

Giving a voice: Integrating South Sudanese civilian and women voices within the peace process

Situation: Many women in South Sudan are marginalised and sadly among the main groups most affected by conflict. Despite this, they remain largely mis- and underrepresented in the peace process and in decision-making mechanisms in the country. They also continue to be misinformed about the progress of implementation, opportunities that they have, and their role in the process. Through the FCDO-funded South Sudan Technical Assistance Facility, Tetra Tech's Gender and Civilian Affairs Advisor supported the South Sudanese Government over the course of seven years to integrate women's voices into the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS).

The participation of women in the peace process is a critical link in the implementation of the R-ARCSS which has largely been ignored by institutions and mechanisms within the peace process, including the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (CTSAMVM).

Action: The Gender and Civil Affairs Advisor knew that she had to take multiple steps to give voice to women in the peace process. She approached the issue by first getting buy-in within CTSAMVM and then support from external groups.

Internally: To bridge this knowledge, representation and participation gap, the Adviser worked with the Chief of Staff and the Chairman of CTSAMVM to ensure that activities promoting the participation of civilians, and in particular those focusing on women were carried out. This was achieved by directly lobbying the Chairman to include requirements to send female international observers to Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) contributing countries, as well as the hiring of female staff within CTSAMVM. The Chairman has also been supportive of outreach activities targeting women and girls. These activities were funded by Ireland and Norway.

Externally: In addition, in support of the Chairman and the Chief of Staff, the Adviser planned a three-day activity to target women in positions of power to raise awareness of the pertinent issues pertaining to the R-ARCSS which includes sexual gender-based violence (SGBV), sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), child abuse, child recruitment into the army and women affirmative action.

The Adviser reached out to women in various mechanisms and institutions including policy makers, civil society representatives, businesswomen and humanitarian aid workers. Organisations invited to the event included Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC), Non-Violence Peace Force (NP), Gender for Empowerment Organisation (GESSO), Female Journalist Network and the South Sudan Women Empowerment Network. The groups were chosen to ensure wide thematic and geographic coverage.

The event served to empower women to disseminate reliable information on the provisions of the agreement affecting women, including their participation and representation in the process. The event established an effective coordination link for the institutions of the agreement to collaborate on the representation of women's issues. It also served to engage the wider citizenry in the peace implementation process by providing them updates on the progress of its implementation and identifying gaps and roles women and civil society can play in the push for its fulfillment.

Why were the actions taken: Overall, the representation of women in these mechanisms remains considerably low. The Monitoring and Verification Teams' (MVTs) challenges in carrying out investigations on SGBV, specifically within the country, stem from a) the lack of female observers in the teams; and b) the lack of understanding of the CTSAMVM mandate as well as the provisions on Protection of Civilians by women leaders across the country. The actions taken by the Adviser ensured that there was adequate knowledge within the CTSAMVM staff and that there is increased knowledge on the part of the civilians, particularly the women.

Results and Impact

Though still considerably low in terms of representation, the number of women in CTSAMVM has increased. As a result of directly lobbying the Chairman, the Head of the Legal Department is a woman seconded from Kenya. A continuous push for more women representation within the institution is critical to ensure that reports on Protection of Civilians are investigated, particularly on SGBV.



Picture 1: Towards Effective Participation of Women in the Implementation of the R-ARCSS for sustainable Peace in South Sudan workshop in Juba (Grace Kilonzi) Peace in South Sudan workshop in Juba (Grace Kilonzi)

As a result of the three-day event held with the different representatives, there was a follow-up meeting with the Deputy Chairperson of the joint committee on the action plans for the Parties on combating conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV/ SGBV) with the coordinator for the Female Journalist Network. This meeting contributed to another workshop with 20 female journalists on reporting on SGBV and how they can work with CTSAMVM.

There has also been additional coordination with the Monitoring and Verification Team in Juba – who presented on the mandate of CTSAMVM – with the various civil society organisations in Juba. Due to the three-day event that raised awareness of the protections of civilians and gender provisions with the Agreement, there was subsequently an increase in reporting of child kidnapping as well as alleged rape cases within the city. There were also three follow-up meetings between the representatives of the women bloc and the women coalition and the Adviser. One of these meetings was at the Bilpham Army Headquarters to discuss outreach activities to the training centres and the cantonment sites.

Recommendations

Despite some progress, there is still need for more women's representation within the MVTs in CTSAMVM. The Adviser has proposed a policy to CTSAMVM leadership that requires the contributing countries to send one female for every three male International Observers. The presence of women in these teams, especially in areas where there are increased incidents of SGBV, will enable the institution to access the victims and write comprehensive and elaborate reports. The women are not open to speak to the male International Observers and in most cases incidents go unreported and undocumented. This is one of the gender dynamics that is often overlooked.

Moreover, the funding for outreach activities and public engagements that the Civilian Affairs and Gender Adviser role heavily relies on are at the behest of other donors. One recommendation for future programming is that the role is provided with an activity budget to improve coordination with the British Embassy and other embassies in the country to be able to coordinate efforts, activities, outputs and results of programmatic interventions.

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