

Refugee Women's Inclusion in the Implementation of the Revitalized Agreement for the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan: Challenges and Opportunities

By **Sandra Tumwesigye, Southern Voices Network for Peacebuilding Scholar**

April 2022

Overview

Protracted conflict and insecurity in South Sudan created the largest refugee crisis in Africa.¹ Uganda hosts the majority (41 percent²) of over 2.3 million South Sudanese refugees, 81 percent of whom are women and children³ primarily living in rural refugee settlements (94 percent). The highest number of refugee women fled the December 2013 civil war and the renewed fighting in July 2016 which signified a failure of the August 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS). The ARCSS was criticized for its insufficient inclusivity, under-prioritizing conflict transformation over power sharing, limited capacity to implement, among others and offered little hope for lasting, gender-inclusive peace. The more inclusive Revitalized Agreement for the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) of September 2018, and its ongoing implementation, therefore represent an important opportunity to mitigate the high human, social, economic, and political cost of decades of conflict, and to build and sustain inclusive peace.

The Deficit of Refugee Women Participation in the R-ARCSS and Why it Matters

By engaging refugees, including more women, and providing a 35 percent quota for women's political participation, parties to the R-ARCSS acknowledged that the meaningful inclusion of diverse women and their voices is central to lasting peace. This aligns with global evidence showing that when diverse women and their voices are meaningfully included, a peace process is more likely to address the root causes of conflict, have stronger legitimacy, broader ownership and significantly increased likelihood of successful peace outcomes.⁴ Women's influence on matters of peace lowers the risk of civil war during political transitions, reduces the chances of peace agreements failing,⁵ and contributes to sustained peace.⁶

Current implementation of the R-ARCSS excludes South Sudanese women living in refugee settlements in Uganda from critical discussions and processes such as permanent constitution-making, establishing of transitional justice mechanisms, and electoral processes, which would benefit from their participation in shaping durable peace in their country of origin and expected return. Refugee women are not provided with information about R-ARCSS implementation progress or opportunities to contribute to ongoing

The Southern Voices Network for Peacebuilding: Centering African knowledge and agency is key to building and sustaining peace in Africa. The Southern Voices Network for Peacebuilding (SVNP) works with the Wilson Center's Africa Program to attain the most appropriate, cohesive, and inclusive policy frameworks and approaches for achieving sustainable peace in Africa. Generously funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York since its establishment in 2011, the SVNP works to generate African knowledge to inform U.S. and international peacebuilding policies on Africa; help build the next generation of African peacebuilders through its scholarship program; and create a pan-African network of African peacebuilding organizations, practitioners, and experts to collaborate and share knowledge, best practices, and lessons learned on peacebuilding in Africa.

This publication was made possible by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The statements made and views expressed in this paper are solely the responsibility of the author and do not represent the views of the Wilson Center or the Carnegie Corporation of New York. For more information please visit:

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/the-southern-voices-network-for-peacebuilding>



discussions, they lack linkages to refugee and women representatives involved in formal processes, and receive insufficient practical support to their peacebuilding roles, particularly young women and women with disabilities.

Refugee women in Uganda are a valuable resource for sustaining peace in South Sudan. The successes of their women mediator networks which are credited for working with local governments in West Nile to curb violence, mitigate or resolve local conflicts and foster peaceful coexistence between ethnic groups, and with host communities, demonstrate their capacities to contribute to lasting peace in South Sudan. They offer South Sudan years of skills building and practical experience in community-based and led conflict early warning, early response and peace building which are necessary for improving social cohesion, and inter-communal relations in order to mitigate current conflicts, restore the country's social fabric and work towards long-term peace. By meaningfully including the voices and agency of diverse women in refugee settlements—including youth and women with disabilities—peace parties, supporters of the R-ARCSS, and Uganda and South Sudan stand to reap the benefits of sustained peace.

Policy Options and Recommendations

1. Government of South Sudan, Parties, and Stakeholders to the Revitalized Agreement for the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS)

- a. Recognize the capacities of South Sudanese women living in refugee settlements in Uganda to meaningfully contribute to sustaining peace and implementing the revitalized peace agreement by taking practical steps to inform and include them.
- b. Work with the Government of Uganda and international partners to establish and operationalize practical measures that ensure the sustained inclusion of refugee women within settlements in decision-making on peace and the future of South Sudan.
- c. Facilitate connections and allot funding to sustained networking between women leaders in refugee settlements and women's rights organizations in South Sudan that are involved in ensuring women's participation and gender-responsive implementation of the R-ARCSS.

