

RAPID GENDER ANALYSIS ON POWER AND PARTICIPATION

Wau, CARE South Sudan

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The views in this Rapid Gender Analysis are those of the author alone and do not necessarily represent those of the CARE or its programs, or the Canadian government, any other partners.

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Abbreviations

ARCSS.....	Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan
CBO.....	Community based organization
CSO.....	Civil society organization
CPA.....	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
FAO.....	Food and Agricultural Organization
FGD.....	Focus group discussion
GAC.....	Global Affairs Canada
GBV.....	Gender-based violence
IDP.....	Internally displaced person
KII.....	Key informant interview
NGO.....	Non-governmental organization
PSEA.....	Preventing sexual exploitation and abuse
R-ARCS.....	Revitalized agreement on the resolution of the conflict in the Republic of South Sudan
RGA-P.....	Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation
SGBV.....	Sexual and gender-based violence
SPU.....	Special Protection Unit
UNFPA.....	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR.....	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF.....	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNOCHA.....	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
WHO.....	World Health Organization
WLIE.....	Women Lead in Emergencies

Executive Summary

South Sudan has experienced cycles of conflict since before its independence in 2011. Since the start of the civil war, the country has faced displacement, violence, and high rates of sexual and gender-based violence. Despite the 2018 peace deal, South Sudan continues to face intermittent violence, political instability, climate shocks, and floods. The humanitarian situation is critical, with millions of people in need.

This Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation is part of the Women Lead in Emergencies project in Wau, Wau County, Western Bahr el-Ghazal State. This project is funded by Global Affairs Canada. It aims to support crisis-affected women to participate more and in more meaningful ways in community and public life and in humanitarian response in South Sudan.

This is the first Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation (RGA-P) conducted in Wau. It has three main objectives: (1) analysis of crisis-affected women's access to, and influence within, decision-making of different kinds; (2) provide practical programming and operational recommendations to support crisis-affected women to participate more in decision-making, and in more meaningful ways; and (3) identify gaps for further assessment and analysis to build a more comprehensive understanding of women's participation and leadership in Wau over time.

The RGA-P is composed of primary qualitative data collection and a secondary data review. Primary data collection took place between Dec 2nd and Dec 6th, 2022, in four locations across Wau. It included 20 focus group discussions, 14 key informant interviews, and 4 community mappings. A total of 249 people participated, including 133 women and 116 men. This data was supplemented a validation workshop with several women's associations and leaders.

Key Findings

Women's participation and leadership in decision-making

- Women have a **long and varied history** of participation in the public sphere in South Sudan. They have played an important role in peace and reconciliation since before South Sudan's independence. There is a 35% affirmative action quota for women's participation in governance structures currently in place across the country.
- **Traditional gender norms** persist in Wau. Men are responsible for providing for their family, participating in community life, and activities such as livestock rearing. Women are responsible for the domestic sphere, such as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children. Displacement has **shifted some norms**, with women taking up different roles in the absence of men. This includes things like income generation or small business.
- Key stakeholders involved in **community decision-making** include chiefs, block leaders, camp managers, police and security actors, and youth leaders. Most of these positions are held by men, although there are some female chiefs and community leaders. Women play larger roles in secondary positions, such as within the chief's office, in administrative roles, or in roles addressing family and gender issues. Overall, **decision-making in Wau is dominated by men**.
- There is a **rich network** of women associations, leaders, and informal groups in Wau. They are already engaged in leadership and decision-making. Key allies, such as the Ministry of Gender, hold positions of trust and accountability with women's groups.
- Women involved in organizations or institutions, such as NGOs or associations, have a higher degree of **influence and decision-making power**. Grassroots women have considerably less influence. They face more difficulties speaking out in their communities. Women already in key leadership positions, such as camp managers or in women's associations, can be influential in **supporting grassroots women**. They can organize, mobilize, and support informal groups and female community members.
- There is a **high degree of support** for women to become leaders and increase their decision-making. Characteristics of effective leaders included factors such as education, trust, patience, and public speaking skills.

Barriers to women's participation and leadership in decision-making

- **Societal and cultural norms** limit the ability of women to take part in decision-making. Traditional views on women's roles constrict their involvement outside of the household. The **time burden of performing unpaid care work** limits women's ability to participate outside of the home.
- **Practical issues**, such as needing to take care of children, a lack of transport, or other community events such as funerals, are constraints that inhibit women's participation. Other barriers include a **lack of information and awareness** on opportunities for leadership and participation.
- **A lack of formal education** is an important barrier. Women without education were less likely to participate in community meetings. This can also lead to **fear and a lack of self-esteem**, causing difficulty for women to speak up in front of others, especially men.
- Other barriers discussed by a few participants during the research include a lack of menstrual hygiene management and the need for trauma healing. Factors such as **disability status or ethnic and religious minorities** were also discussed as barriers. These elements need to be expanded upon in further research.

Risks to women's participation and leadership in decision-making

- The main risk for women's participation in decision-making in Wau is gender-based violence. At a **household level**, women's participation in community forums could lead to mistrust, conflict, and violence by her husband. At a **community level**, gender-based violence increased if women had to pass through dangerous neighborhoods or in the dark to get to the locations of meetings. Finally, women who are active in public life can face threats, intimidation, and harassment from the community.

