

Putting Women at the Centre of South Sudan's Peace and Security Agenda: Insights from Civil Society's Engagement with the African Union's Peace and Security Council

Information Brief

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Women's
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Peace Centre





Editorial Team

Juliet Were
Sandra Tumwesigye
Sarah Abeja
Pauline Kahuubire

Please address all correspondence to:

The Executive Director
Women's International Peace Centre (The Peace Centre)
Plot 1467, Church Road, Bulindo, Wakiso
P.O. Box 4934, Kampala – Uganda
Tel: +256-414-543953
program@wipc.org
www.wipc.org

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Background

The Peace and Security Council conducted its seventh field mission to South Sudan from 22nd to 25th February 2023 as part of its mandate to promote peace, security and stability in Africa. The field mission was undertaken as a follow-up to the Council's decisions¹ and those of the African Union (AU) Assembly on the situation in South Sudan, particularly the transition process involving the commencement of the 24-month extension of the Transition period on 23 February 2023.

The main objective of the field mission was to determine progress in the implementation of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS). The findings would inform the PSC's decisions and actions to effectively support the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) in accomplishing the outstanding tasks within the 24-months period of the extended Transition period.

On 23rd February 2023, the African Union Peace and Security Council (AU PSC) met² with civil society organizations, think tanks and faith-based

organizations (FBOs) in Juba, South Sudan, to discuss the socio-political, economic and security situation in the country. Prior to the meeting, women-led civil society organisations (CSOs) held a preparatory meeting where they agreed on key issues of concern and the role of women in the implementation of the newly announced³ Roadmap to a Peaceful and Democratic end of the Transitional Period for peace.

CSO representatives nominated to present the identified issues to the Peace and Security Council were from Centre for Inclusive Governance, Peace and Justice, Women's International Peace Centre and the Young Women's Christian Association.

Drawing on the discussions and recommendations put forward by the women-led CSOs during the engagement with the AU PSC, this information brief highlights key priorities for women in South Sudan's peace and security agenda. It provides actionable recommendations for policymakers on how to strengthen the role of women-led CSOs in promoting gender equality and sustainable peace in South Sudan.

1 [Communique of the 1123rd meeting of the PSC, held on 30 November 2022, on Updated Briefing on the Situation in South Sudan.](#)

2 [Communique of the 1141st meeting of the PSC held on 28 February 2023, on Consideration of the Report of the Field Mission of the Peace and Security Council to South Sudan conducted from 22 to 25 February 2023](#)

3 [UNMISS Statement on the Announcement of Agreement on the Roadmap to a Peaceful and Democratic End of the Transitional Period](#)

Introduction

Women in South Sudan have been disproportionately⁴ affected by conflict and violence, making their participation in peacebuilding efforts crucial for achieving lasting peace and stability. Women-led civil society organizations in the country have played⁵ a key role in highlighting the contributions of women and women's organisations in advancing peace and security; promoting women's participation in the country's peace and security agenda; advocating for gender-sensitive policies and initiatives, and providing vital support services to women affected by violence.

In particular, women-led CSOs have unique perspectives and expertise on the gendered impacts of conflict and violence, making their engagement with the AU PSC essential for promoting women's participation in peace and security processes. For example, the PSC held an inaugural consultative meeting⁶ with civil society organizations in 2022, during which they discussed ways to enhance collaboration and cooperation between the PSC and

civil society organizations across the continent.

Engaging with women-led CSOs is therefore a crucial step for the African Union's Peace and Security Council in its efforts to promote inclusive and sustainable peace in South Sudan. Through their engagements with women-led CSOs, the AU PSC can draw on their insights and recommendations to ensure that gender considerations are integrated into peacebuilding efforts. This can help to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of peacebuilding initiatives and ensure that the needs and priorities of women and other marginalized groups are addressed.

Moreover, engaging with CSOs can help to foster trust and build partnerships between the AU PSC and local communities, which can help to ensure that peacebuilding efforts are locally owned and sustained. By doing so, the AU PSC can promote a more inclusive, participatory, and sustainable approach to peacebuilding in South Sudan.

