Women's
International
Peace Centre
Amplifying Women's Voice and Power

Policy Brief

Promoting Women's Participation in the Implementation of the Revitalised Agreement for the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan

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Introduction

Women's participation in peace processes is critical for sustaining peace. Notwithstanding, women face several barriers that limit their effective representation and influence in peace processes. Research shows that the political participation and leadership of women in fragile environments, particularly during democratic transitions, is critical to sustaining lasting democratic institutions. For instance, a study on international crises found that a state is five times less likely to use violence when faced with an international crisis when the percentage of women in parliament increases by 5 percent[1]. Countries with more women in government enjoy better standards of living across multiple sectors of society, leading to increased peace and stability[2]. Further to that, in post-conflict or fragile states, women's active inclusion in government strengthens transitions to democracy[3]. As elected or appointed officials, women can increase the legitimacy of emerging institutions, broaden the political agenda, and promote consultative policymaking[4]. A study carried out in Juba, South Sudan by the Women International Peace Centre shows that sustainable peace in South Sudan depends on empowering women and tackling obstacles to their participation in peace processes. The research was carried out to examine opportunities, constraints and the extent to which women are taking part in implementing the peace agreement in South Sudan. Methods of data collection included in-depth interviews with key informants, document review, validation and dissemination workshops with key stakeholders in Juba, South Sudan in December 2019, January 2020 and February 2020.

Context

Since 2005 there have been unprecedented efforts to end the conflict(s) in South Sudan, improve the status of women and their involvement in peace processes. In 2015, South Sudan adopted the National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 and Related Resolutions to address the security situation of women and girls; ensure their participation in conflict resolution, maintaining of peace and security; eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls; increase their access to justice and health services; and improve their economic security by creating opportunities for women to access information, credit, employment, education and skills training. South Sudan has also continued to take positive strides in ensuring women's political participation and representation at all levels of government by increasing the affirmative action quota from 25% as contained in the Transitional Constitution of 2011 to 35% in the revitalized peace agreement of 2018.

Whereas women took part in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005, their participation was limited to observer status. This however changed in 2013 when women's groups came together to lobby for inclusion in the peace process led by the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Women were able to gain a place at the negotiation table through lobbying and building alliances at national (grassroots groups and civil society organisations (CSOs)) and regional levels with the support of IGAD. Women's lobbying received support from international and continental efforts promoting the Women Peace and Security (WPS) agenda articulated in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325[5] (UNSCR1325) to which South Sudan assented. Women collectively strategized and participated in the 2017 High Level Revitalisation Forum and related processes that resulted in the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (in December 2017, the

Declaration of Principles in February 2018, the Khartoum Declaration Agreement in June 2018 and the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in September 2018.Consequently, women were signatories to the two peace agreements of 2015 (the Agreement for the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS)) and 2018 R-ARCSS.

Barriers to Women's Participation in Peace Processes

To ensure women's meaningful participation in peace processes and sustaining peace in South Sudan, several social, cultural, and economic barriers should be addressed. The research findings highlight patriarchy, lack of political will, limited funding, sexual and gender-based violence, competence gaps and perpetual discrimination as significant barriers.

a)   Patriarchy

Patriarchal structures, which entrench gender inequality and disregard for women's rights also impede women's meaningful participation. In South Sudan's pluralistic legal system, customary law prevails and customary institutions do not punish harmful traditional practices against women and girls such as early and forced marriage, abduction of girls for household chores, and denying education for girls due to societal expectations[1]. They limit women's economic freedom by dictating that women cannot own family land or property. This affects women and girl's ability to build critical human capital including education and skills, for their effective participation in peace building processes. Customs, social norms and implicit codes of conduct also assign women responsibility for household tasks and designate public spaces including political participation as men's domain.

b)   Lack of Political Will

While South Sudan has in place the necessary legal, institutions, and policy framework to substantially increase the participation of women in public affairs, the 35% affirmative action has not been fully implemented. There is evidence of limited political will for the effective implementation of the provisions of the R-ARCSS as it relates to women's participation. Since the creation of the new state in 2011, women have not had the same power to make decisions on issues of national importance like men[6]. For example, since the establishment of South Sudan National Legislative Assembly, none of the women Members of Parliament (MPs) has been supported to sponsor a single bill that deals specifically with women's concerns and interests July 2011[7].