Entry points for increasing women's participation and leadership

Based on the RGA-P findings, the following ideas are to guide women's groups on how they may increase women's participation in decision-making. This should be based on their own needs and priorities:

- **Work with existing formal and informal women's groups**, to support their ongoing actions and capitalize on existing practices. This could include **supporting existing networks** of women's groups or collaborating with women leaders to **support grassroots women**. This could also include activities such as **creating safe spaces** for women to come together or organizing **leadership trainings**. Other potential entry points include engagement with **key allies**, such as the Ministry of Gender, as well as **highlighting ongoing successes** in areas such as GBV or peacebuilding. Finally, support women's groups to address **minority representation**, such as building links with ethnic and religious minorities or persons with disabilities.
- **Strengthen GBV response, prevention, and mitigation measures in Wau.** Ensure that women have a safe environment to move freely and enjoy public life in their communities. This could include support to ongoing efforts to address GBV, such as **awareness campaigns**. Hold meetings in **safe and accessible** areas that mitigate GBV risk.
- **Address practical and logistical barriers** to reduce women's care responsibilities and increase their time for participation in public life. Work with women's groups to identify how best to support factors such as **transport and childcare**. Let women's groups decide the best **time and locations** for community meetings.
- **Engage with men, boys, and male leaders in support of women's leadership.** Support women's groups to identify how best to **engage with men and boys**. This could include working with **influential stakeholders**, such as chiefs and their advisors.

- **Provide adult literacy and education classes.** Support women's groups to identify the type of classes that would be most beneficial to improve their **skills, knowledge, and capacity**. This could include support on key leadership qualities, such as **public speaking**.
- **Increase access to information and awareness on decision-making, women's leadership opportunities and participation in humanitarian activities in Wau.** Ensure that women have access to information on **services, rights, and opportunities** available in Wau. When designing information campaigns, take into consideration factors such as **language, literacy rates, age, disability**, and other accessibility elements. Use **CARE's influence** to encourage other relevant stakeholders in Wau to better share and disseminate information on humanitarian, governance, and leadership opportunities.

Introduction

The men, women, boys, and girls of South Sudan have experienced cycles of crisis since before its independence in 2011. With the outbreak of the civil war in 2013, conflict erupted across the country. This has led to mass displacement, violence, and high rates of sexual and gender-based crimes (SGBV). Despite the peace deals of 2015 and 2018, South Sudan still struggles with ongoing violence, political instability, localized conflict, climate shocks, and displacement.¹

According to the Humanitarian Needs Overview in November 2022, there are over 8.9 million people in need across the country, with 2.2 million internally displaced.²

This Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation is part of the Women Lead in Emergencies project in Wau, Wau County, Western Bahr el Gazal State. This project is funded by Global Affairs Canada, to support crisis-affected women to participate more and in more meaningful ways in community and public life and in humanitarian response in South Sudan.

Meaningful participation means that women can be active in public and humanitarian decision-making if they choose, feel able to freely voice their opinions, and have actual influence over the decisions that are taken.

Objectives of the Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation

This is the first Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation (RGA-P) conducted in Wau.

An RGA-P assesses the impact of crisis on gender, power relations and women's participation and leadership. It has three main objectives: (1) **analysis** of crisis-affected women's access to, and influence within, decision-making of different kinds; (2) provide practical programming and operational **recommendations** to support crisis-affected women to participate more in decision-making, and in more meaningful ways; and (3) identify **gaps** for further assessment and analysis to build a more comprehensive understanding of women's participation and leadership in Wau over time.

¹ South Sudan Complex Crisis. ACAPS. August 2022.

² Humanitarian Needs Overview South Sudan. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). November 2022.

Demographic profile

Wau County is in Western Bahr el-Ghazal State. The capital of Western Bahr el-Ghazal State is Wau Town. The headquarters of Wau County is in Bagari Payam. The county has 5 main administrative units (payams). Wau town hosts Naivasha camp, a protection of civilians site for displaced persons.

Wau is made up of many different ethnic groups, such as the Fertit, Luo, Balanda Viri, Balanda Bor, Luo/Jur Chol, and Azande communities.³ The population is engaged in subsistence farming and agriculture, as well as fishing and livestock rearing.⁴ Women are primarily engaged in subsistence agriculture, whereas men play a larger role in livestock rearing.⁵

The last official census conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics in 2008 set the population of Wau County at 151,320 persons. As no census has been done since that time, exact population estimates do not exist. The Humanitarian Needs Overview done in February 2022 estimated that the population of Wau is 320,100 persons, with 193,000 people in need.⁶ Out of all people in need, 53% were women, 47% were men, 57% were children, and 15% were persons with disabilities.⁷ As of 2019, there were 46,555 IDPS and 149,010 returnees in Wau County, however sex and age disaggregation of these figures is unavailable.⁸

Wau continues to face a difficult humanitarian situation. This includes intermittent violence, high rates of SGBV, and climate shocks. Flooding and heavy rains have led to displacement, disruptions to infrastructure, and barriers to access critical services such as health and food supplies. Economic crises, and the devaluation of the South Sudanese pound, has decreased purchasing power. As of February 2022, the monthly food basket cost per person in Wau rose 117%.⁹ Price impacts have been further compounded by the end of food support from key humanitarian partners, such as the WFP, due to funding constraints.¹⁰ Economic shocks and price impacts are particularly difficult for women, as they are responsible for food preparation, storage, and distribution. Female participants in another RGA in Wau described that they wanted to be involved in community meetings regarding food aid, as it has a big impact on their families.¹¹ As food consumption decreases, women are often the last to eat, after men and boys. Other negative coping mechanisms in response to these external shocks have also been recorded. For example, men have increased their drug and alcohol intake as tensions around economic difficulties rise.¹²

In terms of GBV, a recent study in Wau by Oxfam found that over 40% of participants had experienced gender-based violence (GBV).¹³

Methodology

A 15-person assessment team (10 women and 5 men) undertook collection of primary data over 3 days between the **2nd and 6th of December 2022**. A team from CARE in Wau supervised data collection. The study used qualitative methods in four primary research sites: **Bazia Jedid, Bagari Jedid, Agok, and Naivasha camp**. These sites encompassed 2 payams (Wau South payam, Wau North payam), Wau municipality, as well as the protection of civilian (PoC) site.

