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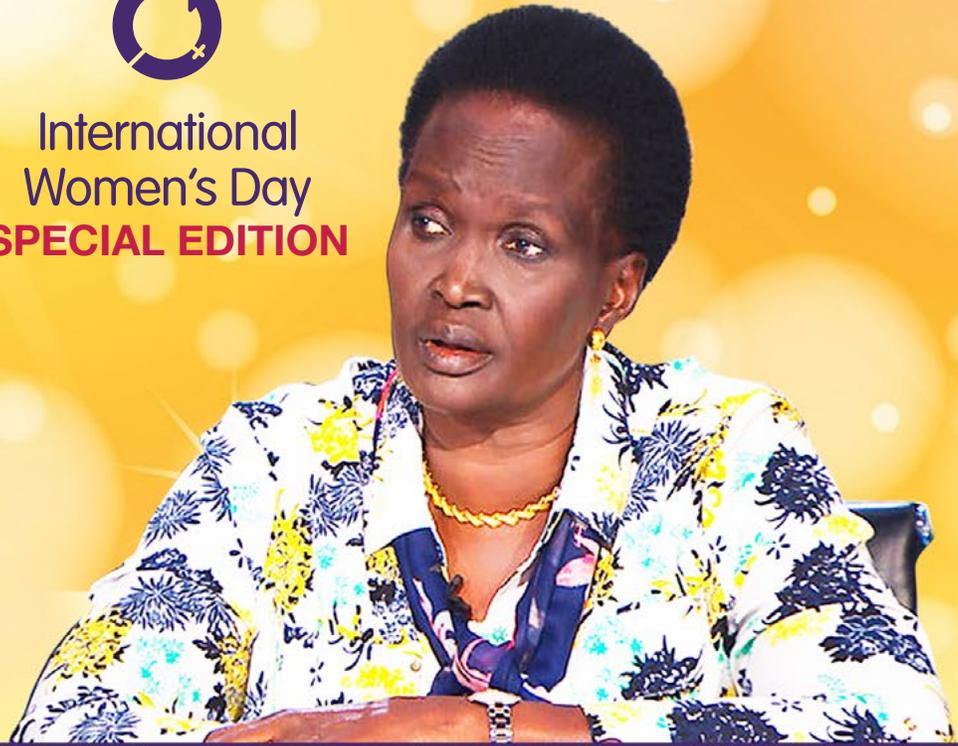
# VOICE of WOMEN

# Canada

## IWD2022 #BreakTheBias



International Women's Day  
**SPECIAL EDITION**



# Celebrating Women *in* Leadership

THE PUSH FOR WOMEN ENTERPRISE FUND

PARTIES STRIVE FOR 35% WOMEN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

WOMEN DEMAND GBV INCLUSION IN POLICE TRAINING

# Vice President's *International Women's Day Message*

## **Happy International Women's Day to the girls and women of South Sudan.**

Today, 8 March, 2022 is a very special to us the women and girls of south Sudan, even though the day was being enjoyed by the international women while we were in bondage. But now our eyes are open, especially during our struggle.

Our movement opened our eyes to know what International Women Day is. But today is a special day for women because it marks the beginning of our struggle.

Our revolution towards women emancipation. It is very important for us to see how we can develop ourselves so that we can reach the equality men want.

Even though I know there are educated women able to compete with men, but we are still being denied opportunities. But when I studied it, it realised it is because women are not strong financially.

This should be a year for women to empower themselves economically so that men know we are part and parcel of them in the upbringing of families together. We should put our hands together.

At the same time, we need to educate our girls to know that this day belongs to them. This is because women were not being heard out internationally until women's day came into existence.

I am really grateful to those who created this day. It is a special day for the women and girls of the Republic of South Sudan.

The day enables women and girls stand together with their sisters internationally.

When I got into office, I created a relationship with my partners and vowed to be knocking their doors so they can support and bring our women out of bondage.

Already, I have knocked doors of the African Development Bank (AfDB), World Bank, USAID, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and they are willing to support us.

It is, however, upon us to see if we can stand up to these challenges. We need to pick up the pieces and equip ourselves.

Yesterday [March 3, 2022], I launched women and youth enterprise development fund. I want women to enter the private sector, politics so that they are stronger.

Women should not be despaired by anybody. We have equal rights like anybody.

I wish all the women of South Sudan a happy International Women's Day.



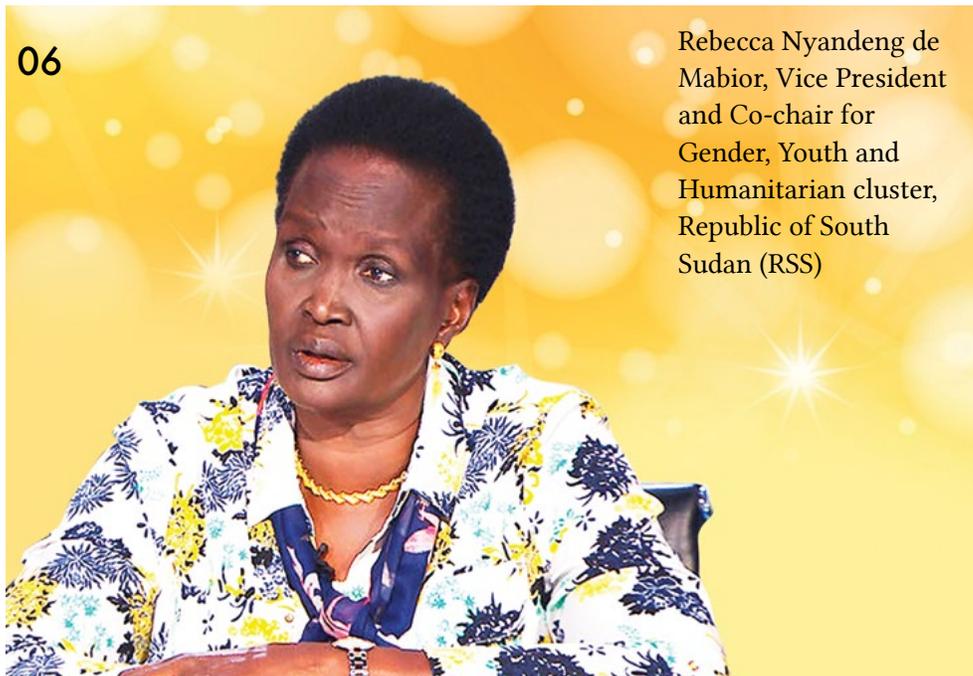
**Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior,**  
Vice President and Co-chair for Gender,  
Youth and Humanitarian cluster,  
Republic of South Sudan (RSS)



