



# BORN TO LEAD

Recommendations on increasing women's participation in South Sudan's peace process

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South Sudanese women have been championing inclusive peace and demanding their meaningful participation at all levels of decision making. However, women continue to confront obstacles to maintaining and increasing space to contribute – particularly in formal decision-making arenas. This brief analyses the modalities of women’s participation and influence in South Sudan’s peace processes that culminated in two agreements, in 2015 and 2018. It identifies women’s critical contributions and the lessons learned, and provides recommendations to ensure women’s continued contribution to building sustainable peace in South Sudan. This briefing note serves as a policy companion to the research paper *Our Search for Peace: Women in South Sudan’s National Peace Processes, 2005–2018* (Oxfam, UN Women and Born to Lead, 2020).

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email [advocacy@oxfaminternational.org](mailto:advocacy@oxfaminternational.org).

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Cover photo: Rebecca is an entrepreneur who owns a vegetable farm; Back page: Elizabeth is a primary school teacher. Both women are featured in the #BornToLead campaign, which showcases the many faces of South Sudanese women’s strength and leadership. Credit: Bullen Chol/Oxfam.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

In September 2018, South Sudan's latest peace agreement, the Revitalised Agreement of Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS), was signed.

While all those who signed on behalf of parties to the conflict were men, seven of the 17 civil society signatories were women. This level of representation was hard-won, an outcome of extensive lobbying, and enabled women delegates to meaningfully influence the process towards the agreement and the text of the agreement itself. Yet barriers remain to South Sudanese women's equal representation, influence and leadership in building and sustaining peace in formal and informal peace processes.

South Sudan is not unique in this regard. Women across the globe are largely marginalized and woefully under-represented in formal peace processes. Between 1992 and 2011, only 4% of signatories to peace agreements and less than 10% of negotiators during peace talks were women.<sup>1</sup> In South Sudan, women made up only 15% of delegates in negotiations that led to the 2015 peace agreement, and 25% during the 2018 negotiations.<sup>2</sup> While this represents a higher level of women's representation than in many peace processes around the world, it is still insufficient.

Tackling barriers to women's participation is a must. Not only is it a right enshrined in international law,<sup>3</sup> but there is a growing body of evidence demonstrating that women's meaningful inclusion – in which women's concerns, recommendations and presence are reflected throughout the process and in its outcomes – contributes to the likelihood of reaching and sustaining peace.<sup>4</sup>

This brief analyses how South Sudanese women have participated in, and successfully influenced, the two recent national peace processes that led to the Agreement of Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) and the R-ARCSS. It draws heavily on the in-depth analysis in *Our Search for Peace: Women in South Sudan's National Peace Processes, 2005–2018*, a research paper based on 25 in-depth, semi-structured interviews which shares South Sudanese women's stories of their roles in the national peace processes.<sup>5</sup>

The paper draws out lessons learned and identifies ongoing challenges, with the aim of contributing to timely discussions in South Sudan and around the world. It concludes with recommendations to maximize women's continuing role in building sustainable peace in South Sudan.

# CONTEXT

South Sudan declared independence in July 2011; internal conflict erupted in December 2013 as a result of political disagreement between President Salva Kiir Mayardit, leader of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) and his deputy, Dr Riek Machar, who went on to form the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO).

In January 2014, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a regional bloc of Eastern African states, convened a political process in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in an effort to broker peace. This process eventually led to the signing of the ARCSS in August 2015. Despite the agreement, fighting continued and then surged dramatically in July 2016. Hundreds of thousands of people fled their homes, many finding safety in Protection of Civilians (POC) sites located in UN bases across the country.

In December 2017, IGAD launched a High Level Revitalization Forum (HLRF) to resume peace talks, culminating in the R-ACRSS, signed in September 2018. The processes have been additionally supported by the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU) and the Troika (the US, Norway and the UK), who have led international diplomacy efforts.

