

Women Participation in the Peace Process in South Sudan

POLICY BRIEF

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Preface

This policy brief has been produced as part of the ‘Strengthening Young Women’s Participation in Local and National Peace Processes in South Sudan’ project which was funded by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (UNPBF). Between December 2019 and June 2021, Search for Common Ground (Search) worked in partnership with an array of organizations in South Sudan, including AnaTaban, Crown the Woman, National Women’s Empowerment & Rehabilitation Organization, Catholic Radio Network, and Eye Radio, to enhance the engagement of young women in South Sudan’s peace processes. The project aimed to strengthen the ability of young women leaders and groups to work together to lead local and national-level peace efforts, to transform attitudes and behaviours towards women and youth and their role in South Sudan’s peace processes and to contribute guidance, best practices and lessons learned to the global field of youth engagement in peace and security.

The following policy brief has been funded by the UNPBF and makes policy recommendations to 3 groups which are: 1) women’s organizations and partners of Search for Common Ground, 2) the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGONU) and political parties, 3) Non-Governmental Organizations and regional and national partners.

Executive Summary

This policy brief is informed by an empirical qualitative study that was conducted in three States in South Sudan. Thus: Central Equatoria; Eastern Equatoria; and Northern Bahr El Ghazal. It presents the case for women participation by documenting the progress made as well as the existing opportunities in the peace processes while recognizing the challenges that women face in asserting their space and voices. It draws conclusions and recommendations from perspectives of different stakeholders who support the cause for women participation in the peace process. It adopts the “We are Here” model of young people’s participation (Altiok and Grizelj, 2019) wherein it framed youth participation in the peace processes in three layers being : *in the room*, *around the room*, and *outside the room*.

In the room means fewer women participated in both the 2014/15 ARCSS and the 2017/18 R-ARCSS peace processes. **The Around the room** layer refers to women mobilizing in different networks and coalitions to exert pressure on the parties in the peace process, while, **Outside the room** means that the women rely on platforms such as the media to launch different campaigns that increase their participation in the peace process. The policy brief recommends that women structures and leaders of both civil society organizations and government institutions should establish platforms that enhance coordination, learning and advocacy on women participation in peace processes at the local and national levels.

The **R-TGONU and political parties** should remain committed to the R-ARCSS, enforce existing frameworks, and enact legislations that guarantee civic space and the role of women in governance and peace processes. The parties to R-ARCSS should remain committed to the full implementation of the 35% affirmative action on women representation at all levels of the government. While, the **NGOs, regional and international partners** should support and increase programming in areas that build women capacities and improve their participation in peace building, reconciliation and nation building; support women peace networks and media outreaches at different levels; support women groups for active engagement; leverage their diplomatic voices in support of women engagement political decision making as key stakeholders; offer financing and technical skills of women in areas of or conflict transformation; and strengthen the capacity of women for effective engagement.

1. Introduction

This policy brief reflects on the progress made by women involvement in governance and peace building efforts and the existing opportunities in South Sudan. It recognizes factors that enable or constrain women participation in peace processes and seeks to achieve three objectives: 1. Reflect briefly on the progress made on women participation and engagement in the negotiation and implementation of the R-ARCSS, and identify opportunities for future women engagement; 2. Identify the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders and institutions that play a vital role in ensuring that women engage in implementation of the R-ARCSS; and 3. Propose avenues for building synergies and linkages on thematic interventions with focus on the impact of women participation in the implementation of peace processes, starting with the R-ARCSS.

The Republic of South Sudan gained its independence on the 9th of July 2011 but slid into political violence within barely two years of its existence. A peace agreement was signed in 2015, but violence broke out again in 2016 resulting to initiation of a Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) that was ultimately signed in 2018¹. Accordingly, 15% and 33% of women participated in the 2015 and 2018 peace negotiations respectively². Unfortunately, there was only one (1) woman mediator, while 20% of the signatories were women by 2018.³ These figures evidently indicate the exclusion of women in participating in the peace processes, yet they suffer much of the brunt of war.

¹ The 2018 peace process was led by a High-level Revitalization Forum (HLRF) initiated by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

² See <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/south-sudan>

³ Ibid.