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## Cover Story

**06** Rebecca Garang de Mabior, Vice President, Republic of South Sudan. Mrs. Garang has been a founding member and early supporter of groups like the National Association of Women), the Business Women’s Network and the Committ of Gender.

## Women’s Month Special

We are so honored to share this special issue that highlights the work of the women in leadership in South Sudan. As you’ll see in these pages, South Sudan is made up of influential women leaders who are focused on breaking the bias and improving empowerment for women in throughout the country.

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**R**ight now is a great and important time in history to do everything possible to help forge a more gender-balanced world. Women have come a long way, yet, like they say, there's still more to be achieved. Annually on March 8, International Women's Day (IWD) celebrates the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women across the globe. It's a gender parity party! It's a fairness festival! It's an equality event! The 2022 theme is

#BreakTheBias

Many would agree that the IWD provides an important moment to showcase commitment to women's equality, launch new initiatives and action, celebrate women's achievements, and raise awareness. That broadly explains why the annual event is celebrated and supported globally by industry, governments, educational institutions, community groups, professional associations, women's networks, charities and non-profit bodies, the media, among others.

The first International Women's Day occurred in 1911, supported by over a million people. Today, IWD belongs to all groups everywhere. This year's theme, 'Break the bias' provides an opportunity for women to measure gains they have so far made over the years. Let us acknowledge and support the struggles of working-class and oppressed women around the world for justice, equality and liberation. One of the most powerful ways you can influence how quickly gender balance is achieved is by championing their cause.

The key questions remain; why don't women have access to equality, education and opportunity? How can women achieve gender equality with equal pay for equal work? How can the common stereotypes about the women in our various societies be tackled?

The maiden edition of the Voice of Women magazine reached out to a cross-section of leaders in the Republic of South Sudan, with specific focus on the theme this year's International Women's Day occasion. Let's work together and break the common biases against women. Happy International Women's Day!

*No country can truly flourish if it stifles the potential of its women and deprives itself of the contributions of half of its citizens.- Michelle Obama*



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*'A remarkable platform for making women voices count, displaying women visibility.'*

## Why CEPO Established Voice of Women Magazine

**C**ommunity Empowerment for Progress Organization (CEPO) decided to establish this magazine called Voice of Women (VOW) after realizing that amplification of women voices is limited and not broad enough. Matters of Women leaders' visibility was among factors that triggered the establishment of VOW magazine.

VOW aims at becoming an outstanding space for raising women voices and efforts in public life. It was a dream now turned into reality and practice. A remarkable platform for making women voices count, displaying women visibility.

As such, the team at CEPO, under its "Status of Women Initiative" program decided to establish the VOW magazine. We can only invest in women if their voices are heard and they are given visibility through recognition in societal life.

VOW is common space created for lifting up and loud voices and visibility of women in South Sudan. Myself, being the champion for localization of UN WOMEN strategy for HEforSHE in South Sudan, I approached

UN WOMEN South Sudan for funding of VOW. The leadership of UN WOMEN South Sudan immediately approved funds for production of VOW. Thanks to UN WOMEN South Sudan office.

It is my pledge that the VOW will act as platform for lifting and amplifying voices and visibility of women leaders from all sectors of life, including women with disabilities. This edition of VOW is dedicated towards celebrating women in leadership. CEPO's advocacy and lobby with the support of UN WOMEN in the realization of meaningful women participation has achieved tangible results.

**Happy International Women's Day!**



**Edmund Yakani**  
*Executive Director,*  
Community Empowerment for  
Progress Organization (CEPO)

**“Women should economically empower themselves”**



# Mama Rebecca Nyandeng Garang is the Vice President of the Republic of South Sudan and co-chair of the Gender, Youth and humanitarian cluster.

In an interview with the Voice of Women editor, Julius N. Uma, the only female Vice Presidents speaks about cultures, general election and the women enterprise development fund, among other issues. Below are excerpts from the interview.

**Q: Your Excellency, what is your understanding of 'Break the bias', the theme for this year's International Women's Day? And how can stereotypes against women be addressed?**

**A:** When I started my home, I learned that we women are enemies of ourselves. When you are bringing up your children (boys and girls), they should be treated equality. Not that when there is scarcity of men, then only boys should to school and the girls stay at home. It is more like pulling down your sister's legs when she is trying to go up. So these are the issues that we need to address to break bias. Because If I want peace, it must start with myself before I disseminate to others. To break the bias depends a lot on our cultures, which are negative about women. Some of them are even misusing cultures for their own selfish gains. So these are the things we are talking about to be broken. This is, therefore, my understanding of the International Women's Day (IWD) theme, 'break the bias'. I have been a victim of culture myself (that's why I don't have my lower teeth). My understanding of the theme is that we need to break our cultures. Even in families, we need to bring up our children equally. We should start with fathers who have a mindset that boys should not go to the kitchen, girls should wash clothes for their brothers, and so on. These are the biases that we need to break.