<b>Box 1: Timeline</b>	
<b>9 July 2011</b>	Independence of South Sudan.
<b>December 2013</b>	Outbreak of civil war.
<b>January 2014</b>	Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA), signed by SPLM/A and SPLM/A-IO.
<b>August 2015</b>	ARCSS signed in Addis Ababa and Juba, South Sudan.
<b>July 2016</b>	Violence between the SPLM/A and SPLM/A-IO erupts in Juba.
<b>December 2017</b>	Launch of the HLRF. The HLRF lasted 15 months, involving negotiations between the SPLM/A, SPLM/A-IO and other political parties. Five key agreements were signed, which eventually led to the R-ARCSS.
<b>December 2017</b>	Agreements on the cessation of hostilities, protection of civilians and humanitarian access signed in Addis Ababa by the SPLM/A, SPLM/A-IO and other political parties, as well as civil society and other stakeholders.

<b>September 2018</b>	R-ARCSS signed in Addis Ababa.
<b>May 2019</b>	Six-month extension of the Pre-Transitional period.
<b>November 2019</b>	Additional 100-day extension of the Pre-Transitional period.

Source: C. Hazvinei Vhumbunu. (2019). *Reviving peace in South Sudan through the Revitalised Peace Agreement*. African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes. <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/reviving-peace-in-south-sudan-through-the-revitalised-peace-agreement/>

While the ceasefire has largely held since the signing of R-ARCSS, the situation in the country is extremely fragile as progress on implementation has been slow. The Pre-Transitional period provided for in the agreement – the time period for the parties to complete critical tasks including security reform – has been extended twice. It is now scheduled to expire in February 2020, at which point a revitalized transitional unity government is due to be formed.

The conflict has had a devastating effect on the lives of women, men, girls and boys. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed,<sup>6</sup> and 1.5 million people are displaced inside the country, while over 2 million have fled across the border. Over 7 million people – almost two-thirds of the population – require humanitarian assistance to meet their daily needs, and 4.5 million are severely food-insecure.<sup>7</sup>

Women and girls have been profoundly impacted. Violence and insecurity have worsened pre-conflict vulnerabilities rooted in gender inequality and marginalization. Nearly half of girls are married before the age of 18,<sup>8</sup> with anecdotal evidence that rates of child marriage are rising, exacerbated by conflict-related poverty and food insecurity.<sup>9</sup> Sexual violence has been used as a tactic of war,<sup>10</sup> including widespread rape, mutilation and torture,<sup>11</sup> and armed actors have abducted women and girls for sexual slavery.<sup>12</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

This briefing note is heavily informed by the research paper *Our Search for Peace: Women in South Sudan's National Peace Processes, 2005–2018*<sup>13</sup> which is based on 25 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with South Sudanese women active in the country's formal peace processes. Both papers use the 'Broadening Participation' framework developed by Thania<sup>14</sup> to analyse the modalities of South Sudanese women's engagement and the factors that have contributed to and limited their meaningful participation. The framework was developed as part of a multi-year research project analysing 40 peace agreements.<sup>15</sup> It identified<sup>16</sup> where women were present – both within or outside formal negotiations. A key conclusion was that women's presence alone was not sufficient to create the conditions for more inclusive and sustainable peace. However, when women had influence over the process of the negotiations at the table and beyond, more peace agreements were signed and implemented.<sup>17</sup>



Meaningful influence relates to the ability of women's groups and networks to push for their presence and preferences before, during and after the negotiation process. Preferences can relate to:

- Bringing issues onto the negotiation and implementation agenda;
- Putting issues into the substance of the agreement;
- Taking part in the implementation of an agreement; and/or
- Demanding negotiations begin or resume, or that an agreement be signed.<sup>18</sup>

## WOMEN IN PEACE PROCESSES

Evidence shows that women's participation in peace processes leads to a higher chance of reaching an agreement, and that the resultant peace will be more sustainable (see **Box 2**).

