



Rift Valley Institute
MAKING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE WORK

HIDDEN FIGURES:

Women navigating a culture of exclusion in peace and conflict resolution processes

Agau Bul Deng



SOUTH SUDAN WOMEN'S RESEARCH NETWORK

RESEARCH GRANTS - ROUND ONE



Mei de Baai Alooch 'Root of the Community' Dance group, Mading-Bor

SOUTH SUDAN WOMEN'S RESEARCH NETWORK

This report is a product of the EU funded South Sudan Women's Research Network (SSWRN), which provides research grants, training and mentorship to early career female researchers in South Sudan. The project aims to ensure that women's perspectives are included in the research and decision-making on development issues in the country.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Agau Bul Deng is an early career researcher and peace practitioner who is among the first batch of the South Sudan Women Research Network (SSWRN) being implemented by the Rift Valley Institute (RVI). Agau's research explores the roles of women in peace engagement and conflict resolution in South Sudan. She is also a member of a social enterprise, Ma 'mara Sakit Village, an Arabic phrase loosely translated as 'Not Just a Woman,' where she coordinates the women community program. Agau prides herself in seeking answers and to gain a better understanding of differential impacts of violent conflict and war by exploring individual and collective lived experiences to inform her work and engagement in the peace and security realm. Agau holds a Bachelor's Degree in Conflict and Peace Studies, and while at university, she helped coordinate public lectures and organize extra curriculum activities to promote experience sharing with prominent youth leaders in peacebuilding realm.

PHOTO CREDIT

Bor County Cultural Women group, mix of singers, church and community representatives.
Credit: Agau Bul Deng, Bor — 2023.



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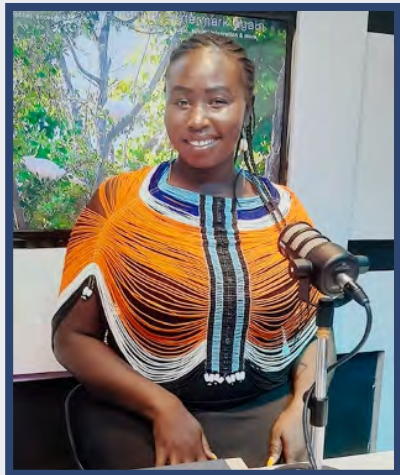
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

With a grateful heart, I am thankful to Rift Valley Institute (RVI) for opening up a space for South Sudanese Women Authorship through its revolutionary project- SSWRN. It's such an opportune moment to have been amongst the first batch of this network and equally a first-time researcher. This has been quite a journey, a walkable one but filled with stumbling blocks in the form of self-doubt and fear of taking the risk of responsibility that came from being entrusted with individual (s) intimate lived experiences.



Things kept getting better, however, and the journey became more interesting and engaging due to the motivation and the interest that I had prior to the project and the support system that gave me the momentum to carry on. My immediate support system in, the form of a mentor, is Dr. Diana Felix da Costa. Thank you, Dr! I owe you one, again to RVI team, thank you for being encouraging and patient with me throughout this project. I am also appreciative of my colleagues that believed in me from the genesis of this project to the end, namely and in no particular order Charles Jacob, Mario Maker, Samuel Matur, Chol Maduk Aleer who supported with transcription, Chuol Reath who was also helpful in Nuer translation, especially with the song and all the young women that came through for me and were very encouraging and also supported with coordination in Mading-Bor, it is finally here, colleagues and friends!

This report is intended to highlight the lived realities of women and girls in Jonglei state by centering their personal experiences, knowledge, encounters and challenges in relation to peace engagement and conflict resolution - deeply personal! The research draws on the work of other respected researchers, and much of the information here in relation to various normative frameworks has been condensed from reports from UN agencies, African Union and national government departments.

INTRODUCTION

*My sisters, My sisters
Sisters from Fangak
Akobo sisters
Sisters from Bor
Sisters from Twic
Sisters from Ruweng
Sisters from Bhar-el Ghazal
All our girls hold your hands together, Nyajoseph [Daughter to Joseph]
It's time for your leadership to get this country to another level
Its time women will be given their place and get stronger
South Sudanese have decided and we are serious
[Ululations]*

The representation of women, particularly in peace processes, often excludes women's voices, their shared experiences, and their contributions. This can be seen in the limited recognition of women's contributions in historical narratives and the frequent portrayal of women solely as victims and vulnerable. Overlooking women's positive contributions serves to make them invisible, even when their strength, determination and contributions were loud and visible. These narratives of women as victims and vulnerable have been unknowingly internalized by women, and this research is part of a wider effort to surface women's contributions to peace in South Sudan, and in so doing, recognize their valuable contributions.

This research sought to explore how women use songs and oral history to share their lived experiences and narratives, demonstrate their resilience, and influence decisions being made, often by men, behind closed doors during peace conferences and reconciliation efforts. It seeks to redress the historical injustice that has undervalued women's contributions by ignoring or misrepresenting them in historical narratives that look at conflict resolution and peace engagement in South Sudan. It is important to recognize that women do not have a monolithic experience, and their lived realities are shaped by their environment, age, time, geographical location,

WOMEN AND SONGS

The women featured in this report use songs to claim their position in the community to connect, educate, contest and inform. This report includes analysis of songs that women shared during the field research. The original versions of these songs will accompany this narrative report in recordings or as a podcast. One song is in Nuer and the other three are in Dinka. These songs include a song composed during the Duk youth peace conference in Mading-Bor, a freedom song, a song to mobilize and share information with women, and lastly a song composed during the liberation struggle in 1987.

level of education, exposure, economic status, mental and physical ability, to name a few.

The report draws on women's own unmediated voices to look at how different women in Mading-Bor in Jonglei state have contributed to peacebuilding and conflict resolution at the local and state level. Since the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), peace processes and agreements in South Sudan have been criticized for being gender blind. While men have been most visible in public spaces, women have played multiple roles behind the scenes which are not included in most written documents, stories and speeches. This is reflective of the patriarchal conceptions of power, which often privilege the public exercise of power, often minimizing women's valuable contributions and rendering them invisible.

South Sudan has incredibly high illiteracy rates, particularly amongst women. Oral history, through storytelling, songwriting, poetry is pivotal and the songs/stories sung or told by women can be very influential in their communities. They represent a means for women to amplify their voices, communicate their concerns within their communities, and engage in local peace processes. Through the songs and stories of the women in Mading-Bor¹, we can learn about how women themselves see their role in the liberation struggle, the contributions of local women-led organizations in peace engagements and conflict resolution processes, and how traditional dance groups can serve as a platform to connect and form friendships that contribute to peaceful coexistence.

1 Mading-Bor used throughout this paper refers to Bor-town, a more recent name of the capital of Jonglei State.

POSITIONALITY, METHODOLOGY AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

POSITIONALITY AND PERSONAL CONTEXT

The drive that brought this research to life comes from a very personal place of deep reflections, lived experiences and interest in peace and security related matters. As a South Sudanese woman, I was particularly interested in understanding how women have contributed to peace and conflict resolution, from their own perspective. Due to my gender and to some extent my age, I am not seen as a culturally acceptable leader, stakeholder or potential partner to facilitate discussions and seek solutions for peace. This is a startling realization—violence and conflict have defined not only my life, but the lives of my parents. Conflict uprooted my parents alongside many other thousands of families in the early nineties from the Bor, Twic East and Duk area, and I was later born in Torit, Eastern Equatoria, a beautiful place that I hold so dear to my heart up to date.

This research was not only a means of providing women with a platform to share their lived experiences, it also allowed me to reconnect with Mading-Bor, the land and its rich history, as narrated by its women. I spoke to both younger women, such as myself, as well as older women and their inspiring narratives and personal stories covered their experience with conflict from the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005) to the post-independence South Sudanese Civil War period. It is imperative to listen to the voices of both seasoned and younger women and their experience with peace engagements and conflict resolution. Not for formalities' sake but rather to ensure that women's expectations of and contributions to sustainable peace, social justice and positive reconstruction processes in their communities be heard, recognized and fulfilled.

Throughout the paper, the term *patriarchy* refers to a system of power practiced and perpetuated by both men and women, that often privileges men's voices over women's, the formal over the informal and power exercised publicly over the private exercise of power. Similarly, in South Sudan there is a gendered approach to programming that is often one-dimensional, presenting women and girls solely as survivors and victims, and men, especially young men as perpetrators².

2 Harriet Kuyang Logo, Ojaswi Shah and Charlotte Watson, 'Gender norms, conflict sensitivity and transition in South Sudan', Better Aid forum Briefing Paper, Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF), July 2022, <https://www.csrf-southsudan.org/repository/gender-norms-conflict-sensitivity-and-transition-in-south-sudan/>.

To view women solely as victims disempowers and overlooks them and makes it easier for those in power to minimize their contributions and influence. South Sudanese women are not passive victims; we have agency and influence. We have contributed immensely to what this country is today, with some women encouraging and enabling conflict and violence, while others have made significant contributions to decisions around peace and security. Conflict is driven by complex factors in South Sudan, and to bring peace to the country, the voices and needs of various group should be given the attention that they need, and the space to challenge the militarization of South Sudan's peace and other societal processes.

METHODOLOGY

This study draws on qualitative field research conducted in Mading-Bor, Jonglei state in May and June 2023. The research sought to uncover the lived realities of different women and girls by providing them with a platform to share their stories and narratives, gathered through qualitative interviews.

These stories were collected during nine in-depth Key Informant Interviews (KII) and five Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) that explored the experiences of women that have been actively involved in peace engagement and peace conferences. A summary of participants, all of whom were women, is provided in Table 1 on the right broken down by age. The KIIs were with six seasoned women that have served their communities and led women in different capacities from the Second Sudan Civil War to independence, as well as three young women who have championed peace from independence onwards, and particularly since the South Sudan civil war. The FGDs were held with both older and younger women, separated into groups of four to ten participants, based on age. The FGDs included women who were singers and as church representatives, representatives of the Jonglei Women Association, women representatives from the Bor PoC/IDP site, and two dance groups of young women, the Mei de Baai and Thokjuor. All interviews were conducted in the Dinka language, except for the one with the women living in the PoC/IDP, which was conducted in the Nuer language using a translator.

