

**WOMEN AND THE FUTURE OF SOUTH SUDAN:
LOCAL INSIGHTS ON
BUILDING INCLUSIVE
CONSTITUENCIES FOR
PEACE**

DOMINC IYAA & KATIE SMITH

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Search for Common Ground in South Sudan

Search for Common Ground has implemented programs in South Sudan since 2014 with the overall objective to promote social cohesion, resilience, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts among individuals and communities. We work across all levels of society to support diverse and constructive dialogue, positive peace-focused media, and access to justice mechanisms. We partner with and engage local actors including civil society organizations, women's groups, youth, media professionals, and others through conflict transformation and conflict-sensitive journalism trainings, participatory theater, radio programming, ongoing conflict analysis, community-led dialogues, and local peace initiatives. Search then connects local-level initiatives and expertise with national and international policymakers and experts to ensure that local voices and local solutions are at the forefront of decision-making.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dominic Iyaa is a South Sudanese Policy Research Fellow with Search for Common Ground, based in Juba. He served as lead researcher, interviewing over a dozen South Sudanese women to provide insights for this paper, conducting interviews with civil society and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) based in Juba and other urban towns, gathering insights from South Sudanese practitioners and scholars that participated in learning exchanges focused on local level peacebuilding in the country, and drawing on additional desk research and programmatic data.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

South Sudan has been in a protracted state of conflict since the fallout between political rivals President Salva Kiir and his former Deputy Riek Machar sparked civil war and reignited violence between tribal groups across the country in 2013. Over 2 million people have fled the country as refugees since then, over 80% of whom are women and children.¹ Many areas of the country are severely food insecure and at high risk of famine. The political and national conflict dynamics have also activated pre-existing familial and tribal tensions, which have come to the fore with communities struggling over access to resources due to food insecurity and economic instability. The persistence of conflict has normalized violence among South Sudanese citizens: from 2015–2017 there was a 15% increase in the number of South Sudanese who believed violence against another tribe was acceptable.² Search for Common Ground’s research also found that the most prominent determinant of a South Sudanese person’s experience with conflict is location.³ This means that the manifestation of conflict are different across the country and the perceptions and attitudes of South Sudanese about peace and conflict in different areas also differs. Thus, efforts to mitigate violence must be context-specific and respond to conflict drivers in the community. National dynamics have ignited tribal divisions and pushed local conflicts between divided groups to quickly escalate and cycle into violence.⁴

Since 2013, a series of ceasefires and tenuous peace arrangements at the national level have attempted to quell the violence and promote stability; despite these efforts, however, intercommunal conflict and tensions remain high. At the time of writing, negotiations are ongoing both under the official auspices of Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and an agreement has been signed between Salva Kiir and Riek Machar mediated by Sudan’s President Omar al-Bashir in Khartoum, Sudan, and attended by Uganda’s President Yoweri Museveni.⁵ While these discussions and the arrangement have spurred some hope among South Sudanese looking for a political resolution of the conflict, the national conflict has affected all of South Sudan’s communities, and a political resolution is necessary but insufficient to put the country on a clear path to peace and stability. While the South Sudanese politicians who contribute to many of the national conflict dynam-

1 Swiss Agency for Development, and United States Agency for International Development, *Situation Overview: Regional Displacement of South Sudanese*, (2018) http://www.reachresourcecentre.info/system/files/resource-documents/reach_ssd_situation_overview_regional_displacement_of_south_sudanese_march_2018.pdf.

2 Search for Common Ground and Forcier, Combined Final Evaluation for “I Love My Country’: Strategic Communications for Peace Building in South Sudan” & Baseline Evaluation for “I Love My Country’: Promoting Localized Understanding and Peaceful Coexistence in South Sudan, report, Search for Common Ground, (2017) <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/SFCG-ILMC-Evaluation-Final-ILT-approved.pdf>.

3 Ibid.

4 Katie Smith, *Building a Constituency For Peace in South Sudan*, (2017) <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Building-a-Constituency-for-Peace-in-South-Sudan.pdf>.