4 [Conflict-related sexual violence against women and girls in South Sudan](#)

5 [Women's informal peace efforts: Grassroots activism in South Sudan](#)

6 [Inaugural Consultative Meeting between the Peace and Security Council of the Africa Union and Civil Society Organizations](#)

Recent Achievements in the Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in South Sudan

South Sudan demonstrated its commitment to advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda through the development of a National Action Plan⁷ (NAP) 2015-2020. Since then, the implementation of the WPS agenda has yielded significant progress in areas such as gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response, women's participation in decision-making processes, and the integration of gender perspectives in security sector reforms. This section highlights some of the key achievements in the implementation of the WPS agenda in South Sudan that were identified by the women's rights organisations.

⁷ <http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/south-sudan>



1. The Signing of the Constitution-Making Process Bill into Law

In December 2022, President Salva Kiir signed⁸ the Constitution-Making Process Bill 2022 into law. The constitution-making process in South Sudan is especially significant for women who have been particularly affected⁹ by conflict in the country, having experienced widespread sexual violence, forced displacement, and other forms of gender-based violence. Women have also been historically marginalized and excluded from formal peacebuilding, political and economic decision-making processes.

Women's involvement in the constitution-making process in South Sudan is supported by various international frameworks, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and its Protocol (the Maputo Protocol), the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG), the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) 1966, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) 1966, United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR 1325), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Protocol, and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) 25+. At the national level, the Transitional Constitution 2011 (as amended), the Local Government Act 2008, the National Action Plan I on 1325, and the Revised National Development Strategy (2021-2024) provide guidance for women's participation in peace and political processes, including the constitution-making process.

The Revitalised Agreement¹⁰ on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) mandates that the permanent constitution-making process is based on eight guiding principles, including

gender equity and affirmative action. According to the International Peace Institute,¹¹ women's involvement in constitutional processes leads to more inclusive, equitable, and non-discriminatory reforms and frameworks that promote sustainable peace and development. Therefore, the permanent constitution-making process serves as a crucial entry point and opportunity for South Sudanese women to protect their rights and institutionalize the progress achieved in the peace agreement.

It presents an opportunity for women to ensure that their rights and concerns such as inclusivity, rule of law, human rights, good governance, gender equity and affirmative action for women and youth are fully recognized and safeguarded in the country's fundamental law. It also provides a platform to address the inequalities and discrimination that women face in South Sudan. It is therefore imperative that women have a voice in the process and that their perspectives and experiences are taken into account for instance, their calls for the fulfilment of the commitment made in the Revitalised Peace Agreement that guarantees 35% representation of women in all political, governance, and security institutions.

Moreover, the process of creating a new constitution provides an opportunity to engage women in the peacebuilding process. Involving women in the constitution-making process and ensuring that their perspectives and experiences are taken into account, will help to build trust and promote social cohesion. The constitution-making process provides an opportunity to address some of the root causes of the conflict and address some of the grievances that have fuelled conflict in the country in the past.

⁸ South Sudan revives law-making process amid fresh leadership wrangles

⁹ South Sudan: UN report highlights widespread sexual violence against women and girls in conflict, fueled by systemic impunity

¹⁰ Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan

¹¹ Re-Imagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes

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2. The Ratification of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol)

South Sudan's President, H.E. Salva Kiir, signed¹² the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), one of the most advanced treaties on the protection of women's and girls' rights anywhere in the world into law on 24th February 2023. The ratification of the Maputo Protocol in South Sudan provides a legal framework for protecting women's rights and advancing gender equality in light of the devastating impact of conflict on women and girls in South Sudan including high levels of sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, abduction, and forced marriage.

The Protocol recognizes the need for women's participation in peacebuilding processes and calls for the elimination of all forms of violence against women. One of the key provisions¹³ of the Protocol is the recognition of women's right to participate in decision-making processes at all levels of government. In South Sudan, women have traditionally been excluded from political participation, and their voices have not been

heard in peace negotiations. By ratifying the Protocol, South Sudan has committed to ensuring that women are included in all aspects of decision-making, including in peacebuilding processes.

