

# Mapping and Analysis of Peacebuilding Initiatives in South Sudan

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Global Network of  
Women Peacebuilders

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## BACKGROUND

The Government of South Sudan adopted a National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) for the period of 2015 to 2020. However, violence and insecurity have escalated and continued, despite the 2015 peace agreement. The violence has caused over 2.2 million South Sudanese women and men to flee to neighboring countries, including Uganda, which hosts over 1 million South Sudanese refugees, 82 per cent of whom are women and children.<sup>1</sup> While women have been disproportionately affected by the conflict, they have played a crucial role in the negotiations for the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS).

Despite the important signing of the R-ARCSS, its implementation is slow, and ongoing violence persists in different parts of the country. South Sudan finds itself at a critical juncture, where consistent support and advocacy for the timely and effective implementation of the R-ARCSS are essential.

The formation of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) in South Sudan on 22 February 2020 marked a key step in the implementation of the R-ARCSS. The beginning of the transition period has been marred by several challenges, including inter-communal conflict and cattle raiding with communal violence in Lakes, Warrap and Unity State, as well as the arrival of desert locusts in several counties in Eastern, Central and Western Equatoria and Lakes — posing an additional threat to food security and livelihoods. The global COVID-19 pandemic further placed South Sudan in a situation of vulnerability.

The pandemic shifted attention from implementing the R-ARCSS to containing the spread of the virus. This led to further delays in the agreement's implementation, including its gender-responsive provisions, such as the 35 per cent quota for women's participation in all elected and appointed positions.

The COVID-19 pandemic had other significant impacts on women's rights and security. During the lockdown period, many young women and girls faced heightened vulnerabilities, such as early pregnancies and early marriages. There was also an increase in cases of rape within communities and child slaughtering.

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<sup>1</sup> South Sudan Refugee Crisis: Aid, Statistics and News: USA FOR UNHCR. South Sudan Refugee Crisis: Aid, Statistics and News | USA for UNHCR. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/south-sudan/>

## MAPPING METHODOLOGY

The mapping sought to answer four key research questions:

1. What are the main peace and security issues that local communities — especially local women — face?
2. What are the existing initiatives (led by the government, civil society or other stakeholders) to address these issues?
3. What are the key barriers to women's full political and economic participation, and women's meaningful participation in peace processes, and what steps are needed to address them?
4. How is the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the peace and security situation and the rights of women, young women and girls, including women internally displaced persons (IDPs) and those living in conflict-affected areas?

Eve Organization for Women Development carried out two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in Torit and in Juba, South Sudan. Each FGD involved 20 participants, including grassroots women, civil society and representatives of local and traditional leaders and youth.

The findings of the mapping are divided into four parts, following the four key research questions:

1. Understanding the peace and security context in South Sudan;
2. Mapping of existing peacebuilding responses in South Sudan;
3. Barriers to women's full political and economic participation, and participation in peace processes; and
4. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on WPS priorities in South Sudan.

## UNDERSTANDING THE PEACE AND SECURITY CONTEXT IN SOUTH SUDAN

There are a number of actors involved in managing or addressing peace and security at the national and local levels. These include the national government, armed opposition groups, community leaders, religious leaders, the Transitional National Legislative Assembly, civil society organizations (CSOs), UN agencies and youth.

When asked about the main peace and security issues faced by local communities, respondents in both locations (Juba and Torit) reported similar issues.

Among the top security concerns are issues stemming from harmful cultural practices. These include early and forced marriage, the practice of "wife inheritance" (the brother of a deceased man "inheriting" his wife), domestic abuse and the killing of women and children, which was reported as an important issue during the pandemic, particularly in Juba.

In both locations, issues of inter-communal violence, land grabbing and clashes between farmers and cattle herders were also identified as a source of insecurity.

Participants in Juba noted that, due to threats from cattle herders, women are not able to go to water points or collect firewood freely. Participants in Torit highlighted that revenge killings between fighting communities increasingly targeted women and children. In Torit, participants also pointed to road robberies and activity of armed gangs as an additional source of insecurity.