5 In June 2017, IGAD (comprised of member states Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda) created the HLRF as a process to reinvigorate the defunct peace arrangement signed in 2015 by some warring parties in South Sudan, the ARCSS, to instate a permanent ceasefire, and prepare for elections. After the last meeting of the HLRF, IGAD announced it would move further talks to Khartoum, Sudan. Sudan’s President Omar al-Bashir mediated talks between South Sudan’s President Salva Kiir and opposition leader Riek Machar, also attended by Uganda’s President Yoweri Museveni. On June 27, Salva Kiir and Riek Machar signed a document in Khartoum which agreed to a number of provisions, including a ceasefire, the deployment of an African Union/IGAD peacekeeping mission, and the rehabilitation of damaged oil fields.

ics discuss arrangements for the future of South Sudan at the national and international level, the people of South Sudan are facing violence in their communities emerging from everyday challenges, heightened by an environment of impunity, instability, and indignation nationally.

Women are intricately linked to and are part of many of the drivers and manifestations of communal conflict in South Sudan. Not only are women and children more likely to be victims of violence,⁶ but issues closely related to women are among the most prominent drivers of inter-communal violence in the country today, such as cattle raiding to pay for high dowries, land disputes around inheritance laws that prohibit the passage of land to women, and tensions surrounding marriage. Academics and practitioners often assume that because women face such severe consequences of conflict, they are natural advocates for peace.⁷ However, recent research shows that women in South Sudan are just as likely as men to believe that violence is a valid way to solve conflicts.⁸ Despite this, women remain under-represented and removed from peacebuilding efforts and peace processes at the community level, and this lack of engagement demonstrates a clear failure to recognize their roles in contributing to violence and peace.

Academics and practitioners often assume that because women face such severe consequences of conflict, they are natural advocates for peace. However, recent research shows that women in South Sudan are just as likely as men to believe that violence is a valid way to solve conflicts.⁹ Despite this, women remain under-represented and removed from peacebuilding efforts and peace processes at the community level, and this lack of engagement demonstrates a clear failure to recognize their roles in contributing to violence and peace.

Holistic peace in South Sudan necessitates inclusive and multi-track engagement at the national and sub-national levels. Conflict resolution initiatives need to both respond to local drivers of conflict and incorporate these drivers and solutions to address them into national level peace processes. As the international community formulates new ways to prevent violence and protect civilians, these interventions should be context-specific and involve all stakeholders to the conflict, including women. Without incorporating women into local and national peacebuilding efforts, the attitudes and actions of nearly half the population will remain unaddressed, undermining the potential for long-term stability. **To build a constituency for peace at the local level in South Sudan, international and domestic efforts must involve men *and* women in initiatives**

6 International Rescue Committee, *No Safe Place: A Lifetime of Violence for Conflict-Affected Women and Girls in South Sudan*, (Summer 2017) <https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/2294/southsudanlgsummaryreportonline.pdf>.

7 Lizele Kumalo, "Why Women Should Have a Greater Role in Peacebuilding," World Economic Forum, (26 May 2015) <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/05/why-women-should-have-a-greater-role-in-peacebuilding/>; United Nations Security Council, Res. 1325, (31 October 2001) <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement>; Swanee Hunt and Cristina Posa, *Women Waging Peace: Inclusive Security*, (May/June 2001) https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/170_fparticle_women_wagin_peace_inclusive_security.pdf.

8 Search for Common Ground and Forcier, Combined Final Evaluation (2017).

9 Ibid.

to transform knowledge, attitudes, skills and behavior to foster non-violence, advance social cohesion and reconciliation across dividing lines, and promote peace. Women’s role in violence and in promoting peace cannot be ignored.

This policy paper highlights opportunities to engage women at the local level to address community conflict issues, promote peace, and empower women as agents of change in South Sudan. It follows the analysis and findings of Search for Common Ground’s November 2017 *Building a Constituency for Peace in South Sudan*, which examined annual data on conflict perceptions and attitudes collected over a four-year span illuminate various opportunities for actors interested in peace to constructively engage. This locally conducted research leverages experiences and expertise from South Sudanese women, as well as analysis and recommendations from South Sudanese practitioners and scholars working to build peace in the country.

