Topic -

A Gender-Sensitive Approach to peacebuilding: A case study of South Sudan from 2014 -

2024

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Executive Summary

The following study evaluates a gender-oriented approach to peacebuilding in South Sudan from 2014 to 2024. Despite the growing international advocacy for gender equality and its specific inclusion in South Sudan peacebuilding, the current efforts are superficial and still connected to women's symbolic participation due to various essentialist values. The results indicate that there is a need for essential structural changes that go beyond inclusion. Genuine peacebuilding in South Sudan should address the current systemic gender inequality and be directed to tackle the underlying causes of current gender disparities. The main results of an essentialist discourse present significant challenges in peacebuilding, such as gender role securitization, ongoing gender-based violence, and the continued marginalization of women at the grassroots and national levels. The target of the policy recommendation is a fundamental rethinking of peace strategies to involve women's actual participation and leadership in peace processes. Thus, this research aims to pave the way for a sustainable peace in South Sudan that benefits from a holistic multi-gender approach.

1   Introduction

The adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 proved to be a turning point in the global effort to incorporate gender into peacebuilding (Longhurst, 2021). Together with further resolutions, it stressed the gendered nature of the impact of conflict, highlighting the importance of women in solving conflict and building peace. The complexity of conflict in South Sudan, including many years of civil war and multifaceted socio-political structures, requires a critical approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution (De Waal, 2023). It is evident that the conflict, based on ethnic grievances, power competition, and even socio-economic disparities, has impacted South Sudanese women and girls disproportionality (Sassi, 2021). On the other hand, gendered perceptions have been quite absent from formal conflict resolution processes. The present proposal aims to outline a gender-sensitive plan where the gender dimension, including significant women's functions and contributions to peace and gender-specific concerns, could be included in the South Sudanese context.

Previous conflict resolution methods in South Sudan have been largely gender-insensitive and failed to consider the differentiated experiences of men and women or the impact gendered power relations have had on the conflict (Onditi, 2022). This type of gendered nationalism presents a strategic threat, in which the participation of women in conflicts and wars is used to positively drive nationalistic interests. For instance, women are used as objects for this symbolic projection and only exist in these conflicts from a paradoxically distancing position of so-called vulnerability.

The development of a gender-sensitive approach to conflict resolution in South Sudan should be framed by the critical analysis of gender regimes and patriarchy types that determine the structure and functioning of the country's society and the gendered relationships within it. Thus, a proper differentiation should be made between practical and strategic gender interests in order to

realise the immediate ones, and, at the same time, to question and restructure gendered power relationships. Therefore, focusing on a gender-sensitive approach is warranted to inform the most appropriate intentions for the country's conflicts.

However, a closer examination of the significance-construction process of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) suggests a blend of feminist ambitions and pragmatic compromises, questioning the sustainability of the constructed gender roles (Aldehaib, 2010). This is especially critical in contexts like South Sudan, where the country is torn by decades of war and in desperate need of effective peacebuilding strategies. Notably, the WPS pursuit was carried west initially by an ideal of rights, advocating for women's involvement in peacekeeping and peacebuilders. The approach was based on feminism's foundational assertion that women's equal participation in politics and peacebuilding is a fundamental human right (Tarnaala, 2016).

Figure 1: Female soldiers in South Sudan Military, UN Peacekeeping, (United Nations, 2020

References to rights suggested inherent equality, implying the independence of the process from context. However, this conception is undermined by the security instrument constructs,'

which perceive more women in peacekeeping – an unquestionable socio-political good. The inclusion of women comes from operational efficiency – with the mindset that the presence of women is an issue of problem-solving practicality (Tindall, 2022). From the perspective of security instrument constructs, including more women in the peace process is likely to reduce sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and is consistent with essentialism, viewing women as ultimately calmer and more caring. This analysis will focus on the role of a gender-sensitive approach in South Sudan's peace-building.

1.1 Gender-based recruitment and deployment

Gender-sensitive peacebuilding remains vital in the South Sudan context, not just because of high levels of SGBV but also due to the prominence of gender relations in women's lives and identities (Pelham, 2020). While the evidence shows that efforts to increase women's participation in peace processes have genuine value, they tend to overshadow the deeper structural changes necessary to address gender inequality in all its forms (Liaga, 2024). For example, in South Sudan, women's representation and voice in peace processes at all levels remain low, despite international support for gender-sensitive peacebuilding (Soma, 2020). Although global policy documents may aspire to certain ideals, they frequently fail to account for the prevailing circumstances. Various stakeholders question the lack of progress, revealing that without monitoring and implementation mechanisms, policy changes are likely to be symbolic rather than substantive (Kezie-Nwoha & Were, 2021).