**Q: You said for the general elections to take place, refugees and internally displaced people should first return home. Has your position on this changed?**

**A:** My position has not changed, not only for elections. They are eager to come back to their country. Noting is better than home. This is their home even if they live under trees. When we talk to our partners, they are concerned about security. So if we are going for elections, we need those people. They will have to come. If it were not

for Covid-19, we would have started bringing back our people. Already, some have started returning home. We are working with the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs to ensure that the returnees are given food. We are also going to ensure that this time, the repatriation is better the one done in 2005.

**Q: What would be your final message to the women of South Sudan as they join the rest of the world on the occasion marking International Women's Day?**

**A:** I would like to say today is a special day for women because it marks the beginning of our struggle. Our revolution towards women emancipation. It is very important for us to see how we can develop ourselves so that we can reach the equality men want. Even though I know there are educated women able to compete with men, but we are still being denied opportunities. But when I studied it, it realised it is because women are not strong financially. This should be a year for women to empower themselves economically so that men know we are part and parcel of them in the upbringing of families together. At the same time, we need to educate our girls to know that this day belongs to them. This is because women were not being heard out internationally until women's day came into existence. Am really grateful to those who created this day. It is a special day for the women and girls of the Republic of South Sudan. The day enables women and girls stand together with their sisters internationally.

## FACT FILE:

*Born on July 15, 1956, Rebecca Nyandeng Garang is a South Sudanese politician. She has been one of the Vice Presidents of South Sudan in the unity government since February 2020. She previously served as the Minister of Roads and Transport for the autonomous government of Southern Sudan and as an advisor for the President of South Sudan Salva Kiir on gender and human rights from 2007 to 2014.*

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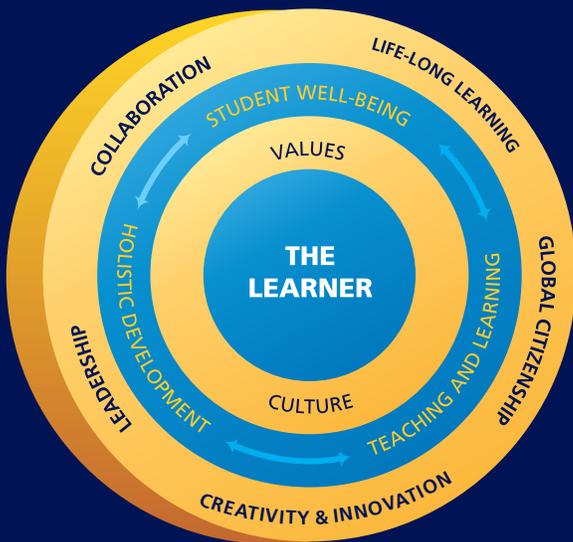
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# “Gender ministry developing an affirmative action plan”

By Julius Uma



Hon. Aya Benjamin Warille, Minister of Gender, Child and Social Welfare

**H**on. Aya Benjamin Warille is the Minister of Gender, Child and Social Welfare. On the occasion to commemorate this year's International Women Day, the minister spoke to Francis Okech on the 35% women affirmative action, the need to set up a women enterprise fund, gender equity, among others. Excerpts as below;

**Q: The theme for this year's International Women's Day event is, "Break the bias". Your understanding of this and why is it important?**

**A:** To me, 'Break the bias' means stop! It means make it a thing of the past, it means

end the bias. Let the bias be history, let the bias be for the uncivilised people. The bias here are stereotypes and myths that are prevalent in the society or in the country. It has many negative impacts on the lives, especially of girls and women. For example, we have girls, but we give priorities for the boys because we believe girls are going to be married off. So why invest in a girl? We have also seen girls being denied in inheritance when families divide properties because they are going to join another family. Even in those families, married woman do not inherit property. Worst still, when a woman loses a husband, the brothers will come in and inherit his properties. When a couple

gets married, they have expectations and when expectations are not met, they blame it on the woman. You give birth to a girl, they blame it on the woman. You know, some communities they want boys. Even in issues affecting children, like when a child is not performing well, whether it's a girl or a boy, they blame it on the mother. Individually, we are all responsible for our thoughts and actions. Every day, we should be thinking about breaking the bias in our families, workplaces, communities and as a country, we should be able to break the bias. This year's theme is therefore very relevant to our context!



A woman celebrating during one of the recent events in Juba, South Sudan (File Photo)

**Q: The national theme for Women's Day is "Gender Equality for Future Sustainability: Promote and Celebrate Women and Girls' Achievements and Resilience." How did you come up with this?**

**A:** We looked at our context and this year we want to single out some of our women and celebrate them in a special way, looking at their resilience and their achievements. The component of gender equality is very important because we are looking at how they have contributed individually in their different areas of expertise towards gender equality.

**Q: Talking about the 35% affirmative action for women! How much, in your view, has been achieved at the national and state levels?**

**A:** It is a journey that we have started and we will walk this journey. I must say we have made progress. Some of us, like me, came on the 35% quota and so the fact that we in

this government have not met the 35% is a setback for us. But, generally we have made progress and we look forward. We are working very hard so that we achieve that, at least a minimum of 35%. Now there are many issues that women in the country face. We just spoke about stereotyping, opportunities given to women and girls and it starts right from the family. It's very unfortunate that we are made to believe that we are second class citizens. So in every action or every decision a family takes, priority will be given to a boy child. So if you look at it critically, it really starts right from the beginning. We have so much we can do, it's really about education and awareness.