CONTEXT: WOMEN, CONFLICT, AND PEACE IN SOUTH SUDAN

Previous research in South Sudan highlights the importance of women's inclusion in peacebuilding because of the disproportionate impact of conflict on them.¹⁰ Women are more likely to experience gender-based violence, up to 65% of women in conflict areas have experienced physical or sexual violence,¹¹ 80% of recorded refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are women and children,¹² women also face higher rates of abduction and assault since the conflict began.¹³

Violence in South Sudan has been intricately linked to localized drivers that are deeply related to women and their role within the family and community. While national and political trends affect the dynamics of the conflict across the country, they interact with local drivers that perpetuate violence in communities across South Sudan. National events can exacerbate local cycles of grievance and revenge, resulting in explosive community reactions. Issues related to marriage and bride price including cattle raiding, inter-familial disputes over marriage arrangements, and violence in the home remain primary sources of inter-communal conflict in many areas. For instance, in Awerial, Lakes State, violence in the home was the most recent conflict experienced for 43% of people,¹⁴ and more women than men report experiencing violence in the home. Despite their centrality to many of these issues, women are unlikely to bring forward their cases to traditional or statutory courts. Nearly 30% of women responded they “do nothing” when they have experienced human rights violations.¹⁵

Even if peace is negotiated at the highest levels in South Sudan, these types of violence will persist at the local level and undermine stability if they are not sufficiently addressed as part of peacebuilding and peace negotiation efforts and if women's involvement and perspectives are not included. Key community conflict dynamics are closely linked to the role of women within the community. This section examines the linkage of women's role in the community to these 4 common conflict dynamics in communities across the country and identify some structural and cultural practices that prevent their active participation in the process of resolving them.

Dowry price: In the traditional dowry system in South Sudan, male family members arrange marriages and set the bride price for their female relatives. The most popular form of dowry compensation is the exchange of cattle for permission to marry. The deteriorating economy has left many men unable to pay for the traditional

10 Kumalo, (26 May 2015); United Nations Security Council, Res. 1325, (31 October 2001); Swanee Hunt and Cristina Posa, *Women Waging Peace: Inclusive Security*, (May/June 2001).

11 International Rescue Committee, (Summer 2017).

12 Swiss Agency for Development, and United States Agency for International Development, *Situation Overview: Regional Displacement of South Sudanese*, (2018).

13 “Women, Girls in South Sudan Face Staggering Rates of Violence,” GW Today, (1 December 2017), <https://gwtoday.gwu.edu/women-girls-south-sudan-face-staggering-rates-violence>.

14 Search for Common Ground, and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, (April 2015).

15 This reflects the overall percentage for women surveyed across 5 counties (Juba, Bor, Wau, Pageri, Rumbek Central). Search for Common Ground, (4 August 2017)

dowry. This accounts for some, though not all, of the cattle raiding in South Sudan, as men seek to add cattle to their dowry payment in order to marry. While cattle raiding between different tribes is deeply rooted in South Sudan's history, the economic and political insecurity caused by the national conflict has intensified cattle raiding across the country.¹⁶ In Bor, for example, the number of people affected by cattle raiding increased 72% between 2015 and 2017.¹⁷ Cattle raids are linked with cycles of revenge attacks between and among communities. A surge in the availability of weapons due to the conflict has increased the lethality of cattle raids, leading to an increased number of deaths that can trigger cycles of revenge killings.¹⁸

Familial disputes related to marriage: Family disputes are often associated with marriage, including issues of inter-tribal marriage, rape, divorce, and abducted women for marriage. In marriage arrangements, women are often treated as property and the arrangement treated as a transaction. Conflicts also arise when the traditional/cultural marriages procedures are not followed. In some cases, financial constraints prohibit a dowry payment; in others, disapproval of the marriage may result in bride kidnapping. "Taking girls for marriage" is reported as a major conflict trigger in South Sudan.¹⁹ When this occurs, it often results in violent conflict between the two families, who demand compensation for "theft."²⁰ Similar dynamics are often at play when a woman becomes pregnant without a dowry having been paid. Since violence escalated, particularly since 2016, women are becoming less likely to believe that inter-tribal marriage is acceptable, and they are significantly less likely to interact with members of other tribes.²¹ Nevertheless, inter-marriage has been widely perceived as a potential unifier across tribal divides.²²

Gender-based violence: Domestic violence is the type of violence most commonly reported by women: nearly one quarter of women in South Sudan report that the last conflict they experienced was violence in the home.²³ As national and inter-communal conflicts continue, and violence is further normalized, violence has entrenched in the domestic space. Up to 65% of women and girls in South Sudan have experienced physical or sexual abuse, most commonly from the hand of an intimate partner.²⁴ These cases of sexual or physical abuse often go unreported and unaddressed. Local customs and attitudes on gender have perpetuated abuses toward women and precluded them from accessing justice. Victims of gender-based violence often face stigmatization by community members and are sometimes discouraged from reporting these cases by the police, who may

16 Search for Common Ground, and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, (April/May 2016).

17 Search for Common Ground, and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, (April 2015); Search for Common Ground and Forcier, (2017).