1.   Gender Based Violence Information Management System, 2019

c) Limited Funding

Lack of financial resources remains one of the most significant deterrents for women's participation. Women in South Sudan tend to have a systematically poorer command over a range of productive resources including education, land, information and financial resources. As a consequence, women's mobility and ability to run programmes and carry out civic education including awareness ra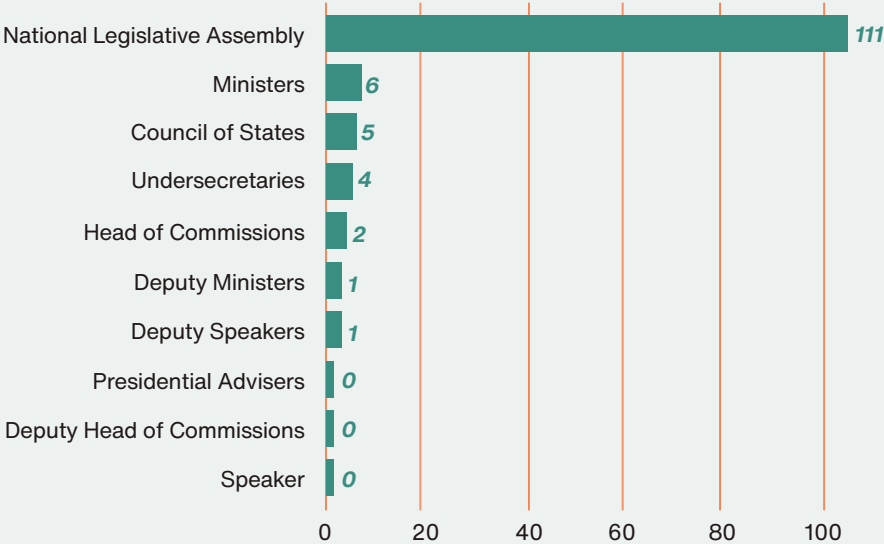ising campaigns is grossly curtailed.   Limited access to resources constrains women's mobilising, lobbying, power to influence policy and to actively participate in elective politics. Women access to resources is not helped by the fact that government allocates more resources to defense and security than to human capital development that would ideally benefit more women and girls[8]. Whereas women have received funding from donors and international NGOs to support their activities associated with ongoing peace processes, the ad hoc nature of funding to NGOs limits their support to women's effective and long-term participation[9].

d) Discrimination against Women in Positions of Decision-making

Discrimination is partly a result of a general view that women lack the competence and requisite skills for leadership. While the R-ARCSS sets quotas for women representation in key institutions, these have not been adhered to in political appointments. It is not a question of women's competence but the criteria used in political appointments. Women's lobbying and advocacy efforts as well as the evidence from grassroots groups and civil society organisations show that there are competent women to take up leadership positions.

Women's Representation in Governance, 2019

Category	Value
National Legislative Assembly	111
Ministers	6
Council of States	5
Undersecretaries	4
Head of Commissions	2
Deputy Ministers	1
Deputy Speakers	1
Presidential Advisers	0
Deputy Head of Commissions	0
Speaker	0

Source: GOSS 2019[10]

e) Sexual and Gender Based Violence

Intimate partner violence regularly comprises at least half of all reported GBV incidents largely blamed on structural gender inequality and unequal power relations between men and women[11]. Consequences of violence against women also manifest in the public sphere where women political leaders, aspirants and candidates face psychological, physical, and sexual violence. Women politicians are often targets of intimidation and coercion specifically because they are women, with the goal of pressuring them to leave politics, resign as candidates or political officials, withdraw from their membership in political parties or other political institutions, or to otherwise remain silent on the political issues they care about. Such fear is faced by politically active women around the globe, regardless of their roles, whether as activists, civil society leaders, voters, candidates, or elected or appointed officials[12].

f) Culture as a Barrier

Patriarchal structures and cultural norms that subordinate women and deny them a voice in the public space hinder women's participation in peace processes. The findings indicate that men are responsible for providing financially for their families, and for assets such as cattle and land. Women control the homestead and household items, as well as small animals. As such men's space is cut out as 'the public sphere' and women as the 'private sphere'.

g) Illiteracy and Competence

The high illiteracy rate of women in South Sudan affects their participation. In 2018, for instance, the literacy rates girls were significantly lower at 40% compared to 60% for boys[13]. The research found that the literacy gap affects women's access to formal capacity enhancing sessions such as workshop and other trainings. Less educated women also have a more pronounced work burden at home, undermining their participation in other important aspects of public life. A significant number of women in leadership who might have been educated in Arabic and in their native languages, face difficulties communicating at policy level in English, South Sudan's official language. Several women also lack the technical skills necessary to participate effectively in technical positions as required in sectors such as security and economic development. The result has been the general view that there are no competent women to take up leadership positions.