### **Box 2: Research findings on women's participation in peace processes<sup>20</sup>**

#### **Women's participation increases the longevity of a peace agreement.**

An analysis of 182 signed peace agreements between 1989 and 2011 showed that agreements from peace negotiations including women were 35 percent more likely to last at least 15 years.<sup>21</sup>

**Women's groups build coalitions and bridge divides to advocate for peace, and are less likely than other societal groups to disrupt negotiations.** An in-depth study of 40 peace processes found that no women's groups attempted to derail any process, unlike other societal groups.<sup>22</sup>

**Largely seen as less threatening, women are often perceived by parties to conflict as honest brokers, which gives unique access to, and influence over, belligerents.** This is relevant both in community-level disputes and at negotiating tables.<sup>23</sup>

**Women at the negotiating table can raise issues that are vital for sustainable peace, expanding peace process agendas.** They also more often advocate for excluded groups and the need to address underlying causes of conflict, such as development and human rights issues.<sup>24</sup>

**Women can more often prioritize gender equality, which is critical for the stability of a state.** While the causal relationship is still unclear, levels of gender equality can serve as a predictor of armed conflict between states and within states.<sup>25</sup>

**The likelihood of agreements being reached and implemented is much higher when women's influence is stronger.** In these negotiations, women were able to bring forward issues, perspectives and proposals throughout the different phases of a peace process in a way that positively affected decisions.<sup>26</sup>

***'Women at the negotiating table raise issues that are vital for sustainable peace, expanding peace process agendas. They also more often advocate for excluded groups and the need to address underlying causes of conflict, such as development and human rights issues.'**<sup>19</sup>*

UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2000) calls on member states and other key actors to recognize and address the specific needs of women and girls during conflict and post-conflict reconstruction (see **Box 3**).

Since UNSCR 1325, the UN Security Council has passed nine additional resolutions, elaborating and expanding the focus, and making up what is now known as the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda.<sup>27</sup>

South Sudan launched a WPS National Action Plan (NAP) in 2015. The NAP provides a roadmap to protect women from SGBV and *'increase women's participation in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, the maintenance of peace and security, and guarantee their participation in post-conflict peacebuilding and statebuilding processes'*.<sup>28</sup> The country has also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979), legally binding the state and government to guarantee gender equality and women's political, economic, social and civil rights.<sup>29</sup> CEDAW's General Recommendation 30, which was introduced in 2013 to better align interpretation and implementation of the treaty with the WPS resolutions, highlights the need for signatories to comply with the convention's obligations on equal participation by women in conflict prevention, resolution and peace negotiations.<sup>30</sup>

### Box 3: UNSCR 1325 (2000)

The four pillars of UNSCR 1325 (2000) call for:

1. the full **participation** of women in the maintenance of international peace and security – at all levels and stages;
2. **protection** of women and girls from conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV);
3. **prevention** of conflict and of conflict-related sexual violence; and
4. gender-sensitive **relief and recovery** measures.

Source: United Nations Security Council. Resolution 1325, S/RES/1325 (31 October 2000). Retrieved 1 September 2019, from <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/WPS%20SRES1325%20.pdf>

## 2 WOMEN'S INCLUSION IN SOUTH SUDAN'S PEACE PROCESSES

South Sudanese women have a long – albeit under-documented and under-recognized – history of peacemaking at national and community levels.<sup>31</sup> During the process that led to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) (2005), which ended the Second Sudanese Civil War and led to South Sudan's independence, many southern Sudanese women were peacebuilders, peace advocates and humanitarians. They were also actively engaged in the independence movement as combatants, and caregivers to wounded soldiers.<sup>32</sup>

At the outbreak of the 2013 conflict, women's groups – some of which were active during the CPA process – quickly mobilized to call for a cessation to hostilities and women's participation in the IGAD-led peace talks.<sup>33</sup> They lobbied the parties to the conflict, IGAD mediators and international actors on the sidelines of the talks, and ultimately secured women's formal participation in the talks that led to both the 2015 and 2018 peace agreements.