Girls must be made to understand they are equal with boys and every opportunity

**Given our mandate at the ministry of gender, we are constantly reminding the parties to this agreement that look here, there is this provision of 35 percent.**

must be given equally. Once a child goes to school, what happens in school also shapes their lives. What is the curriculum talking about, what kind of training are our teachers getting? So these ones all impact on the gender equality we are talking about. This one will therefore shape the kind of women that will go to the university and to offices. In a democratic society where the majority make decisions, men are the majority, but the good news is that there are some men who believe in what we are

struggling for so they are our partners in this struggle.

I think with theme on board, we can make progress. Given our mandate at the ministry of gender, we are constantly reminding the parties to this agreement that look here, there is this provision of 35 percent. We write, but this is the maximum we can do. We even use our own relations with the decision makers to influence them.

Also we have realised we can't go beyond this that's why we are developing the plan for affirmative action. There is progress and that one will hold parties accountable. It won't be like the minister of gender who is appointed by the president challenging the president for not meeting the 35 percent. This is why I'm saying we have made progress but we shouldn't relax, there is still a long way to go and everybody has to play their part for this success.

**Q: How far is your ministry in efforts to ensure the women enterprise development fund provided for in the peace deal is established?**

**A:** The women enterprise fund is a provision of the revitalised agreement and like any other chapters, we have not done what we are expected to have done. We have not met the expectation of our people and the expectation of the agreement itself. With the enterprise fund, the development of the model was started back in 2018 then we realised the consultant was given, the scope of his work was only in Juba. This, we thought, that can be the basis on which we will make a country wide consultation so that we get the opinion of everybody. I am happy we are soon starting the consultation. We will officially launch once consultations are done.

**Q: What would be your message to the women of South Sudan on this occasion to commemorate the International Women's Day?**

**A:** I celebrate every woman in the world and every woman in South Sudan. I believe in women and I know they have greatly contributed and continue to contribute to the development of this country. This year, with out theme, I would like to ask all of us to break the bias. Let's be honest with ourselves, let's accept that. Let's acknowledge that it exist so that we can face it. It's a challenge that is existing and we have to face it and we have to devise ways of addressing it. Let's educate ourselves, let's also support ourselves in addressing it. Importantly, let's speak about it. As we go through this process, I know that the women of South Sudan are very strong. They have, however, gone through a lot. I want to say that we can't move a step if we are holding grudges. So it's important we start working on forgiveness. Let go of what is holding you and move forward doing something progressive.



# Women Enterprise Fund Will Uplift Impoverished Women, Widows

*Rt. Hon. Wakila Charles Abdu is the Speaker of Western Equatoria State Legislative Assembly. On the occasion to mark this year's International Women's Day (IWD), the legislator spoke to our editor, Julius N. Uma on the 35% affirmative action for women provided for in the revitalized peace agreement, Women Enterprise Development Fund, peace, gender equality, among others. Excerpts as below;*



**Q: What is your understanding of “Break the bias”, the theme for this year's International Women's Day? How can we break bias against women in society?**

**A:** According to my understanding, bias means unfair or unfavorable judgment against someone. In other words, it is like a discrimination against people. Furthermore, it is like some people wanting to be better than others. So how do we break the bias among women? We need to come together

because as women, we don't have tribe. By coming together, I mean interacting with one another. It should start from our states and then to the other states of South Sudan. I think we shall learn a lot of things by interacting with women from the other states. We shall be able to share our ideas, problems and by coming together, we will find themselves singing the same song.

At the same time, we are able to realize there are some other positive things we don't have, which our sisters in other

states have. So we collect all these things and implement in our day to day lives. Some women are self-centered, but they will be able to interact with others by socializing. In that way, that fear of self-centeredness will go out of them. That is one advantage of women coming together with those from other states. Socializing with other women also helps improve thinking capacity. The way we think will expand, allowing us do bigger things in our societies.

**Q: What, in your view, can be done to address the common stereotypes about women in today's societies?**

**A:** A stereotype, by definition, is the untrue or unfair belief some people have about others with particular characteristics. Negative stereotypes are common among people in South Sudan. For example, you find someone asking where you come from, knowing very well you are South Sudanese. Such questions make one feel inferior. So how do we address stereotypes? We need to create awareness among our people so that each and every one feels he or she is part of you. These stereotypes also affect us in decision

**I want to thank our late hero Dr. John Garang de Mabior for his love and support of rewarding women with 25% affirmative action during the war [May his soul rest in eternal peace]. Secondly, I want to thank the President of the Republic of South Sudan, His Excellency Salva Kiir Mayardit for not killing the vision of our late hero.**

making. Sometimes when you have that tendency of thinking at the back of your brain, it will affect the person you asked making her or she feel the decision you are going to make will affect them because you had asked that question. This is a tendency that also needs to be removed. We need to make people more aware of those processes of helping them to correct themselves.



How do we therefore recognize and stop stereotypes? First of all, we need to check our bias right from the door. We should desist from asking people questions those that will demoralize them. We need to first check ourselves. We need to create a welcoming environment to avoid fear among people.

Focus should also be on multiple perspectives. For example, we need to see conditions in many directions or angles. We need to create many directions to see what next if something happens. We should also put this into consideration.

**Q: What is your opinion on the Women Enterprise Development Fund initiative?**

**A:** Thank you very much. I think that initiative was in April 2019. The stipulation that the forthcoming transitional national government establishes a women enterprise development fund, which aims at assisting women entrepreneurs as well as building their capacities. This initiative, to me, was a good idea because they had already identified a problem. This problem could not be solved unless this is done [women enterprise development fund formed]. That is why the idea of empowering women through this enterprise came up. So that means women are facing a lot of problems compared to men, thus the

women enterprise fund is a solution for empowering women.

