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Beyond participation: Rethinking women's engagement in South Sudan's transitional context

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ABSTRACT

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda is reshaping women's roles in peace and security. In South Sudan, the WPS Agenda has gained traction by raising awareness and supporting women's participation in peace processes. However, the implementation of the Agenda and gender-mainstreaming remain superficial. To understand the representation and (missed) opportunities for South Sudanese women in peace processes, we used purposive sampling to select eight peace agreements from 1972 to 2025. Using critical discourse theory, we analysed these agreements to deconstruct language, reveal inequalities, and identify opportunities. We argue that peace agreements developed after the adoption of South Sudan's WPS National Action Plan (NAP) in 2015 would contain greater references to and opportunities for women. Our findings reveal that despite the increased inclusion of women after the WPS NAP, peace agreements continue to reinforce patriarchal values and power imbalances. This underscores the urgent need to implement the WPS Agenda and for women's groups and civil society actors to leverage WPS NAPs as advocacy tools for gender-mainstreaming in future peace agreements. Aligning discourses in future agreements with the WPS NAP would contribute to ensuring women's meaningful contribution and supporting the achievement of sustainable peace.

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South Sudan; women peace and security (WPS); peace agreements; critical discourse analysis; gender representation

Introduction

The violent outbreak in South Sudan in 2013 between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Government (SPLM-IG) and the main armed opposition group, the Sudan People's Liberation Army-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO), increased insecurity among South Sudanese women. A report by the African Union Commission of Inquiry (2014) reveals accounts of sexual violence, including forced abortions, gang rapes, abductions, and sexual slavery, and underscores how conflict exacerbates violence experienced by women (Rubini et al., 2023). The adoption of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (Intergovermental Authority on Development 2015) and later the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (Intergovermental Authority on Development 2018) aimed to mitigate the implications of conflict on women. These agreements introduced a

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women's bloc in negotiations and emphasised the need to respond to cases of sexual exploitation, harassment, and violence against women and girls (Swaine et al., 2018).

To respond to the implications of conflict on women, in 2000, the United Nations Security Council adopted the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), the first of ten resolutions that form the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda. Informed by four main pillars, the Agenda calls for the prevention of conflict and gender-based insecurities, women's full and equal participation in peace and security decision-making, their protection, and the implementation of measures to support their relief and recovery efforts (Piras, 2025). South Sudan adopted the WPS Agenda in 2015, with the launch of its first WPS National Action Plan (NAP), followed by a second iteration in 2023 (Republic of South Sudan, 2015; United Nations South Sudan, 2023). The country's NAP encourages women's leadership and active participation in conflict resolution, promoting an inclusive and equitable approach to conflict prevention and conflict reconstruction processes (Republic of South Sudan, 2015). Despite these objectives, the country's first WPS NAP encountered bureaucratic obstacles, contributing to its failure. Heebøll (2024) suggests that the lack of political will and state government officials' refusal to reform existing legal and customary laws that encourage gender inequality contributed to the failure of implementation, reinforcing that tokenistic engagement of women is inadequate to achieve the outcomes of the Agenda. This also raises concerns about the likely success of the current WPS NAP.

Studies show that the inclusion of women in peace processes increases the likelihood of attaining and sustaining peace (Aduda & Liesch, 2022; Nazary et al., 2020; O'Reilly et al., 2015), and the integration of gendered perspectives in peace policy drafts and agreements is a necessity to ensure greater inclusion of women (Kabonesa, 2005; True & Riveros-Morales, 2019). Throughout South Sudan's history, peace agreements have frequently excluded women or involved them only in a tokenistic capacity, as seen in their limited role as signatories to the R-ARCSS. To promote their inclusion, South Sudanese women advocate for participation (Adeogun & Muthuki, 2018; Aduda & Liesch, 2022; Lopidia & Hall, 2020). However, they continue to experience marginalisation (Atem, 2024; Lemlemu, 2024; Mayen, 2013; Nyuon, 2021) and, when engaged due to gender quotas established in the R-ARCSS and in the Transitional Constitution of South Sudan, their meaningful participation and adherence to quotas are often disregarded (Lihiru, 2024).