Negative traditional beliefs, the presence of organized gangs and armed groups, the domination of certain ethnic groups in certain spheres and the complacency of government officials and politicians were named as some of the root causes of this insecurity. In Torit, participants noted that politicians sometimes provide organized armed groups with weapons to ensure their support. Overall, the circulation of guns — particularly small arms and light weapons — was identified as a major problem that fuels insecurity in the country. The participants also highlighted that a weak justice system and the frequent release of violent offenders by police further contribute to increased insecurity.

Both groups also identified the delay in the implementation of the R-ARCSS as another major contributor to insecurity in the South Sudan. The slow response to the historic agreement has delayed important provisions ensuring peace and stability.

The participants also discussed the mismanagement of natural resources as a source of insecurity. South Sudan has a vast number of natural resources, such as oil, gold, land, forests, water, agricultural resources, minerals and wildlife. Laws and policies governing the proper use of these resources are lacking, and existing ones are rarely followed. This leads to resource mismanagement with consequences for people's health as well as the potential to create environmental hazards.

For example, the improper disposal of oil waste is a threat to the health and wellbeing of residents in some regions, and that of women and children in particular. Participants noted cases of pregnant women miscarrying and giving birth to stillborn or deformed babies due to water pollution.

Deforestation also causes untimely migration of animals and results in longer travel distances for fetching firewood. Given the gendered nature of these tasks, it heightens the risk of insecurity and violence against women and girls. The poaching of wildlife is also an issue as well-armed poachers and opposition fighters occupy parts of South Sudan's national parks and game reserves, which constitute nearly 13 per cent of the country's land, with limited resources for state park rangers to combat them and no proper policies in place against poaching.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> South Sudan Refugee Crisis: Aid, Statistics and News: USA FOR UNHCR. South Sudan Refugee Crisis: Aid, Statistics and News | USA for UNHCR. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/south-sudan/>

## MAPPING THE EXISTING RESPONSES

Existing peacebuilding initiatives are led by both the government and CSOs. The initiatives led by the government include the National Dialogue, which aimed to accelerate the implementation of the R-ARCSS, the adoption of the NAP on WPS, the adoption of the National Policy Framework and the implementation of the 35 per cent minimum quota of women in elected political positions. The main civil society initiatives mentioned are the Women's Monthly Forum and the work of the South Sudan Women's Coalition towards the implementation of the R-ARCSS.

At the local level, the participants in Torit identified a reconciliation dialogue that took place between the two Otuho kingdoms, Ojang and Mayia, as a good practice. They also noted that representatives of the Peace Commission (the local conflict resolution entity), civil society, women and religious leaders carry out community meetings related to issues of peace, child protection and security more broadly. Women are active in such initiatives. Notably, women landlords participated in organizing the peace and reconciliation dialogue between the two kingdoms. There were women mediators who participated in the dialogue and also led meetings with communities. They noted that there are some women who are powerful leaders in the local communities. For example, a woman in Ibahure persuaded the youth not to go to war with the Ohulok community. The participants also listed a number of other successful cases of mediation.

In the case of Gie to Gie, four clans were fighting among themselves. A dialogue was held between the civilian population and the military, and the Tiriangore, Loronyo and Itari. Many of these processes were supported by civil society and mediated by traditional and religious leaders. Some were also supported by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

However, participants noted that women are not always represented in these mediation processes, particularly at the grassroots level.

International actors supporting these initiatives include the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), UNMISS, the South Sudan Troika (consisting of the governments of Norway, United Kingdom and United States), and other international donors. These actors support the efforts led by both the government and civil society.

Generally, the participants noted that, despite the above efforts, women are not sufficiently involved in most peacebuilding initiatives in the country. Even with the 35 per cent quota mandated by the R-ARCSS, women remain underrepresented in most transitional bodies. The participants in Juba shared that this was due largely to a lack of political will to implement the quota. They also noted a few successes in increasing women's participation, particularly in public life. It is worth noting the inclusion of eight female Ministers in the new cabinet, including the female Minister of Defense, female Minister of Foreign Affairs and first female Vice President.