³ Wau. Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility. 2020.

⁴ Rapid Gender Analysis Wau County, Western Bahr-EI-Ghazal State, South Sudan. CARE South Sudan. December 2022.

⁵ Rapid Gender Analysis Wau County, Western Bahr-EI-Ghazal State, South Sudan. CARE South Sudan. December 2022.

⁶ Humanitarian Needs Overview South Sudan. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). February 2022

⁷ Humanitarian Needs Overview South Sudan. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). February 2022

⁸ Wau. Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility. 2020.

⁹ South Sudan Country Brief. World Food Programme. September 2022

¹⁰ Humanitarian Needs Overview South Sudan. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). February 2022

¹¹ Rapid Gender Analysis Wau County, Western Bahr-EI-Ghazal State, South Sudan. CARE South Sudan. December 2022.

¹² Rapid Gender Analysis Wau County, Western Bahr-EI-Ghazal State, South Sudan. CARE South Sudan. December 2022.

¹³ South Sudan gender analysis. Oxfam. July 2016.

Primary data collection included:

- **20 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)** with women (10 FGDs) and men (9), and one mixed FGD
- **14 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)** with community leaders, women leaders, chiefs, faith leaders, youth leaders, Ministry of Gender representatives, NGO officers, and police.
- **4 community mapping sessions** with male and female community members, to map resources, services, and key decision-making spaces in Wau.

A total of **249 participants** participated in the study, including 195 participants in FGDs, 40 in community mapping, and 14 in KIIs.

	Women	Men	Total Participants
Focus Group Discussions	103	92	195
Key Informant Interviews	10	4	14
Community Mapping	20	20	40
Total	133	116	249

Primary data was supplemented with an analysis workshop with the assessment team. This was further supplemented through a validation workshop with various women's groups and women leaders. The insights from these workshops are included in the analysis for this report. A validation workshop with the wider community was planned, however, this had to be postponed due to time limitations. This will be held at a later date, to respond to community questions on how CARE will use the RGA-P data.

Primary data collection was supplemented with a secondary data review. A list of sources that were used for secondary data analysis can be found at the end of this report.

Before data collection, research teams participated in a 2-day CARE training on research and data collection, as well as a 1-day pilot test of the tools.

The assessment team was trained on ethical data collection methods. This included training on the GBV referral pathway, PSEA protocols, and feedback mechanisms. Standard practices were used throughout the study, such as informed consent, proper data storage methods, and engaging with key leaders in the community for safety and security access.

This research has several limitations:

- Data was collected in 3 days and concentrated in 4 sites. Due to **limited time**, the team was not able to delve deep into a disaggregated analysis based on different vulnerabilities (such as economic status, disabilities, etc.)
- Due to limited time, some data collection methods that were originally planned were not used, **such as individual stories**. Further research could highlight individual stories to strengthen the findings of this report.
- The research was concentrated in the immediate surroundings of **Wau Town**. Findings cannot be generalized to other areas further away in Wau County.
- RGA-Ps are meant to be **progressive documents**. Therefore, as this is the first round of an RGA-P for Wau, future research will be needed to expand upon these initial finds. This can be discussed with women's groups and areas for future research prioritised as part of the WLiE initiative.

Women's participation and leadership in Wau

Women and men's roles in Wau are shaped by **traditional gender norms**. Men are responsible for providing for their family, including income and goods. They are also responsible for participating in community activities, as well as protection and security. Women are primarily responsible for care work, such as looking after the home, children, cooking, and collecting water and firewood.¹⁴ There have been some changes in gender roles in recent years. For example, more women are taking up men's roles such as providing for the household, especially when men are not present due to conflict-related displacement¹⁵ Women have also started small businesses and taking up income generating roles.¹⁶

Women have a **long and varied history of participation** in the public sphere. During the civil war (1983 – 2005), women's organisations and activists played a fundamental role in peace and security. Their influence helped to bring about the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.¹⁷ This laid the groundwork to build into the interim constitution a 25% quota on women's participation in government. In 2018, the Revitalized Agreement to Resolve the Crisis of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) increased the affirmative action quota to 35%, which is currently in place across all transitional governance bodies. Despite this policy framework, women's participation and decision-making at a national and state level is quite varied. As of November 2021, 28% of seats in parliament were held by women.¹⁸ At a state level, this is slightly higher, with women making up 30.8% of seats in the state assemblies.¹⁹ Although these numbers may be promising, women's influence is still a challenge. Men still hold most of the decision-making power and women are often relegated to service focused roles or institutions – such as focusing on women and children.

In Wau, FGD and KII participants described varying ways that women played a role in community participation and decision-making. Respondents highlighted several key decisions that impact the community, including decisions around service provision (such as water points), the coordination of humanitarian activities, coordination of camp activities, conflict resolution, infrastructure, and social activities. The main stakeholders that play a role in decision-making include the chief, block leaders, camp managers, police and security actors, youth leaders, and women leaders, among others. Most of these stakeholders are men, however, a few women were noted as holding positions as chiefs or block leaders.

