Forging a Shared Future

Women Resilience, Recovery and Stabilization in Gbudue State

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1. Introduction

While the massive mobilization by both faith-based and traditional leaders succeeded in bringing the Gbudue State[1] government and warring parties to the table to sign the State Peace Agreement in 2017, the puzzle remains as to what really triggered the conflict in the state that was once considered the most peaceful and a bread basket of South Sudan. What happened to the pre-existing structures that used to cement together the Azande people?[2] And what type of recovery, resilience and stabilization mechanisms would be relevant at this time, specifically for women and children who bear a disproportionate burden of the effects of conflict.

2. About Gbudue State: The Socio-Economic, Political and Cultural Facets

Gbudue State is one of the 32 States of South Sudan.[3] It borders Tombura State to the west, the Democratic Republic of Congo to the south, Maridi State to the east, and Western Lakes State to the northeast. It is administratively divided into two old counties, Yambio and Nzara, and occupies an area of 15,313 sq km with a population of 269,907 of whom 50.9 percent are male and 49 percent are female (mid-2016 population).[4] Gbudue State is inhabited by mainly the Azande, Balanda and Bongo.

The state's literacy rate is not known but for the former Western Equatoria State (WES) the literacy rate among the age group of 15 to 24 years was 14.3 percent for young women.[5] Access to adequate health care remains a major challenge. Infant mortality and the mater-

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1 Gbudwe State is one of the 28 states of South Sudan created in 2015 after President Salva Kiir issued a decree establishing 28 states, expanding the previous 10 constitutionally established states to 28. It is located in the Greater Equatoria Region and it is part of the former state of Western Equatoria.

2 The Azande people are culturally diverse group of peoples (nations) that are predominantly in the Greater Equatoria region of South Sudan and live partly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and partly in the Central African Republic.

3 The Second Republican Order for the year 2017. See also *Juba Monitor – Tuesday Jan 17, 2017 vol. 7 issue No.963 – 12 pages* (www.jubamonitor.com). The Second Republican Order for the year 2017

4 National Bureau of Statistics (2015). Population Projection for South Sudan by Payam from 2015- 2020.

5 Ministry of Health and National Bureau of Statistics (2010). South Sudan Household Survey 2010, Final Report. Juba, South Sudan. Available from http://www.ssnbss.org/sites/default/files/2016-08/Sudan_Household_Health_Survey_Report_2010.pdf [Accessed 22st Dec 2018].

nal mortality rate remain high (2,327 deaths per 100,000 live births).[6]

In terms of agricultural production, the state falls in the green belt agro-ecological zone, 550-650m above sea level and has a generally wet climate with long, reliable rainy seasons with annual rainfall reaching 1400 mm and more, which is highest in the whole of South Sudan. It enjoys a very long growing period (March–December): 99 percent of the land is prime agricultural land, suitable for agro-pastoral and forest products. Depending on the season, the temperature ranges from 17° to 30° centigrade, which provides the state with the potential to be the food basket for the rest of South Sudan and to produce export market oriented crops. Nearly 90 percent of the population is involved in crop farming. Yet, the frequent displacement of the community due to violence and insecurity – especially over the last few years – has aggravated the low production of food crops and increased reliance on imported food from neighboring countries.[7] Inadequate market information, limited access to microfinance institutions and support from cooperatives/or agricultural banks too, have had a negative bearing on the support and services rendered to farmers.

Materially, many parts of the area and infrastructures such as roads and bridges, schools, health centers, agricultural plantations of cash crops and the Nzara industrial complex require substantial restoration. Most roads and bridges in Gbudue State are dilapidated and not passable, especially during rainy seasons. The present condition of roads hampers resettlement of Internally Displaced People (IDPs), rehabilitation and future development.