Women from both civil society and political parties overcame barriers to participate, both formally and informally, in the pre-negotiation, negotiation and implementation phases of South Sudan's peace processes. Their participation went beyond just being present in relevant fora; women critically influenced the processes and agreements.

Six of the 'Broadening Participation' modalities are relevant to how women engaged in South Sudan's peace processes, as follows.<sup>34</sup>

### OBSERVER STATUS

**ARCSS (2015):** When negotiations on the agreement began in January 2014 in Addis Ababa, IGAD did not include women's participation in the delegations as a prerequisite for joining the talks. After extensive lobbying from a number of women's groups, IGAD heeded women's demand for representation – on the condition that they formed a single group. This led to the creation of the Women's Bloc of South Sudan (Women's Bloc), under which women from different political parties and civil society mobilized. In August 2014, the Women's Bloc secured observer status in the negotiations.<sup>35</sup> This enabled women representatives to listen but not contribute during the negotiations.

**R-ARCSS (2018):** Following a workshop hosted by IGAD (see **High-level problem-solving workshops** later in this section) and a meeting hosted by Eve Organization on the HLRF, women formed the South Sudan Women Coalition.<sup>36</sup> It consisted of a network of women civil



society leaders based in South Sudan and neighbouring countries, and was established because of a perceived need from IGAD and women's groups to represent a wider constituency of women, further harmonize their input and reinforce pressure for women's increased representation. The Coalition became official observers and ultimately signatories.<sup>37</sup>

## DIRECT REPRESENTATION AT THE NEGOTIATING TABLE

**ARCSS:** At the start of the negotiations, out of the two 10-person negotiating parties of the SPLM/A and SPLM/A-IO, there were only three women delegates, participating as part of the latter group.<sup>38</sup> Three women later participated in the SPLM/A delegation after internal lobbying from women party members.<sup>39</sup> Civil society was initially absent, but was accredited in subsequent rounds of negotiations, following sustained pressure. Women made up six of the 18-person civil society delegation accredited for the June 2014 round of talks.<sup>40</sup> There were two women signatories to the agreement, one specifically representing women.<sup>41</sup>

**R-ARCSS:** With increased levels of preparedness following the ARCSS, civil society advocated for a more inclusive process, supported by the international community.<sup>42</sup> The HLRF and resulting peace agreement was more inclusive than the ARCSS, with more delegates and signatories representing women's organizations and civil society. The Women's Bloc secured full delegate status. With each subsequent round of the HLRF, there was a steady increase in the number of women delegates for political parties and civil society, increasing from 11 out of 90 delegates (12%) in December 2017 to 39 out of 120 (32%) by the end of the Addis Ababa rounds of talks in May 2018.<sup>43</sup> In total, seven of the 17 R-ARCSS signatories from the stakeholder group were women representing different constituencies (including women's groups, civil society and youth).<sup>44</sup>

*The HLRF and resulting peace agreement was more inclusive than the ARCSS, with more delegates and signatories representing women's organizations and civil society.*

## CONSULTATIONS

**ARCSS:** The Women's Monthly Forum on Peace and Political Processes in South Sudan held consultations with women from communities across South Sudan, providing updates and gathering input on women's perspectives, to inform their public positions and to share with civil society delegates when they were back in the country between rounds of the negotiations. However, there were limits to how effective consultation was in the process. The fast pace of the talks meant that often, by the time the Forum had met to consult on a set of issues, the discussions in Addis Ababa had already moved on.<sup>45</sup>

**R-ARCSS:** During the HLRF, the IGAD Special Envoy held consultations with key stakeholder groups, including women's groups, and invited them to make written submissions with concrete proposals.<sup>46</sup> Prior to the start, the Women's Coalition and Women's Bloc held strategy meetings to

develop positions and key demands.<sup>47</sup> Between phases of the negotiations, they met their members, reporting on progress and gathering input for the next phase of the negotiations.<sup>48</sup> The R-ACRSS rounds were more spread out than in the earlier process, making consultations more feasible.