Participants noted that women's **level of influence** in these decisions depended on key categories. Women that were involved in institutions and organizations - such as NGO staff, women in associations, or working for the Ministry of Gender - were seen as having a higher degree of influence and decision-making power. Their influence included being able to discuss community issues, raise awareness, mobilize with other women, and find solutions to community problems. However, grassroots women were seen as having little influence in community decisions.

When women were in key leadership positions, such as camp managers, they were seen as **influential in supporting grassroots women**. For example, during the research, a women leader in Naivasha camp helped mobilize other women in the camp to come and speak to CARE, to be able to voice their ideas. Overall, women that were active in decision-making were seen as taking up an **advocacy and mobilization role**, to support community development. Final decisions, however, were still in the hands of men, particularly the chief.

Although there are more men in leadership positions in Wau, all participants noted that both men and women can be good leaders and make decisions in their community. Participants described key characteristics of a leader as someone who is educated, trusted, patient, has a good reputation, and can speak in public.

There was a female deputy chief, who after coming into power, she was able to handle and solve many complaints of women, such as domestic violence, women's participation at the community level and helped women understand their rights and how to advocate for them.

- Participation validation workshop

¹⁴ Rapid Gender Analysis Wau County, Western Bahr-EI-Ghazal State, South Sudan. CARE South Sudan. November 2021

¹⁵ South Sudan gender analysis. Oxfam. July 2016.

¹⁶ Assessment and mapping of existing systems, mechanisms and networks on conflict resolution and local peacebuilding in Wau and Pariang County. Bodhi Global Analysis for CARE South Sudan. June 2022.

¹⁷ South Sudan gender analysis. Oxfam. July 2016.

¹⁸ Experts of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Commend South Sudan's Progressive Legislation for Women, and Ask about Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: Press Release. United Nations Office of the High Commission of Human Rights. November 2021.

¹⁹ 25th Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference of Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: National Review. Republic of South Sudan. June 2019.

Governance, decision-making and accountability structure in Wau

Governance and leadership in Wau county are divided along rural and urban lines. Traditional authorities, primarily chiefs, are integrated into these varying levels of governance, through the Local Governance Act of 2009. As South Sudan has not had elections since 2011, most roles are appointed, other than some local level community elections (such as for block representatives or camp leaders).

Western Bahr el Gazal State			
Wau County			
Rural structures		Urban structures	
Payam	Payam administration Payam administrator Sub-divided into boma's Report to the county commissioner 5 payams in Wau County	Municipality	Area of administration is 5 km around Wau Town Mayor Municipal council Reports directly to State level – at the same governance hierarchy as county commissioner
Boma	Boma administration Paramount chiefs	Block	Block leaders and block council, reports to Mayor Paramount chiefs 4 blocks in Wau town
Village	Paramount chiefs	Quarter	Quarter leaders and quarter council, reports to block leaders Paramount chiefs

The stakeholders identified as key figures involved in governance and decision-making in Wau include the following:

Chiefs: chiefs play a key role across multiple levels of governance. Although technically a traditional authority, they are recognized in the Local Governance Act. They are present across various levels of governance (payam, boma, block, quarter, etc.), however participants mostly spoke about block and quarter chiefs. All participants noted chiefs as the main stakeholder with the highest degree of influence on community decisions. They are responsible for conflict resolution, disseminating information, identifying safety concerns, and making general community decisions. They have a high level of trust and legitimacy across the community, with both women and men. Most chiefs are men, with only a few female chiefs present in Wau; however, women's groups spoke about how women did have the opportunity to become chiefs. Women can also play various roles in the chief's office, such as deputy chief, or in administrative roles such as secretary or treasurer.²⁰ Another study conducted in Wau on women's participation in peacebuilding noted that while many chief's offices did include women and men, women were often relegated to dealing with issues relating to women or family.²¹

During the research, it was observed that an informal group around the chief also plays an important role in community decision-making. This group is composed of male friends and advisors. They can act as 'gatekeepers' of who gets access to chiefs, and what information community members can share to the chief. In this way, this informal group was seen as being important for women's participation – as they can act either as key allies or blockers in regard to the chief's influence.

Block leaders: There are 4 blocks in Wau Town, each with a block leader. They are responsible for reporting to the municipal council and the mayor. Each block is further sub-divided into quarters, with a quarter representative reporting to the block leader. All of the current block leaders in Wau are men.

Camp committee and leaders: Naivasha camp is the protection of civilian camp present in Wau. The camp is divided into different blocks, with each block organising elections for a block leader. The collective of block leaders make up the camp committee. The camp committee oversees the humanitarian activities in the camp and is the main representation toward humanitarian actors. Camp leaders serve short terms – new leaders are elected on a rotating basis (ex. 6 months). Only a few block leaders are women.

²⁰ Assessment and mapping of existing systems, mechanisms and networks on conflict resolution and local peacebuilding in Wau and Pariang County. Bodhi Global Analysis for CARE South Sudan. June 2022.

²¹ Assessment and mapping of existing systems, mechanisms and networks on conflict resolution and local peacebuilding in Wau and Pariang County. Bodhi Global Analysis for CARE South Sudan. June 2022.

Police and security actors: Police, including the Special Protection Unit (SPU), are responsible for ensuring law and order in Wau. Participants noted that the SPU plays a key protection role in the community. They are responsible for overseeing protection services and access to justice for GBV survivors. The SPU has made efforts to include women in its ranks, including women in leadership positions.²²

Youth office and youth leaders: The Youth Office oversees youth mobilization and facilitates activities across the state. It is responsible for mobilizing youth for various engagements. The youth office is made up of all men. There are various youth leaders across Wau, working for different youth associations and on various projects. These leaders were noted by participants as being a critical stakeholder in community participation and decision-making. Although many youth leaders are men, some members of youth groups are also women.