2. Government of Uganda and Development Partners

- a. Put in place mechanisms within refugee settlements to provide current information, consult, receive input and provide a feedback loop on R-ARCSS implementation progress to a larger number of diverse refugee women. Take advantage of existing opportunities to minimize the time and cost burden. These platforms, for instance community meetings, should consider and address barriers to access for women with disabilities and youth such as ensuring diversity in the criteria for attendance, the presence of an interpreter, an accessible location and a plan for further dissemination of presented information. In the case of online meetings, facilitate access and equip women with the skills and tools required to participate in the digital world, while mitigating security risks.
- b. Enable coordination of partners across thematic areas and policy agendas to explore opportunities to expand the reach of information and feedback on R-ARCSS among refugee women. Adopt a transnational approach to support refugee women's peace building in both countries.
- c. Use existing humanitarian-development activities which grant development partners regular access to diverse refugee women as channels to provide information and document women's voices on key R-ARCSS implementation issues. Incorporate strategies that promote positive masculinity and encourage men to support women's political participation.



3. Governments of the United States, United Kingdom, and Norway and Supporters of the R-ARCSS

a. Prioritize the specific case of refugee women within settlements in efforts to encourage and support the Government of South Sudan to ensure women’s meaningful participation in peace and security processes, particularly related to the R-ARCSS. Address the situation of refugee women’s participation during ongoing advocacy calling on the government and parties to R-ARCSS to fulfill the 35 percent quota. Provide practical and capacity support to ensure the R-ARCSS commitment to inclusivity despite geographic location, consistently includes women in refugee settlements.

b. Allot a portion of current funding for implementation of the women, peace, and security agenda in South Sudan and Uganda, to interventions that facilitate the participation of women in refugee settlements in R-ARCSS implementation. Provide direct support to refugee women’s groups in Uganda and women’s rights organizations or coalitions promoting gender-responsive R-ARCSS implementation in South Sudan, to facilitate refugee women’s awareness and input into ongoing R-ARCSS processes.

-
1. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, South Sudan Regional Refugee Response Plan January 2020 - December 2021, *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, 2021, 4.
 2. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR Operational Data Portal (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022), <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/southsudan>.
 3. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Uganda Refugee Statistics”; (Office of the Prime Minister of Uganda: *Uganda Refugee Statistics*, 2020), <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/uga>.
 4. Erik Melander, “Gender Equality and Intrastate Armed Conflict,” *International Studies Quarterly* 49, No.4 (2005): 695-714.
 5. Marie O’Reilly, Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, and Thania Paffenholz, “Reimagining Peacemaking: Women’s Roles in Peace Processes,” *International Peace Institute*, (June 2015) 12, <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/IPI-E-pub-Reimagining-Peacemaking.pdf>.
 6. Jana Krause, Werner Krause, and Pila Branfors, “Women’s Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace,” *International Interactions*, vol. 44 no. 6 (2018): 985-1016.
-

Ms. Sandra Tumwesigye is the Advocacy and Partnerships Manager at Women’s International Peace Centre, a feminist peace building organization with a mission to ignite women’s leadership, amplify their voices and deepen their activism in creating peace. Her research, policy advocacy, and programming work is focused on promoting women’s leadership in conflict and conflict settings, women’s meaningful participation in peace discussions and processes, and their efforts to transform the current nature and outcomes. She has a Master of Arts in Peace Education from the University of Peace, a Master’s degree in Cooperation and Development from the Istituto Universitario di Studi Superiori (IUSS), and a Bachelor of Mass Communication from Makerere University. She was a Southern Voices (SVNP) Scholar during the spring (January to April) 2022 term at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C.



The Africa Program

The Africa Program works to address the most critical issues facing Africa and U.S.-Africa relations, build mutually beneficial U.S.-Africa relations, and enhance knowledge and understanding about Africa in the United States.

The Program achieves its mission through in-depth research and analyses, including our blog Africa Up Close, public discussion, working groups, and briefings that bring together policymakers, practitioners, and subject matter experts to analyze and offer practical options for tackling key challenges in Africa and in U.S.-Africa relations.

The Africa Program focuses on four core issues:

- i. Good governance and leadership
- ii. Conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and security
- iii. Trade, investment, and sustainable development
- iv. Africa's evolving role in the global arena

The Program maintains a cross-cutting focus on the roles of women, youth, and technology, which are critical to Africa's future: to supporting good governance, to securing peace, to mitigating poverty, and to assuring sustainable development.






SVNP Policy Brief and Research Paper Series

For the accompanying Research Paper and the full series of SVNP Research Papers and Policy Briefs, please see our website at <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/the-southern-voices-network-for-peacebuilding>








One Woodrow Wilson Plaza
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20004-3027

The Wilson Center

 www.wilsoncenter.org
 wwics@wilsoncenter.org
 facebook.com/woodrowwilsoncenter
 [@thewilsoncenter](https://twitter.com/thewilsoncenter)
 202.691.4000

The Africa Program

 www.wilsoncenter.org/africa
 africa@wilsoncenter.org
 facebook.com/africaprogram
 [@AfricaUpClose](https://twitter.com/AfricaUpClose)
 202.691.4118