Figure 2: Female Soldiers in UN Peacekeeping Mission in South Sudan, 2022

The essentialist narratives in some instrumentalist arguments can be viewed as construed to suit political ideologies (Caitlin Hamilton & Laura Shepherd, 2015). The idea that women are by nature more peaceful or empathetic is just as dangerous as the argument that men are inherently violent, dehumanising, and homophobic. The reasons why people commit or are encouraged to commit violent acts in society are rooted in hierarchies of power and dominance (Nyuon, 2021). This potential principle can limit the roles women are supposed to perform on peace missions to tokens and dismiss the significance of men's roles in achieving gender equality (Krause, Krause & Bränfors, 2018). The essentialist narratives further de-politicise the WPS program, making it more appealing to conservative states while burying gender matters.

The conflict in South Sudan can be analysed as a case of gendered nationalism. In many cases, nationalism tends to emphasise the masculine aspects of national identity while constructing female identities as submissive and unobtrusive to patriarchal structures (Yusuf, 2022). South Sudan's concept of gender consists of public and private patriarchy, as noted by Walby (1990). Women are oppressed in both the political and economic spheres, as well as in the household. This dual segregation limits women from taking part in the resolution of armed conflict in these dual spheres.

The phenomenon of securitising gender identities in South Sudan demonstrates that gender roles are instrumentalised to legitimise and prioritise the needs and security of powerful groups over women's actual security needs and autonomy (Luedke, 2023). The woman's bodies and roles are soft sites in ideological battles – practices such as forced marriage or rape during conflict are allowed to secure national identity and community integrity. Thus, any conflict resolution must be gender-sensitive, which means that such securitised narratives must be dismantled and the needs of all genders must be addressed.

When evaluating the conflict in South Sudan from the wider socio-economic setup, it is clear that capitalist relations and a weak democracy feed into gender compliance (Pinaud, 2021). The scurrying for resources and political authority is gendered as women are affected and disadvantaged by the structural hegemonies. Even more, the neoliberal capitalist economic canon, which strengthens competition and development directions driven by the market, disregards women's unpaid labour roles, therefore cementing gender inequalities (Myers, 2020). A gender-related conflict resolution approach has to be informed by the socio-economic nature of the conflict, pushing for fair involvement in both political and economic realms.

Moser's (1989) perspectives of practical and strategic gender interests are fundamental for developing a gender-balanced approach to conflict resolution. Practical gender interests concentrate on urgent problems, such as the issues of women's healthcare and education, which are especially exacerbated during conflicts (MacArthur et al., 2022). Strategic gender interests, however, specialise in the root causes of gender inequality, such as legal disparities and patriarchal biases. Consequently, a properly developed strategy of conflict resolution should encompass both, providing immediate relief to women and working towards the changes in the society that promotes gender equality.

2   Implementation of assessment

In the context of South Sudan, a gender-sensitive mode of peacebuilding implies the recognition of differing gendered relationships that shape post-conflict settings. According to Baran (2023), national identities are often constructed through gendered patterns, and such narratives can include and exclude women in the context of conflict. Therefore, South Sudan's prolonged conflicts bear strong gendered dimensions that should be addressed by a peacebuilding approach. For example, policies of securitisation of women's vulnerability make women's identities and roles vehicles of the community's honour; however, they do not create preconditions to ensure these women play an active role in defining the peace process (Luedke, 2023). Therefore, women are seen as passive objects of protection and not active agents that could contribute to positive changes in the peacebuilding process. Additionally, this argument can be elaborated by the claim that gendered national narratives do not take into account women's plural identities and reduce them to unite categorisation, which can be used as a co-optation in the nationally constructed well-being (Smyth et al., 2020). Such a reductionist approach is very problematic because it does not recognise the differentiated impacts of conflict on different groups of women,

including Dinka and Nuer women, who may have varied experiences or understandings of peace (Holvikivi & Reeves, 2020).

2.1 Securitisation of gender roles

The securitisation theory also intersects with the international peacekeeping dynamics. According to Petrikova and Lazell (2022), the WPS agenda has little changed the efforts to include women in peacekeeping, as in all other post-conflict states. Despite all the demands to increase the number of women participating in peacekeeping, no changes have occurred. As the baseline study conducted by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) shows, there are multiple barriers to women's inclusion in peacekeeping; these include the requirements for candidates who opt to join the international peacekeeping force to the opportunities for career development (BBC, 2018). Evidently, the barrier mentioned above can also be attributed to South Sudan. However, the overall approaches used to combat these issues by the international community do not consider the local specifics of the issue. The current aspects identify the need for the South Sudanese securitisation theory to become more adjusted to the national context by addressing South Sudanese women and their empowerment in the peace process (Wilén, 2020). This approach envisions a need-based model that considers the performance and empowerment of the actors. Thus, it is important to look at women not just as a protective category, but empower them to become strong leaders, solutions architects, and influential figures.