Religious leaders: Many participants noted religious leaders as key stakeholders in community decisions. Although the majority of the population is Christian, there are other religions as well, such as Islam. Other than religious leaders, there are also groups that were seen as part of the social fabric of Wau, including church groups, mixed worship groups, and mother's unions. A more complete mapping of faith leaders and religious social groups is needed in the next round of this RGA-P.

Line ministries: During the validation workshop, women leaders mentioned that line ministries can play a big role in supporting women's participation. This was not only in relation to the Ministry of Gender, but included the perception that ministries such as education, communication, health and others were involved in supporting women throughout their various mandates. Further research could be used to explore the extent specific ministries play a supportive role in Wau.

Humanitarian system and accountability mechanisms

Relief and Rehabilitation Commission: The RRC is the primary organization linking the government and humanitarian actors. This includes interaction with CBO's, CSO's and women's associations. It is responsible for monitoring humanitarian and development activities, as well as providing registration. It is also the government body responsible for overseeing Naivasha camp's activities.

UN agencies: There are various UN agencies present in Wau, tasked with ensuring the provision of coordinated and multi-sectoral humanitarian aid. The cluster system includes the coordination forum (UNOCHA) protection cluster (UNHCR), GBV sub-cluster (UNFPA), health cluster (WHO), food security cluster (FAO), and education cluster (UNICEF), among others. Each cluster is run in coordination with a relevant line ministry.

National organizations, civil society and women's groups have varying levels of engagement in this traditional humanitarian architecture. For smaller groups, a lack of funding, as well as experience in skills that the humanitarian system views as important (such as networking, public speaking, proposal writing, etc), often means that they are not able to participate in a sustained way.²³

Further research is needed to better understand the interactions both between local governance structures and the humanitarian system, as well as the extent of inclusion and participation of community groups in emergency response planning and humanitarian activities.

NGO's: There are a variety of international and national NGOs providing humanitarian and development services in Wau, including CARE, IMC, ACTED, Islamic Relief, SIHA, and others.

Complaint and feedback mechanisms: Some of the largest feedback mechanisms related to humanitarian response in Wau are safeguarding mechanisms. Tools used to collect safeguarding complaints include ethics and reporting lines, hotlines by UN agencies, as well as community suggestion boxes. There are also community watch groups and women protection networks. These

²² Assessment and mapping of existing systems, mechanisms and networks on conflict resolution and local peacebuilding in Wau and Pariang County. Bodhi Global Analysis for CARE South Sudan. June 2022.

²³ Women leading locally: Exploring women's leadership in humanitarian action in Bangladesh and South Sudan. Oxfam. January 2020

groups are made up of community members that have been trained on safeguarding issues and how to raise concerns to relevant channels.

Community action committees: During the research, participants mentioned several community action committees, such as the committee for water or boreholes, or community watch groups. A more comprehensive mapping of these action groups and their role in the community is needed.

Women's organizations, groups, and activists

Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare: Although a state institution, most participants noted that the Ministry of Gender plays one of the most important roles in terms of supporting women's participation and organizations in Wau (and is therefore included under women's groups). They influence policies that favour women's empowerment, support advocacy, coordinate and monitor women's activities in Wau, and link to state and national levels. They are seen as having a large degree of influence, support, and power in Wau. Despite their perceived legitimacy, a lack of financial resources is a barrier in their ability to advance their women's empowerment agenda.²⁴

Women's associations: There are many different women's associations present in Wau. These include formal and registered groups, such as WDG, WOTAP, Women Association for Wau, and others. This also includes more informal women's associations, such as Mama Gum Fuog, Young Women's Forum, Friends Forever group and others. Women's associations range from larger, more established organizations with widespread programming, to smaller community based and informal groups with less reach. Women's associations undertake a range of activities, including holding leadership or empowerment trainings, organizing peacebuilding efforts, implementing services such as for GBV survivors, providing spaces for networking and mentorship, or conducting awareness raising campaigns.²⁵ A list of women's associations that have been mapped in Wau can be found in Annex A.

Women's Forum Network: The WFN is an umbrella organization of informal women's groups. They have come together to advocate towards government structures, coordinate activities, as well as organize activities together, such as for women's day. They often represent women's groups toward state institutions such as the state parliament, municipalities, or the payam.

State Women's Association: The SWA is responsible for awareness raising on women empowerment and gender equality. It organizes capacity building for formal and informal women's groups, including providing training on entrepreneurial skills and economic activities.

Women's leaders/activists: Within the women's rights landscape in Wau, many participants mentioned individual women leaders and activists that play an important role in their community. Women leaders were seen as helping women to address their problems, supporting women in their communities, advocating for women's rights, and creating linkages with other key stakeholders, such as chiefs and community leaders, to raise attention on women's issues.

Church groups: There are various informal church groups that exist in Wau. These include worship teams, choir groups, as well as women groups within the church and mother's unions. Further research is needed to map these groups and their influence at Wau level.

Savings and loans: Some women participate in village savings and loan programs across Wau. In some research locations, such as Agok, women mentioned that these activities had stopped due to the economic crisis. Further research is needed to map these groups and women's involvement in Wau.

Social groups: Participants also mentioned social groups, such as sports groups, and spaces for music and dance. Further research is needed to map the extent of women's involvement in social and leisure groups.

²⁴ 25th Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference of Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: National Review. Republic of South Sudan. June 2019

²⁵ Assessment and mapping of existing systems, mechanisms and networks on conflict resolution and local peacebuilding in Wau and Pariang County. Bodhi Global Analysis for CARE South Sudan. June 2022.