## INCLUSIVE COMMISSIONS<sup>49</sup>

**ARCSS:** South Sudan's 2011 Transitional Constitution mandated 25% representation of women in decision-making positions in government, institutions and commissions.<sup>50</sup> This was upheld in the peace agreement. The ARCSS also explicitly provided for the inclusion of different stakeholder groups (including women's groups) in the peace process implementation institutions and commissions. This helped women secure some representation, but the conflict parties did not adhere to the quota, and in practice women were largely under-represented in commissions.<sup>51</sup>

**R-ARCSS:** As a result of extensive lobbying, the peace agreement provided for an increased representation of women to 35% in the Executive and transitional justice institutions, as well allocated seats in post-agreement institutions and mechanisms.<sup>52</sup> Several of the bodies are chaired by women, and the number of women in commissions has increased since the ARCSS. However, the quota is still not met,<sup>53</sup> despite repeated calls from women in political parties and civil society.<sup>54</sup>

## HIGH-LEVEL PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHOPS

**ARCSS:** No high-level problem-solving workshops took place.

**R-ARCSS:** In August 2017, IGAD held a two-day high-level problem-solving workshop in Bishoftu, Ethiopia, bringing together 22 South Sudanese multi-disciplinary, independent experts to develop recommendations for the HLRF.<sup>55</sup> Four of the participants were women from civil society, and they pushed IGAD to ensure that women's representation would be a key element in the HLRF.<sup>56</sup>

## MASS ACTION

**ARCSS:** Women's groups organized peaceful processions, increasing public awareness about the devastating impact of the conflict and building national and international support for a peaceful resolution. In March 2015, when the peace talks risked collapse, the Women's Monthly Forum (WMF) organized a procession in Juba with representatives from all 10 states, calling for parties to return to the negotiating table.

**R-ACRSS:** Women's groups continued to take a leading role in organizing peaceful processions. For example, in December 2017, the

Women's Coalition, in partnership with the WMF and the South Sudan Council of Churches, brought together 500 women in a silent march through Juba. Protestors taped their mouths closed, calling for peaceful resolution of the conflict, as well as accountability for sexual violence and other atrocities.<sup>57</sup>

Women used other strategies to influence the processes and agreements. In the ARCSS process, this included lobbying political parties and international stakeholders, producing civil society position papers with gender-sensitive language and gender-specific recommendations, and working with male allies and the international community to amplify their messages.<sup>58</sup> Women also pushed for the inclusion of SGBV as a crime to be prosecuted by the transitional justice mechanisms of the R-ARCSS, including the Hybrid Court.<sup>59</sup>

Building on their experience during the ARCSS process, women's groups and civil society were better prepared for the HLRF. The Women's Coalition, for example, established a technical support team comprising women with diverse skills, including mediation, advocacy and content knowledge, to support women delegates.<sup>60</sup> Women's groups worked with broader civil society,<sup>61</sup> and continued to share position papers and communiqués with the AU and key embassies, liaised with the IGAD Senior Gender Advisor as an effective channel to communicate with the IGAD,<sup>62</sup> and shared their messages at international fora such as the UN Security Council.<sup>63</sup>

## OUTCOMES OF WOMEN'S INFLUENCING EFFORTS

**Strategies to encourage dialogue and continue peace talks:** During negotiations, women conducted informal mediation and promoted dialogue, ensuring the conflict parties returned to the table. For example, women's groups contributed to efforts to secure a face-to-face meeting between President Kiir and Riek Machar, adding their voices to broader civil society calls.<sup>64</sup> In June 2018, the two principles met for the first time in two years, arguably a necessary step in moving the negotiations forward.

