***Intersectionality and Identity Shifts:*** Identifying most closely with a clan (rather than a nationality or

[24] Search for Common Ground, (4 August 2017). Iyaa, D and Smith, K. (2018). Women and the Future of South Sudan: Local Insight on Building Inclusive Constituencies for Peace, 1st ed. Washington DC: Search for Common Ground.

[25] Young women peacebuilder in Juba, February 2020. Robinson, Michael. (2020).

[26] Forcier Consulting, Search for Common Ground Endline Evaluation: Facilitating Access to Justice in South Sudan 2018.

[27] Smith, Katie. Building a Constituency for Peace in South Sudan. Report. Search for Common Ground. November 2017. https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ Building-a-Constituency-for-Peace-in-South-Sudan.pdf.

[28] Interview with Civil Society, (May 2018). Iyaa, D and Smith, K. (2018). W

ethnic group) correlates to a higher level of violence. Shifts towards national identity are associated with greater mistrust of government.[29] Women included in the 2020 study reported their preference to the local identity across age ranges, with 79% of rural women surveyed identifying with their local identity, compared to 46% of rural men**. "I identify with my national identity to avoid conflicts,**" said a young woman in Juba.[30] Utilizing different approaches to support peace and address risks as identities shift and understanding the complexities of intersecting identities are key to addressing the facets of the conflict in South Sudan. Devoting airtime to discussions of positive perceptions of South Sudan, youth, intersectional identities, women's role in shaping peace, and positive examples of inter-communal cooperation can positively contribute to peace and security in South Sudan. (Search has since created radio programs, *Hiwar al-Shabab*, *Sergeant Esther*, and *Lugara Shabab* to address this)

Even if peace is negotiated at the highest levels in South Sudan, violence will persist at the local level and undermine stability if they are not sufficiently addressed as part of peacebuilding and peace negotiation efforts and if women's involvement and perspectives are not included. Key community conflict dynamics are closely linked to the role of women within the community. While prevailing wisdom holds that women should be included in peacebuilding because they are disproportionately affected by the consequences of war and are more inclined towards peacebuilding; in fact, women are no more likely than men to seek constructive solutions to conflict. Shifting the focus from why inclusive peace is important, towards providing actionable opportunities for inclusive peace are key to increasing women's and young women's inclusion.

There have been improvements in incorporating women into national level peacebuilding initiatives,[31] women are generally absent from local peacebuilding and conflict resolution mechanisms. As the international community, Government of South Sudan, and other actors look to shift conflict dynamics across the country, there needs to be a localized approach that addresses conflict issues at the community-level and brings in all stakeholders to the conflict. Women and young women in South Sudan need to be incorporated into local peacebuilding initiatives to promote inter-tribal trust, non-violent dispute resolution mechanisms, and empower women as a constituency for peace in their communities.

[29] Search for Common Ground, and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, (April 2015).

[30] Robinson, Michael. (2020). Baseline Report, Strengthening Young Women's Participation in Local and National Peace Processes in South Sudan.

[31] The current Government of National Unity has appointed more women into leadership positions. Women voices within urban communities are included more compared to the rural areas of South Sudan.