18 Search for Common Ground, and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, (April/May 2016).

19 Search for Common Ground, and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, (April 2015).

20 Interviews with civil society in Juba (May 2018).

21 Women's disapproval for inter-tribal marriage increased 14% between 2015 and 2016. While acceptance of inter-tribal marriage decreased in areas between 2015 and 2016, in areas where local peacebuilding programs were active, there was a 17% increase in the total number of people who reported inter-tribal marriage was acceptable. Search for Common Ground, and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, (April/May 2016); Search for Common Ground and Forcier, (2017).

22 Search for Common Ground, and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, (April 2015).

23 In addition to the 24.3% of women that identified their most recently experienced conflict as "violence in the home," 15.1% responded the most recent form of violence they experienced was "Other" and these most often were identified as disputes related to women, such as forced marriage and unwanted pregnancy. Search for Common Ground, and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, (April 2015).

24 International Rescue Committee, (Summer 2017).

tell them to go home and settle the issue with their families.²⁵ Women also report early and forced marriages as key gender-based conflicts they face in the community.²⁶

Economic and livelihoods constraints: Political instability, ongoing violence, and reduced international investment have created a rapidly deteriorating economic environment, characterized by volatile currency fluctuations and limited employment opportunities.²⁷ At the beginning of the current conflict in 2013, one U.S. dollar was worth five South Sudanese pounds. Now, the exchange rate has multiplied 60-fold as the economy remains in freefall due to the continuing instability in South Sudan.²⁸ The costs of essential goods and services have skyrocketed, further escalating the likelihood of food insecurity and famine. The deteriorating economic situation has also increased criminality and petty crime, with instances of theft and burglary becoming more common.²⁹ Within the context of economic difficulty and conflict, women have come to inhabit new gender roles in the community. Across much of the country, an estimated 58% of households in South Sudan have women as their primary source of income as many of the male family members are killed or recruited into armed groups.³⁰ Yet, even as they head households, they face significant constraints including frequent denial of formal ownership of property, even in instances where husbands or male relatives have passed away. Only 13% of women in Juba, Bor, Wau, Pageri, and Rumbek Central were aware of their legal and constitutional right to own property.³¹

Despite the unique challenges and conflict dynamics facing women in South Sudan, women there are just as likely as their male counterparts to believe that violence against another tribe is justified and to respond to conflict by fighting or yelling.³² At the same time, women are less likely to engage in discussion around issues of peace and conflict with others within and outside their community than their male counterparts.³³ Nevertheless, women are also perceived by civil society members to have a unique role influencing attitudes towards peace, particularly because of their potential role in teaching non-violent values to their children or coaxing their male family members out of violence.³⁴ These findings suggest a need for more initiatives designed to promote tolerance and peaceful dispute resolution targeted at women to engage them as a constituency for peace within their communities.

25 Search for Common Ground, *Final Report, Search for Common Ground Endline Evaluation: Facilitating Access to Justice in South Sudan*, (Forthcoming).

26 Ibid.

27 KPMG, "South Sudan Economic Snapshot H2, 2017," (2017) https://home.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/za/pdf/2017/12/KPMG_South%20Sudan_2017_V2.pdf.

28 Ibid.

29 "South Sudan 2017 Crime & Safety Report," United State Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security, (5 May 2017), <https://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=21796>.

30 Gaby Rojas Pérez, "Conflict in South Sudan: How Does It Affect Women?" Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust, (6 May 2014) <https://www.hart-uk.org/blog/conflict-south-sudan-affect-women/>.