**Sustained pressure to push for cessation of hostilities and the signing of the peace agreements:** Peaceful processes that brought together women from across political divides – as well as lobbying conflict parties and influential regional and international stakeholders – increased awareness about the devastating impact of conflict and created sustained pressure for peace agreements to be signed.<sup>65</sup>

**Greater gender equality in formal representation:** From the CPA to the R-ARCSS, women have incrementally increased their representation and influence in formal peace processes and implementation bodies. In the R-ARCSS, women secured a provision for at least 35% representation of women in the Executive and transitional justice institutions; allocated seats in post-agreement institutions and

mechanisms; and at least one female vice president out of five. While the 35% quota has largely not yet been met in the transitional mechanisms, it moves the needle on women's rights to representation in decision-making spaces, and provides a benchmark and a level of accountability for party nominations. It continues to be a rallying point for the lobby efforts of women's groups.

**Increased gender-sensitive process:** During the ARCSS process, women's groups successfully lobbied IGAD to appoint a Senior Gender Advisor to the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC),<sup>66</sup> to ensure gender-sensitive monitoring of the agreement. This proved crucial, as the gender advisor regularly solicited input from women's groups on violations of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) and was an internal advocate for women's meaningful participation within JMEC.<sup>67</sup>

**Increased gender-sensitive agreements:** Women have secured gender-sensitive provisions in agreements. In the ARCSS, this included provisions on safeguarding women's rights and strong justice and accountability measures, such the establishment of a Hybrid Court, which will investigate and prosecute serious war crimes, including SGBV, which has disproportionately affected women and girls.<sup>68</sup> However, again, implementation of these elements has largely stalled.

**Broadened focus of agreements:** Women's groups broadened the conversation at the table beyond political interests to ensure issues essential for sustainable peace were enshrined in the agreement. They lobbied to address the needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees, and contributed to the inclusion of language on the '*relief, voluntary and dignified repatriation, rehabilitation and resettlement of IDPs and returnees*' in the ARCSS.<sup>69</sup>

# 3 LESSONS LEARNED: FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN'S INFLUENCE

## 1. SUPPORTING FACTORS

**Early involvement of women in processes:** During the ARCSS process, securing observer status served as an important stepping stone for the Women's Bloc to then gain full delegate status, allowing them to push for specific provisions in the agreement. This ultimately afforded two women the opportunity to sign the ARCSS, setting a precedent for women's participation. In addition, all signatories to the ARCSS, including the Women's Bloc, were afforded representation on implementation bodies in the agreement. Women's inclusion was also used to pressure other groups to increase the representation of women in their delegations. For example, at the start of the ARCSS process, the SPLM/A had no women in their ten-person delegation, compared to three in the SPLM/A-IO. Women members of the SPLM/A leveraged this imbalance, as well as other legal frameworks and policies (such as the 25% quota in the Transitional Constitution of South Sudan (2011) and UNSCR 1325) to successfully pressure for their inclusion.<sup>70</sup>

**Existence of prior commitments to women's inclusion:** Existing legal frameworks have been important to leverage women's increased representation. The 25% quota in the Transitional Constitution of South Sudan (2011) was used as a baseline in women's lobbying to achieve the provision of 35% in the R-ACRSS.

**Women's coalitions and joint positions:** Building coalitions and associations was a critical factor that contributed to women's influence. Women often built coalitions across political and ethnic divides. They provided coordinating bodies to harmonize demands and develop joint positions, which were presented by women delegates during negotiations, and used to influence national, regional and international stakeholders. When women united around specific demands – such as the 35% quota and the need for justice and accountability mechanisms – they were able to leverage greater influence.

**Including women outside of the negotiation table:** The women's movement organized strategy meetings and developed position papers, sharing with the negotiating parties and other stakeholders, such as IGAD and the Troika special envoys, who ultimately took up many of their recommendations (see below).<sup>71</sup> Women delegates linked up with women at sub-state level to relay updates from the peace talks and to ensure their input was informed by a broader constituency. This meant their input was more representative of community needs and arguably created more local buy-in for the agreements.