Barriers to women's public participation and leadership in Wau

Women in South Sudan have a **long and rich history** of playing key leadership roles in their communities. Their roles include those such as peace activists contributing to the end of the civil war, to advocating for affirmative action quotas in the transitional government. As previously described, women in institutions, such as the Ministry of Gender, women's associations, or NGOs, do hold some level of influence and power in their communities. Women leaders such as chiefs or camp managers also have significant influence within Wau and their respective communities.

Nevertheless, **societal and cultural norms** limit the ability of women to fully participate in decision-making in formal and informal structures. FGD and KII participants noted that some men believed that women should not be engaged outside of the household, as they did not want them to speak in front of other men. Others noted that if women participated in community meetings, they would not be able to fulfil their roles within the household, such as taking care of children, or preparing meals. A recent study conducted in Wau on women's participation in peacebuilding noted similar dynamics, with 55% of respondents noting that their home duties were the main barrier to participating in peacebuilding efforts.²⁶

Although male participants did discuss this sentiment, some participants noted that it was women themselves that put up some of these barriers. For example, participants spoke about how some women were afraid to speak up in front of others, especially men, and that this **fear led to a lack of self-confidence or self-esteem** to be able to participate. This fear was often related to a lack of education.

Linked to unpaid care roles, women discussed the **practical difficulties** of being able to participate in community events. Needing to do house chores or taking care of children were responsibilities that took up time. Other participants mentioned being sick, having to care for sick family members, or needing to go to funerals, as activities that took up their time. This prevented them from being able to take part in community meetings.

During the research, there was a divide between women at the grassroots level and women already in leadership positions. Women within institutions (such as associations, NGOs) spoke of how these cultural norms should not limit women to participate. They described how women do take up leadership roles in Wau. Women in organizations and institutions were seen as being able to speak up about women's issues. They were also able to create linkages with influential decision-makers, such as chiefs or government officials. Interestingly, during the validation workshop participants referenced the 35% quota as a reason that women in Wau should claim their right to decision-making. Female community members and grassroots women, however, were more likely to highlight how traditional norms limit their participation. They discussed how social norms and home duties were key barriers.

During the research, while interviewing a woman for a KII, members of the participants household came to find her and ask her to come back to continue taking care of home responsibilities. She refused to go back home and said that she was not happy with never having time to participate in anything. She explained that she wanted to finish the discussion, despite her family expressing her need to continue her home chores. This demonstrates the burden of home and care responsibilities, and the difficulties of women to negotiate access to meetings and participation structures outside of their daily responsibilities.

The **specific locations** of community meetings could be limiting to women's participation. For example, locations outside of town or in dangerous neighbourhoods increased the risk of gender-based violence. Sexual assault and rape are particular risks that women face while moving through the community. This is especially relevant after dark. There was a consensus that these factors of space (specific locations) and time (during the evening) would be barriers for women, increasing their likelihood of experiencing GBV.

²⁶ Women's participation and inclusion in conflict resolution and peacebuilding at community and national level. Bodhi Global Analysis for CARE South Sudan. June 2022.

Lack of awareness and information on decision-making structures and opportunities for women's participation were also key barriers. Participants expressed their desire to have better information on opportunities within their community. This was seen as an important condition for increasing women's leadership. A recent survey conducted by IOM noted that community members lacked knowledge on humanitarian activities and opportunities more generally. 74% of survey participants reported that they did not have adequate information about humanitarian activities in Wau.²⁷

Factors such as **education level, disability status, and minorities** also affected participation. Women lacking formal education were less likely to participate in community decision-making structures. Several participants mentioned that they would not feel comfortable to speak up in meetings if they lacked an education. This was particular to grassroots women, as women involved in institutions and associations presumably have a higher educational status. Participants also noted that women with disabilities faced challenges to their participation. These included constraints on mobility, as well as the discrimination they faced. Finally, a few participants noted that minorities, such as religious minorities, may be discriminated against and not be able to participate. Further research should expand upon these topics.

'Women with disabilities have no consideration, no chance in services, and no education offered to them. They are unable to access the meeting hall, and services because of their disabilities.' – FGD participant

Finally, a few FGD participants talked about a lack of **menstrual hygiene management** as a barrier to women's participation, as well as needing to **heal from trauma** as a pre-condition to community participation. These concepts should be further expanded upon and explored in future research.

Risks from support to women's public participation

Gender-based violence is a pervasive issue across South Sudan. It continues to be experienced by women and girls (and to a lesser extent, boys, and men). A study by Oxfam in Wau noted that over 41% of participants have experienced GBV.²⁸ Another study conducted by IRC and the Global Women's Institute found that over 65% of women and girls in South Sudan have experienced GBV in their lifetime.²⁹

The findings of this RGA-P support this trend. Gender-based violence was identified as **the main risk** regarding women's decision-making and participation in Wau.

The risk of GBV takes various forms. FGD and KII participants described how if women wanted to participate in community events, this could increase **mistrust at a household level**. This could subsequently lead to conflict and even divorce. Female participants spoke of how if a husband did not want his wife participating in community meetings and she did anyways, he could become violent towards her.

At a community level, GBV was seen as a particular risk if community meetings were held in certain locations. Higher risk areas for sexual assault included specific blocks within Naivasha camp, by the river, and farther outside of town. Meetings and forums held after dark were also seen as increasing risks of GBV for female participants. During the data collection, participants spoke openly about the high number of GBV incidents in their community, including cases that had occurred that week.