TABLE 1. BREAKDOWN OF PARTICIPANTS

AGE GROUP	#
17-25	10
28-32	4
45-68	28
Total	42

Throughout the discussions during the KIIs and FGDs it became clear that songs and dance are crucial mediums through which women exercise considerable influence and power, using them to communicate with and make their positions known to the wider community. A patriarchal lens often overlooks the influence of songs and dance, thereby minimizing women's power and influence, in part because it is cultural, often informal, rather than political and exercised within formal structures.

This paper analyses four songs that were shared by different groups of women. Women often have very limited chances to openly speak or make formal contributions to important conversations in their communities. Women are often given the chance to sing, however,

and during the FGDs, women would spontaneously share some powerful songs composed by women on different occasions in the communities. Songs are powerful ways that women express their emotions, and their knowledge on historical accounts. Women also use songs to mobilize, organize and amplify their own voices. The analysis also includes the perspective of younger women who are part of dance groups.

Women are viewed as carriers of culture in many communities across South Sudan. Dance groups have been used by women and girls to strategically gain access to and actively participate in peace conferences, political and other community events. As noted above, women are often not given formal space to participate with speeches, perhaps those dictated by quotas as reserved for women representatives. However, women do mobilize and organize themselves, attending in large numbers to showcase their beautiful cultures through dancing and singing. They also strategically use these opportunities to raise their positions and issues in songs, thereby actively contributing to and influencing the discussions. Women finding ways of making their wishes known or putting pressure on political leaders - often using culture—is not limited to South Sudan, similar examples can be drawn from the neighboring countries. For instance, in 1992 in Kenya, the police were sent in to remove the mothers of political prisoners, led by Wangari Maathai, who were holding a hunger strike in Uhuru Park in the Centre of Nairobi to pressure the government for their son's release. The police action was seen as violent and brutal, and to protest police tactics, several women stripped naked, thereby cursing them.³

Dance is also used strategically to be invited to events since culture is expressed through women. It is no secret that women make appearances not just to be physically present but to make statements through these socially and culturally accepted mediums. Women draw on these cultural mediums to be actively involved in peace conferences and other political forums in ways that are socially acceptable but that also help them push gender boundaries and negotiate gender roles through these platforms.

REPORT STRUCTURE

The objective of this research was to provide a platform for women's voices to be heard, in relation to their involvement in peace processes. In line with this objective, this report includes and privileges the raw interviews and first-person accounts of events, experiences and perspectives. The report is structured in two connected parts. After a brief review of literature on women, peace and security in South Sudan, the first part of the report offers women's unmediated first-person accounts, divided into around six key themes explored with women informants during the research.

The six key themes are: an exploration of the key terms in Dinka language related to peace and

3 Global Nonviolent Action Database, 'Kenyan mothers win release of political prisoners and press for democratic reform, 1992-1993', Accessed 12 May 2024, <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/kenyan-mothers-win-release-political-prisoners-and-press-democratic-reform-1992-1993>.

conflict, the life histories and trajectories of some key informants and their engagement with peace resolution processes; women's contributions to the liberation struggle; women's explicit accounts of their involvement and memories of local peace processes; poverty, survival and challenges to peace' and finally, cultural repertoires of communication like song and dance as a means to leverage peace.

In the first part, I provide brief introduction to each theme, followed by the women's own words, while in the second part of the report, I offer my own reflections and analysis highlighting five common dimensions that emerged from the interviews.

WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY IN SOUTH SUDAN: IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN INCLUSION

The importance of women's involvement in peace processes has been recognized in various legal and normative frameworks nationally, regionally and globally. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, among other things, seeks to ensure greater representation, participation and involvement of women in peacemaking processes, and include a gender perspective in peacemaking operations.⁴ This reflects a global recognition that women are disproportionately affected by conflict and invites all UN member-states to ensure women's meaningful engagement through its four pillars, outlined below.⁵ Nonetheless, it remains a male centered and very masculine approach to and framing of peace and security.

- **Participation:** Women's participation at all levels of decision-making processes in the peace and security sphere
- **Protection:** Protection of the rights of women and girls
- **Prevention:** Incorporation of gender perspective into conflict prevention initiatives
- **Relief and Recovery:** Ensuring that gender considerations are integrated into relief and recovery efforts.

INTERNATIONAL NORMATIVE FRAMEWORKS ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

Women's inclusion and active participation in peace and security related matters remains a global concern. The birth of the Commission on the status of Women (CSW) in 1946 marked the start of a process where leaders continue to deliberate on and discuss pressing issues facing the world's women, evaluate progress, make recommendations, and formulate policies for gender equality.⁶ The Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979, underscored the importance of women's participation and

4 United Nations, Security Council, 'Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security', 31 October 2000, S/RES/1325 (2000), <https://peacemaker.un.org/node/105>.

5 UN Security Council, 'Resolution 1325'.

6 UN Women, 'A brief history of the Commission on the Status of Women' <https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/brief-history#:~:text=The%20Commission%20drafted%20the%20early,on%20women%E2%80%99s%20rights%20in%20marriage%2C>.

leadership in all contexts, and this research speaks directly to Recommendation 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations.⁷ Fast forward to 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action is a visionary agenda that calls for an increase in the participation of women in conflict resolution, and in the protection of women living in situations of armed conflict, among other strategic objectives.⁸ And lastly, the Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030), three of which are relevant for this research:

- **Goal 5** calls for achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, echoing that gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.
- **Goal 16** calls for peace, justice and strong institutions, this entails promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.
- **Goal 17** partnerships for the goals, this speak to the importance of revitalizing the global partnerships for sustainable development.⁹

As old as some of these frameworks are, however, they remain important to the women in South Sudan.

REGIONAL NORMATIVE FRAMEWORKS ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

On the African Continent, there are also normative frameworks that underpin women's engagement in peace and security. South Sudan recently ratified the Maputo Protocol (2003)¹⁰, and Article 10 (Right to Peace) affirms that women have the right to a peaceful existence and to participate in the promotion and maintenance of peace.¹¹ In 2004, the Solemn Declaration of Gender Equality in Africa was adopted by the AU Assembly. Its mandate is to 'ensure the full and effective participation and representation of women in peace processes including the prevention, resolution, management of conflicts and post-conflict reconstruction in Africa as stipulated in UN Resolution 1325(2000) and also to appoint women as Special Envoys and Special

7 UN Women, 'Guidebook on CEDAW general recommendation no. 30 and the UN Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security', 2015, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/8/guidebook-cedawgeneralrecommendation30-womenpeaceandsecurity#:~:text=30%20on%20women%20in%20conflict,human%20rights%20are%20protected%20before%20C>.

8 UN Women, 'The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women', Platform for Action, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/armed.htm>.

9 United Nations, 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Sustainable Development Goals', September 2015, <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>.

10 Formal name is the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

11 African Union, 'South Sudan becomes the 44th country to ratify the Protocol on Women's Rights', African Union Press Release, 7 June 2023, <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20230607/south-sudan-becomes-44th-country-ratify-protocol-womens-rights>.

Representatives of the African Union.¹² Equally, the Agenda 2063; ‘Africa we want’ encourages widespread participation and ownership of Agenda 2063 by all stakeholders including women which can accelerate the realization of Gender Equality, Women Empowerment (GEWE) across the Continent, and in line with this research are, Aspiration 4(Peaceful Africa) and Aspiration 6(People Driven Continent).¹³ Lastly, the continental Results Framework on Women, Peace and Security in Africa (2015) stresses the need to monitor the implementation by AU member-states and other relevant stakeholders on the various regional and international instruments and commitments on Advancing WPS agenda in Africa.¹⁴

TRANSITIONAL CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH SUDAN 2011

South Sudan’s provisional constitution Article 1. (5) affirms the country is founded on justice, equality, respect for human dignity and advancement of human rights and fundamental freedom. It is also stipulated in the constitution, particularly in part two of the Bill of Rights 16. (1) that women shall be accorded full and equal dignity of the person with men, 16. (3) also states that women shall have the right to participate equally with men in public life. Further on (4), it stressed that, all levels of government shall, a) Promote women’s participation in public life and their representation in legislative and executive by at least thirty-five percent as an affirmative action to redress imbalances created by history, customs and tradition; as amended in the Revitalized Agreement for the Resolution of conflict in South Sudan(R-ARCSS) b) Enact laws to combat harmful customs and traditions which undermine the dignity and status of women.¹⁵ This is a great place to start from, but considering the plight of most women in the present-day South Sudan, I would say, these are largely still aspirational.

Given the well-drafted constitution and the adopted frameworks, I acknowledge that there have been some changes, as women continue to assert themselves in different spaces and break societal and structural barriers by using the constitution and other normative frameworks. In addition to increased numbers of women in top leadership positions, there are also women-led organizations promoting women’s engagement such as Ma’mara Sakit Village, Go Girls’ Initiative and Crown the Woman among others. Despite the progress, however, the reality for most South Sudanese women and girls is that they are excluded from key decision-making forums, and do not have the same freedom to participate in public life as men. Women and girls often suffer the most in various crisis, yet their needs and concerns remain unattended

12 African Union, ‘Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa’, African Union, July 2004, https://www.mrfcj.org/pdf/Solemn_Declaration_on_Gender_Equality_in_Africa.pdf.

13 African Union, ‘Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want’, African Union, <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview>.

14 African Union, ‘CONTINENTAL RESULTS FRAMEWORK MONITORING AND REPORTING ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA IN AFRICA (2018 – 2028)’, African Union, https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/35958-doc-continental_result_framework_on_wps_agenda_in_africa.pdf.