But my concern is whether the women fund initiative will cover all the states. If not, there is need to cover the rest of the states so that everyone benefits from this initiative. This is because during the war, women were left with nothing. This is coupled with the coronavirus pandemic, which attacked the whole world. Our women suffered a lot. Even the little they had is gone.

The unstable economy of our country has also contributed a lot to the problems women are facing today. Women have been left with nothing, yet most of them are widow taking care of orphans. So this initiative is good and it should be revised to ensure that it covers all the country's 10 states.

**Q: So what type of women fund would you want to see in terms of its autonomy?**

**A:** Thank you. I think before any money is given to someone, there is a body formed with a mandate of how the money is allocated and controlled. According to me, government can only come in the middle to monitor how this initiative is being run. This is because there must be a written agreement between the funding agency and beneficiaries of the fund.



A situation where it is clearly stated how money given to the beneficiaries will be used. In this way, government will also make sure that project coming through the funders are implemented accordingly. This is done by monitoring them, not interfering with their work. Also, government will encourage citizens on how to efficiently use money so that they benefit from the next round of funds. By involvement in such activities, women income will increase and enable them help their children.

**Q: As a beneficiary from the 35% affirmative action, would one rightly say all is on course for the women of South Sudan? And does this call for celebration?**

**Women are generally peace makers and peace lovers. As such, women have big roles to play for many reasons.**

**A:** First of all, I want to thank our late hero Dr. John Garang de Mabior for his love and support of rewarding women with 25% affirmative action during the war [May his soul rest in eternal peace]. Secondly, I want to thank the President of the Republic of South Sudan, His Excellency Salva Kiir Mayardit for not killing the vision of our late hero.



He continued to have it in his thinking until the Reconstituted Transitional Government of National Unity was formed and it was raised to 35%. We have been celebrating this initiative and we will continue to celebrate. Even if other states are yet to form their cabinets, we are celebrating because there is already a female Vice President. The Reconstituted Transitional National Assembly also has female as its speaker. That means we are celebrating and the celebration continues. I think women are now beginning to realize the 35% affirmative action provided for them in the revitalized peace agreement. I think the celebration will continue until the government is fully put in. I'm sure our government and parties to the revitalized peace agreement will not let women down, otherwise we will raise our voices to demand what it meant for the women.

**Q: What role, in your view, can women play in ensuring peace and stability?**

**A:** Women are generally peace makers and peace lovers. As such, women have big roles to play for many reasons. Firstly, because woman are the majority who suffered during the war, becoming widows taking care of their orphans, they remained with nothing. They have the right to contribute to peace and stability in this country. Government must therefore give space for women because they were the most affected people during war. Women must be involved in any peace negotiation because they are the ones who feel the pain. When you take your brother or sister to hospital, they are the ones to explain how he or she is feeling. The same thing applies to the women. If there is any negotiation on a place that has been affected by war, women must be given chance to talk. Also when women talk, their voices must be heard and taken into consideration. For women to effectively contribute to the peace and stability in this country, they should advise their husbands and sons to avoid situations that can lead to war.

**Q: Any advice you have for young girls intending to pursue a political career?**

**A:** In any society, people look at girls as sources of wealth. My message to the girls out there is that 'you are responsible for your future', especially the grown up ones. If the decision you take is good, it will help you tomorrow. Some girls don't have a say in the family. They are caught up in situations whereby they become speechless. In some states, we have even been hearing of girls committing suicide because they don't know what to do, where to go or who can help them. They end up killing themselves. The girls should know the decisions they make is for their future, especially in the world we live in today. It is not easy. There are lots of problems and conditions that even girls cannot handle. For example, sometimes, you girls end up venturing in to other situations simply because their parents cannot afford all school requirements. So before you take decisions, try to ask yourself several questions and try to answer these questions by yourself. Here, I'm talking about girls who are mature and they understand what life is all about. But some girls enter such situations unknowingly. They may not know what they are doing, maybe associated with poverty. But my message to them is 'it is better to die poor than rushing into richness and then you die before it is your time. Maintain your integrity so that you are able to tell your children what happened in future. Don't simply rush into something that will make you regret tomorrow.

**Q: What special message do you have for the women as South Sudan joins rest of the world to commemorate this year's International Women's Day occasion?**

**A:** Women's day is not all about coming together, sing songs and have some drinks. The day means a lot to us. It is a day when we should reflect back. If you cannot realize the suffering of other fellow women, think of yourself. Ask yourself why that organization decided to make it a day to be celebrated. I'm sure there are women out there who are suffering, but they will force themselves to go and celebrate that day. Not because



**Rt. Hon. Wakila Charles Abdu is the Speaker of Western Equatoria State Legislative Assembly gestures during the interview.**

they are happy, but going to relive their stress.

My message to our partners, husbands, especially married couples is that in any family has gone through a lot, more so during this condition of pandemics and our usual economic crisis. People are going through a lot and families are divided.

Children have left homes, are now street children and yet their parents are there. They have nothing to say. Some men have even gone to the extent of beating their wives and killing them. Our fellow women have also gone to extent fighting and killing their husbands.

My message as we celebrate women day is keep in mind that when two of you are coming together to become couples, it is out of love'. We are just in a temporary situation. The solution for each problem lies in your hands. You cannot take the life of your wife or husband because of situations you are in. Let anger not drive you to kill someone.

Secondly, some of us end up killing our

own children. If your daughter does not want to marry somebody, you kill her. Or if your son becomes stubborn and does not want to listen, you beat and kill that child. These are children given to you by God out of love. They are gifts from God. Let us discipline our children on a humble way and they will respect us. When we become old tomorrow, they will help us.

Let us come together as husband and wife, family and make homes a better place for our children. Let us also make this country a better place for us all.