While existing studies provide valuable knowledge about the obstacles experienced by South Sudanese women in their efforts to contribute to peace, there is little insight into the ways that women are positioned and represented in peace agreements and dialogues. Likewise, there is little knowledge of the patterns of exclusion and the potential opportunities afforded. Deconstructing texts and the analysis of language play a critical role in uncovering patterns of inequality and how these patterns are perpetuated through linguistic practices. This process provides an understanding of the narratives employed to justify excluding South Sudanese women in peace processes. We argue that peace agreements created after the development of the country's WPS NAP in 2015 have greater references to and propose opportunities for women's participation in peace processes. However, these documents will likely justify women's inclusion in peace processes through gendered roles in the local contexts, hence limiting meaningful participation and access to key political decision-making roles. We emphasise that these gendered representations perpetuate power imbalances and have adverse effects on the lives of South Sudanese women and the country's ability to achieve sustainable peace.

We further highlight that despite the challenges to implementing the country's WPS NAP, this document can serve as a strategic tool for women's groups and civil society. By advocating for discourse aligned with the WPS NAP, they can negotiate for the integration of gendered perspectives in future peace agreements. This approach will further promote the recognition of women's full capabilities and support the country's pursuit of sustainable peace. Our argument is structured into three sections. First, we provide an overview of women's representation in peace and security processes, their roles in peace and security activities in South Sudan, and the implementation of the WPS Agenda in South Sudan. In the second stage, we elucidate critical discourse theory, which underpins our analysis of peace agreements. Finally, we discuss the findings and their implications for policy and practice.

Literature review

Women's representation in peace and security processes

Women remain under-represented in peace and security processes in global organisations despite these organisations' roles in shaping and promoting global gendered norms. In a review of international organisations by Wright et al. (2020), major international organisations, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the United Nations (UN), have yet to appoint a woman as Secretary-General. Between 1992 and 2011, women constituted only 4% of signatories to peace agreements and less than 10% of peace negotiators in peace talks (UN Women, 2012). This underrepresentation reflects broader societal attitudes towards women in leadership roles. Women in the peace and security sphere are often perceived through the lens of traditional gender roles. They are frequently depicted as victims of violence and conflict, associated with vulnerability and the need for protection, whereas men are perceived as perpetrators and protectors (Aroussi, 2009; Sterner, 2017). For instance, the European Union (EU) has focused predominantly on women and girls, while placing less emphasis on men and boys' security needs (Wright et al., 2020). These gendered distinctions exacerbate the victimisation of women and obscure the complex dynamics of conflict, as well as the diverse experiences of people of all genders (Aroussi, 2009; Sterner, 2017).

Despite these obstacles, the representation of African women in leadership roles and their capacity to engage in peace and security activities have significantly improved in recent years. African women have broken significant barriers and become prominent heads of state. Between 2006 and 2025, six African women served as heads of state, including Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia (2006-2018), Joyce Banda of Malawi (2012–2024), Ameenah Gurib of Mauritius (2015-2018), Sahle-Work Zewde of Ethiopia (2018-2024), Samia Suluhu Hassan of Tanzania, and Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah of Namibia (Smith, 2025; Tripp, 2023). African women have also risen to the highest offices in the justice systems, which has created opportunities for their meaningful participation and contribution to key decision-making activities. For instance, the International Criminal Court (2021) appointed Fatou Bensouda from the Gambia as the Prosecutor from 2012 to 2021, and in Kenya, Martha Koome was appointed in 2021 as the country's Chief Justice (National Gender and Equality Commission, 2021). The inclusion of women in these roles and decision-making positions at the legislative, judicial and executive levels increases the likelihood of equal and inclusive outcomes (Ninyio, 2024).