Women, Peace and Security

In terms of women, peace and security, there is a positive political will, but limited social welfare services available to address the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable, including poor women, widows, the disabled and children,

There continues to be underrepresentation of women, despite the enactment of gender responsive policies and laws.

returning individuals and families, internally displaced people and refugees. While the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security emphasizes the inclusion of women in all decision-making structures in the post-conflict reconstruction period, the implementation of the resolution has been lagging throughout South Sudan. There continues to be underrepresentation of women despite the enactment of gender responsive policies and laws. Even though many authors reject the assumption that women's political presence is sufficient for the substantive representation of women, they agree that women's political presence is a necessary end, in and of itself.[8]

As homemakers and care givers, women bear a huge workload hindering their effective participation in the social, economic and political decision-making that affects their lives. Traditional practices such as early marriage, earlier pregnancies and other forms of violence, effectively subordinate women and girls and restrict their efforts to contribute to development. Many young women are exposed to elevated risk of maternal death, and contraceptive use is practically non-existent or insufficient. Youth friendly services on adolescent sexual reproductive health and rights services are minimal. Compounding this, the majority of women have very limited access to basic healthcare services needed during pregnancy and after birth; more than 80 percent of deliveries occur at home and mostly at the hands of traditional birth attendants. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Gbudue State, which was part of Western Equatoria State (WES), is 6.8 percent, higher than the country level, estimated at 3 percent.[9] The higher rate is attributed to limited knowledge about HIV/AIDS and prevailing high-risk behaviors, such as multiple concurrent sexual partners, polygamy without condom use, as well as low school enrollment and poverty.

8 Bazugba, A. 2014. "The Politics of Gender Quotas: What Accounts for the Relative Success of Gender Quotas in the first South Sudanese Elections?" University of Edinburgh.

 O'Neil, D.A. al. 2015. A Framework for Developing Women Leaders: Applications to Executive Coaching. The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 2015, Vol. 51(2) 253–276; Celis, K and Childs, S. (2008). Introduction: The Descriptive and Substantive Representation of Women: New Directions. Parliamentary Affairs Vol. 61 No. 3, 2008, 419–425

9 Medecins Sans Frontieres (2015). Maternal and Child Health in Yambio, South Sudan. Available from https://www.msf.org/gallery-maternal-and-child-health-yambio-south-sudan [Accessed 22nd Dec 2018]

6 Medecins Sans Frontieres (2015). Maternal and Child Health in Yambio, South Sudan. Available from https://www.msf.org/gallery-maternal-and-child-health-yambio-south-sudan [Accessed 22nd Dec 2018]

7 Famine Early Warning Systems Network (2018). South Sudan Food Security Outlook. Feb to Sept 2018

For example, although the situation of women from 2016, shows that the maternal mortality rate has decreased marginally from 2,054 (2006) to 789 per 100,000 live births,[10] comprehensive and basic emergency obstetric care services are limited with up to 57 percent of health facilities non-functional in most conflict-affected areas. A majority of women (87 percent) deliver their babies at home. Amidst critical shortage of human resources for health, skilled birth attendance stands as low as 11 percent.

Family planning uptake is low (contraceptive prevalence rate is 4.5 percent for all methods and 1.7 percent for modern methods). The teenage pregnancy rate is exceptionally high (300/1,000 for girls aged 15-19 years), attributable to the high rate of child marriage in which 40 percent of girls are married before the age of 18.[11] South Sudan has a generalized HIV epidemic with an adult prevalence of 2.6 percent. The epidemic is geographically concentrated in the southern states, with a prevalence of 6.8 percent in Western Equatoria, 3.1 percent in Central Equatoria, and 4.0 percent in Eastern Equatoria.[12]

In terms of gender and security issues, there is a low understanding of security threats and limited representation and participation in peacebuilding and conflict prevention and mitigation despite the fact that women are the most affected. Besides, the proliferation of small arms that contribute to making public spaces dangerous for women and children, landmines and other unexplosive ordnances discourage them from engaging in productive activities such as farming, political and public decision-making. Discussions with women indicate that women prefer to resolve tensions within the community amicably by consulting the conflicting parties, as opposed to men who resort to fighting and threats.[13] This suggests the

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importance of women's priorities to overall peace building, recovery and stabilization efforts.