15 Government of South Sudan, ‘The Transitional Constitution of South Sudan 2011 (Amendment) Act, 2013’, February 2013, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2013/en/28180c>.

to in peace and conflict resolution processes. How can we compete at the regional and global arena as a country when the half of the population is drastically excluded? The constitution, national gender policy and other regional and international normative frameworks remain critical and instrumental in changing the plight of women. What will also be helpful is to shift the conversations and have women leadership and effective participation at the heart of peace engagement and conflict resolution processes for inclusive and sustainable purposes.

WHAT IS KNOWN: WOMEN NAVIGATING A CULTURE OF EXCLUSION

There are stories and narratives of how women have navigated the patriarchal system, challenges norms and customs to claim their spaces. Most are not documented, however, despite the critical contributions of South Sudanese women in achieving peace in the country, as they are passed on orally. A review of existing literature shows how women's multiple roles, as active combatants, peacemakers, peace advocates, caregivers and humanitarians, have been under-recognized and remain un-documented.¹⁶

Women have also been persistently excluded from peacebuilding and mediation processes in South Sudan, although they had to overcome cultural barriers to participate in the political sphere; wherever they did, it was in opposition to traditional gender roles. In patriarchal South Sudanese society, women are limited primarily to the private sphere or generating income, not to be seen engaging in public political life.¹⁷ This could be seen during the 2015-2018 negotiations held in Addis Ababa where, 'Women activists and groups faced opposition to their participation in the peace processes from some mediators and warring parties. The IGAD mediation team was entirely male with Ambassador and lead special envoy chief mediator and two deputy special envoys all with military backgrounds.'¹⁸ After back-and-forth consultations and several pushes on why women should be part of this agreement, positions were created and there were women signatories to the agreement representing different entities. This illustrates that not only are South Sudanese women dealing with male dominated power structures/ cultural institutions in South Sudan, but are also confronted with the same challenges within the IGAD membership.

Patriarchal ideologies imbedded in the culture have crept into the modern institutions of governance where women leadership and decision-making positions are seen as trivial, despite the unique skills and knowledge women bring to the table.¹⁹ These experiences are not only limited to South Sudanese women, but women in different African countries who have also

16 Esther Soma, 'Our search for peace: Women in South Sudan National Peace Processes (2015-2018)', Oxfam and UM Women, January 2020, <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620930/r-r-women-south-sudan-peace-processes-300120-en.pdf;jsessionid=EF80D4C3085AF239014F6E208DFB79C8?sequence=1>.

17 Soma, 'Our search for peace'.

18 Soma, 'Our search for peace'.

19 Nyathon James Hoth Mai, 'The role of women in Peace-Building in South Sudan', Policy Brief, The Sudd Institute, December 2015, https://www.suddinstitute.org/assets/Publications/572b7eb2dd52b_TheRoleOfWomenInPeace-BuildingIn_Full.pdf.

undergone similar experiences and we can always learn from them. In my view, the systemic subjugation of South Sudanese women continues to be an impediment, regardless of the progress because women continue to encounter hurdles and more in their quest for equal representation in peace related matters. Indeed, women's empowerment is crucial and our collective effort is needed to address the structural challenges and historical imbalances that perpetuate the systemic exclusion and under-representation of women in relation to peace and security. Only then will women's participation cease to be treated as an afterthought or in an ad hoc manner.

In her research, Nyathon interrogated South Sudanese women's roles in formal peace processes, focusing on the evolution of their participation in national peace processes. According to Nyanthon, women's participation in peacebuilding processes can help to bridge conflict divides as women can more easily cross religious, ethnic and tribal lines to promote peace. She cited examples of how during the Second Sudanese civil war, South Sudanese women convened in Kenya to form NGOs and related networks to support their movements, including the South Sudan Women Network (SWAN), which was formed in response to the 1991 split of SPLA and the Sudanese Women Voice of Peace (SWVP) among others.²⁰ On the other hand, Ali's research focuses on women-led grassroots organizations that have established local peace committees and built inter-ethnic coalitions with tribal elders to promote post-conflict healing for their respective ethnic communities with the hope of transforming inter-tribal attitudes and promote healthy political relations. According to Ali, women-led organizations have mobilized national coalitions against sexual violence and to push national political and peace actors to implement gender-responsive aspects of peace agreements, public policies and national laws. Ali recognizes these bottom-up peacebuilding efforts are critical to community-level resilience and also help to address the gaps in top- down peace processes.²¹

Women are largely side-lined from participation in formal peace processes and structures, with their inclusion often tokenistic, rather than meaningful, despite the fact that women are disproportionately negatively affected by conflict. In spite of the existence of a legal framework outlining the inclusion of women in peace processes, this is still largely conceptual. Unfortunately, this has been normalized and women seem to be comfortable with it, especially those few women who represent others. Research indicates that although South Sudan has drafted policies and adopted normative frameworks that guarantee women's right to equal participation, the lack of political will remains a serious concern, as is under-funding for gender-responsive programs and under-representation or exclusion of women on decision-making tables. Ali discusses how women's strength and contributions are more prominent in informal peace engagements. This is manifested most notably in the strategic shift of their skills, capabilities, resources, and networks into informal peacebuilding at the community and

20 Nyathon, 'The role of women in Peacebuilding'.

21 Jihan Ali, 'Challenging Norms: Marginalized women and informal peacebuilding in South Sudan', Horn of Africa Bulletin, Life and Peace Institute, August 2023, <https://life-peace.org/hab-bulletin/challenging-norms-marginalised-women-and-informal-peacebuilding-in-south/>.

grassroots levels.²² Furthermore, South Sudanese women are said to have identified informal peacebuilding and social movements as a way to share their voices and have a critical impact on long lasting peace. Women-led organizations have emerged and created space for peacebuilding, and the examples they shared included community dialogues and reconciliation of health and psycho-social services to survivors of conflict and violence.²³

OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN INCLUSION IN PEACE ENGAGEMENT AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION: NEW INSIGHTS

Informants in this study collectively emphasized the challenges of leading as women, describing in effect a 'glass ceiling effect' that places a barrier on how far women can rise in leadership and what they can achieve. The stories shared in this report are a proof that women are challenging this 'glass ceiling' through their authorship, ownership and sharing of their collective stories and narratives. This research paper provides women from Bor, Twic East, Duk counties and some Nuer women with the opportunity to share their songs and stories with a wider audience. Although there are no written community frameworks that speak to the inclusion and active participation of women in peace processes, women are present, as singers, dancers and looking after domestic chores. The constitution is explicit on the importance of women's involvement and on combating harmful customs and traditions that undermine the dignity and status of women. Investing in women, however, does not appear to be a priority for South Sudan's leaders, nor does adhering to the provisions of the constitution and other regional and international normative frameworks. Additional research is needed to document women's contributions, challenge the existing power structures in historical narratives, profile women who can serve as role models, and open up spaces to amplify and echo the achievements and contributions of women and girls in the present and the past.

²² Ali, 'Challenging Norms'.

²³ Ali, 'Challenging Norms'.

WOMEN'S OWN WORDS

During this research, a song composed and sung by Teresa Nyagoal Chuol, a resident in the IDP site²⁴ in Mading-Bor, Jonglei was recorded and opens this report. Nyagoal, originally from Unity, had been living in Jonglei ‘for long that gives me the right to say I belong here.’²⁵ The song encapsulates what this report is about - promoting women’s voices in local peace processes. Storytelling, oral history and face to face communication in Dinka community and in other African societies are powerful means of connecting people, building rapport, transmitting knowledge/history from generations to generations, preserving cultural heritage and eventually imparting moral lessons. This research draws on women’s oral histories and songs to unpack how women have been involved in conflict resolution initiatives, what mediums they use to communicate, and the struggles they have found on the way. Nyagoal offered some additional insight into her song and motivation:

When I sang the song, I did it because I have seen my children have become united. The children of Nuer and Dinka are united. They even visited and gifted us a bull. As a woman who knows the pain of losing lives, I am excited with the gesture knowing that our children will not die anymore. We ate the Bull and got exhilarated together in the camp. It was good for us. I am so happy because what I want is peace for my children to be able to visit each other, even us the mothers [can visit each other].

Nyagoal composed this song in 2022 when youth from Duk county had a gathering in Mading-Bor and invited people from other communities, including those from the PoC and gifted each community a bull. The significance of this gesture was to open up opportunities for peace, sharing a meal is one important way of coming together to foster better relations and start to repair the broken social fabric. The residents of the PoC then returned to the PoC and had their own celebration where they slaughtered the bull and ate together, inspiring Nyagoal to compose and sing this song, ‘As a mother that knows the pain that enmity between Nuer and Dinka has caused, I felt happy that day that they were able to think about us and even brought to us a bull as a sign of peace. I was very happy, and I ended up composing a song about it while I was just in the market washing dishes.’²⁶

This section of the report acknowledges how powerful and influential women’s voices and

24 Former United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Protection of Civilians (PoC) Site, which has a significant Nuer population.

25 Interview with POC women, Mading-Bor, Jonglei, 1 June 2023.

26 Interview with POC women, Mading-Bor, Jonglei, 1 June 2023.

provides them with a platform to express their knowledge, stories, memories and aspirations on their own terms. This first part is divided around six key themes namely, meanings of different peace and conflict related terms in Dinka language, women's leadership trajectories, women's experiences of violent conflict, women supporting local peace, poverty and survival as challenges to peace and deploying 'cieng' to leverage peace and connect communities. Furthermore, it is important to note that the themes were not predetermined, they organically emerged during the KIIs, FGDs and throughout the transcription and analysis processes.