While the WPS Agenda sometimes results in unintended gender biases, it offers transformative changes in conflict prevention, protection, and post-conflict reconstruction due to

its intersection with the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) (Hewitt, 2016). However, feminist perspectives are constrained by a focus on military solutions, referred to as the securitisation of the peace process. This approach links peacebuilding to defence and security concerns, thereby undermining feminists' demands for structural changes and gender equality (Jansson & Eduards, 2016). Likewise, the participation of women in peacekeeping, intended to enhance the efficacy and legitimacy of peace operations, does not necessarily advance support for women's rights but rather contributes to reducing sexism, as evidenced by the experiences of South African women peacekeepers (Huber, 2022).

Women's peace and security activities in South Sudan

In South Sudan, women play a crucial role in peacebuilding at the grassroots level. They actively promote inter-ethnic reconciliation and engage in the social reconstruction of society (Ali, 2023). Their roles extend beyond traditional boundaries, encompassing positions as combatants, peacemakers, peace advocates, caregivers, humanitarians, and members of formal peace delegations (Soma 2020). The diversity in the roles held by these actors underscores the significance of their capability to contribute to shaping national peace and security architectures, and their right to participation (Mai 2015). Women's civil society organisations (CSOs) and religious institutions in South Sudan have lobbied for gender-equal outcomes in the country. The EVE Organisation for Women's Development (EOWD) has advocated for the adoption of gender equality frameworks at the regional level and utilised regional gendered mechanisms developed by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to encourage a national adoption of the NAP (Lopidia & Hall, 2020). EOWD has extended its ability to support women through collaboration with local institutions such as the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC), which aids in monitoring, evaluating, and ensuring that government departments are held accountable for their WPS commitments (UN Women, 2022). Collaboration between civil society organisations has gained some success in achieving peace and security outcomes in the country. For instance, in 2015, the South Sudan government acknowledged the SSCC's role in fostering peace through the formation of the Committee for National Healing, Peace, and Reconciliation (2016).

The incorporation of gendered mechanisms within peace processes has gained momentum. During the negotiations of the 2015 ARCSS, women comprised only 15% of delegates, increasing to 25% during the 2018 negotiations of the R-ARCSS (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025; UN Women, 2012). This increase shows some acknowledgement of women's capability and agency to contribute to peaceful outcomes in South Sudan. Despite these improvements, women have only accounted for 11% of peace agreement signatories and represent 24% of government ministers in South Sudan's parliament (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025). While these figures show some progress, they remain insufficient. The participation of women has remained tokenistic, impacting their ability to influence peace outcomes. Conflicts continue to impact security outcomes and women's human rights in the country, and there is a lack of structured measures implemented to respond to their relief and recovery needs. As earlier mentioned, formal efforts towards WPS implementation in the country emerged in 2015 through women's civil society advocacy, with the country adopting its first WPS NAP for the 2015–2020 period (UN Women, 2022). Although CSOs in South Sudan have facilitated processes to increase women's engagement in peace and security processes, CSOs do not always represent or advocate for the needs of local women, whom they claim to support,

and can act as barriers to increasing gender-mainstreaming efforts (de Almagro, 2018; Pearce, 2000).

WPS implementation in South Sudan

The role of women and women's CSOs in the adoption of South Sudan's WPS NAP, as mentioned earlier, is evident in their role in aiding the mainstreaming of gender equality in the region. In 2011, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) adopted its first WPS Regional Action Plan (RAP) for the period of 2011–2015 (Intergovernmental Authority on Development, 2023). The RAP, which was adopted with the effort of women's groups, aims to address gender inequality in the region and strengthen the East African governments' current commitments to gender equality and their support for member states in advancing the objectives of the WPS Agenda (Intergovernmental Authority on Development, 2023). Women's groups in South Sudan, including the EOWD, supported the IGAD's gender-mainstreaming activities and further utilised regional gendered activities and support to advocate for the adoption of South Sudan's first WPS NAP (Lopidia & Hall, 2020).