Figure 3: Cambodian Women in UN peacekeeping mission, BBC (2018)

2.2   Gender-Based Violence

One of the most striking omissions in peacebuilding has been the overlook of gender violence. Liaga (2024) saw a highly positive link between gender violence and peacebuilding exercises in South Sudan, underlining that if gender issues aimed at reducing gender violence are not addressed, there can be no success in peacebuilding. In other words, the positive connection suggests that gender violence is not merely a social issue to be addressed in the context of peacebuilding. Another major concern is the continued ignorance of women's efforts to build peace on the ground. According to Hilhorst and van Leeuwen (2020), grassroots women's organisations can and have been successful in efforts to cultivate local-based peace. Nevertheless, such efforts have always been underestimated and under-recognised by national and international peacebuilding strategies. Most attempts have been reluctant to redistribute power imbalances in the global cultural systems, rendering no meaningful gender equity. Therefore, a functional

peacebuilding attempt in South Sudan should not be a token game around the inclusion of women in peace initiation and the continuation of the gender issues-ignore paradigm (Yoshida, 2023).

In addition, South Sudan women's organisations employ a bottom-up approach to peacebuilding which is implied to be essential for sustainable peace. Unfortunately, however, such an approach remains marginally integrated and disconnected from national and international peace efforts (Yusuf, 2022). Specifically, this means that local insights and gendered experiences are marginalised in high-level peace negotiations and implementation more broadly. To clarify, as it concerns peace agreements and negotiations, scholars and local actors review and criticise them for failure to incorporate gender perspectives adequately or at least prioritise it above all other goals (Donais & Solomon, 2022). These aspects are necessary to address gender inequalities and violence caused, perpetuated, and exacerbated by the conflict. The criticism also applies to international support mechanisms which, albeit good-spirited, often apply frameworks that do not work well with the local dynamic or are not supportive of the most effective gender initiatives on the ground. This consideration suggests a gap in the translation of local gender dynamics and needs in aid strategy and implementation.

3   Considerations

The South Sudanese context presents a case of gender identity in peace and liberation processes characterised by multiple oversights and underutilisation. As Mayen (2021) points out in her comprehensive policy brief, peace agreements and negotiations systematically exclude women and neglect the potential impact of a thorough gender perspective. While the constitution and global campaigns mandate women's inclusion in peace negotiation forums, their actual involvement in such critical roles of securing a lasting peace seems limited (Plassnig, 2020). The observation indicates a broader deviation from women's participation based on cultural integration

to systematic ignorance of the women's potential to sustain peace because their exclusion is not merely a normal reflection. The discussions surrounding the 2018 peace agreement that many scholars celebrate for its inclusivity fall on the practical integration of gender. As Peace (2021) argues, the 2018 agreement provides for the establishment of a Permanent Constitution and a few other transitional justice mechanisms with some gendered language, although their implementation remains slow and with serious challenges. The observations raise critical questions: Is sufficient gender awareness integrated into peace agreements? Are women practically integrated into peace-making efforts?

While peace processes globally and nationally integrate gender sensitivity theoretically in peace processes, practical integration varies extensively. For instance, the United Nations requires the peace process to include a 25% representation of women. In practice, women's representation fails to achieve the quota and only supports tokenism, whereby their input in policy consideration may lack influence (Nyadera & Bingol, 2021). Such a practice automatically frustrates the potential influence of integrating gender in peace processes because the representation is superficial. Besides, the gender neutrality argument poses additional limitations, including continually sidelining women and creating ideal conditions for gender-related crimes.

Whatever the South Sudanese people's choice of the constitution and transitional justice, it will be easy that it will foreground the inception of universal equality required law. The observation clearly indicates the need and opportunities requiring more radical improvements to internalise a practical integration frame for gender considerations in peace processes. Kindersley & Rolandsen (2021) take a human-scale approach by focusing their question on how well FGM is integrated into the legal framework in peace processes, especially the 2018 agreement, drawing. Thus, practical integration to get closer to real change captures the absolute prescriptive solution

on how South Sudan may revolutionise peace and liberation within the context of gender and in the union process.