MEANINGS OF DIFFERENT PEACE AND CONFLICT RELATED TERMS IN DINKA LANGUAGE

Often, peace and conflict-related terms are used with a Eurocentric lens that fails to consider what they mean locally. This can invalidate South Sudanese knowledge and also questions our values and beliefs as Africans and particularly as South Sudanese. This section offers a review of key terms in Dinka language around peace and conflict. Unpacking these terms in Dinka language is critical towards understanding women's own interpretation and explanations of peace and conflict. Therefore, the research participants and I deemed it necessary to contextualize and culturally interpret these terminologies. Below are key terms and definitions from the women and girls involved in the study, in their own words:

- *Door e be ran lau kuchin adier ne kerac* — Peace is freedom from fear of insecurity
- *Door e ping erot ne koc waccic* — Peace is an understanding among different people
- *Door e lau, ping erot, riiu ku mat* — Peace is freedom, understanding, respect and unity
- *Tong/keek* — Violence
- *Agoth / hok* — Conflict
- *Dak e piou* — Mistrust
- *Chien ping erot* — Lack of understanding
- *Jam* — Communication
- *Door* — Peace
- *Gel* — Protection
- *Luoi* — Participation
- *Mat* — Unity
- *Dok* — Prevention
- *Cieng* — Culture

Several research informants emphasized the connections between peace and development:

Peace means a lot, where there is peace there is development and where development is, services should reach the grassroots. Peace is crosscutting, but how are we going to achieve peace when we are battling hunger? Divorce cases have now skyrocketed, women have been empowered and at least fend for their families but that also causes issues in their marriages, if we do not have peace at the family level, communities,

then what kind of peace do we aim to achieve at the national level?²⁷

Peace/door do not come without conflict or violence, for peace to be initiated, it means that the harmonies living has been interrupted by conflict and that process of restoring back the harmony is call door/meet which is mediation. There has to be a friction or social disharmony for me to talk about peace.²⁸

One customary leader emphasized the importance of communication, *jam*, in managing conflict:

The reason as to why suicide cases and divorce cases have increased is because people lack proper ways to communicate, and they would rather just keep or accumulate issues within them and gives each other attitude or silence treatment and such acts will only amplify the already existing issues. If you have doubts whether at your work place, with friends or in your house, just look for someone you can trust and confine in them to help you see the issue differently. My advice is that, let us learn how to communicate respectfully even when we are disagreeing with each other.²⁹

We discussed the contributions that a network of women-led organizations has made to the community and their efforts to contextualize programmes to local society. Two young women who are part of the network shared the approach they used to mitigate conflict in the communities and to sensitize women about peace and conflict. To them, it is one thing for South Sudan to ratify the UN Resolution 1325 on ‘Women Peace and Security’, and it is another thing for the community to relate or resonate with the resolution such that it becomes meaningful. As such, the network domesticated and contextualized the resolution. Below were their reflections:

To foster feasible collaborations with the communities, the Women-led Organizations Network which consists of twenty-five women led organizations in Mading-Bor, Jonglei State first conducted baseline research with questionnaire that had 1325-related questions, this was to enable them to liaise with the community in their approach. The network focus is entirely on women, peace and security (1325) which they loosely translate into Dinka as (*Akuut ke gel e diaar*). The network recognized that most of the women and girls in the communities do not read and write and that automatically meant workshops and PowerPoint presentation would only favor few, thus they opted for the translation.³⁰

We translated it into local language to make it simpler for people to understand

27 Interview, young leader, Mading-Bor, 31 May 2023.

28 Interview, senior leader, Mading-Bor, 2 June 2023.

29 Interview, customary leader, Mading-Bor, 5 June 2023.

30 Interview, young leader, Mading-Bor, 2 May 2023.

and open up by using advocacy, radio talk shows, community outreaches and by creating women friendly spaces. In these friendly spaces, they provide us with a weekly update and a monthly report for the GBV incidences in their various areas. They do talk to us directly and then we link them up with the service providers. The network is led by one of us, young woman who assumed the office through election. Each organization delegated two or three people, it can be through workshop or community outreaches.³¹

³¹ Interview, young leader, Mading-Bor, 2 May 2023.

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP TRAJECTORIES

There are many ways that individuals become leaders. Here, we unpacked what leadership looked like for different women, and learn about women's own leadership trajectories. These discussions also provided avenues to understand women's perceptions of leadership, how they have navigated the existing systems and structures and how these have impacted them as leaders. Informants underscored being born and learning to be leaders and they reference many examples such as being the bedrock of their households in all aspects. Let us delve into various accounts of women experiences in leadership.

One young woman, a mother of two leading an organization and a network in Mading-Bor shared her own path to leadership:

I was raised by a single mother that did everything humanely possible for me to be the leader I am today. I joined school when I was six years old and that was not the case for other girls my age at the time. My mom struggled to ensure that I got the best education I could and that really motivated me a lot. I was elected as a time keeper in class 7 and that is where my leadership started, again I was nominated to lead the debate club and when I joined high school I served as a head girl. In these processes, I learned leadership skills, I learned public speaking, built my confidence and became better at relating with people from different communities. These positions prepared me in so many ways, I learned punctuality, anger management and teamwork and even now, I am the leader for a women-led organization network in Mading-Bor and that is not an easy task.

My experience as a leader has increased my network, I have learned resource distribution and resource management. Generally, it is very challenging to lead as a woman, not because you are incapable of leading but because of merely being a woman here in our community. People view you from the perspective of being weak and shy or just being a woman, regardless of your position. This is seen in church leadership, school, community and even organizations and institutions. Personally, I have encountered so many challenges since my school days as a young girl and it's a reality that I have to live with. However, I stick to the vision and goals of the network and make decisions that need to be made at the end of the day. I have distributed roles and I encourage team work in the network, although I cannot please or make everyone happy but the priority is to get the job done as envisioned. I am never shy

in these spaces.³²

Similarly, a senior government official spoke extensively on how her upbringing had been a crucial factor to the leader she became in a male dominated sphere. While training and grooming girls to remain soft-spoken, shy and fearful was the norm, her father broke these walls of impossibilities and opted to prepare her for the actual world and positioning her as a role model for other girls. She recalled her childhood:

Growing up, I was very bold, harsh and tough and would accomplish anything that I set my mind into, and I remember my father started calling me a teacher even before I joined school because I was so strict and he thought I would fit to being a teacher later on. I was also a very honest child amongst my siblings which led to the entire family into loving and liking me. I eventually became a teacher and couldn't be prouder of myself knowing that my Dad professed it, it is safe to say teaching was my calling because I imitated everything my teachers used to do, I remember asking my dad why he was passionate about me becoming a teacher by profession when it was a field dominated by men but his response was that he needed me to be groomed as a teacher in order to step in and teach and also inspires young girls and spend most time with them.³³

Although she was raised to be tough, strong and assertive, she remained empathetic, kind and compassionate, part of what made her a great leader. According to her, violence was never an option. She opted for a dialogue which is evidenced by this statement:

I used to separate my siblings from fighting and sit them down and mediate between them. At times, I would be referred to as a weak individual but that never bothered me because I had confidence in whatever that I used to do and I also knew all that I did came from a place of self-awareness and I knew very well I was not weak, I would ignore the negativity because I knew myself better and my ways better and wouldn't allow others to define me , so, as a leader, you will always be subjected to abuse from majority of people and how you respond or handle criticism define the kind of leader that you are. I used to respect everyone regardless of how they perceived me. I also used to share the same space with my brothers and we brainstorm and I replicated this in the community still, I've never shied away from being in the same space with men because I used to view them as colleagues rather as men who are superior or better than me in anyway. I have always felt free to share the same space with men regardless of their age and experiences.³⁴

32 Interview, young leader, Mading-Bor, 31 May 2023.

33 Interview, senior leader, Mading-Bor, 30 May 2023.

34 Interview, senior Chairlady, Mading-Bor, 30 may 2023.

A young woman who rose to leadership via ‘replacement’ also shared her insights on her own leadership trajectory. She became a Member of Parliament in Mading-Bor, recalling it was a position she ‘inherited’ from her co-wife who succumbed to short illness, ‘I came to the parliament through nomination, taking up a position that was occupied by my co-wife who was elected in 2010.’³⁵ Her selection followed several community consultations, and although many candidates were lobbying, the community stressed that they had a suitable candidate from the same family. This decision was challenged, in part because the lady was deemed too young for such responsibility, and because she had married into the family and was from a different state. Other women in the Jonglei Parliament at the time mobilized and collaborated with the family to ensure that the young woman was able to take up the position. She has served her community diligently, raising and tabling serious motions in the Parliament, supporting peace conferences that were organized to combat child abduction and cattle raiding through planning and documentation, and due to her determination and commitment, she was re-elected for the second term. This shows the capabilities that are embodied by young women and proof that sometimes, all that young women need is support and a platform to show case their talent and contribute collectively to making their communities better.

We also collected the life history of a senior parliamentarian and how she practiced her leadership even in the midst of crisis. She shared her memories of women’s political organizing and leadership in Itang refugee camp in Ethiopia during the Second Sudanese civil war where women conducted the first ever election held by Southerners.

When we got to Itang, women had already formed a Women Association. It was initiated by the current vice president Rebecca Nyandeng, in this refugee camp, and areas were divided into different sections or groups that we then called Telun (zone). The Association was chaired and deputized by some great women namely Fatna Nyawang and Alokiir Malual. Each section was given a leader under this association and I was leading zone eight because that is where we resided. After a while, it was decided that women had to conduct elections for new leaders. We then organized to vie for different positions and this was the first election to be conducted since the formation of the SPLM/A. There were no ballot boxes and papers, this election was designed in a way that those who needed the position of the chair to line up and those who wanted them also line up behind them then the numbers were counted. It was in this process that Sitona Abdallah won the position of the chair and I was elected as the deputized chair.³⁶ Prior to this leadership role, she was nominated in the early 80s to succeed the then leader of a Jonglei province women association and a Katiba banat veteran, Achieu Duoi, and that was the beginning of her career, especially with women:- ‘I became the chairperson of Jonglei Province Women Association, after the nomination, I was sent to Khartoum to attend women Conference that brought all Sudanese women together and that is where we chose the overall women leader.