31 Search for Common Ground, (4 August 2017).

32 Search for Common Ground and Forcier, Combined Final Evaluation, (2017).

33 Ibid.

34 Interviews with civil society in Juba, (May 2018).

OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE WOMEN IN LOCAL PEACEBUILDING EFFORTS

When asked about examples of women's involvement in peace, women in South Sudan responded with a few key examples from recent and more distant history. Notably, the examples they provided were primarily of women's political representation and peace engagement at the national level and not instances of peacebuilding within communities.

The efforts of women thus far have undoubtedly been an important step in increasing the prominence of women's perspectives on conflict and peace; however, the involvement of women remains limited and even when women are involved, there is a perceived distance between women representatives at the national level and women living in communities outside Juba.³⁵ Real and perceived differences between "elite," "urban wealthy," and "grassroots" women have expanded the gaps between them when promoting women's issues and involvement. Many women outside Juba believe that the national representatives do not reflect their own priorities and perspectives.³⁶ Given that violence in South Sudan is highly localized, the participation and empowerment of women as peacebuilders is critical. While there were some stories of women in leadership positions within their communities, there is a clear gap of women's participation in peace at the local level. To successfully engage women in peacebuilding, more women's participation is needed, and more diverse female participation is needed to include women of different age groups, tribal affiliation, educational background, and geographic location. This section will highlight some promising opportunities to engage women to renounce violence and be champions for peace.

Participatory Theater and Media

Theater and radio have proved to be viable platforms for diverse, constructive, and non-violent dialogue around sensitive conflict issues. Participatory theater is a particularly useful way to engage women in the non-violent transformation of community challenges, such as gender-based violence, domestic violence, and forced marriage. Women more commonly attend theater performances than men and are more likely than their male counterparts to get on stage and act out their own perspectives and solutions on the issues performed by the actors.³⁷ The illumination of community issues and women's role in them has shown change in some communities in South Sudan. After participating in several theater performances, research respondents in Mingkaman, Lakes State reported that more girls were allowed to go to school and more women were allowed to be employed because of values portrayed in the performances. Female participants in the theater events reported that *"the rate of rape and domestic violence have been reduced in the community and now women are*

35 Interviews with women civil society leaders in Juba (May 2018).

36 *South Sudan National Women's Strategy: Enhancing Women's Participation in Various Decision-Making Structures During and After the Transitional Period*, South Sudan Democratic Engagement, Monitoring and Observation Programme, (September 2016); Interviews with women civil society leaders in Juba, (May 2018).

37 Search for Common Ground, (30 June 2018).

*considered when decisions affecting the whole community are being made.*³⁸ Over 90% of attendees of participatory theater performances showed increased understanding of human rights issues and ways to nonviolently transform conflict and access justice.³⁹

“The rate of rape and domestic violence have been reduced in the community and now women are considered when decisions affecting the whole community are being made.” – Participatory theater participant in Mingkaman, Lakes State

Radio is a key source of information for people in South Sudan,⁴⁰ and there is a strong correlation between radio access and positive knowledge, attitudes, and practices of social cohesion and conflict. In areas reached by radio programs with peacebuilding-related content, listeners were more likely to have tolerant attitudes towards other tribes and greater knowledge of conflict resolution practices.⁴¹ However, radio access is nearly 10% lower for women than men in South Sudan, and there is more limited radio penetration in rural areas. Talk shows have shown success in raising the profile and incorporating diverse perspectives on community issues such as forced marriage, girls’ education, helping widows and orphans, peacebuilding, and conflict resolution.⁴² Listeners to talk shows on peace and conflict issues were significantly more likely to say that they trusted people from other tribes.⁴³ Yet participation in radio discussions can be more challenging for women. One Search study found that despite similar rates of listenership between women and men to peace-related radio programs, there were fewer female callers to the program.⁴⁴ Listener clubs based in women’s centers and led by women can help bridge this gap between listening and acting by facilitating safe spaces for women to engage on issues across dividing lines. Women have also requested radio talk shows be developed to specifically engage women and reflect issues affecting women at the local level.⁴⁵ Media programming has been particularly effective when it has been linked with other peacebuilding activities, such as participatory theater or community dialogues.⁴⁶

Mentorship and Positive Role Modeling Initiatives

Many women across the country and at all levels have limited knowledge of the achievements of other women working for peace in their country. More can be done to amplify the achievements of these women leaders

38 Search for Common Ground and Forcier, (2017).

39 Search for Common Ground, (Forthcoming).

40 For example, radio is the primary source of any legal and human rights information for over 80% of women. Search for Common Ground, (4 August 2017).

