

# SOUTH SUDAN ON THE BRINK: The Urgent Importance of an Integrated Peacebuilding Approach

*Experiences and lessons learned from PAX, Plan International and HealthNet TPO*

## THE CRISIS: SOUTH SUDAN AT A TIPPING POINT

South Sudan remains one of the world's most fragile contexts. The 2018 peace deal has failed to hold: renewed violence, political instability, mass displacement, impunity and entrenched gender inequality define daily life for millions. Women and girls bear a disproportionate burden — facing pervasive sexual and gender-based violence, severely restricted civic space, and limited access to justice. In all layers of society, people are deeply traumatised. Root causes of conflict - including land disputes, political manipulation, (instrumentalization of) inter-ethnic violence- remain too often unaddressed.

Despite immense adversity, local women's groups, community leaders, and civil society organisations have demonstrated extraordinary resilience. Their work shows that sustainable peace requires more than political agreements: it demands integrated approaches that address the human, social, and structural dimensions of conflict.

## THREE PILLARS OF INTEGRATED PEACEBUILDING

<p> <b>Mental Health &amp; Psychosocial Support</b></p> <p>Trauma is pervasive in South Sudan. Psychosocial wellbeing is not an optional service — it is the foundation that enables women and communities to participate in peace. MHPSS must be embedded in all WPS frameworks, National Action Plans, and peacebuilding strategies.</p>	<p> <b>Militarised Masculinities &amp; Engaging Men and Boys</b></p> <p>Deeply entrenched rigid gender roles and militarised cultures perpetuate violence. Transformative engagement with men and boys — challenging harmful norms and promoting positive masculinities — is an essential, often overlooked pillar of sustainable peacebuilding.</p>	<p> <b>Gender-Transformative Approaches &amp; Youth/Women's Leadership</b></p> <p>Women and youth leaders are agents of change, not just beneficiaries. A gender-transformative approach goes beyond participation to dismantle structural inequalities, ensuring women and young people lead and participate in peace processes from the community to the national level.</p>
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## WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS AND OUR JOINT CALL TO ACTION

Grounded in evidence from a.o. the Leaders of Peace Programme (PAX, Plan International, AMA, EVE and HealthNet TPO) Shared Learning Agenda, we call for:

- Strengthening and building women's collective leadership infrastructure through evidence-based partnerships means backing South Sudanese women at every level to shape legislation, justice reform, and peace processes through psychosocial support, gender-transformative programming and investing in accountability in relation to conflict related sexual violence and GBV
- Psychosocial wellbeing as a prerequisite for participation — women engage more effectively in civic and peace processes when they have access to safe spaces, emotional support, and collective care
- Community-based Mental Health Psycho-Social Support rebuilds social cohesion — trust-building and dialogue reduce inter-group tensions and enable collective action in divided communities
- Challenging militarised masculinities reduces violence — engaging men and boys as active partners (not obstacles) is transformative for community safety and gender equality
- Gender-transformative approaches enable women and young people to move from symbolic inclusion to legitimate decision making roles in peace processes, mediation and governance at community, county and national level
- Locally embedded systems drive sustainability — community structures, traditional leaders, and women-led organisations are the backbone of peacebuilding; they must be resourced and respected as such
- Short-term, fragmented funding undermines impact — meaningful psychosocial recovery, locally rooted peacebuilding, norm transformation and trust-building require multi-year investment and ensuring sustainability beyond project cycles