35 Interview, young parliamentarian, Mading-Bor, 2 June 2023.

36 Interview, senior parliamentarian, Juba, 21 July 2023.

We elected Fatma Abdel Mahamoud then as Sudanese Women Association leader, this was during Abel Alier leadership.³⁷

Again in 2008, this same leader got elected to another position, Chair of the Jonglei Women Association. For her, women's full involvement in peace, needs to be precluded by women's economic empowerment, and it is good for women to be self-reliant such that they can fully participate in peace and development. Her first focus was to train women to be strong farmers, which opened doors for them after they received tools and training from FAO and the community gave women land to farm. The other item on her agenda was to empower women through education, and adult education was introduced. The women's center she established also introduced computer training, enrolling both young and older women in computer classes, and training women on hygiene through workshops and community outreaches. She continued:

When the referendum was near, we mobilized women on all corners to be part of the process and history and indeed women were the majority voters during referendum and that is historical. We conducted many workshops around governance and the meaning of referendum and the role of women in elections. We even went to the county level mobilizing all women and educating them on the importance of elections, referendum and peace.³⁸

Education and upbringing are paramount to building a leader. Having shared four accounts of women with formal education and how that informed their life choices, careers and leadership trajectories, there were two other phenomenal women who leveraged their informal education to earn spots on the Jonglei State Local Court to represent women among eighteen men. Before they were nominated to join the Bench court, these women had done tremendous work in their communities by solving familial issues, marital issues and, to some extent, communal issues which got them the recognition at the state level. The two female customary leaders from Twic East and Bor county respectively shared their journey in conflict resolution.

People were impressed with my work as a leader at the clan level and that came with me being nominated to lead Nyuak Payam women at a community level, in this position, I used to solve various issues such as familial and women related disagreements through dialogue with the support from my team and this again led to me being elevated higher to represent at the County level. Having moved to Mading-Bor from Panyagor, I was seconded to the Bench Court by my County people to represent women at the state level. This is a very diverse court that includes foreigners and other communities within Jonglei State.³⁹

37 Interview, senior parliamentarian, Juba, 21 July 2023.

38 Interview, senior parliamentarian, Juba, 21 July 2023.

39 Interview, senior customary leader, Mading-Bor, 5 June 2023.

The other senior female customary leader interviewed for this study went into leadership from the Boma, Payam, and County level as a representative of women, until she was taken to the state bench court as women representative,

I went into leadership through nomination by the women from my clans to Boma level, but at first, I just happened to be that woman that is eager to mobilize and organize women just to discuss things that unite us and when misunderstanding arose from our small group then I often stepped in to solve and this is where it all started, I am in awe that I am in the state court representing women from Bor County. I was nominated by men in my absence to be in this position.⁴⁰

40 Interview, customary leader, Mading-Bor, 5 June 2023.

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENT CONFLICT

Older informants spoke confidently and emotionally of their experiences during the liberation struggle. There was a roller-coaster of emotions as different women recollected their memories of the 16th May 1983, when the Bor mutiny occurred and the SPLM/A launched its rebellion, and the events that followed. At the time, the majority were girls and young women in school, some had just had their babies and others had just gotten married. There is no any other way to learn from the experiences of these women other than giving them the liberty to speak in their own voices. They spoke into and of their emotions and traumas, recognizing every contribution they made into South Sudan's independence and to women's lives today. Abuk-Agutyyar shared this history through a song:⁴¹

John Garang, the leader left back then in May, twenty years later and we still remained in Ethiopia/foreign Country seeking the right ownership of our land until we achieved it. (repeat x 2)

Garang Mabiior, educated our youth/children in that we had no worries/doubts in our communities, Garang Mabiordit, educated our youth/children in that we had no worries/doubts in our communities. (repeat x 2)

Deng Dau, Majak Agot-malang and Chol Bior-wei are our leaders that knows the important of the land. Bull of the land (Thon e Baai) went and educated his youth/children very well in that there is no worry/doubt Garang, Deng Dau, Majak de Agot-malang, and Chol Bior-wei the very leaders that knows the important of the land.' (repeat x 2)

The same senior parliamentarian whose detailed leadership trajectory was provided above, shared her memories of this time,

When the Liberation Movement began, we were not aware of what was happening, but we noticed sudden movement of Southern Soldiers from Juba to Mading-Bor, and suddenly the war escalated. At that time, I was only nine days into the birth of my son in 1983. When people heard that the northern soldiers were coming to Mading- Bor, people began to migrate, my mother was in the village then in Makuach payam, she managed to send me an ajuruk (baby carrier) and so I joined her with my

41 Interview, senior customary leader, Mading-Bor, 5 June 2023.

new born baby and spent two years in the village and came back in 1985.

In Itang refugee camp, we volunteered to teach, this was in the schools that were operated under the trees, each person that left Sudan as a teacher was allowed to teach. We also took care of the sick and the wounded, they would bring them to us from Bilpham (Military center) and we used to host them in our houses. The camp was mainly for women and children, they would send the men that were sick and wounded to be treated by women then taken back once they got better.⁴² In this same movement, there emerged a group of women and girls call **Katiba Banat**. This movement within the SPLM umbrella was an idea that came from a place of support and patriotism, as young boys were extracted from school and got initiated into SPLM, the young girls and women thought it would be unfair for them to watch these young men go to the frontline all by themselves. The bigger question was what can we do as young girls/women in this liberation struggle? The first convening was initiated by young women in upper classes and they were about six and eight at the first meeting. Some of those young women were, Abeny Anai Kur, Achieu Duoi, Agum Atem, Akuek Achiek, Alek Maketh Duk, Adau Mathiang, Adhieu Lueth and Aluel Aquila among other many more ladies.

Katiba Banat were combatants, they also played humanitarian roles, support survivors of war, trained in military centers in Bonga, Cuba and Bilpham. Additionally, they used to care for the sick and wounded by providing them with the first aid, they would also bring people to Itang for treatment and take them back to Bilpham. Katiba-Banat played important roles in information sharing, by linking up families and soldiers. It was later realized that these girls were indeed patriotic and they also championed the liberation movement in their own unique ways, they exhibited patriotism in those trying times. The girls and women that had joined the Katiba Banat Movement were all residing in the military center (Bilpham) while the rest of us were in the refugee camp. They only went back to the camp when they were sick or wounded. The headquarter was four-five hours walkable distance.⁴³

42 Interview, senior parliamentarian, Juba, 21 July 2023.

43 Interview, senior peace ambassador, Mading-Bor, 2 June 2023.

WOMEN SUPPORTING LOCAL PEACE

Jonglei has been the epicenter of violent, intra and inter-communal conflicts across its counties. Here we share some of the voices of women that have been very instrumental in supporting local peace processes. Although, women are often left out at the decision-making table when conflict is being discussed and peace being facilitated, it is important to note that they continue to make efforts behind the scenes and seek solutions that can restore harmony whether in their families, social groups or communities.

In the midst of these complexities, women continue to maintain and provide for their families, which takes a lot of mental strength and sacrifices from them. Everyday tasks such as fetching water, firewood and food can be dangerous during times of insecurity and below are few voices of women that were involved in the Pibor Peace Process of 2016, the Pieri Peace Processes of 2021 and the Jonglei Peace Conference for Abii community of 2022.

PIBOR PEACE CONFERENCE (PPC 2016)

This peace conference took place in Pibor in 2016, lasting for seven days during Philip Aguer's tenure as Governor of Jonglei state. At the time, there were back and forth confrontations among the Murle of Pibor and the Dinka sections of Twic East, Bor and Duk Counties. The continuing violence became a point of concern and after being discussed in the Parliament, the government approached UNMISS to support with logistics for holding a conference. Representatives from various Dinka sections in Jonglei, Murle and the Anyuak were brought together to collectively interrogate and identify how to resolve issues that perpetuated child abduction and cattle raiding. Attendees included women, youth, traditional chiefs and government representatives with logistics and other support provided by UNMISS and ZOA. A senior peace ambassador was heavily involved in the entire process and below are her major reflections and learnings:

My colleague and I were among the first delegates. We went there first to support in organizing and also to establish some form of relations and friendships prior to the meetings. We also wanted to engage informally with the Murle Salatiin (Chiefs) in order to grasp their perspectives and stand on this peace conference. Good enough my colleague knew a bit of Murle language and that helped us in conversing with them. The Salatiin of Murle welcomed us, we found them with their women representatives and other peace commissions. One of the oldest Murle chiefs asked, 'Why are you women brought for this peace conference, why is it important for you to be involved?' Our response as women advance team from Jonglei was that

‘We came to make peace with you people, peace is important to us as women.’ We continued to engage with them, my colleague was sharing her childhood stories with the Salatiin, as she had lived in Pibor when her father was posted there as a police officer and she wanted to be here for this peace conference. We made it a routine to have stories and conversations with the chiefs for the days that we were there.⁴⁴

The senior peace ambassador offered great insights on why it is instrumental to have women in these peace processes. Her example highlights that doing ‘domestic’ tasks together often give women the opportunity to informally get to know each other and find common ground, exactly what the men are trying to do in a more formal setting.

To ensure that our involvement was effective as women, we organized secret conversations with Murle women as we prepared meals for everyone, during our secrets convening, we shared views and emotions around the endless conflicts and child abduction. As expected, Murle women were also aggrieved as much as we were, and we all wanted solutions as women. We asked them what they normally tell their men that abduct people’s children and hand them over to them to raise? And they were like they are tired of doing that and it’s the same thing that they do tell their men, as for us, we made it known to our men that if they abduct other people’s children and bring them home then we will report them to the authorities because we can’t raise other people’s children. The Murle women replied that the message that they were taking inside is to let their men and everyone in the room know that ‘if their men do not cease from child abduction then they will stop producing with them such that men can raise the abducted kids as their own.

We all said to ourselves, its only us as women that will bring peace among our communities. We eventually joined everyone in the room and when our chance came to speak as women, one Murle woman passed the agreed message exactly as we discussed and that shocked different men in the conference hall. With that experience and more, I believe women should be the ones to champion peace because they do not target, envied and killed people or abduct children either and when they work for peace then it is for the benefit of everyone not themselves.⁴⁵

This same peace conference was also attended by another young woman in the state parliament, and she played the role of the secretary in the conference.