The inclusion of women in peacebuilding processes is crucial because women have unique perspectives and experiences that can contribute to more sustainable and effective peace agreements. Women are often the most affected by conflict, and they have valuable insights into the root causes of conflict and potential solutions. The Protocol also provides a framework for addressing the high levels of violence against women in South Sudan. It recognizes that violence against women is a human rights violation and calls for the elimination of all forms of violence, including domestic violence, rape, and female genital mutilation. By implementing the provisions of the Protocol, South Sudan can take concrete steps to address gender-based violence and provide support to survivors.

¹² South Sudan's President Takes Positive Steps Toward The Ratification Of The Maputo Protocol
¹³ Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa

3. Establishment of the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise-Africa) in South Sudan

Women's participation in peacebuilding and conflict prevention is essential for achieving sustainable peace in South Sudan, yet women have historically been excluded from formal peace negotiations and decision-making processes. The establishment of the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise) in South Sudan represents a significant step forward for women's participation in peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

FemWise was launched¹⁴ in Juba in October 2022, with the aim of promoting the role of women in peace and security processes in South Sudan, as well as providing them with training and resources to help them take an active role in conflict prevention and mediation.

FemWise seeks to address the marginalization of women in peacebuilding processes by providing a platform for women to participate in peacebuilding and conflict prevention activities.

The network brings together women from a range of backgrounds, including civil society organizations, government agencies, and religious groups, to promote women's participation in peace and security processes. Through FemWise, women in South Sudan will have access to training and resources on conflict prevention, mediation, and peacebuilding, as well as opportunities to network and share their experiences, in both formal and informal settings.

¹⁴ <https://twitter.com/FemWiseAfrica/status/1586802055104139270?cxt=HHwWjMC89fqDuoUsAAAA>

4. The Development of the National Action Plan II (2023 -2027) on Women, Peace and Security

South Sudan recently developed¹⁵ its National Action Plan II (2023 – 2027) which builds on the first NAP (2015 to 2020). The new plan sets out a framework for promoting and advancing the gains made in gender equality and women’s participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution in South Sudan. Once signed, it will signal an important step forward for women in South Sudan.

The NAP II recognizes the important role that women play in peace and security processes and sets out concrete steps to ensure that women are included in all aspects of peacebuilding in line with UNSCR1325. This includes increasing the representation of women

in decision-making bodies at all levels, including in the government, the military, and civil society. The plan also aims to ensure that women’s voices are heard and that their perspectives are taken into account in all peace-building processes.

The NAP II also recognizes the unique challenges faced by women in South Sudan such as sexual violence, gender-based violence and harmful social norms and sets out measures to address these challenges. The plan sets out a range of measures to address this issue, including increasing access to justice for survivors of SGBV and providing support services for survivors for survivors.

¹⁵ South Sudan begins the development of its second National Action Plan on the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security

5. The Unification of the Security Forces in South Sudan

One of the key challenges¹⁶ facing South Sudan has been the lack of a unified security force, with various factions and militias operating independently and often at odds with one another. The 2018 Revitalised Peace Agreement includes provisions for the integration and unification of the country’s security forces. The commencement¹⁷ of the unification process in August 2022 offers hope for a more peaceful and stable country.

The benefits of a unified security force extend beyond traditional security concerns such as inter-communal violence, which has been a major source¹⁸ of conflict in South Sudan. By bringing together different groups under a single command structure, the risk of clashes between different factions is greatly reduced. Women, in particular, stand to benefit from a more unified security force.

A more cohesive military would be better equipped to address gender-based violence and other forms of human rights abuses that have affected women during times of conflict. The establishment of a more stable and secure environment can help to reduce the risks of sexual violence, forced displacement and other forms of gender-based violence, allowing women to participate more fully in the peace-building process and ensuring that their voices are heard.

The inclusion of women in the security forces and other decision-making bodies will promote trust between different communities and lay the foundation for a more stable and peaceful country.

¹⁶ South Sudan: root causes of ongoing conflict remain untouched

¹⁷ South Sudan begins unifying ex-rebels and army

¹⁸ Victims of intercommunal violence in South Sudan deserve ‘justice, truth and reparations



Formation of a Technical Committee for the Establishment of the Commission for Truth, Healing and Reconciliation in South Sudan.