⁴ <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620930/rr-women-south-sudan-peace-processes-300120-en.pdf;jsessionid=1DB5E00217A15F57AAB985348B61677B?sequence=1>

Moreover, the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action affirms full participation of women in decision making⁴. This was further ensured by the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 calling for women participation in peace processes⁵. In South Sudan, women participated in various forms. Henceforth, this policy brief adopts the three-layer framework to understand the women participation in the peace processes in South Sudan particularly after the December 2013 conflict. These layers are discussed in the following pages.

2. Policy Discussion and Findings

Women Inclusion and Participation in South Sudan Peace Process

IN THE ROOM: This layer refers to the participation of women in formal peace processes. However, the findings indicate that only 15% of women formally participated in the 2015 peace negotiations, while 33% women took part in the 2018 in the peace process. This shows that women were hardly involved in the peace processes so far on an equal basis to their men counterparts. Increased participation of women in the peace process would improve advocacy space and enable women to assert themselves and become vocal in bringing to the table issues that concern women during conflict and the dividends of peace to the family, Communities, and the country at large. The support from regional bodies and civil society organizations created entry for women as they called for wider participation of varied stakeholders. This support should be leveraged more. Furthermore, direct participation of women as delegates is essential in shaping the conversation during the peace processes. This enables women to bring to the table the voices of the conflict affected people like the youth, with regards to issues of governance, security, economic recovery, and social cohesion.

AROUND THE ROOM: This layer describes the involvement of women in the peace processes through formal or informal mechanisms but outside the negotiation or dialogue rooms. In other words, it is an indirect participation of women in peace processes. This mode of participation enables the women to mobilize through different networks and coalitions to exert pressure on the parties. They promote access to information and bridge the gap between citizens and political elites on the peace processes. The joint advocacy with like-minded allies is essential as it draws the attention of the government bureaucracies and political elites to take seriously and respond to the voices of all the affected parties.

OUTSIDE THE ROOM: This layer refers to women's involvement through informal engagements or alternative mechanisms that seek to bring the voices of women to the negotiation table and implementation process through active engagement with platforms such as the media and later their voices are taken to

⁵ Ibid

the negotiation table. This offers a chance for campaigns that increase access to sustained acquisition of relevant information that influence the peace processes. Media activities help to leverage voices of the actors around women voices in the peace process. Several peace festivals and camps preach messages of peace. Through media use, women would be able to increase advocacy with regional and global entities to push for speedy resolution of the conflict. Unlike the *in the room* layer where percentages of women who participated in the South Sudan's peace processes are noticeable albeit very insignificant, there is no accurate information which indicates the level and number of women or their organizations participating in the peace processes with regards to the *around the room* and *outside the room* layers.

Avenues for building synergies and linkages

As already indicated, the Government; international and regional bodies and NGOs; political parties; civil society organizations; universities and church institutions offer essential spaces and avenues for building synergies and linkages. Women are supported to develop strategies for increased participation and amplified voices in the peace process. Media platforms also offer women useful and significant space around and outside the room. Through the media, useful information, and strategies, press statements, as well as key policy documents are shared. Increased outreach for rural women is essential because this fosters social cohesion and supports development efforts as evidence shows that women are mostly the ones engaging in community's social and domestic work. The urban women participate more in the peace process than their rural counterparts, largely due to limited access to information, capacity to mobilize and organize themselves.

Increased rural outreach to communities is key to promoting the participation of women. In addition, the recognition and enforcement of the role of women in peace and security per the UNSCR (1325) is critical to enforcing the participation of South Sudanese women in peace processes. Other avenues include sports and cultural peace festivals and events which eventually foster participation of young women in local peace building initiatives. These equally provide opportunities for confidence building and empowerment of young women. There should be continuous work on gender and collaboration with influential civic actors and line governmental institutions such as the rule of law institutions, national and state ministries of gender, child and social welfare and legislative committees is key as a strategy for women participation and ultimate realization of gender equality. As indicated above requires continuous work on gender issues and achieving gender equality.