I was the secretary and the presenter at the same time and what I remembered from the women side of the story is that they were the victims of all this because their children are abducted, and their husbands are being killed. All the women in both Jonglei and Pibor raise the point of not producing children anymore due to fears of

44 Interview, senior peace ambassador, Mading-Bor, 2 June 2023.

45 Interview, senior woman peace ambassador, Mading-Bor, 2 May 2023.

abductions and it was actually documented. But unfortunately, the killing and child abduction are still going on meaning the conference was not fully implemented.⁴⁶

PIERI PEACE PROCESS (2021)

The Pieri Peace Process was also a result of recurrent inter-communal conflict among the Dinka, Lou Nuer and Murle in Jonglei and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA). Taking place in 2021, it included representatives from the three communities, traditional chiefs, women groups, and youth groups. The process brought together the three communities, seeking to find common ground and support the communities to forge better solutions to give peace a chance in their communities and the wider Jonglei state. The JWA delegate to the conference, a senior woman, reflected that women from all three communities were extremely exhausted by the cycles of violence and the ineffective peace conferences that follow outbursts of violence.

In Pieri, Nuer and Dinka women sat outside and were informally brainstorming on conflict and peace related matters.⁴⁷ When the Murle women came, they first isolated, but we both urged them to join us in discussions which they did. We all shared our painful stories as a result of the continuous violent conflict that has had detrimental effect on us. And our communities. One thing that we requested for as women that day was a trade Centre that will bring women from the three communities together. Just like we share the pain of loss as women, economic challenges also hit us alike. Additionally, we exchanged our phone numbers amongst ourselves in order for us to collectively monitor situations in our communities and also check up on each other as sisters. Women have change of heart and they are willing to work towards achieving a collective peace.⁴⁸

JONGLEI PEACE CONFERENCE FOR ABII COMMUNITY⁴⁹ (2022)

In 2016, a deadly violent conflict that claimed enormous lives and vandalized properties erupted in Abii community. This was an intra-communal violence between Nyicak and Nyara sections of Abii community, Kolnyang Payam in Bor County over the naming and re-naming of the land. This encounter fragmented the community and there were several attempts throughout the years to initiate a dialogue that could bring peace to the community, but all hit a dead end. The leadership of Jonglei State, along with Bor community leaders, finally managed to bring the two sections together for dialogue. A three-day Conference was held in May 2022 in the Malek Diocese, Jonglei State, under the theme '*Peace, Reconciliation and Tolerance*'. Each community

46 Interview, young parliamentarian, Mading-Bor, 02 May 2023.

47 Although the Murle women were not interviewed in this research, most Dinka and some Nuer women acknowledged their voices and shared their stories.

48 FGD, senior women, Mading-Bor, 30 May 2023.

49 The sections used here refers to distinct part of the same clan (Abii) community.

sent five women representatives, and one of the women representatives encouraged the other women and from both communities to gather courage, pour out all their grievances, admit their wrongs and also be willing to forgive, for it is what God requires from the believers. One young woman leader that participated in the peace conference recounted her experience,

Abii intra-clan violence conflict was a horrible one, as a young woman that was a presenter at radio Jonglei at the time, we targeted women and children and collected their stories and experiences by using voice pops ‘I lost my dad through this conflict, all I want is peace.’ We then played the voices online to evoke discussions. This led community leaders to come out to speak. Use of radio drama also worked for us and lastly, we came to the dialogues part after the drama, peace and reconciliation, to discuss how that drama can be mediated. The voice pops we used were from the evidences collected by the Kolnyang youth in the community, the youth leaders played a huge role in that. I applaud Jonglei State and Bor community for they managed to bring the sections of Abii community together to dialogue and find a common ground again.⁵⁰

The young leader continued her reflections, shedding some light on the outcome of the conference,

The declaration on the last day was that the place will not be called Anuet or Panwel, it will be call and known as Abii and anyone that violates this mandate and gives it a different name will be held accountable by the authorities, there is free movement now in the community and interactions between the two sections of the Abii clan. It was an opportunity to be part of the peace conference and I am proud of it; it was hard to digest or accept what was happening because I have descendants from both sides that were fighting.⁵¹

Another thoughtful contribution from the women of the JWA, to benefit other women, was the erection of the center in the middle of the two conflicting sections of Abii community. This show of love and solidarity by Jonglei Women Association is based on their belief that women are paramount to cementing any peace. In their own words, ‘[I]f women are united then there is a high possibility of the community as a whole to unite.’⁵² The Centre is available for women from both sides to use to air out their differences and rebuild their relationships eventually.

50 Interview, young leader, Mading-Bor, 2 June 2023

51 Interview, young leader, Mading-Bor, 2 June 2023.

52 FGD, Jonglei Women’s Association members, Mading-Bor, 30 May 2023.

POVERTY AND SURVIVAL AS CHALLENGES TO PEACE

Women carry the responsibilities of their families on their shoulders due to their socially assigned role. They grapple daily with social-economic challenges, which can take a heavy toll on their mental health and hinders their efforts to fully participate in peace engagements. A senior customary leader shared her learning from the bench court cases which reflect the poverty and economic challenges women face.

The number of cases that are brought to us are divorce cases, adultery and the gang grouping, even young ladies like you have joined gangs. These are caused by the situation that we have found ourselves in as a state. Poverty is the cause of all the chaos that we are dealing with in our community, it is destroying our social harmony and breaking our families.

Cattle raiding is encouraged by high bride price rate, the economic challenges also push men and even women to indulged themselves in all sorts of crime related activities to sustain themselves and for these young men to afford the demand of high bride price. Early child marriage, forced marriage, teen pregnancy which are to some extent enabled by poverty are practices that continue to increase conflicts in the communities.⁵³

The challenges created by the post-independence civil war are still felt greatly, and relived by many women. An older woman from the Bor PoC/IDP site reflected on her decades of experience,

We have spent ten years in the protection of civilian site (POCs) here in Bor now the internally displaced persons (IDPs), as you can see around you the living conditions here make life unbearable. Our villages were way better compared to this kind of living where we struggle to feed our children not to even mention schools and hospitals. This living condition continue to disturb us on daily basis as women because we are the one that are majorly left to look after the children because some of us loss our husbands during the war and some disappeared from us.⁵⁴

53 Interview, customary leader, Mading-Bor, 5 June 2023.

54 Interview, leader of PoC women, Mading-Bor, 1 June 2023.

Other women also recounted their experiences in the PoC/IDP site,

Our daily struggles make it hard for us to attend forums often, although, we normally get invited to participate in activities by Jonglei Women Association, we try sometime to mobilize ourselves and attend but, in most cases, we end up missing out on these opportunities and more because of the way we are struggling to fend for our families, you cannot be at peace in the training when you know you left your children at home without anything to eat. Almost all women in Bor are out there in the market, at the fishing site and at the water point trying to make all ends meet for their families, there is no enough time to even think of attending discussions around peace or if we even make it to the training then the full focus is really not there, it is sad that UN and the government seems not to think of us anymore. We really need peace because we hope it will be the only solution to our situation if not for us, at least for the sake of these children.⁵⁵

DEPLOYING 'CIENG' TO LEVERAGE PEACE AND CONNECT COMMUNITIES

Culture, loosely translated to 'cieng' in Dinka language, is a way of life. This can refer to a set of values, rules, norms, customs and traditions that are socially accepted by the group of individuals and communities. Bor, Twic East and Duk Counties have long used *traditional dance* to connect with each other, form friendships and strengthen their relations. It is encouraging and interesting to see young people deploying this cultural practice not only to continue the tradition but also to help bring about positive changes in their communities.

Culture impacts our lives and informs how we interpret our realities, it can also mold us into better versions of ourselves, and cultural practices and events can positively contribute to mending broken relationships and help to reweave the social fabric. The two cultural dance groups interviewed use culture, and its tangible manifestations like song and dance, as a tool to contribute positively to changing the narratives around violence, improve relations and build more a cohesive community.

THOKJUOR ALOOCH GROUP 'DIVERSE COMMUNITY' DANCE GROUP

Co-led by a young man and woman, Thokjuor is a cultural dance group formed in 2018 after some young people met and thought of a platform that would bring them together and contribute to building their networks and organize themselves. The young woman that leads the girls' part of this group was nominated and specifically assigned into dealing with girls directly, largely due to the fact that parents would trust her more than the young men.

This group was founded by different young people who wanted a community that is full of unity and support and were working hard towards this goal. A question facing these young people was, 'what should we do for us to make our goal and existence known by others?' One of the members came up with an idea of revisiting their past and reviving the old practices of their forefathers with cultural dances. The idea was shared with a female member, who was asked for her input - she automatically seconded the idea and later approached a group of young women, explained the group's philosophy and desire to revitalize traditional dances and encouraged

them to join, which is how the group came into existence.⁵⁶

According to the young women in Thokjuor, they are a dance group that seeks to unite the counties of Twic East, Duk and Bor and their neighbors. It is open to anyone that speaks the language of love and unity. One female member remarked that ‘[t]he one reason I so love this group is how it brings you closer to some people that you would have not had a chance to meet had you just decide to enclose yourself in your clan or community surrounding. To me, Thokjuor is not just a dance group but a place that provide us with refuge and peace.’⁵⁷ She had joined the group in 2021, motivated to join because of the unity she had observed from far. Another young girl joined the group in 2020 because ‘the beautiful thing about this group is that it makes us united regardless of our differences, in this space, we see ourselves as people with common interest and bonded by love.’⁵⁸ For the dancers, the group has improved how they interreacted with each other as young people,

We are known now in Mading-Bor as members of this group, and we are uniquely known for peace and unity because that is the language that we speak and preach to the rest of the communities. Another important thing that we value in this group is togetherness, you still remain a member of the group whether you know how to dance or not, we are patient with those who are willing to learn and also pay respect to those that wants to be part of the group without engaging in dances. Our uniform is black and pink as Thokjuor.⁵⁹

MEI DE BAAI ALOOCH ‘ROOT OF THE COMMUNITY’ DANCE GROUP

Mei de Baai, a Dinka phrase loosely translated as ‘*Root of the Community*’ was established in 2017, and draws its name from its goal of acting as roots that are holding different people from different communities together. It is an ethnically diverse group that is open to anyone so long as they have the will to join the group, and it encourages peaceful coexistence among its members through dance as a way of mobilizing, connecting and building friendship.