#### **FACT FILE**

*Born on July 12, 1962 in Maridi county of Western Equatoria State, Wakila Charles Abdu holds a Diploma in Entrepreneurship from the Nile Institute of Management Studies (NIMS) in Arua, Uganda. She previously served as a member of the now defunct Maridi State Legislative Assembly, Secretary of the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement (SPLM) for the defunct Maridi State prior to her recent appointment as the Speaker of Western Equatoria State Legislative Assembly.*

# Do Not Discriminate Against Persons With Disabilities, Media Urged

By Michael Taban Moses



Over 40 journalists attended the training held in Juba, South Sudan.

**M**edia practitioners have been urged to desist from sensational reports discriminating against persons with disabilities in South Sudan.

The call emerged as part of resolutions derived at the end of a three-day media workshop organized by Community Empowerment for Progress Organization (CEPO) with support from Light for the World. Over 40 journalists attended the training held in Juba, South Sudan.

“As journalists, do not discriminate against persons with disabilities. Media strives to amplify voices in society. Avoid sensationalism when reporting on persons with disabilities,” said Sapana

Agyuli Abuyi, the acting Managing Director of Media Regulatory Authority (MRA). He further appealed to the media to always work in the interest of the public, taking into account the interests of persons with disabilities.

“Media is a link between government and the public as they play fundamental roles in disseminating information,” stressed Abuyi.

Sophia Mohammed, the Country Director of Light for the World said the media should accurately report on persons living with disabilities. “We believe the media plays a fundamental role in raising the voices of person living with disabilities in our various societies,” she noted.

CEPO’s Executive Director, Edmund Yakani said it is media’s human right role to protect and promote inclusion of persons with disabilities.

“Such trainings should empower journalists to effectively and accurately amplify voices of persons with disabilities in society,” he said, adding, “Knowledge and skills acquired will improve reporting on inclusion of disabilities in the various media outlets in the country”.

South Sudan’s Interim Constitution contains a Bill of Rights, which seeks to respect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms.

About 1.2 million people are living with disabilities in South Sudan.

# Disability Is Not Inability: Margaret's Real Life Story



By WfWi team & agencies

**L**iving with disability did not deter Margaret Dure Edward, a 21-year woman at an internally displaced peoples' camp, from realizing her dreams.

In 2015, Margaret's life was changed when she developed a stroke which left her with permanent disabilities affecting her mobility. Her parents were able to care for her and she rested comfortably until she lost both



**"I hated my disability condition", narrates Margaret, adding "I didn't think I had any value to my relatives in any way".**

parents due to a bloody civil war that broke out in July 2016. Left on her own with difficulty walking, she had no choice, but move from Lasu payam in Yei River County to the South Juba in order to get support from her brother.

Difficulties continued in Juba, and her sister-in-law rejected her due to her disability in 2018. Her vulnerability, as her sister-in-law stated, became a "burden on her

brother's home" because she needed additional support from family members. At this time, she began pushing the husband (Margret's brother) to send Margret back to Yei to live with her aunt.

According to Margaret, the conflict in South Sudan worsened her situation. She noted she lacked skills to earn income due to the nature of disability, making her unable to cope while being



an internally displaced person. She started several businesses, but failed due to poor record keeping and low demand of the product she offered for sale.

“I hated my disability condition”, narrates Margaret, adding “I didn’t think I had any value to my relatives in any way”.

Her joy was restored when she finally joined Women for Women International (WfWI) training in 2021. She immediately developed a fresh business plan and restarted new business after receiving a stipend of 9000 SSP (\$20). She is

currently selling cooking oil, onions, locally-made powdered coffee, groundnuts and daga fish.

Margaret says her joy was restored when she finally joined WfWI training. She immediately developed a fresh business plan and restarted a new business.

She is determined to use the social and community network session covered by her WfWI trainer to work collectively with both her community members and trainers for any psycho-social and business support she needs. She now knows that friends and colleagues she met during the training are her family.

Margaret thanked WfWI for standing by all the women like her, no matter their disability or economic status in a society.

A non-profit humanitarian entity, WfWI provides practical and moral support to female survivors of war. It helps women rebuild their lives after war’s devastation through a year-long tiered program that begins with direct financial aid and emotional counseling and includes life skills training if necessary, rights awareness education, health education, job skills training and small business development.

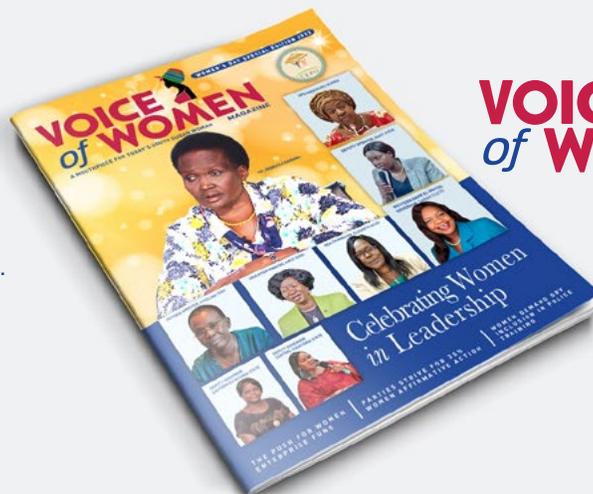
Since 2006, WfWI has worked with women uprooted from their homes and left behind by conflict and danger in South Sudan. The organization established its first office in the Lakes State capital, Rumbek, but has since relocated to Yei. In 2016, WfWI was forced to pause all its programming and transition to supporting local partners in Yei and northern Uganda as intensified war wracked the country.