Although successful in achieving adoption, the implementation of the NAP has fallen short of its intended purpose of preventing conflict in South Sudan, improving security outcomes, and ensuring the implementation of measures to protect and respond to women's security needs during and post-conflict (Lopidia & Hall, 2020). The lack of political will, a budget, and CSOs' experiences of implementation challenges have further contributed to the lack of successful implementation (Lopidia & Hall, 2020). These implementation obstacles resonate with the experiences of women's advocates engaged in peace and security activities globally (Lindsey, 2025). This includes patriarchal values that undermine and close opportunities for women's political engagement (Westendorf, 2018). For instance, men dominate political spaces, and when present, women's voices and experiences are often marginalised (International Alert, 2020). Despite the progress made by South Sudanese women in leadership spaces, the public and political space remains overwhelmingly male-dominated, and many women who operate in these spaces struggle to influence and promote a women's rights agenda and shape peace agreements, due to structural inequities. Obstacles to the WPS implementation efforts of women and women's groups in South Sudan are also evident globally, with a lack of political will and alignment between national plans and local needs as identified by civil society actors (Newby & O'Malley, 2021), minimal to no resourcing or support for women's groups (Hamilton et al., 2020), and the lack of strategic partnership and engagement of women (International Alert, 2020), contributing to limited success.

Methodology

Critical discourse theory provides insights into meaning production in texts and narratives by uncovering embedded political and social norms to better understand ideological manipulations, social powers and hegemony that underpin political and social contexts (Amerian and Fateme 2015; Rahimi & Sahragard, 2007). As 'language connects with the social through being the primary domain of ideology, and through being a site of, and a stake in struggles of power' (Fairclough, 1989, pp. 14–15), critical discourse theory highlights entities assigned agency, and those denied the capacity to act (Meyer, 2001). Assumptions and judgments that underlie gender discourse also shape the conditions that create opportunities for certain individuals (Van Dijk, 2015). The application of critical discourse theory provides

insight into inequalities experienced by South Sudanese women, the agency ascribed, the opportunities afforded, and the characteristics and assumptions that define women's roles in South Sudan's peace processes. Critical discourse theory will demonstrate how South Sudan's WPS texts perpetuate the very limitations of the WPS Agenda, including tokenistic inclusion, protection-centred framing, and restricted agency. This will show how language contributes to the persistent gap between women's representation and meaningful participation. Although women can participate in achieving peace (Aduda & Liesch, 2022; Nazary et al., 2020), we hypothesise that socially constructed gendered attitudes assume that South Sudanese women are passive, dependent and fragile, and will contribute to minimal references or recognition of their role in peace agreements. When included, women are likely to be positioned as supporters of the actions proposed by their male colleagues or actors to be protected.

We further highlight that with the adoption of South Sudan's WPS NAP, women will be portrayed as having greater agency and recognised as local peace actors capable of supporting peace processes through their nurturing roles. This discourse is unlikely to align with the country's WPS NAP or the principles of the WPS Agenda. South Sudan has experienced civil unrest since the mid-1950s and has developed eight declarations and peace agreements as frameworks in an effort to achieve sustainable peace. The country's first peace agreement, the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement, was signed on 27 February 1972 and aimed to achieve peace in the region by establishing the autonomy of Southern Sudan, integrating rebel actors into government security mechanisms, promoting economic and resource development in the region and establishing democratic processes in South Sudan (Shinn 2004). As a landmark agreement and the first of many to achieve little success, the Addis Ababa Agreement failed due to increased economic and security disparities, ongoing conflict over resources, and the Nimeiry government's decision to divide the country into three regions (Shinn 2004).

To understand how women in the country are represented, including the qualities, characteristics, and opportunities ascribed to them in South Sudanese peace agreements, purposive sampling was applied to select eight agreements developed between 1972 and 2025. In each document, we analysed the frequency (see Figure 1) and context in which women are