**Inclusion-friendly mediators and allies:** Several key actors have provided critical support for women's inclusion and input. This includes Ismail Wais, the IGAD Special Envoy to South Sudan, who reiterated in invitation letters to parties that women should be represented in their delegations<sup>72</sup> and held consultations with women's groups prior to the HLRF. The international diplomatic community, such as the Troika, was also receptive to women's lobbying, amplifying calls for women's meaningful inclusion in both the pre-agreement processes and the implementation of the agreements.<sup>73</sup>

## 2. CONSTRAINING FACTORS

**Lack of access to funding and resources:** South Sudanese women identified the lack – and often ad-hoc nature – of funding as a key barrier to participation. This limited consultations between women delegates and their constituencies, particularly given the fast-paced and at times unpredictable nature of the processes. Competition over limited funding from donors and support from international partners also exacerbated tensions between women and women's groups.<sup>74</sup>

**Harmful gender norms and practices:** Widely held and deeply embedded beliefs about gender roles in South Sudan, which situate women largely in private, rather than public and political spheres, have limited women's political participation, decision making and leadership.<sup>75</sup> This has meant that women do not have equal opportunities to be involved in leadership roles, and those who take them on feel they are not taken seriously or face backlash. Such societal expectations surrounding gender roles begin at a young age as girls are often given less priority than boys. Nearly three-quarters of girls do not receive an education, making South Sudan the lowest-ranking country for girls' education.<sup>76</sup> Nearly half of girls are married before the age of 18.<sup>77</sup>

**Insecurity, intimidation and sexual harassment:** Women engaged in the ARCSS process spoke of many incidents of sexual harassment. During the ARCSS, women drafted a letter to the mediators, to be signed by women delegates, calling for action to end such harassment. However, fear of reprisals prohibited some from signing the letter, and the lack of buy-in led to it never being delivered.<sup>78</sup> During the R-ARCSS process, women feared arrest, intimidation and harassment by the authorities on their return from negotiations in Addis Ababa and Khartoum to Juba.<sup>79</sup> Security threats mean that some women are still living in exile.

**Diverging interests:** Despite women's achievements in bridging divides during the peace processes, diversity across political and other lines made consensus building a challenge at times. While women united around specific issues, such as the 35% quota, many other issues were more contentious and stoked divisions. Men are often afforded the option to have differing positions and perspectives; however, women were frequently held to expectations to speak with a collective voice, undermining the nuance that differing perspectives bring to discussions.

# 4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The impact and importance of women's role in South Sudan's peace processes are clear. Yet their participation to date is no guarantee of a continued role in the implementation of the peace agreement, as well as in the future governance of the country.

Inclusion in decision making, especially in political domains, contributes to the consolidation of peace and to cohesive societies.<sup>80</sup> There is a pressing need to ensure the continued participation of women in the implementation of the agreement and in broader governance structures.

**With the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity to be formed shortly, this is a critical time. Sustained commitment, strategies and resources are needed at all levels to ensure women's participation is ongoing, meaningful and maximized.**

## GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL LEADERS IN SOUTH SUDAN

Parties to the R-ARCSS should:

**Ensure that at least 35% of party nominations and appointments at all levels of government are women.** UN Women and the Government of Canada have developed a resource that provides a breakdown of the minimum number of women representatives that are required at each level of government to fulfil the quota, which should be used to monitor commitment.<sup>81</sup>

**Take additional steps to ensure at least 35% representation and leadership by women in traditionally male-dominated bodies and institutions,** especially security and defence institutions.

**Review party manifestos and related documents to ensure strong language on women's representation and participation.** Parties' strategies should include measures such as all-women shortlists, and the establishment and strengthening of 'women's leagues' to provide space for women to come together.<sup>82</sup>

**Increase awareness about women's rights and the need for representation via training and sensitization programmes.** This should be targeted at staff in national and state governments, policy makers and parliamentarians.