41 Trust in other tribes increased 15% between 2016–2018 in areas targeted by access to justice initiatives. Search for Common Ground, (Forthcoming); Search for Common Ground and Forcier, (2017).

42 Search for Common Ground and Forcier, (2017).

43 Ibid.

44 Search for Common Ground, (Forthcoming).

45 Ibid.

46 Search for Common Ground and Forcier, (2017).

to inspire new leaders and link existing leaders to each other. Mentorship and networking programs are also opportunities to link women with skills and opportunities to participate in peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and justice activities. Through community-based organizations and women groups, mentorship in schools can help motivate young women to actively participation in community conflict transformation efforts.⁴⁷

“So many women feel they are starting from zero because they haven’t heard the other stories of women [involved in peace].”

Media programming that highlights women as leaders and experts have brought in higher rates of women listenership. While radio access for women is lower overall, over 60% of the listenership of the radio show *Sergeant Esther* was female.⁴⁸ *Sergeant Esther* follows the fictional trials and triumphs of a female police officer who resolves problems in her everyday life nonviolently. The most commonly reported reason for tuning in was because the main character was a woman leader. Representation in the media is also useful in promoting the success of actual women activists working to build peace in South Sudan. As one activist stated, “So many women feel they are starting from zero because they haven’t heard the other stories of women [involved in peace.]”⁴⁹ There have been efforts to bridge this gap, including members of the HLRF women’s delegation traveling to towns outside of Juba to report back on outcomes and issues discussed.⁵⁰ These types of bridging activities are critical to connect local issues to national fora and vice versa and have been proven successful in other countries in the past. In post-war Sierra Leone, for example, local radio stations gave awards to women who were seen to be playing active roles in the empowerment of women, standing up for women, and mentoring others.⁵¹ A similar model could be enacted in South Sudan to encourage women leadership in the community and to share success stories around the country.

Business and Economic Activities

Women are the primary breadwinners for most homes in South Sudan, as 58% of households are headed by women.⁵² Economic spaces such as markets are critical areas to engage women. However, as inter-tribal relationships deteriorate, women often retreat from engaging in trade and other economic activities with groups other than their own, reducing opportunities for constructive inter-group collaboration and exchange. There is a strong correlation between the number of interactions between tribes and levels of inter-communal trust.⁵³ The more often that communities interact, the more likely there will be higher trust between the

47 Interview with Civil Society, (May 2018).

48 62% of listeners were female. Search for Common Ground, (Forthcoming).

49 Interview with Civil Society, (May 2018).

50 Interviews with members of the women delegation to Addis Ababa, (June 2018).

51 Interview with Civil Society, (May 2018).

52 Gaby Rojas Pérez, “Conflict in South Sudan: How Does It Affect Women?” Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust, (6 May 2014).

53 Smith, (2017).

groups. Economic and livelihood interventions can be a unifying force.⁵⁴ In one example, RABITA is a group of women community members in Gudele Bloc 4, Joppa, and Kabo near Juba town, who provide training to women from different tribal groups on farming and gardening and on women-specific issues related to health and hygiene. In another example, women's local "federations" that were established during South Sudan's independence movement and were comprised of women and young girls across tribal lines later went on to conduct activities that directly benefited women, including building women's centers, education support, self-help groups, agriculture and craft initiatives, and employment placements at local hotels and restaurants.⁵⁵ Models like this can empower women to come together and build relationships across dividing lines, focused on shared interests.