Recommendations

a) Implement theNational Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 and Related Resolutions

- *Put in place and fund measures to alleviate the security situation of women and girls; ensure women participation in decision-making processes; increase women's access to justice and health services; and improve women's economic security.*

b) Increase women's political participation

- *Create an enabling political environment supportive of women's political participation such as adherence to the 35% quota for their representation in leadership positions at national and regional levels;*

- *Make affirmative action a reality by supporting women into leadership positions in political parties and government institutions.*

- *Support women to mobilise across political, religious and ethnic divides which many times are the center of divisions among the conflicting parties.*

c) Institutional reform

- *Legal and regulatory frameworks should be based on principles of equal rights, equal opportunity, and equal voice for women and men.*

- *A family law should be enacted that establishes equal basic rights for males and females; provides for equal property rights in particular land ownership rights; political rights in line with the 35 percent representation for women's rights in the R-ARCSS and transitional constitution.*

d) Financing

- *The budget of the Republic of South Sudan should be gender equal. Budgeting process and financial allocations should ideally reflect the needs of women.*

- *Financing and needs assessments must involve gender mainstreaming assessments and gender budgeting so that resources benefit women and men equally.*

- *Mechanisms such as gender audits as well as guidelines such as the gender and equity requirements should be put in place to hold governments accountable.*

- *Development partners should continue to support and build the capacity of women groups at grassroots and national levels in financial management, gender budgeting and reporting among others.*

e) Strengthen Gender-based Violence Response

- *Government should make a commitment to end impunity for SGBV by holding perpetrators accountable at national and local levels;*

- *Accountability mechanisms for preventing SGBV should be strengthened including increased support to implement the National Standard Operating Procedures for Protection, Prevention and Response to GBV, adequate gender-sensitive policing, and stronger justice mechanisms to protect women and girls from violence.*

- *The international community should support civil society organizations in South Sudan to monitor the implementation of laws addressing violence against women.*

- *Civil Society Organizations and development partners should partner with government to assist with local capacity building and sensitizing post-conflict security, police, and*

judicial institutions and personnel to gender issues in the application and enforcement of the law.

Endnotes

[1] Mary Caprioli and Mark Boyer, "Gender, Violence, and International Crisis," Journal of Conflict Resolution 45 (2001): 514.

[2] Erik Melander, "Gender Equality and Intrastate Armed Conflict," International Studies International Studies Quarterly 49, no. 4 (2005): 695–714.

[3] Henderson Tanya, Amanda Domingues, and Ursala Knudsen-Latta (2018). Promoting Women's Political Participation: A Pathway to Peace. A Policy Brief in the 2018 U.S. Civil Society Working Group on Women, Peace and Security Policy Brief Series

[4] Ibid.

[5] UNSCR 1325 calls on countries to address the impacts of conflict on women and to systematically include women in peacebuilding efforts, including peace talks, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction efforts . The resolution also provides a framework for the participation of women in peace negotiations, humanitarian and peace keeping operations and the rebuilding of war communities.

[6] GOSS (2019). National Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) Republic of South Sudan. JUNE

[7] Ibid.

[8] GOSS (2019). 'National Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) Republic of South Sudan' report prepared for the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), June 2019

[9] Esther Soma (2020). Our search for peace: Women in South Sudan's National Peace Processes 2005-2018. UN Women, Born to Lead and Oxfam.

[10] Government of South Sudan (2019). National Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) Republic of South Sudan. J

11 South Sudan Gender-Based Violence Sub-Cluster, National Strategy, 2019

[12] National Democratic Institute, "#NotTheCost: Stopping Violence against Women in Politics: A Call to Action," (Washington, DC: NDI, 2016);

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