**Ensure that at least one of South Sudan's five vice presidents is a woman and that the agreed number of women per party are nominated to the Council of Ministers, as per the R-ARCSS.**

**Incorporate the R-ARCSS into the Transitional Constitution 2011, amended in 2015.**

**Implement South Sudan's National Action Plan (NAP) on WPS 2015–20, and prioritize the development, resourcing and implementation of the second NAP.**<sup>83</sup> A recent report identified a lack of political will and 'inadequate budgets' as barriers to implementation of the current NAP.<sup>84</sup> Adequate funding and commitment from the highest levels are necessary to ensure the crucial role of women in peace and security processes.

**Comprehensively review the activities, outcomes and impact of the current NAP, working closely with implementing institutions and civil society.** This should inform the development of the second NAP. The NAP can be strengthened by aligning the pillars of the WPS agenda – participation, prevention, protection, recovery and relief – with provisions in the R-ARCSS.<sup>85</sup>

## IGAD AND THE AFRICAN UNION

IGAD and the African Union should:

**Systematically consult women's groups and wider civil society throughout the Pre-Transitional and Transitional periods and ensure their input informs implementation of the peace agreement.**

**Hold South Sudan's government and political parties accountable for ensuring that the 35% quota for women's representation is met.**

**Push South Sudan's leaders to adhere to the gender-sensitive provisions** in the 2017 COHA and R-ARCSS, including prevention and protection measures on SGBV.

**Hold signatories accountable for ensuring that one of the five vice presidents is a woman.**

**Ensure strong protection measures for women's groups and civil society organizations in South Sudan.** Steps such as the creation of a safe reporting mechanism for threats and intimidation against civil society should be taken to ensure that violence and intimidation do not curb women's participation in the implementation of the R-ARCSS. These should be developed in close consultation with civil society and women's rights actors.

**Ensure a gender balance of African Union special representatives and envoys and that they have inclusion-friendly profiles.** Research has shown that inclusion-friendly mediators are an important factor in supporting the meaningful participation of women and other groups in peace processes.<sup>86</sup> Enhancing gender-sensitivity and increasing the representation of women can contribute to more inclusive and sustainable processes.

# DONORS AND THE WIDER INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Donors and the wider international community should:

**Systematically consult women's rights actors and civil society on their positions to inform the development of positions and messaging on the peace process.**

**Increase direct funding for national and subnational women's rights organizations and groups, which are currently missing out on the vast majority of international funding.** This is urgent, as the government provides no funding to women's organizations, and those that work on peacebuilding and conflict transformation face funding and capacity constraints.<sup>87</sup> Funding to these organizations should be multi-year core funding, and direct whenever possible, prioritizing strengthening institutional capacity. Funding should equally allow for adaptive programming, enabling women's organizations to respond to rapid changes in the country context. At present, less than 1% of gender-focused funding goes to women's rights organizations globally.<sup>88</sup>

**Fund initiatives that promote connections and coalitions between women's movements and organizations.** This includes building on existing initiatives, facilitating links between community, state and national levels, and supporting the development of joint positions. Platforms that bridge national, subnational and grassroots levels should be strengthened to allow greater exchange of information, so that the voices, needs and realities of women in communities inform national policy and practice – and the implementation of the R-ARCSS.

**Support South Sudanese women's advocacy on peace and security, and their participation at regional and international levels.** This includes supporting their safe access to opportunities, for example at regional and international platforms such as the UN Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council.

**Provide resources to document women's participation in peacebuilding at all levels.** Increased visibility of women's participation and leadership can shift attitudes, beliefs and social norms, and increase public support for women's leadership.

**Continue to call on parties to implement the 35% quota for women's representation, and consider this in measuring progress towards implementation.**

# NOTES

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## BORN TO LEAD

#BornToLead is campaign driven by a coalition of South Sudanese women's rights organisations pushing for a future where South Sudanese women and girls have the power to influence the decisions that affect their future, through equal participation in peace-building and policy-making. For further information please contact [borntoleadssd@gmail.com](mailto:borntoleadssd@gmail.com)

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