In April 2022, the Government of South Sudan initiated¹⁹ public consultations to establish the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing (CTRH), a transitional justice mechanism provided for in the Revitalised Peace Agreement. A 36-member Technical Committee on the establishment of the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation, and Healing (TC-CTRH) had been created by the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs in South Sudan and launched by the 1st Vice President of South Sudan in June 2021. The TC-CTRH was tasked with conducting public consultations that centred the needs of survivors and gather the opinions of South Sudanese citizens to inform the CTRH bill.

¹⁹ South Sudan launches public consultation to pave way for truth, reconciliation

²⁰ Women's Perspectives on the Establishment of the Committee for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing in South Sudan

Civil society organisations including Women's International Peace Centre, in partnership with CORDAID South Sudan, Search for Common Ground South Sudan, Initiative for Peace Communication, and Centre for Inclusive Governance, Peace and Justice, held parallel consultative²⁰ meetings with women leaders in Juba, Yei, Wau, and Bor. The recommendations of the women for the establishment of the Commission were shared with the TC-CTRH and some have been adopted.

7. Establishment of the Gender-Based Violence Court

Efforts have been made to address pervasive gender-based violence in South Sudan through the establishment²¹ of a GBV Court, which has been functional since 2019. The court seeks to provide justice for survivors of GBV, hold perpetrators accountable, and deter future incidents of GBV. It also provides an alternative to the customary justice system for survivors of GBV, which often fails to protect the rights of women and girls as forced marriage²² is a common outcome of cases of GBV that are resolved through customary courts and traditional leaders. The GBV court empowers survivors and implements a survivor-

centred approach, including the use of state-of-the-art video conferencing equipment to ensure the privacy and well-being of victims by reducing contact with perpetrators.

The GBV court is significant for women's participation in peacebuilding which has often been hindered by the prevalence of GBV. It will provide an avenue to challenge harmful gender norms and stereotypes that promote discrimination against women and help to create a more inclusive and equitable society, which can encourage women's participation in peace processes.

²¹ South Sudan's Gender Based Violence Court Inaugurated During #16DaysOfActivism

²² No Safe Place: A Lifetime of Violence for Conflict-Affected Women and Girls in South Sudan



8. Review of the Draft National Family Law

The development²³ of the National Family Law is essential in promoting women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery efforts. It recognises and protects women's rights within the family and society, which is essential for their full and equal participation in all aspects of life, including peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery. Firstly, the law provides protection for women against violence and discrimination within the family and society. This is important because violence against women is a significant barrier to their participation in peace processes. By addressing this issue, the law will create a safe environment for women to participate fully in these efforts.

Secondly, the law recognizes women's equal rights to own and inherit property, which is important for their economic empowerment and subsequent participation

²³ Steering a Path to Family Law in South Sudan

in peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery, as it enables them to contribute to the reconstruction and development of their communities. The law also provides for the establishment of family courts to address disputes and conflicts within families. This is important because it highlights the significant role that women play in resolving family disputes and conflicts peacefully.

The process of reviewing the National Family Law in South Sudan provides an opportunity for women to articulate their issues such as increased representation, protection from violence, recognition of women's rights, and economic empowerment. Addressing these issues will create an enabling environment for women to participate fully in peace processes and contribute to building a more peaceful and stable society.

Key Concerns for the Implementation of the Roadmap for Peace in South Sudan

Women's Rights Organisations identified key concerns that may pose significant challenges to the implementation of the Roadmap for Peace and ultimately, sustainable peace in the country. Some of the key concerns included:

I. The delayed deployment of the Unified Forces is a critical concern that could potentially derail the peace process in South Sudan. Despite the successful training and passing out of soldiers, they have not yet been deployed to their designated areas and allocated proper roles and thus remain within the communities. The delayed deployment has created a vacuum that could potentially be exploited by different armed groups, leading to an increase in violence and instability. The failure to deploy these forces as per the peace agreement can be interpreted as a lack of commitment from the principal peace partners, which could erode trust in the peace process.

II. Additionally, the issue of disarmament has not been adequately addressed, which not only creates a risk of increased violence ahead of the 2024 elections but can also exacerbate ongoing conflicts in the country.