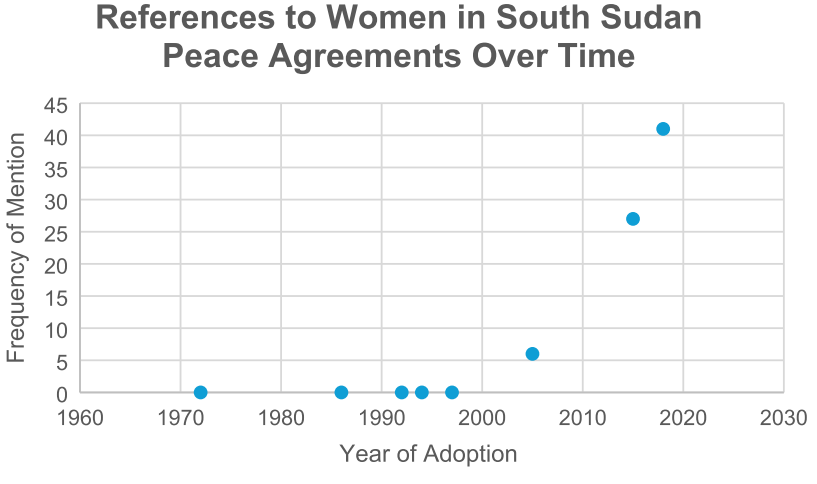

Figure 1. References to women in South Sudan peace agreements over time.

mentioned, thematically analysed the roles assigned and opportunities excluded, and critically assessed whether the language used empowers or diminishes women's potential and their implications. A total of four themes were found during the analysis. Below, we provide a discussion and analysis of these themes.

Results

Limited references to and engagement of women in peace processes

Initially excluded, women's contribution to peace agreements has improved since the adoption of the country's WPS NAP in 2015; however, their roles remain gendered in ways that sustain inequalities. Peace agreements developed before 2015 (Addis Ababa Agreement on the Problem of South Sudan, 1972, Koka Dam Declaration, 1986, Abuja I Sudanese Peace Conference, 1992, Abuja II Sudanese Peace Conference, 1993, and the Khartoum Peace Agreement, 1997) make reference to the engagement of security groups, and specifically name domestic and international male leaders who participated in peace dialogues that led to the development of these agreements or contributed to signing them into effect. However, references to domestic or international women and women's groups are excluded in these documents. For instance, the Khartoum Peace Agreement provides a list of male actors representing the South Sudan Independence Movement/Army (SSIM/A), the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM/A), and regional and international male actors who participated in its development as witnesses. Likewise, references to security actors involved in the agreement's development and implementation default to male identities. For example, the Addis Ababa Agreement on the Problem of South Sudan states, 'the People's Armed Forces in the Southern Region shall consist of a national force called the Southern Command composed of 12,000 officers and men, of whom 6,000 shall be citizens from the region and 6,000 from outside the region' (UN Peacemaker, 1972, 10). The exclusion and lack of recognition of women as capable security actors within these documents reflect and reinforce perceptions of women as lacking the capacity and skill to engage in peace dialogues, achieve security, and align with patriarchal Sudanese societies' values, which position women's perspectives and needs as an afterthought of peace processes (on the impact of patriarchal values on women's exclusion from peace and security processes, see Akbari & True, 2024). Iwilade (2011) argues that patriarchal traditions alone do not explain women's exclusion; in Sudan, however, patriarchal values appear to have a greater impact than authoritarian dynamics. Peace agreements in South Sudan have primarily focused on addressing religious, ethnic, and racial tensions and promoting reconciliation between opposing sides. However, they often overlook the gendered dynamics that sustain unequal outcomes for women, despite the significant contributions of figures such as Angelina Teny during the 2015 and 2018 peace processes (on Teny and other women's roles in South Sudan peacebuilding efforts, see Bazugba, 2024; Lopidia & Hall, 2020). Hence, it positions women's needs and roles in peace activities as subordinate to the overarching issues between the parties. Women's representation under the 2018 R-ARCSS has largely been symbolic, with powerful political actors dictating their roles and responsibilities, thereby limiting their capacity to effect meaningful political change.