'A woman who was denied permission by her husband to participate in the community gathering went anyways and managed to participate in the function. On her way back home, she experienced domestic violence from the husband until her front teeth were all broken.'

- Participant in validation workshop

Women leaders and activists also face risks of violence during their participation in community life. For example, during events organized for 16 days of activism in Wau by CARE in November 2022, community members spoke about how women leaders involved in community advocacy can face **threats, intimidation, and harassment**.

²⁷ IDP site multi-sector needs and vulnerabilities survey (FSNMS+) Wau Town. IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix South Sudan. May 2022

²⁸ South Sudan gender analysis. Oxfam. July 2016

²⁹ No Safe Place: A Lifetime of Violence for Conflict-Affected Women and Girls in South Sudan. The Global Women's Institute at the George Washington University, International Rescue Committee, and CARE International. 2017

During the FGDs, some male participants noted **resentment towards NGOs**. They were frustrated that NGOs only focus on women's activities and women's leadership. They also expressed a general resentment that they are the ones blamed, in their view unfairly, for GBV cases. As one participant noted 'we are always blamed when something bad happens in the camp.'

Risk mitigation strategies are needed to ensure that this initiative does not do harm and further worsen men's violence against women and girls. There is a risk that if men are not properly engaged on a Women Lead project, male resentment, and backlash, as well as resulting GBV, could increase. Specific recommendations have been included on Engaging Men and Boys as part of the Women Lead project. Further work should also be done to engage CARE programming and other actors on gender-based violence in Wau on prevention, mitigation, and response.

Promising directions for Women Lead in Wau

This section outlines promising entry points and directions for increasing women's meaningful participation in decision-making in Wau. Women Lead is a five-step approach to working with collectives of women to Reflect, Analyse, Co-Create, Act and Learn. However, beyond this process, women themselves will choose the specific activities. The one exception is the recommendation that Women Lead has some activities to engage male relatives and leaders. This is because of their importance for changing community norms around women's participation and mitigating risk to women who are active in public life.

Over the course of South Sudanese history, women have played influential **leadership roles**. This has been particularly notable in peace and reconciliation, with women playing a strong role in peacebuilding. National policies, including the 35% affirmative action quota as well the presence of women in key leadership positions at various government levels, demonstrate the importance that women continue to play in governance and decision-making bodies.

In Wau, it is interesting to note that all study participants believed that women can be **effective leaders**. Female participants described **strong aspirations** to increase women's participation and decision-making capacity in Wau. This sentiment was described by both community members as well as women already in leadership positions. Women consistently asked for trainings in leadership, to build their knowledge, skills, and networks.

In addition to these aspirations, there already exists a **groundwork of women's groups, associations, and leaders** that are active in community life in Wau. These existing groups, as well as key allies such as the Ministry of Gender, are a positive element that can be built upon to support Women Lead in Wau. Existing spaces, such as community centres or NGO supported safe spaces, are already being used by women to network and organize. These spaces can continue to be utilized and supported.

Potential entry points for a future Women Lead project could include:

Work with existing formal and informal women's groups, to support their actions and capitalize on existing practices on women's leadership.

- Work with **existing women's groups and associations** to support how they want to have more influence in decision-making, governance, and community participation.
- Create **safe spaces for women** to come together, reflect, network, and mobilize. This could be supporting existing safe spaces (such as the women and girls' centres) or supporting women's groups to create new spaces where they can build trust and linkages between women.
- Support **existing women leaders to uplift the voices of grassroots women**. Women leaders, such as female chiefs, women in associations and camp leaders, are already trusted by their community. They have been shown to use their influence to support women community members with less power. Work with existing leaders as well as identified grassroots groups to explore how best to support these types of partnerships.

- Engage with the **Ministry of Gender**. As a key ally and supportive institution to women's leadership, that has trust across the community, support women's groups in how they may want to engage with the Ministry in their activities for Women Lead.
- Support women's leadership on key issues such as **peacebuilding and GBV**. Research has shown that women's leadership has played an important role in advancing issues regarding peace and reconciliation, as well as GBV response and prevention. Work with women's groups to **highlight existing successes**, and support women's groups in the ways they identify to continue working on these issues.
- Organize **leadership trainings** with women in the community, encouraging women to come together to learn more about leadership and their rights. Work with women's groups to see what other elements could be included, such as financial literacy, vocational skills or entrepreneurial skills (as noted by several participants).
- Support women's groups to address **different minority groups and ensure holistic representation** in women's participation. This could include **persons with disabilities**, and **ethnic and religious minorities**. Support women to create linkages with groups already working with these populations and identify ways to increase **intersectional representation** in community decision-making.

Strengthen GBV response, prevention, and mitigation measures in Wau. This should be for Women Lead specific activities, as well as encouraging CARE and other humanitarian stakeholders to strengthen GBV programming in Wau more generally. Ensuring a safe and secure environment for women to be able to freely move and participate in community life was seen as a pre-condition for women's participation in leadership and decision-making.

- Ensure that Women Lead activities include **elements of GBV awareness**, including engagement with men, to mitigate risks.
- Consider the **timing and location** of community meetings, to avoid locations and neighbourhoods where GBV is an identified risk. Support women's groups to identify the best time of day where they will feel safe and able to access community forums.
- Support women's groups in their **ongoing efforts on gender-based violence**, such as awareness raising campaigns and protection activities.
- Support efforts to **strengthen security** in and around Wau, including Naivasha camp. This could include support to community watch groups or women's protection groups.

Address practical and logistical barriers for women's participation, to reduce women's care responsibilities and increase time available for participation in public life.