Mei de baai was initiated by some youth that were looking for ways or a platform that could bring young people together to talk about peace and contribute positively to the society. One member noted that ‘[w]e thought of activities that can bring young people together, we agreed on forming this as dancing group that brings both young women and men together as a way of forging positive relations, building communities and preserving our cultural heritage.’⁶⁰ ‘We dance to any song from any community because we do not have our own songs,’ said one of the

⁵⁶ Interview, Thokjuor dance group representatives, Mading-Bor, 31 May 2023.

⁵⁷ Interview, Thokjuor dance group representatives, Mading-Bor, 31 May 2023.

⁵⁸ FGD, Thokjuor dance group representatives, Mading-Bor, 31 May 2023.

⁵⁹ FGD, Thokjuor dance group representatives, Mading-Bor, 31 May 2023.

⁶⁰ FGD, Mei de Baai dance group, Mading-Bor, 30 June 2023.

dancers.⁶¹

According to the young women, this dancing group has brought diverse communities together and it is promoting peaceful coexistence in the society. When dancing, members do not see themselves as coming from one community or another, but rather as peacebuilders using dance as a tool or a platform to unite people. Members felt that,

Peace begins within our group, friendships are established by different people and from different communities in the group and this is extended to outside relations as well... Conflict is part of us and what we do as young girls in this group, we embrace the importance of dialogue among ourselves and with other people that we relate with in the society, respect is also paramount to us and that help us to live in harmony in the group.⁶²

Another important ethos within the group is that they view each other as equals. A young woman member noted that '[y]oung men respect us and our position and vice versa, we respect each other, and we have healthy boundaries when relating with them.'⁶³ They went on to explain the importance of engaging with girls and women for peace,

As young girls, we believe that women are peace champions, we know that because these women are our mothers and grandmothers, but sadly, they are always the collateral damage in the violence process. These women encourage peaceful means of conflict resolutions at the familial and community levels. Women have never organized themselves to stage an attack on other communities but they have organized and mobilized to initiate peace. Similarly, Nuer or Murle women never anticipated to attack their fellow women as well. Here in Mading-Bor, Nuer and Dinka women trade among themselves. If anything, they are the ones that are majorly affected by any violence conflict in their communities directly or indirectly and as such, they opt for peaceful means of conflict resolutions.⁶⁴

61 FGD, Mei de Baai dance group, Mading-Bor, 30 June 2023.

62 FGD, Mei de Baai dance group, Mading-Bor, 30 June 2023.

63 FGD, young women dancers, Mei de Baai group, in Mading-Bor, 30 May 2023.

64 FGD, Mei de Baai dance group, Mading-Bor, 30 May 2023.

REFLECTIONS AND ANALYSIS

This research report has sought to amplify women's voices and highlight their contributions to peace processes in South Sudan, through a case study of women in Mading-Bor. Drawing from both KII and FGDs, there is a lot of learning that can be drawn from the life histories narrated above, the songs sung, and women's efforts to influence peace processes.

Majority of women and girls do not have much knowledge of what is in the constitution, human rights declarations, or regional and the international legal frameworks about women's involvement and inclusion into peace and security related matters. Nonetheless, they have continuously availed themselves to support peace processes and seek non-violent solutions to address societal challenges. Unfortunately, their great contributions, support and efforts are often unrecognized, resulting in their strengths and ability to influence remaining untapped. This research report invites leaders, stakeholder partners, women and every other concerned citizen to better understand the perspectives and narratives of women in peace and conflict related matters and realize the importance of engaging them at all levels. It also encourages women to collaborate and work as a collective from the local to the national levels, as women do have considerable influence and power when they mobilize and use their collective voice for the common good of all South Sudanese communities.

The first—and longer—section of this research report showcased women's unmediated own words on peace and conflict: their memories, perspectives, positions and experiences. It privileged women's knowledge on their own terms. This second part of the report offers my own concluding reflections and analysis on the five themes that emerged from the interviews, while also recognizing my own position as a South Sudanese woman with an interest in peace and conflict resolution related matters.

A PERSONAL AND SHARED SENSE OF LOSS, PAIN BUT ALSO HOPE

My interaction with women was triggering and emotional—I remember breaking down one night as I was transcribing. I could not continue, I just had to close my laptop and cried myself to sleep. That experience confirmed to me that our personal stories are inter-connected and tied to our country's larger historical narratives. When women were narrating their transition to Itang and Ethiopia, it broke me, as at that point I was picturing my close family members that I have lost as a result of war. I have an uncle, who was also a singer, that I only got to know and meet through his songs. I am reminded daily of his rich legacy in our community through his powerful songs that are still cherished today in Kongor and Twic East.

The loss of my two stepbrothers, which I am yet to heal from, remains entrenched in my

heart. I relive this pain every time I pay my stepmother a visit, as I am reminded of cruelty and tragedy of war. Violent conflict deprived my stepmother of the joy of motherhood, as well as the opportunity to be a grandmother and see her lineage continue, as her sons were her only children. Nevertheless, her resilience motivates me to reach more women and offer them a space to share their stories, and pain. That for me is a way of healing. Many other women shared the same sentiment with me, as they are also battling traumas from the loss of people close to them. In our conversations, this came out through words and songs—we women, we know the pain of motherhood, and the pain of loss that brings nothing but emptiness.

Healing is the first step for women to participate in peace processes meaningfully and effectively, and many of the women I spoke to were willing, eager even, to set aside enmity as the first step in their healing journey. During the liberation struggle, women relied on songs to support their healing processes and to make peace with the reality they were facing on the ground. During my engagements with women in their different capacities, I realized that their valuable contributions have been overlooked, depriving them of the recognition they deserve. The lack of documentation on women's contributions, combined with the lack of spaces or platforms for women to share their stories and lived realities, has meant that women's own peace initiatives remain largely invisible. When reflecting, I realized that for women of my generation, this has meant that we have been robbed of the opportunity to draw and be inspired by older women's wisdom and contributions to peace.

Indeed, it is incumbent upon us younger women to challenge the current peace narratives and rewrite the story and narratives to better reflect and appreciate women's contributions. We need to create more spaces for peer-to-peer learning. The Jonglei women stories left me with an appreciative, yet heavy, heart. Their stories had so much weight and depth—loss, resilience, and faith that their efforts will bear fruit, eventually. The objective of this research was to uncover and document women's experiences, share them with a wider audience and encourage other women and girls, especially young women, to learn from these powerful and impactful stories. What became very clear over the course of this research is there is much to learn from these women, and others, that could help to ground and shape efforts to support peace engagement and conflict resolution at the local or national level in South Sudan, or other countries in Africa affected by violent conflict.

Women are resourceful and leaders in their own right, as demonstrated by their experiences, perspectives, challenges, efforts, creative methods and strategies outlined above. Sustainable peace in South Sudan remains elusive, and partners and other stakeholders in peace processes continue to overlook women's contributions. Why do women continue to be excluded in such vital discussions when it is their constitutional right? What needs to change about our conceptions of power and influence to be more inclusive and appreciative of the informal exercise of power and influence? Conflict is complex and affect men and women differently hence their needs and priorities too when discussing peace remains distinct. It is imperative that the different needs of women and men are addressed during peace processes, and this cannot be done when women are excluded, under-represented or their voices ignored. Only when such an approach is used is there potential for the socioeconomic, cultural and political

reforms needed for sustainable peace to be realized.

THE POWER OF SONG AND DANCE

Songs are a big deal where I come from. In most Dinka communities and many other non-literate cultures, songs, poems, stories are how history, traditions and new practices are remembered and passed on. Unfortunately, literate cultures often underestimate or minimize the importance of oral traditions, as their history, traditions and new practices are passed on and shared through the written word. The songs shared in this research paper demonstrate how powerful songs are and how they are used to store histories, transmit knowledge to the next generation, and educate (and correct) people and communities. The beauty of this medium is that women's voices are not dismissed or restricted, in fact women are expected to sing and celebrate their community's culture. Not surprisingly, women have proven adept at using this existing and culturally accepted platform to communicate their emotions, critiques and praise. This has motivated many women to compose all manner of songs, depending on the situation on the ground or the mood that they are in to communicate their views.

In contemporary Bor, Twic East and Duk communities, women and girls have formed groups based on their respective counties, payam and clans, and these groups have been used by women to mobilize and organize. In addition to women and girls living in the immediate area, these groups also connect them to women and girls in the diaspora, and they work together to think of the agenda that will advance their communities back home and improve their status as women. Social media has proven invaluable, especially TikTok and Facebook, as these platforms have allowed South Sudanese women, no matter where they are located, to work together and amplify their collective voices.

Songs and cultural dance are a form of informal voice that can be as powerful and influential as formal venues. While songs are often used to praise communities and the beauty of women and girls, they are also used to amplify issues facing women and girls. Women use songs and storytelling to further negotiate with patriarchy by being more critical and intentional with these community groups to support a progressive agenda. Women told of how they use their praise songs strategically to be invited into community high level functions they are not formally invited to or asked to speak in. Using culturally accepted mediums, such as songs and dance, has allowed women to contribute to and provide input into important discussion. Attending, even if only as informal participants, has provided women with the opportunity to learn about how peace conferences function and strategize amongst themselves on how to use cultural dance spaces and songs to bring about positive change in their communities and the country at large.