Women were first recognised in a peace agreement in 2005, with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) for Sudan, making six references to women, their right to marriage and acknowledgement of their human rights as outlined in the United Nations Declaration

of Human Rights (UDHR) (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). However, this agreement excludes them from further discourses on peacebuilding activities, including activities to prepare and implement agreed initiatives, as they are not recognised as active stakeholders within political parties. The inclusion of women within this document and the emphasis on their marriage rights reflect religious tensions between the Muslim majority North and Christian majority South, regarding religious doctrines that prohibit non-Muslims from marrying Muslims. The CPA acknowledges the social and religious tensions between Muslims and other groups and attempts to address them by emphasising adherence to the UDHR and women's right to marry without interference. However, these efforts are undermined by deep-rooted socio-cultural and religious divides between the north and south, shaped by entrenched social norms and historical tensions reinforced through the manipulation of religious texts and ideologies (Amerian and Fateme, 2014; Rahimi & Sahragard, 2007). While peace agreements make subtle references to the UDHR, they lack substantive mechanisms for implementation and fail to ensure women's inclusion or address the gendered dimensions of the conflict, despite women's roles as both perpetrators and victims. Moreover, the focus on married women's rights confines women to the private sphere, overlooking their potential as active contributors to peacebuilding. This focus on married women's rights implies that their relationships with male counterparts and adherence to traditional gender roles. Such an approach contradicts the principles of the UDHR and the WPS Agenda, as it denies unmarried women equal protections, thereby perpetuating structural inequalities.

Inclusion of women in peace agreements

Women's inclusion in peace agreements increased after independence and around the adoption of the country's WPS NAP. The series of peace agreements (ARCSS, R-ARCSS) developed during this period made more references (68) to women's roles in peace and security activities, including engaging women's representatives and women's NGOs from the north and south in their development. These agreements emphasised the need to empower women economically by establishing financial credit programmes to alleviate the effects of poverty and gendered inequalities, and ensuring their participation in key industries, peace observation committees, transitional constitutional processes, defence and security review boards. The ARCSS established quotas to further reinforce participation. For instance, it states that 'in accordance with the CRSS provisions providing for the participation of women in the Executive (25%), the GRSS shall nominate no fewer than four (4) women to the Council of Ministers, and the South Sudan Armed Opposition shall nominate no fewer than three (3) women to the Council of Ministers. Parties shall give due consideration to national diversity, including regional representation, in appointing their nominees' (Intergovernmental Authority on Development, 2015, p. 14).

These quotas aim to create opportunities for women to influence all areas of peacebuilding and security, observe the implementation of agreed mechanisms, and participate in monitoring and evaluation practices. When the ARCSS collapsed in 2016 and stakeholders renegotiated a future agreement, there was a call for greater engagement of women by women's groups. These negotiations achieved desired outcomes, as the ARCSS acknowledged the historical exclusion of women, established a 35% quota, and provided for the participation of women in transitional justice reform processes. Unlike the ARCSS, the revitalised agreement recognised the critical role of women in achieving peace outcomes, which is likely influenced by the increased participation of women's groups in the negotiations, lessons learned from

the failure of the previous agreement, and the operationalisation of WPS in South Sudan. During the negotiations of the 2015 ARCSS, women comprised only 15% of delegates, with this increasing to 25% during the 2018 negotiations of the R-ARCSS (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025). Although these developments attribute agency to women as peace negotiators, actors, and implementers, and recognise their equal ability to participate in national and regional decision-making processes, the lack of measures to reinforce these quotas raises concerns regarding their realisation in the local context. This tokenistic engagement and allocation of roles for women, although they create a platform for the inclusion of gender provisions in policy processes and aid in challenging patriarchal norms within political spaces (Aduda & Liesch, 2022; Nazary et al., 2020), achieve few outcomes in the local context. de Almagro (2018) and Asante (2023) explain that the lack of outcomes in the local context can be influenced by the engagement of elite women who utilise political platforms to advance their political goals as opposed to advocating for improved outcomes for local women.