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**VOICE of WOMEN**  
 MAGAZINE

# Media paying less attention to gender equality issues: Ayaa

*Ms. Irene Ayaa is the Principal at the Association for Media Development in South Sudan (AMDISS), a media advocacy and training organization committed to promote professional journalism and advocating for a vibrant, free and independent media. She spoke to our editor on a range of issues. Excerpts below;*

**Q: How, in your view, can we address the common stereotypes people have about women in the various societies within Africa's newest nation?**

**A:** First of all, many people view women as people who cannot do other things. For example, people think women cannot be journalists. Yes! If you talk about journalism as a profession, many people think that women cannot make good journalists because they look at journalism as quite a demanding field, whereby people move a lot, write a lot and it demands a lot of time. Even the working hours alone may require that you go very early to work and come back very late. As such, many people view journalism as a field which is not meant for women.

Now, other things also include sciences if you talk about schools. People think that girls are not bright enough to manage science subjects. They think women can only make it to be nurses, but not doctors because it is hard for them to read and pass sciences to the level of becoming doctors. They also think women are short tempered and cannot, for example, work on patients in critical conditions, wounded patients and all the other areas. Also, many people think that women cannot be good



**The inclusion of affirmative action is not sufficient. More needs to be done.**

electrical engineers, those involved in building, among others.

The theme is challenging us as women to first of all break the bias. As women, I think we need to show people that we can do it. That the only way! When people see you doing things they didn't expect a woman to do, you are trying to break the bias. The theme for this year's Women's Day is also giving a very strong message to the other agenda [men] to look at women otherwise and not the other way round. They should not look at women as the weaker sex. Even when you go to school

and get a degree, some men will still not allow you work because they think your work is in the kitchen. Therefore, the theme is telling them to break that bias and look at women as people who are professionals in their fields.

**Q: Tell us about your Media Development Institute (MDI) training program for journalists. And how has enrolment for female applicants been over the year?**

**A:** AMDISS has training wing called Media Development Institute (MDI), which was established in 2014 by AMDISS itself because they wanted to address the challenges of lack of training for journalists. So, then the institute started training journalists in 2015. Since then, we have graduated about 132 graduates from MDI. Our training lasts for one year and it is divided into two semesters. We are first semesters and second semester. The first semester is mainly about introduction to, you know, writing skills, basic journalism skills, conflict sensitive reporting and so on. Then the second semester is basically practical, introducing journalists to practical work, videography, photography and specialized writing skills. We also take them to the field to interview people and write stories because we have a student journal, which is purely print and publishes stories written and edited by students.

We have 11 modules, including conflict sensitive reporting, basic journalism skills, writing skills, foundational journalism, gender sensitive reporting and extractive industries, among others. Our courses run from Monday to Friday (8am-12pm).

MDI has a very competitive enrollment process because it is actually a specialized training. So we have a target. Yes, our target is always between 25-30 students. Usually, we conduct written tests and face to face interviews with our applicants.

In terms of gender, majority of our applicants are male and females are always very few. In our advertisements, we strongly encourage females to apply.

**Q: How do you rate media performance in advocating for gender quality?**

**A:** I think media has, to a lesser extent, contributed to promoting gender quality! May be, just 35%, like the affirmative action for women. The media does not capture women progress, activities and their contribution to the nation building. Yeah! Women are doing a lot of work in various areas in the country. You find women are in the military, police, national security and involved in small, medium and large scale businesses. Women are there, but media pays less attention to cover women



successes stories and those that can inspire people. Most times, media covers women who are victims of certain circumstances during conflict, widows and victims of sexual gender-based based violence, among others. Yet, we have women in legal fraternity. We have women lawyers and judges, but you find that very little is said about them. This actually makes people perception towards women to remain negative. Yeah, people think women cannot make it and that they cannot be good leaders. This is because we don't show people the women leaders, their leadership and their contributions. The more we keep this uncovered, the more people's perception towards women will remain negative.

**Q: What advice would you give to a young lady out there who intends to study journalism? What is your message for females aspiring to become journalists?**

**A:** Journalism is a field where you work for humanity. First of all, it is a less paying profession, not only in South Sudan, but all over the world. Journalism is a risky field, but people are driven by passion for it because they want to serve humanity. But journalism is a noble profession. It is a profession that exposes you to the world, a profession that can earn you a lot of respect from people. And it's a profession that also earns you a living. You may not be well paid from your job, but you get other benefits. A lot of journalists I trained at MDI have travelled around the world.

**Q: What message do you have for women as South Sudan marks Women's Day?**

**A:** Firstly, I would encourage women to speak up. Yeah, for them to be known and for them to share with the good things they are doing, they should speak up. That is even the more reason why the media should write about them, you know? Because if you don't speak out, the media will not have information to write about you. Another thing is for women to unite themselves. I know situations where women leaders in politics have different political parties, women in civil society and other sectors. People just want to be where they are, but for the women cause, we have to unite and see to it that we raise women up. For instance, if we see that a woman is doing the job, she should be celebrated and supported. We should not pull another woman down simply because of the negative perception people have about women. We also have a challenged where people say women are divided, jealous and so on. We have to be united because we want to see gender equality in leadership at the various levels. Another thing is to develop our capacities as women. We have a huge number of women who have not gone to schools and don't know how to read and write. So we have a chance to go to school and learn. If you have not attended classes, you can start now. Education has no age limit. Even the 35% for women will require people who can manage. You may find that our numbers are not enough for the 35%. Now, what about our dreams to even have 50-50%? So we need women to also focus on educating themselves so they can make it to the leadership. We also need women to form political parties for those who are struggling in politics so that there are chances for them to get into leadership positions in the country.

# South Sudan Women Entrepreneurs Showcase At Eac Trade Fair

By Awaate Alison Onesimus

A group of South Sudanese women attended the 21st edition of the annual East African Community (EAC) Jua Kali/Nguvu Kazi exhibition, conducted in Mwanza city, Tanzania from December 2-12, 2021.