3.1 Militarism and Masculinity in South Sudan's Peacebuilding Efforts

When evaluating gender roles in South Sudan's peace process, it is vital to assess the concept of militarism and the gendered approach. Militarism and masculinity, as seen in South Sudan, pose some of the greatest difficulties for gender-sensitive peacebuilding (Hilhorst & van Leeuwen, 2021). South Sudan's militarism is thus inextricably tied to more traditional ideas of masculinity that equate being a soldier with being a man. It is an ethos that vaporises physical strength and bravery at the expense of women, who are often sidelined or excluded altogether from the tableau of the security state and the table of peace negotiations (Akala, 2023). Such militarised masculinity establishes an ideal of the warrior that is antithetical to humanistic traits such as compassion and empathy that are deemed feminine and ill-suited to the resolution of conflicts that involve taking up arms.

The implications for peace-building are profound. Not only does militarised masculinity marginalise women, but it perpetuates a cycle in which the only means to an end is violence rather than conversation and understanding. Furthermore, the undue emphasis on militaristic tactics ignores the female potential (Liaga, 2024). Women's exclusion and gender inequity persistence are yet other challenges. Different stakeholders have criticised the exclusion of women in different peace processes in South Sudan (Luedke, 2020). Few women played a limited role in peace negotiations in the post-2013–2018 civil war. Participation in few peace processes is consistent with exclusion in political processes and decision-making processes at large. The system is also supported by a patriarchal ideology that believes that the business of peace-making is domiciled in the male gender. Women are, therefore, sidelined despite being affected by the continuous

conflicts. Consequently, the constitutional provision and international framework for increasing women's participation in the peace process are construed to limit women's participation and engagement.

4   Recommendations

In the sphere of peacebuilding, a subtler criticism against the gender-sensitive approaches in South Sudan highlights an area overflowing with complexities and contradictions (Wright, 2020). The very nature of the desire to incorporate gender issues into the work of humanitarian, development, and peace-building areas is excellent and necessary as long as it comes to practice, the genuine extension of the impact seems to be transformative. Traditional patriarchy, conflicting images of appropriate gender conduct, and the occasional convergence of international aid-related interpretations and local views create what can best be described as a meeting by the Nile (Gray, 2020). The South Sudan Constitution of 2011 purports to embrace gender equality, but societal practices undermine the constitutional secular code, establishing a contradiction between the legal code and the actual customary practice deeply ingrained in the social structure (Deng, 2021). Moreover, they limit resource control, including their own lives, genuinely crystallising power relations and reinforcing patriarchy.

While the changing dynamics of the crisis and conflict in South Sudan might at sometimes lead to women taking over previously male roles, it is essential to assess how sustainable and "deep" such shifts are. Partially due to the post-crisis resilience of patriarchal structures, many women are often pushed back into their traditional roles (Mai & James, 2022). Aid programs many times seem to draw much attention to this issue, which they afterwards not only fail to solve – but even strengthen, due to a significant reliance on patriarchal societal structures that are easier to adapt to in the short term. In this context, it becomes clear that superficial solutions that are quickly

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reversed post-program indicate a lack of deep structure that such plans rely on (Tounsel, 2020). Another aspect that area-focused assessment and measures ignore is the necessity to see gender primarily not even as a women's issue. It also creates a binary "us vs. them" approach that fails to take into account the nuances of how men are also not only victims of this system but potential allies in changing it. For instance, the challenges that male rape victims face in South Sudan are extreme, but not as widely recognised or treated.

Thus, in their endeavours to foster gender equality, the programs must avoid the common pitfall of treating the gains made by one group as a zero-sum game for the other party, an approach which tends to be met with resistance rather than cooperation (Tindall, 2022). Therein, a truly transformative, gender-sensitive endeavour must encompass the entire spectrum of gender roles and experiences, accounting for the compounding effects of age, ethnic background, disability, and socio-economic position on the individual experience of gender (Onditi, 2022). Ultimately, albeit there is a theoretical commitment to gender sensitivity, in practice, South Sudan peacebuilding efforts seldom reflect the profundity required to manifest enduring manifestations of institutional change. A critical reassessment of the extant efforts should explore the prospects of women's assimilations into the existing systems less nobly, and more fundamentally redefine the systems to create an equitable, all-inclusive society. In that regard, there must be articulative endeavours to challenge and overturn the patriarchal tenets that constrain peacekeeping operations in South Sudan, such that our gender-sensitive peacebuilding ceases being tokenistic and adopts status as a distinct focal point of the nation.