WOMEN WITH A UNIFIED VOICE

There is nothing that can beat a group of women speaking with a unified voice. Across Africa, women have organized to work for peace, such as in Liberia and Mozambique. South Sudanese women have a history of organizing to mobilize communities towards a common cause, as demonstrated by this research. Furthermore, when the then UN-Secretary General Kofi Annan

visited the UN offices in Nairobi, Kenya South Sudanese women, organized by SAWN, held a peaceful demonstration carrying an empty baby coffin and marched to the UN offices dressed in rags, bare foot and shabby hair.⁶⁵ Growing up, I witnessed women coming together to sing liberation, cultural and gospel songs that detailed every struggle they encountered and the hope to go back to their ancestral homes. When I joined Sunday school, the themes of the songs we sung and the poems we recited carried so much weight and messages that indicated longing for a better future. Fast forward to the present day, I am reminded of the relevance of such powerful informal gatherings, which all made sense to me when we eventually gained our independence in 2011. The depth of women's influence and the power of their unified voices through the use of songs can be seen in the Bor United Women Association for Development's (BUWAD) patriotic and liberation songs documented on 10th July, 2011 in Nairobi, Kenya.⁶⁶

In the same spirit, women and girls in Mading-Bor are familiar with what other groups are doing and they collaborate from time to time, building positive synergies that are vital for the success of women movements, and to challenge systemic barriers that hinder their meaningful engagement. Speaking with a unified voice and combining their efforts allows women to be more effective, and influential. Women's experience with the Pibor and Pieri peace processes, as well as women-led organizations efforts to form a network, help not only to bring women together but also provides them with support in their communities and offers them better opportunities to understand the challenges that exist and how they can possibly intervene to mitigate them.

Indeed, there is a need to continuously advocate against gender-based violence and all forms of discrimination against women, invest in education, continuous capacity building opportunities, mentorship, information sharing and seminars that specifically target women. This will help to expand opportunities available for women to be at decision-making tables. The participation of women in mediation processes is critical, as women play a significant role in fostering an environment supportive of peace, both prior to and after signing formal peace agreements. If it were not for the patriarchal influence over the nature of peace and conflict resolution structures and institutions, which privileges the formal over the informal, women could potentially play a more prominent role as mediators and peace negotiators. This research found that women from the Dinka, Nuer and Murle communities recognize their shared and collective struggles as women/sisters, and do not see the other as enemies. Instead, their focus is on the issues that affect all of them, choosing to overlook or ignore personal grievances or community affiliations.

CHALLENGING PATRIARCHY

Patriarchy is a system of relationships, beliefs, and values embedded in political, social, and

65 Lorna James, Public Lecture, Catholic University of South Sudan, 2019.

66 Bor United Women Association for Development – Patriots, https://youtu.be/_YsbBzOWmfA?si=4QoXWtNg1IpFJ-8Lu.

economic systems that structure gender inequality between men and women.⁶⁷ In patriarchy, the imbalances in opportunities are quite visible, and the historical and social norms governing acceptable roles for women continue to intensify existing inequalities face by women. The exclusion of women in South Sudan is a deep-rooted issue that is embedded in our social structures and permeates our political system and institutions. Deconstructing how we perceive ourselves as women and countering how we are perceived and represented in these social structures and systems is key. Labelling women as minority group or victims is part of the problem, as it socializes girls and women to accept being considered less or not deserving of anything of importance beyond the domestic roles that we are socially assigned to. In addition, when women's domestic and cultural contributions are overlooked and undervalued, even by aid workers and donors, this can render them, and their contributions, invisible. Often, it is only when women generate cash income, participate in public decision making or secure formal employment is their work seen and valued. This same social conditioning influences who we see as a leader, who is deserving of recognition and reward, and who should be respected, seen and heard in public spaces. This can create fear in women who want to step outside of their traditional roles or result in women lacking confidence in themselves. Many women have internalized the societal ideal of a South Sudanese woman, where wanting better for oneself or being ambitious feel like a rebellious act, so they let go of their dreams and aspirations and conform to what society expects of them.

The women who were part of this research and others that were not featured here are proof of women's capabilities and willingness to break societal barriers, if the issue is important to them. They are role models who are reclaiming spaces for women and negotiating with patriarchy. Things like family structures, supportive environment, education and autonomy to organize and make decisions are vital for nurturing women's talents and building their careers as crucial actors not only in peace and conflict resolution but in all other sectors.

THE POWER OF ROLE MODELS

There is a need to mentor and encourage as many women as possible to assume leadership positions in various sectors. Women collaborate to uplift each other and organize to affect changes as a collective. When the women interviewed reflected on their leadership trajectories one element was consistently emphasized: the challenge of leading as a woman, especially when holding a key position in a male-dominated space. While their experiences were different, many of the women spoken to challenge the idea that their only role was domestic, or that they lacked the necessary skills, knowledge, experience and expertise to lead. Negative perceptions of women as leaders have not only undermined their confidence, it has also discouraged many of them from seeking to advance their leadership careers or support and nurture other women who aspire to be leaders. Women remain cognizant of the fact that their positions in their communities and the nation at large matters, regardless of the hurdles they face. By refusing to

67 Catherine J Nash, 'Patriarchy' in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, eds. Rob Kitchin and Nigel Thrift, Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, 2009, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/B9780080449104009822>.

accept the role dictated by culture, the women who participated in this study are role models for other girls and women.

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

The majority of South Sudanese women continue to live in poverty, often due to poverty because of unequal opportunities, high illiteracy rates and the lack of marketable skills. Given the expectation that women will prioritize meeting their family's needs, women are often prevented from engaging in public life: if women are struggling for their own and their children's day-to-day survival, it will be difficult for them to be meaningfully involved in contributing into crucial matters such as peace and conflict resolution. Many women experience economic violence, which denies a woman's right to access or control of resources, including time, money, employment opportunities, training, transportation, food and clothing. Social norms in South Sudan can prohibit a woman doing specific types of jobs, allowing men to refuse to pay bills or maintain his children, or deny women the right to own, inherit or control land.

Furthermore, participating in peace conferences is not cheap, and most women do not have the financial means to attend crucial meetings in the next payam, let alone in the state or national capitals. Women are also largely left out of economic decision-making processes, the result of which can negatively affect every aspect of their life, especially when natural and man-made calamities such as floods, droughts and war set in. Financial inclusion is key for women to unlock their full potential and be able to meaningfully engage in peace processes. Gender inequalities are structural and systemic, and they need to be redressed by being critically analyzed and reviewed using a gender and intersectional lens. Only then will it be possible to shift policies and institutions alike so that they can be more equitable and give equal consideration to women's voice, needs and concerns.

CONCLUSION

I conclude this report with a song composed by Akuang Maketh and sung by a cultural women's group from Bor county in Mading-Bor in May 2023 during this research. The song is a powerful call for women's mobilization for peace. It is also an appreciation song to some of the leaders who erected the eagle statue, which is a symbol of national unity in Malual Chaat, the place where the liberation struggle began in 1983.

The composer was inspired by the monument or the statue. With her song, she takes us down memory lane, reciting every bit of history and the lived experiences of Malual E Chaat, particularly Amiie where the liberation struggle begun. She could not contain her excitement after witnessing such a memorial site alongside her fellow Anyidi Women. As such, she immediately took advantage of that event and using it as an opportunity to inform, educate and mobilize her fellow women from various payam(s) in Bor, Twic East and Duk counties to visit the site and witness the eagle monument for themselves. Her song celebrates the freedom fighters that made the independence possible. In that regard, it is safe to say that women have a lot to say—their lived experiences are South Sudan's history, and their songs are important for transmitting knowledge and keeping their history alive.

SONG

(First Verse): Oh, Kolnyang de Bol Daughters, lets us visit the area of Malual Chaat to witness what the son of Ayom Door has done by erecting the eagle of the soldiers,

The women of Makuach payam, lets us visit the area of Malual Chaat to witness what the son of Ayom Door has done by erecting the eagle of the soldiers,

The women of Baidit, lets us visit the area of Malual Chaat to witness what the son of Ayom Door has done by erecting the eagle of the soldiers,

The Women of Jalle payam, lets us visit the area of Malual Chaat to witness what the son of Ayom Door has done by erecting the eagle of the soldiers,

The Women of Twic East, lets us visit the area of Malual Chaat to witness what the son of Ayom Door has done by erecting the eagle of the soldiers,

*What the son of Aler has done, by erecting the eagle monument for the soldiers,
What Dau Majok has done by erecting the eagle monument for the soldiers,*

(Chorus): *Oh, you Duk Deng! What have you heard? Duk Padiet What have you heard?*
(x 3)

EEh Anyidi woman has gone to visit the eagle that has been drawn(erected) alongside the road in Malual e Chaat where the liberation struggle began in the area call amiie..... (x 3)

(Second verse): *Dior Kot Kolnyang——Women of Kolnyang payam, lets us visit the area of Malual Chaat to witness what the son of Ayom Door has done by erecting the eagle of the soldiers*

Dior kot Makuach——Women of Makuach paya, lets us visit the area of Malual Chaat to witness what the son of Ayom Door has done by erecting the eagle of the soldiers

Dior E Baaidit———Women of Baaidit payam, lets us visit the area of Malual Chaat to witness what the son of Ayom Door has done by erecting the eagle of the soldiers

Dior e Kot Jalle.....Women of Jalle payam, lets us visit the area of Malual Chaat to witness what the son of Ayom Door has done by erecting the eagle of the soldiers,

Dior Twic East———Women of Twic East, lets us visit the area of Malual Chaat to witness what the son of Ayom Door has done by erecting the eagle of the soldiers,

*What the son of Aleer has done, by erecting the eagle monument for the soldiers,
What Dau Majok has done by erecting the eagle monument for the soldiers,*

(Chorus): *Oh, you Duk Deng! What have you heard? Duk Padiet What have you heard?*
(x 3)

EEh Anyidi woman has gone to visit the eagle that has been drawn(erected) alongside the road in Malual e Chaat where the liberation struggle began in the area call amiie.....

(x 2)⁶⁸



Some of the research participants at JWA compound during the validation phase in Mading-Bor

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Research participants during validation workshop at JWA conference hall in Mading-Bor



Jonglei Women Association representatives, Mading-Bor



Women representatives from the Bor PoC/IDP camp



Rift Valley Institute
MAKING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE WORK