Representation of women as victims

Despite the participation of women and women's groups in the development of the ARCSS and R-ARCSS, women continue to be positioned as victims. Agreements developed before 2005 failed to recognise the security needs of women and the impact that insecurity has on their well-being, and they did not create spaces for their empowerment. In contrast, agreements developed after 2005, which engage women, recognise the disproportionate implications of violence; however, they position women as victims and without agency. For instance, the ARCSS (2015) states that it will 'offer special consideration to conflict-affected persons (children, orphans, women, widows, war wounded, etc.) in the provision of public service delivery, including access to health and education services and grant the host communities the same benefits, protection, and humanitarian services … ' (Intergovernmental Authority on Development, 2015, p. 27). The connection made between women and other vulnerable groups such as children and orphans, denotes that women are incapable of responding to their own security needs, lack the ability to participate in decision-making, or implement measures to address their own needs. Further associations between women, orphans and the war wounded highlight the necessity to aid women by rescuing them from harm, providing protection and guardianship in all areas of their lives. It also positions women as being incapable of contributing to insecurity or ongoing conflict in South Sudan, although studies show that women can contribute to violence (Henshaw, 2016; Ibáñez, 2001). These documents do not recognise men as victims or acknowledge their need for protection. Instead, they position men as inherently leaders, equipped to address their security needs, and assume that women's security can only be achieved through male guidance. Although women were engaged in the development of these agreements and engagement quotas are established, it is evident that these quotas are implemented as a measure to make women feel equal to men in society. However, they are implemented without changing structures to empower and encourage their voices and experiences to transform peace outcomes in the country. These symbolic, yet ineffective measures further perpetuate inequalities for women, prevent their leadership in future peace processes and promote patriarchal values that position women and their needs as secondary

and only visible through male recognition (on representation of women as victims in peace agreements see Aroussi, 2009; Sterner, 2017).

Although women were perceived to be capable of being present during the processes to develop these agreements, a committee was established to create measures for victims of war, with this including women to determine their security needs. For instance, the ARCSS (2015) indicates that 'the CTRH shall implement measures to protect victims and witnesses, in particular, youth, women and children. Such protection measures shall include, but shall not be limited to, the conduct of in camera proceedings and the protection of the identity of a victim or witness' (Intergovernmental Authority on Development, 2015, p. 42). The establishment of institutions to support women, children, and youth may create opportunities for greater awareness and measures that may support women post-conflict and encourage the inclusion of gendered needs within future agreements. However, the patriarchal undertones that shape the development of such institutions foster the notion that addressing the symptoms of conflict, such as physical insecurity, social and physical dislocation experienced by women, is sufficient, while neglecting to confront the social, religious, ethnic, and traditional gendered inequalities that perpetuate their victimisation and infantilisation. This acts as a potential future barrier to meaningful engagement, sustainable change and peace in the country.

Opportunities to influence future peace agreements

Although limited, there are opportunities afforded that enable women and women's groups to influence future peace agreements. The R-ARCSS calls for the inclusion of women within some committees, including those to monitor the implementation of strategies to achieve peace. Although such measures contradict their positioning as victims, women's groups can utilise these opportunities to accentuate women's ability to display their leadership skills in post-conflict governance and transitional justice, by providing evaluation and evidence of the lack of progress made in processes when women are excluded or limited in leadership activities. As the R-ARCSS (2018) states that 'in accordance with the TCRSS provisions on the participation of women in the executive, no fewer than two (2) of the Deputy Ministers shall be women' (Intergovernmental Authority on Development, 2015, p. 14), such prominent roles provide an avenue for women to call for the greater inclusion of women's groups within peace discourse and to highlight the necessity for women's empowerment and role in the development and implementation of peace strategies. It also establishes a platform for women to shape the discourse in future peace agreements by aligning it with the WPS Agenda and WPS NAP. This alignment will provide all women with opportunities to actively contribute to peace outcomes at the national and grassroots levels.

As South Sudanese women played a critical role in the adoption of the country's WPS NAP and have contributed to gendered activities through IGAD platforms, there exist opportunities for women in these positions to highlight these achievements, capabilities and skill sets, and reinforce women's groups' ability to achieve similar outcomes at the national and local contexts and aid the country in achieving sustainable peace. Women appointed to various committees and platforms can further enhance this discourse by creating awareness of the measures adopted by local women in their constituencies to enhance security outcomes for all members of society (on South Sudanese women's local peacebuilding activities, see Adeogun & Muthuki, 2018; Aduda & Liesch, 2022; Lopidia & Hall, 2020). As South Sudan's WPS NAP (Republic of South Sudan, 2015) calls for the meaningful engagement of women in

all peace and security processes, this document can also be utilised to bargain for meaningful participation and active contribution to future peace agreements. Other African countries, such as Nigeria, provide a case study for the effectiveness of such an approach, as women's groups utilise the Agenda to advocate for input into legislation and policies that affect women, greater appointment of women within key leadership roles in the military, and to gain international support to influence the government to prioritise women's security needs (Asante, 2023).