# MAPPING THE GAPS AND PRIORITIES FOR ENABLING WOMEN'S FULL POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION, AND WOMEN'S MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION IN PEACE PROCESSES

Participants in both sites identified similar barriers to women's meaningful participation in politics and peace processes. These include:

- Negative cultural beliefs and stereotypes depicting women as weak and lacking leadership potential;
- Low level of education and high rates of illiteracy among women and girls;
- Lack of political and financial support for women during electoral processes;
- High levels of domestic burden, especially for married women; and
- Lack of effective communication skills and knowledge of the political system.

Despite the above, women's inclusion in official and non-official mediation and peace negotiations increased.

During the 2015 IGAD peace processes, women made up 30 per cent of official negotiators and the Women's Bloc of South Sudan — a coalition of civil society leaders — served as formal observers and signatories. In the 2018 High Level Revitalization Forum peace processes, women were represented by 1 mediator, 33 per cent of negotiators, 20 per cent of signatories and as official observers through the South Sudan Women's Coalition, another new network of civil society leaders.<sup>3</sup> However, in 2020, it was found that in the implementation of R-ARCSS, the government fell short of the 35 per cent commitment on women's participation. In response, South Sudanese women representing CSOs, political parties, academia and youth coalitions developed a gender matrix to monitor the implementation of the 35 per cent provision.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Council on Foreign Relations. (n.d.). South Sudan Case Study: Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. Council on Foreign Relations. Retrieved December 20, 2022, from <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/south-sudan>

<sup>4</sup> S. S. W. C. for P. (2020, June 1). Implementation Of The 35% Provision Revitalized Agreement On The Resolution Of The Conflict In South Sudan (R-ARCSS). UNDP. Retrieved December 20, 2022, from <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/ss/Gender-Matrix-RARCSS-South-Sudan-April-2020.pdf>



# UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

The questions in this section were answered only by the participants in the FGD in Juba, as the FGD in Torit took place before the outbreak of the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused many setbacks in accomplishments made towards the rights of women and girls. Early and child marriage rates increased, as families married off their daughters as a form of protection and to ease the economic burden of the lockdown. In September 2020, the South Sudanese civil society organization Support Peace Development Initiative Organisation reported at least 1,535 cases of child marriage and teen pregnancy following COVID-19 restrictions imposed in April 2020.<sup>5</sup> With schools remaining closed during this period, young girls were also more vulnerable to sexual abuse. The participants noted a rise in other forms of sexual and gender-based violence, including domestic violence and rape within and outside the home, as inter-communal clashes and conflicts escalated during the lockdown.

The pandemic also resulted in fewer opportunities for meetings with those outside the household, which denied women the chance to advance their rights and conduct advocacy related to the WPS

agenda. Planned training, dialogues and other activities, especially with the women at the grassroots level, were canceled as a result of the pandemic.

A shift in attention and prioritization of the pandemic was also associated with a delay in the implementation of the R-ARCSS. This played a part in limiting women's advocacy efforts toward ensuring the implementation of the 35 per cent minimum affirmative action. Many CSOs and women-led organizations also experienced terminations of funding, difficulty in movement and challenges to participation in online activities due to poor connectivity. However, women and women-led organizations did their best to adjust to the new conditions. Many meetings were held virtually and some activities had to be switched from in-person meetings to virtual or communication through social media. There continues to be a need for capacity-building on the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), as well as support in acquiring ICT materials, such as computers, laptops and internet routers.

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<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2020, November 30). Submission to the committee on the rights of the child's review of South Sudan. Human Rights Watch. Retrieved December 20, 2022, from [https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/30/submission-committee-rights-childs-review-south-sudan#\\_ftn24](https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/30/submission-committee-rights-childs-review-south-sudan#_ftn24)



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