Figure 4: UN Mission in South Sudan, UN, 2022

As explained by Deng (2021), women in the south of the Sudanese state actively participated in the liberation. Upon the establishment of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), women in vast numbers were picked from its army wing SPLA. The civil war in Sudan had politicised masculinities that means when the men and given armed authority they took advantage of any available woman, wild lase, and their counterpart, provider (Agwanda & Asal, 2020). That made the changes in their nature led to the women being left with no generation and this has prompted the growing problems of increased domestic violence perpetrated against women. Mangok (2022) feels that the war leads to the disruption of social systems.

Evaluating the conflicts in South Sudan suggests that the considered instrumentalist approach to implementing gender-sensitive peacebuilding cannot be limited to expanding female representation (Nyadera & Bingol, 2021). A more in-depth orientation involves a transformational perspective, but the essence of the militarised masculinity that currently inherently dominates

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society. In other words, even adding women to peacebuilding is not just increasing participation, but rethinking the very strategies and objectives of peace, making them truly all-encompassing, equitable, and consistent over time (Wanjala, 2019). By educational campaigns and restructuring the efforts of women's groups to a complete reform of the peace process, meaning their involvement at all stages from negotiations to the control of agreement implementation. Therefore, in rethinking the instrumental approach to gender-sensitive peacebuilding in South Sudan, it is necessary to further investigate and challenge the primary premise that the inclusion of women in the peace process should, in itself, radically change its outcome.

When analysing all the diverse perspectives, it becomes apparent that South Sudan is a complicated conflict-ridden system in which gender is closely associated with broader levels of social and political cohesion (Adeogun & Muthuki, 2018). Integrating women into peacebuilding processes is based on the idea that the concept itself, simply through her presence, will disrupt the traditional balance of power. In any case, it democratises the system and changes the final results. However, Selebogo (2020) argues that women's presence at peace tables as has been done in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) inherently changes peacebuilding practices or qualitatively shifts peacebuilding outcomes in a significant way. An evaluation of the existing peacebuilding strategies used in South Sudan highlights women projected into tradition-dynamic roles, including mediators or actors of community peace, without preparation or empowerment to conduct such work changes (Karlsrud & Solhjell, 2012). Such an approach can be beneficial in its way but not always maximally use the potential of women's work or their placement in strategic peacebuilding positions. Ultimately, the focus on means-tested effectiveness, based on hierarchical ideas about the nature of women, queries an existential change of peace to reflect root differences that are found on network sites of gender in protestant dissolving places.

The conflict dynamics in South Sudan from 2014-2024 underscored by acute humanitarian crises and structural deficits have profoundly impacted the lives of its inhabitants, particularly women and girls (Deng, 2021). Firstly, the provided content highlights the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls, who face higher risks to their physical and psychological safety due to discriminatory gender norms. These norms perpetuate a "men-first" society, wherein women are marginalised socially, politically, and economically. This resonates with feminist theory, which emphasises the importance of understanding power dynamics and social structures in analysing gender inequalities.

According to Akala (2023), gender is performative, meaning that it is made up of repeated actions depending on specific cultural settings. In South Sudan, patriarchal ideals and the male-dominated decision-making process exacerbate women's vulnerability and limit their role in conflict solutions (Krystalli & Enloe, 2020). Similarly, the fact that many men work as perpetrators and initiators of violence is critical. This notion aligns well with Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity (Yang, 2020), where one form of masculinity exerts dominance over many other kinds of masculinity and femininity, usually through violent means, in this case, powers handed down through the male household heads and non-state actor leaders. Furthermore, gendered nationalism to some extent supports the interaction of gender identities and nationalist activities as linked phenomena; gender ideologies guide nationalist action and post-conflict rebuilding. In South Sudan, traditional gender dynamics paint a picture that women are excluded from leadership and the decision-making sphere of their organisations (Tounsel, 2020). It poses a challenge to human rights and long-term development stability intended for the nation.

5   Conclusion

Thus, the contribution to peacebuilding through community-based conflict resolution mechanisms must carry along the role of women in this process. Referring to Cynthia Enloe, who explored how conflicts and peacebuilding are gendered, empowering women in local peace initiatives challenges the existing power and provides sustainable peace. However, the author highlights the comprehensive approach to social change alongside economic inequalities; social norms will have to be transformed to ensure women can actively participate in peacebuilding. Concerning the future, the essay indicates the need to ensure the support of various social groups and key stakeholders in addressing the causes of conflicts and inequalities. Thus, empowering women by considering their capabilities can help to build resilient communities and develop peaceful ways of co-existing in South Sudan.

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