Delayed disarmament could lead to election violence as armed groups may use weapons to intimidate voters, interfere with the electoral process, or challenge the legitimacy of election results. If weapons remain in the hands of civilians, political candidates may resort to violence to ensure they are elected or to challenge the election results. In addition, with weapons still in circulation, tensions between different ethnic and regional groups could be easily inflamed, leading to inter-communal violence during the election period.

III. Intercommunal conflicts remain persistent and threaten the success of the peace agreement and the implementation of the Roadmap for Peace.

They are fuelled by ethnic divisions, competition over resources, and political rivalries and have led to displacement, loss of lives, and destruction of property. If these conflicts continue to rage unchecked, they could plunge the country back into violence.

IV. The delayed²⁴ establishment of the Hybrid Court of South Sudan by the African Union Commission, which is intended to hold those responsible for human rights violations and atrocities committed during the conflict accountable, undermines the credibility of the peace process and risks the perception that those responsible for crimes against humanity will go unpunished. This could fuel resentment among victims and their communities, and potentially lead to a resurgence of violence.

V. Despite being recognized as key stakeholders in the implementation of the peace agreement, women-led CSOs have faced challenges in engaging with the African Union and receiving feedback on their concerns. The dearth of engagement from the AU raises questions about the extent to which the voices and concerns of civil society are being heard and considered in the peacebuilding process.

VI. Despite the provision in the peace agreement for a 35% quota for women's participation, this provision has not been fulfilled. Women's representation in government, decision-making and peacebuilding remains low. Violations of the quota have been reported to the African Union but have not been addressed. The lack of meaningful inclusion of women in decision-making undermines the potential for sustainable peace and security in South Sudan as their needs and perspectives will not be prioritised. The African Union, as a key stakeholder in the peace process, must ensure that the provision for women's participation is fully implemented and that women's voices are heard in all aspects of peacebuilding in South Sudan.

24 South Sudan: African Union's abandoned commitment to justice in Africa: The case of the hybrid court for South Sudan



Key Recommendations in the Implementation of the Roadmap for Peace.

The women-led CSOs identified the following key priorities and recommendations to address the gaps in the implementation of the peace agreement and ensure women's meaningful participation in the peace process.



A. Fast-track the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms such as the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing (CTRH) and the Compensation and Reparation Authority (CRA). The CTRH and CRA are essential for addressing past human rights violations, promoting accountability and reconciliation, and providing reparations for survivors of violence, most of whom are women and girls. The establishment of these mechanisms must involve meaningful participation and consultation with women and women-led CSOs to ensure that the needs and perspectives of women are fully integrated. Furthermore, adequate funding must be allocated to support the effective functioning of these mechanisms.

B. Strictly adhere to the 35% quota for women's participation by all parties at all levels of the peace process, including in the permanent constitution-making process. The AU PSC should promote the government's compliance with the 35% women's quota by constantly monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the provision. This will help to identify any barriers to its implementation and supporting the Government of South Sudan in addressing them.

C. Popularising the National Action Plan for Women, Peace, and Security will contribute significantly to the overall success of the Roadmap for Peace. The Peace and Security Council should support the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare in its efforts to sensitize communities on the NAP and its importance in promoting women's participation and protection in peacebuilding processes.

This is by encouraging the Government of South Sudan to allocate resources for the implementation of the NAP. The PSC should also promote the development and implementation of joint advocacy and sensitization campaigns on the NAP between the Government of South Sudan and the AU Political Affairs, Peace, and Security Department (PAPS), particularly the Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security.

D. Fast-track the disarmament process since the ownership of guns by civilians poses a great threat to the safety and well-being of women and children who are most affected by armed violence. Disarmament will create a safe environment for women to participate in the implementation of the peace agreement and engage in various development activities without fear of attacks. Additionally, sensitization campaigns on the importance of disarmament should be conducted to create awareness among the public, particularly men who may resist the process. The involvement of women in the disarmament process should also be considered to ensure their safety and promote their active participation in building a peaceful and stable South Sudan.

E. The establishment of mobile GBV courts to ensure that perpetrators of gender-based violence outside of Juba are held accountable for their actions. Reports of women's rights violations are frequently reported, with no swift action taken to address the reported issues. The setting up of mobile GBV courts would ensure that justice is served promptly and effectively in all parts of the country which will promote a safe and secure environment for women in South Sudan.