- Provide **transport** or reimbursement for transport for women to attend community meetings.
- Organise **childcare services** for women wanting to participate in community decision-making, so they can attend meetings and activities.
- Work with women's groups to identify the best time and locations for meetings, to ensure that women can participate in **safe and accessible ways**.

Engage with men and male leaders in support of women's leadership.

- Work with **chiefs as key stakeholders** in Wau and engage with them to be male leaders and champions for women's participation. Make sure to include **the informal group of friends and advisors of the chief** in any male role model programming, as they act as key gatekeepers for the chief's influence, knowledge, and attention.

- Support women's groups to identify how best to **engage men and boys** in areas where Women Lead will be implemented, including Wau Town and Naivasha camp. This could include support to women's groups on activities from the **Engaging Men and Boys as Role Model Men** module, where they deem relevant.

Provide adult literacy and education classes, to address women's concerns that a lack of education - including reading, writing, and speaking skills – are a main barrier for participation.

- Support women's groups to identify the types of **adult literacy or education classes** that they would deem helpful to improve their knowledge and skills.
- As **public speaking** skills were deemed as important for community leaders, as well as a barrier for why women felt they cannot speak up, support women's groups in building skills in public speaking.

Increase access to information and awareness on decision-making, women's leadership opportunities and participation in humanitarian activities in Wau.

- Support formal and informal women's groups in **identifying the opportunities** for women's participation in community decision-making forums. Ensure that access to information on services, rights, and opportunities is available to women across the community
- Use **CARE's influence** to encourage other relevant stakeholders in Wau (including UN agencies, OCHA, NGOs, Ministry of Gender, etc.) to better **share and disseminate information** on humanitarian activities, governance activities, and community meetings.
- Take into consider language, literacy rates, gendered access to information, and factors such as age and disability when designing information campaigns.
- Organize trainings to bring women together, for **collective learning on leadership** and other relevant subjects linked to their status in the community (ex. financial literacy, business skills, entrepreneurship, or vocational training).

Gaps and areas for further research

As this is the first RGA-P conducted in Wau, deepening, and expanding this analysis will be crucial. Future research should **expand the mapping of key stakeholders**. This could look at the role of **faith leaders and religious groups**, including informal women's groups like choir groups or mothers' unions. An expanded mapping should also deepen the understanding of informal women's groups, community action groups, and social groups, including their influence and power.

Although this research has outlined the main governance, humanitarian, and women's stakeholders, there needs to be a deeper analysis of **how women's groups currently engage with traditional humanitarian structures**, such as the cluster system. How these groups interact during the planning and implementation of emergency response activities are important elements to further understand. Given that many of the stakeholders outlined in this report - including local governance, associations, CBOs, and national organizations – are often siloed by humanitarian agencies during an emergency response³⁰, a deeper understanding of these dynamics in Wau is needed.

Future research could expand upon **existing inequalities** and how these interact with women's leadership, such as **disabilities, or ethnic and religious minorities**. This should include a deeper analysis of how minorities, are currently represented in existing power structures, and what influence they have on community decisions.

³⁰ Oxfam

Finally, a few participations mentioned that **menstrual hygiene management and healing from trauma** were barriers to their participation in community meetings. These topics need to be further investigated.

Conclusion

Women in South Sudan have a **long and rich history** of taking up leadership roles in their communities. In Wau, there exists a network of various women's associations, leaders, institutions, and informal groups. They are already engaged in leadership and decision-making. As the research has shown, women at an institutional and organizational level (such as block leaders, the Ministry of Gender, female chiefs, or associations) can play an influential role in uplifting and supporting grassroots women.

Given this **varied picture of women's leadership** in Wau, there are several opportunities and potential entry points to support women's participation in a Women Lead project. This could include building upon existing networks and women's associations, engaging key allies that have been highlighted, creating safe spaces for women to come together and participate in community life, and supporting activities such as leadership trainings.

To be able to take full advantage of these opportunities, several **key barriers** need to be addressed. This includes **increasing awareness** on leadership opportunities, addressing the need for women's **education**, and providing **practical solutions** (such as childcare or transport) for logistical challenges. **Gender-based violence** has been identified as the main risk facing women who want to participate in community spaces and public life. As such, risk mitigation measures, as well as engaging men and boys, is a crucial step for any future Women Lead projects.

Overall, there are **aspirations and encouragement** from a community level to increase women's participation and decision-making. The Women Lead in Emergencies project should capitalize on these opportunities and will most likely find an engaged and interested network of women's groups, as well as larger community, to start the Women Lead process.

Annex 1: Women's groups in Wau

Informal women's groups present in Wau	
1	Al akwaat Society
2	Advocacy Committee
3	Islamic Council
4	Mama Gum Fuog
5	Muhaba wa Salaam
6	Batul Juma
7	Women Initiative for Empowerment
8	Women Empowerment
9	Friends forever Group
10	Young Women Forum
11	Women Empowerment for Change
12	Wano Association for Development and Capacity Building [WADCAP]
13	Future Women
Formal (registered) women's groups present in Wau	
14	Women Development Group [WDG]
15	Women training and Promotion [WOTAP]
16	Women Association in WAU
17	Center for Strengthening Community Voices
18	Communication for Life Change [CLC]
19	Alliance of Women Lawyers

Annex 2: Participation in validation workshop

List of participants for RGA-P validation workshop		
1	Women Initiative for Empowerment and Development	Community Based
2	Mama Gum Fuog	Community Based
3	Centre for Strengthening Community Voices	NNGO
4	Women Development Group	NNGO
5	Communication for Life Change	NNGO
6	Friends forever Women Group	Community Based
7	Al Akuaat Society	Community Based

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