The Role of Women in Various Sectors

The critical roles played by women in formal and informal sectors contribute significantly to peacebuilding and development. Studies have shown that South Sudanese women play a central role in society as well as in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Despite the independence of South Sudan in 2011, women's post-conflict status is among the lowest of all groups in South Sudan, regardless of ethnic background.[14] During the referendum on self-determination, South Sudanese women were mobilized to educate community members about the referendum in addition to leading voting centers in registering and making sure the election was transparent, fair and credible.[15]

While in most cases those in formal policy agencies (operating within parliaments, governments and ministries) are widely recognized, some studies suggest that other actors may be as critical or more critical than formal political representatives.[16] By exploring the role played by women's movement actors/women's associations, operating as part of civil society or faith-based organizations, and as integrated parts of political parties, findings indicate that there are numerous activities undertaken by these groups as noted elsewhere.[17] For example, these groups work together and continue to provide a catalytic forum for women to freely raise, discuss and address issues affecting the lives of their communities. Voicing women's concerns related to gender-based violence,

10 World Bank: South Sudan Health Rapid Results Project: P127187- Implementation Status Results Report , June 29th 2017.

11 The Republic of South Sudan. National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2010). Sudan Household Health Survey (SHHS) Report. Available from http://www.ssnbss.org/home/document/survey/sudan-household-health-survey [Accessed 22st Dec 2018].

12 Southern Sudan Antenatal Care Clinics Sentinel Surveillance Report, MOH, 2012.

13 State Consultation interview with women's groups held in Yambio 28-

29/01/2018.

14 Zambakari, C. (2013), The Role of Women in the Nation and State Building Projects in South Sudan, *Sudan Studies Association Bulletin (Spring Issue) 31*(1), 12-17.

15 Ibid., pp. 10

16 Lovenduski et al. (eds), (2005). State Feminism and Political Representation, Cambridge University Press; Mazur, A. (ed.), (2001). State Feminism, Women's Movements and Job Training:Making Democracies Work in the Global Economy, Routledge

17 Celis, K, Childs, S. Kantola, J. and Krook,M.L (2008). 'Rethinking Women's Substantive Representation', Representation. Special issue on the Substantive Representation of Women. London: Routledge.

harmful traditional practices, insecurity and unfavorable economic policies, among others, not only helps to prioritize and construct women's interests and the conceptions of the female citizen, but will also encourage them from not shying away from politics and agree to engage in intra-party strategies as experienced elsewhere.[18] Equally, the roles women played during the liberation movement as peace builders, as caretakers of families, the wounded and elderly, and subsequently as mobilizers for voting in the referendum of January 2011, contributed to the recognition of their status in political processes.[19]

Policy and Legal Framework

The Republic of South Sudan has progressive laws and policies on women and gender equality that recognize 25 percent gender quotas for women's representation. These include the Transitional Constitutional of South Sudan (TCSS 2011), the Gender Policy, the Elections Act (2012), the South Sudan Development Plan and the National Action Plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325, among others. However, this requirement which "stipulates that at least 25 percent of seats and positions in each legislative and each executive organ of the state needs to be allocated to women as part of Affirmative Action designed to redress historical injustices"[20] has not been met. Recently, the Revitalized Agreement on Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) has adopted 35 percent representation at all decision-making levels. Yet, the implementation and enforcement continue to lag behind due to cultural barriers, political will, a lack of oversight mechanisms, a limited understanding and poor interpretation.

Political and Community Protection Mechanisms: What Went Wrong?

While the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement

(CPA) on January 9th, 2005, brought peace in most parts of the country, this was disrupted by attacks and invasion by insurgents from the neighboring country of Uganda, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), as early as 2006, while the gains achieved after independence in 2011 were again plunged into a brutal civil conflict in December 2013, triggered by a political dispute between factions of the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M). Since then, the state has continued to encounter insecurity and challenges, resulting in the displacement and devastation of her citizens, of which women and children are the most affected.