According to the R-ARCSS, there is a provision for the establishment of the Women Enterprise Development Fund, a special economic programme for women returning from displacement, greater focus on women's access to justice and resources (Intergovernmental Authority on Development, 2018, p. 56; 110). However, there is a lack of a budget allocation to achieve these activities, although women's right to participation is recognised through references to the UDHR (United Nations General Assembly, 1948), the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (United Nations Security Council, 2000), and South Sudan's WPS NAP (Republic of South Sudan, 2015), which collectively call for the allocation of funds for gender-mainstreaming activities. As political support and access to funds play a key role in the achievement of gender equality outcomes (Davies & True, 2022; Hamilton et al., 2020), the WPS NAP (Republic of South Sudan, 2015), the Great Lakes Regional Action Plan on WPS (International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), 2021) and the Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security for the IGAD region (Intergovernmental Authority on Development, 2023), which calls for states to provide financial support to women's groups to achieve the principles of the agenda, can be further used as advocacy tools to establish future financial resources, support for the meaningful participation of South Sudanese women in future peace agreements, and to promote activities to align the language in future agreements with the NAP and the RAPs. These documents, along with support from regional and international agencies, can enhance access to funding opportunities at both the regional and international levels. This is particularly important in contexts where government departments are unwilling to allocate funds to enable women's participation and the implementation of peace initiatives (Asante, 2024). To ensure the effectiveness of these processes, Hessini (2020) suggests that funders must account for the true cost of participation. This includes providing funding for the development of infrastructure to promote meaningful engagement of women and allocating funds to encourage the participation and perspectives of diverse women. Hence, despite the ongoing restrictions that have led to women's exclusion from past peace processes, women can leverage developments in current peace agreements, regional and international gendered normative frameworks to create opportunities to meaningfully influence future peace agreements and aid the country in achieving sustainable peace.

Conclusion

An analysis of the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement (1972), the Koko Dam Declaration (1986), the Khartoum Peace Agreement (1997), the Abuja I Sudanese Peace Conference (1992), the Abuja II Sudanese Peace Conference (1993), the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005), and the post-independence ARCSS (2015) and R-ARCSS (2018) shows historical patterns of marginalising women from peace processes. Although there were some improvements in women's engagement and participation in South Sudan's peace agreements, such as the ARCSS and R-ARCSS, their meaningful engagement continues to be limited. Although women were excluded from earlier peace agreements, their engagement increased post-

independence, with peace agreements acknowledging the impact of conflict on women and their roles in peace institutions and committees to achieve peace in agreements developed after 2015.

While these measures signal progress in the right direction, translating them into implementable policies and initiatives remains a challenge. We argue that even though there has been expanded visibility of WPS commitments, women's participation in South Sudan remains limited, largely symbolic, and constrained by patriarchal norms and weak implementation of peace agreements. The later agreements, especially, the ARCSS granted women 25% participation in the executive, expanded opportunities in financial and security reform, and increased women's involvement in peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery. The 2018 R-ARCSS also increased women's quotas to 35%, further enhancing their economic participation and engagement in the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing. Despite this, South Sudan continues to grapple with political instability, civil war, ethnic violence, economic collapse, and kleptocracy, factors that undermine the state's capacity to meet its citizens, including women's needs. These issues and the patriarchal undertones that shape these agreements call for women's groups, CSOs, political actors and practitioners to leverage regional and international frameworks such as the WPS NAP and RAPs to promote meaningful engagement, gain support and funding to align future peace agreements with international gender norms. These results further demonstrate that the 'add women and stir' approach to peacebuilding policy and practice in South Sudan and other contexts fails to recognise and appreciate women's full potential in peace and security.

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