Challenges for effective women engagement

Key noticeable challenges that affect women participation in the peace processes in South Sudan include; limited civic and political opportunities for women empowerment due to lack of political will from the top leadership of the government; limited leadership capacity among the women for grassroots mobilization and engagement in peace building; and women organizations being seen as instigators against

government, elements of regime change and emissaries of the foreign agents. Insecurity at national and subnational levels continue to affect the participation of women in peace building. Violent incidents at the subnational level and persistent security threats impede women participation in peace building. Difficulty in identifying and mobilizing peace interlocutors because political leaders are hardly available to dialogue through the existing media platforms to champion participation and empowerment of women programs.

Cultural norms shaped under patriarchy impede women participation in peace building. Structures at the local level are formed and influenced by tribal interests, and limit space for women participation. Platforms that nurture and coordinate the participation of women in peace processes are still limited. The efforts of women are not adequately directed towards common goals and objectives of promoting peace and development.

Inadequate funding and technical support for women in advocacy affect their participation in the peace process. Bureaucracies within some funding intermediaries and preferential treatment promote unhealthy competition among women organizations. This is a major barrier to female engagement in monitoring and implementation of R-ARCSS. Limitations in transport and communication also deny women the opportunity to engage in the peace processes. This is worse in the face of limited skills in the use of virtual technology, which excluded the women, especially from the rural settings. This limits coordination and information sharing among women leaders and groups because There is a structural exclusion of youth that is also fundamentally gendered.

3. Conclusions

Active participation of women in peace processes requires concerted support in line with global and continental calls for countries emerging from conflict. The R-ARCSS should guarantee progress in 35% and beyond women participation, as a majority population and active perpetrators of violence. Building networks and coalitions is key for the women to effectively influence the peace process. The setbacks limiting women inclusion and participation must be effectively addressed through inter-stakeholder engagement.

4. Recommendations

Based on the analysis and findings presented, the study provides the below recommendations to increase women inclusion and participation in the peace process.

The Women Organization and Search's Partners should:

- ➔ Develop structures and strategies to engage government and partners at local and national levels.
- ➔ A network of Search partners should be created and the organization should Invest in virtual platforms for enhanced coordination and strengthening links with various stakeholders where necessary; establish appropriate channels for information sharing.
- ➔ Support for dialogue with authorities including regular bilateral meetings, roundtable events and sharing the work that women do in communities is key for advancing women participation in local and national peacebuilding process.
- ➔ A separate support for women should be provided and uphold the culture of dialogue, peaceful co-existence, and social cohesion including exchange visits and experience sharing for women in leadership at local and national level.
- ➔ Search should support women organizations to conduct training to Enhance Psychosocial Support in Speaking and Leadership Skills for National Female Activists, Female Ministers and Female Parliamentarians in Juba- South Sudan
- ➔ Develop structures and strategies to engage government and partners at local and national levels. Investment in virtual platforms for enhanced coordination and strengthening links with various stakeholders is necessary; establish appropriate channels for information sharing and dialogue with authorities including regular bilateral meetings, roundtable events and sharing the work that women do in communities.
- ➔ The women should support and uphold the culture of dialogue, peaceful co-existence, and social cohesion.

To the RTGONU and Political Parties should:

- ➔ It is recommended that, Ministry of Gender, Child, and Social Welfare should organize and coordinate activities of women, strengthen networking and linkage between the local and national women networks, the women networks which have a direct role in the peace process such as women bloc.
- ➔ Ministry of Gender, Child, and Social Welfare should work with the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity in South Sudan to uphold the government commitments to the R-ARCSS of 35% women representation, enforce existing frameworks and enact legislations that safeguard civic space

and guarantee women participation as key stakeholders in the peace processes including advancing engagement of women nationwide on the R-ARCSS.

To the NGOs, regional and international partners should:

- ➔ Strengthen women programming and capacity development for effective participation; support long-term peace building programs and women participation therein; support peace networks for women at subnational levels to build a critical mass for policy influence, and promotion of collaboration and joint programming; pastoralists and agricultural people; work well with regional and international bodies including the IGAD, AU and UN should leverage their influence on the government through the relevant channels to pressure the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity to repeal the laws and lift the measures that limit the freedom of assembly, association and, speech and expression.

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