In 2008, the U.S.-backed Operation Lightning Thunder to crush the LRA[21] was launched, but the strike caused by the LRA's persevered, resulting in a loosely organized local militia[22] called the Arrow Boys, which formed in Western Equatoria State (WES) to protect civilians from further attacks by the LRA. The Arrow Boys mainly used arrows with some self-made guns that were provided to them by ex-combatants. Although they succeeded in pushing out the LRA in 2010, the group did not disband. They continued with patrolling in the bushes along the borders of the three countries while collecting special tax or food-in-kind from the community for their sustenance. Meanwhile, government initiatives to support and recompense the Arrow Boys who drove away the LRA did not materialize. As a consequence, distrust, rebellion and a claim for political recognition set in, leading to a formation of South Sudan National Liberation Army (SSNLA). This took the state back to conflict and sporadic attacks that destabilized life and the livelihoods of the entire society.

With continued intercommunal, resource-based conflicts, and tensions in the border areas, there was an increased death toll, occurrences of sexual violence and displacement. The protracted war brought a culture of violence and the proliferation of small arms, which in turn perpetuated more violence. Similarly, the capacity of local peace infrastructure parties – including traditional and religious institutions and peace committees – has been undermined by emerging youth groups who are energetic, defensive and use fire arms to seize resources and endanger citizens' lives. However, var-

18 Inglehart, Ronald, and Pippa Norris. 2003. Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural

Change Around the World. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.; Lawless, Jennifer L., and Richard L. Fox. 2005. It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Political Office. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

19 Ali, N. (2011), Gender and State building in South Sudan, Special Report, Washington: USA.; Faria, C., (2011). Gendering War and Peace in South Sudan. The Elision and Emergence of Women. The Association of Concerned Africa Scholars (ACAS). Bulletin no.86: "The Sudan's: Which Way?" November, pp.20-29

20 Zambakari, C. (2013), The Role of Women in the Nation and State Building Projects in South Sudan, *Sudan Studies Association Bulletin (Spring Issue) 31*(1), pp.6.

21 The Lord's Resistance Army: End Game? Africa Report N°182 – 17 November 2011; International Crisis Group, working to Prevent Conflicts Worldwide.

22 Non-state security providers and Political formation in South Sudan: The Case of Western Equatoria's Arrow Boys; Centre for Security Governance, No. 4/ April 2016

ious reports show that the negotiation initiatives by the state government and religious leaders succeeded in making the youth sign the peace deal with the government and lay down their arms: At least 1900 had already been trained and re-integrated into the regional army by the end of January 2018.[23]

The spillover of armed hostilities that erupted in Juba in December 2013 hit the state in different parts. Yambio and Nzara counties experienced desertions and infighting among rival military groups, together with increasing youth and militia mobilization, which led to high levels of insecurity and massive displacement. At the same time, the spillover brought in some tribes, such as the Jur Ber Community, from other states who forcefully wanted to settle in Gbudue State. The dispute over land spurred communal misunderstandings, ethnic conflicts and disassociation, hate speech and competition over resources and employment. As a consequence, incidents of targeted/revenge attacks, loss of lives and displacement, mental stress and fear have risen in Yambio, the capital city of Gbudue State.[24] Prices of food and fuel have sky rocketed; markets have fragmented; and there has been limited movement of people undertaking hunting and fishing.

Equally, the renewed fighting in July 2016 affected the livelihood of groups in Gbudue State. With two militia groups in place – the Sudan People's Liberation Army In-Opposition (SPLA-IO) and South Sudan National Liberation Army (SSNLA) – all the six payams of Yambio County were affected.

The state peace initiatives involving government and religious leaders succeeded in bringing the SSNLA to Yambio cantonment areas from the bush, and in ensuring the SSNLA signed the peace deal and was integrated into the national army (SPLA). However, other sources of political tension remain, which includes the presence of ex-combatants who would like to join other organized forces and returnees. Among the returned Arrow Boys are boys and girls who need to be given

skills as they have not been absorbed in the SPLA. To prevent further socioeconomic sliding down and to mitigate some of the adverse development impacts, building resilience and tangible stabilization and recovery interventions are of vital importance for development.[25] This approach will prevent the fall back or a spillover of the conflict to other relatively peaceful areas.