Peer Support Groups

Civic spaces and groups designed by women and for women have demonstrated the potential to increased inter-tribal interactions and foster collaboration, promoting women's issues and expanding women's roles in the community. For instance, in Bor town, the "Women Friendly Space" has been a place for women across tribal differences, including those residing in PoC sites, to come together to organize activities, talk about peace and conflict issues, discuss economic opportunities, and develop ways for peaceful coexistence in their communities.⁵⁶ The Jonglei Women's Association works to bring together women living in Protection of Civilian sites, primarily of the Nuer ethnic group, with residents of Bor town, primarily women of the Dinka ethnic group, through shared social spaces. The shared space provides an opportunity to build lasting relationships, encourage shared interests, and increase trust through virtuous cycles of interaction.⁵⁷ There are several initiatives ongoing to bring women together to advocate for their interests and empower women's participation in governance and local dispute resolution. These initiatives can be amplified and reinforced to cement more meaningful involvement and actions of women in local peacebuilding around the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the Government of South Sudan, foreign governments, international organizations, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders look to end violent conflict and promote peace in South Sudan, there needs to be improved engagement of women in peacebuilding at the community level. To bring holistic peace to South Sudan, there should be consistent and long-term efforts to build more diverse and inclusive constituencies for peace at the local level who will prevent violence in their communities and strengthen the foundation for a national peace agreement. Women's involvement should move towards empowering them as agents of change. This section provides some recommendations on opportunities to engage women for peace at the local level.

54 Interview with Civil Society, (May 2018).

55 Øystein H. Rolandsen, *From Guerrilla Movement to Political Party: The Restructuring of Sudan's People Liberation Movement*, (2017).

56 Interview with Civil Society, (May 2018).

57 Smith, (2017).

- **Amplify examples of women’s leadership in peacebuilding at the payam, state, and national level.** Stories of women’s leadership are not well known within South Sudan. Mentorship and internship programs that link women leaders with young girls have shown progress in improving women’s understanding of rights, skills, and ambitions. Support listener clubs and mentorship programs that link positive women leaders with young women.
- **Expand women’s role in media through women radio hosts, actors, storylines, and listenership clubs.** Media programming that highlights women as leaders, hosts, and experts have brought in higher rates of women listenership and increased focus on issues that are affecting women at the community level. Development of program content, including drama storylines, should be done in coordination with local women centers to reflect issues facing the community. Listener clubs for women to discuss the issues portrayed via media outlets can help engage women to move from listening to acting.⁵⁸
- **Provide legal training to paralegals, lawyers, and judges alongside capacity-building support to customary and statutory justice systems to handle issues of gender-based violence, domestic violence, inheritance law, and familial disputes around marriage.** Despite women being more trusting of local authorities than men, women’s issues are rarely brought to the customary and statutory courts for fear of stigma or because of familial/community advisement against legal action.⁵⁹ Training for communities on legal rights has helped women to access legal services and bring forward cases of rape, marital distress, and land issues.⁶⁰
- **Provide financial resources and training to community-based theater troupes.** Participatory theater has been linked with more tolerant and positive attitudes towards women and diversity.⁶¹ Women are more likely to attend and participate in participatory theater productions in their communities. Because topics are developed within the community, topics are highly relevant to the audience.
- **Ensure that support given to women representatives to the HLRF and national dialogue are diverse and representative and provide feedback loops to communities around the country.** Issues affecting women and families outside of Juba have largely been removed from national level peace processes. Journalists from local media can report on the progress of national processes to communities across the country. New peacebuilding and governance initiatives should encourage and support representatives from the women’s bloc at the HLRF and national women’s organizations to bridge the disconnect with communities around the country for broader consultations and input.
- **Resource economic and livelihoods interventions that target women and bring together groups across dividing lines.** Livelihoods opportunities and small-business training, such as crafting and farming, can help reduce economic constraints and food constraints. These opportunities also promote opportunities to bridge divides as women from different tribes come together in markets and trading centers towards a common goal.

58 Search for Common Ground, (Forthcoming).

59 Search for Common Ground and Forcier, (2017).

60 Search for Common Ground, (Forthcoming).

61 Search for Common Ground and Forcier, (2017).

CONCLUSION

While prevailing wisdom holds that women should be included in peacebuilding because they are disproportionately affected by the consequences of war and are more inclined towards peacebuilding; in fact, women are no more likely than men to seek constructive solutions to conflict. There have been improvements in incorporating women into national level peacebuilding initiatives, women are generally absent from local peacebuilding and conflict resolution mechanisms. As the international community, Government of South Sudan, and other actors look to shift conflict dynamics across the country, there needs to be a localized approach that addresses conflict issues at the community-level and brings in all stakeholders to the conflict. Women in South Sudan need to be incorporated into local peacebuilding initiatives to promote inter-tribal trust, non-violent dispute resolution mechanisms, and empower women as a constituency for peace in their communities.

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