The results of a rapid assessment and consultations with state authorities and other key stakeholders in February 2018 indicate interventions areas that could benefit Gbudue State under the resilience/stabilization/recovery grouping. These are categorized into five main areas:

1. Consolidation of local government and traditional authority. Since these structures are closer to the people, empowering them with increased knowledge and skills will expedite peacebuilding initiatives by a trickle down to the community. By strengthening police, judicial and prisons services, the rule of law will be maintained.
2. Rebuilding and empowering communities. This includes the provision of humanitarian assistance to the conflict affected areas, IDPs, returnees and their resettlements, as well as the establishment of community empowerment and development programs in which basic service delivery including health and education will be provided.
3. Revitalization of the economy through: a production and marketing enhancement program; infrastructure rehabilitation and urban improvement services; and the protection of the environment and natural resource management program.
4. Peacebuilding, reconciliation and social cohesion. This can be achieved through the provision of common social services that bring together communities from various backgrounds with the objective of sharing and achieving a common purpose such as education and recreation. In the process, information may be shared publicly, and education and communication materials distributed to enlighten the communities.
5. Counseling program; demobilization and re-integration of ex-combatants program.
6. A number of people have been traumatized due to the nature of the prolonged conflicts. Providing a safe space to talk, listen and allow them to find solutions

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23 Interview with Paramount Chief of Gbudue State – 27/01/2018; Interview with the Governor 28/01/2018; State Consultation workshop in Yambio 28-29/01/2018.

24 UNMISS and UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (2018). Violations And Abuses Against Civilians In Gbudue And Tambura States (Western Equatoria) April-August 2018 report. Published on 18 October 2018 Available from https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/SS/ReportWesternEquatoria-17Oct2018.pdf (Accessed20th Nov 2018)

25 Consultation workshop for Gbudue State authorities and intellectuals 28-29/01/2018, Yambio, Tourist Hotel.

to their problems is vital in assisting them to come out of shock and enabling them to move on with their lives.

Conclusion

Based on women's historical participation in peacebuilding processes, it is clear that the sustainability of the networks and women's organizations rely on an agreed agenda for women, peace and development, and therefore it is possible to collaborate beyond and above party lines. The associations have been able to successfully work as an important instrument for gender responsive laws, diplomacy, and legislation on critical issues faced by women through legislative measures, sensitization and advocacy, and knowledge sharing through organizing training, meetings, workshops and seminars. Establishing alliances, within and outside the state, for building a critical mass and for developing joint strategic moves regarding women's empowerment have been some of the most successful strategies adopted by women's association. Equally, civil society organizations and female activists are regularly invited by members of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus at the national level for consultations on key issues.

The different roles women play inform the substantive representation of women that is critical for national peacebuilding. The advocacy and lobbying for gender responsive laws and the conflict mediation roles of women are likely to take place at different, and often, interacting levels (supra-national, national, regional and local) and in different and interacting fora (within legislatures, executives, semi-autonomous non-governmental organizations or civil society). Furthermore, the substantive representation of women is likely to take place in contexts that can be considered to a lesser or greater extent as enabling or constraining. This is in line with other studies, which found that where there is a supportive women's movement and networks inside and outside of parliament, women seeking to influence policies ideologically consistent with the governing party, are more likely to enable feminized change.[26] Since one of the significant landmark achievements by women has been establishment of women's associations/organizations and women's parliamentarians caucus in the state, their inclusion in the design, planning and implementation of peace agreements and in the resilience, recovery and stabilization programs should not be overlooked if the success of the UNSCR 1325 is to be realized at the state and national levels.

About the Author

Angelina Mattijo-Bazugba holds a PhD in social policy, from the University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom; an MA in rural development and a Bachelor of Science in horticulture, both from Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA), Tanzania; an advanced diploma in sexual and reproductive health and rights, Lund University, Sweden, and a diploma in peace building and conflict management from LECIA, University of Accra, Ghana.

26 Childs, S. and Krook, M.L (2005).The Substantive Representation of Women: Rethinking the Critical Mass Debate, Paper presented at the 2005 APSA Annual Meeting, Washington.; Mansbridge, J. (1999). "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes'" *Journal of Politics* 61 (3): 628–57.