The event, under the theme “Promoting Quality and Innovation to enhance EAC MSMEs Competitiveness and post COVID -19 Recovery”, attracted over 1,500 Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) representing manufacturing, trade and agribusiness sectors.

The annual regional event saw six EAC partner states, namely the Republics of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Uganda and the host country United Republic of Tanzania participating. South Sudan was represented by various MSMEs from diverse sectors who showcased the country’s innovative and creative products.

Speaking at the event, Tanzania’s Minister of Industry and Trade, Prof. Kitila Mkumbo said the main aim of the EAC MSMEs trade fair was to provide a platform for enhancing marketing linkages for MSMEs sector products and services within the region to enable them access the existing regional market with a population of over 100 million people. He reaffirmed the six partner states’ commitment to the EAC regional integration initiatives, such as the ongoing

exhibition, adding that the key component for the integration agenda was doing business together as the Community and expanding the market beyond East Africa, as well as removing barriers to trade. According to the Trade and Industry minister, the EAC partner states have agreed to address the challenges impacting the growth and development



of MSMEs and industries in the region by developing Policies which will facilitate cross-border business in the region. He said some partner states are establishing mechanisms to facilitate access to affordable capital by MSMEs from financial institutions. The 21st edition of the annual EAC MSMEs under the theme “Promoting Quality and Innovation to enhance

EAC MSMEs Competitiveness and post COVID -19 Recovery’, attracted over 1,500 artisans from the six EAC Partner States, namely the Republics of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Uganda and host country United Republic of Tanzania.

The Secretary General of the EAC, Dr. Peter Mathuki said MSMEs play a crucial role in the economic development of East African countries, accounting for 90% of businesses and 80% of employment especially among youth and women. He stressed that EAC partner states still have a critical role in enabling MSMEs growth to ensure long term sustainability and recovery by promoting programs that prioritise MSMEs to spur demand for quality finished goods and thus improve the region’s competitiveness. “As the community, we have the responsibility of enabling MSMEs growth to ensure long term sustainability and recovery,” said Muthuki. The top EAC official further informed the exhibitors that the theme for this year recognises the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on trade and places greater emphasises on quality and innovation as critical paths to enhance competitiveness. He commended MSMEs for their resilience in adopting new business models to enable business continuity during the Covid-19 pandemic. Mathuki challenged partner states to provide all necessary support to ensure MSMEs are export-ready and ready to compete with more prominent players



and offer alternatives to imported goods. The annual trade fair was jam-packed with fun and action for everybody, with traditional and cultural performances from all the EAC partner states, delicious local foods and lots of entertainment. Meanwhile the head of South Sudan women entrepreneurs, Jane Gordon Soro said her country is ready for full integration into the EAC. “The annual trade fair was an

opportunity for South Sudanese women entrepreneurs to learn new experiences from other partner states and share lessons learnt with their fellow women in the business,” she said.

Angelina Telar, an exhibitor from South Sudan, said she was delighted to showcase her products to entrepreneurs from the partner countries.

**Meanwhile the head of South Sudan women entrepreneurs, Jane Gordon Soro said her country is ready for full integration into the EAC.**



The 1st EAC MSMEs Trade Fair was held in Arusha, Tanzania in November 1999 during the historic event of signing of the Treaty for the Establishment of the EAC. Subsequent to the success of the Arusha exhibition, the EAC Heads of State directed that the exhibition be held annually on rotational basis among partner states to enhance and revamp the socio-economic integration of the people of East Africa.



# Civil society should raise more awareness on women rights

*Mrs. Lorna Merekaje is an award-winning civil society activist in South Sudan. She has, over the years, acquired different skills in leadership, mediation, advocacy and lobbying. On the occasion to mark International Women's Day, Merekaje spoke to our editor, Julius N. Uma on the role civil society actors can play in helping women achieve gender equality, among others. Below are the excerpts.*

**Q: As a renowned civil society activist, what is your own understanding of 'Break the bias,' the theme chosen for this year's International Women's Day (IWD)?**

**A:** This, to me, is a reminder and means of drawing everyone's attention to the numerous prejudice that the society has against women of all stature or walks of life (young or old including the girl child) This year, the theme requires action and evaluation of the status of women in the society, including how institutions are structured and how different policies impact women disproportionately.

**Q: Has progress been made in achieving gender equality? To what extent, if so?**

**A:** Gender equality and gender equity have been difficult subjects to measure in South Sudan. Yes, there is a lot of discourse about women inclusion and participation in different national and functional processes. However, this has not adequately responded to the question of gender equality or equity. What is happening may as well be described as tokenism. To achieve gender equality or equity, there is need to design policies and



make deliberate efforts to implement gender equality or equity. The inclusion of affirmative action is not sufficient. More needs to be done. There is need to fully engender national reform processes such as Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR),

**The inclusion of affirmative action is not sufficient. More needs to be done.**

Public Financial Management (PFM) etc. Gender equality or equity in South Sudan requires concerted efforts and multifaceted approaches to gender mainstreaming. This requires sufficient political will from the level of head of state. Gender inequality is actually a development concern to the country.

**Q: What role, in your view, can civil society play in advancing rights of women?**

**A:** Civil society has a great role in creating awareness on women rights and initiating

constructive dialogue with the power brokers within society to ensure that impediment and limitations to women enjoying equal rights as human beings are eliminated and the decision makers understand that women rights too are inherent.

**Q: What role can women play in achieving peace and security in South Sudan?\***

**A:** If peace and security is perceived comprehensively, women actually have a big role to play in society and they can plan the same roles that men plan.

**Q: And finally, what would be your message to the women of South Sudan as they join the rest of the world to celebrate the International Women's Day event?**

**A:** Women are human and thus they should be allowed to enjoy equal rights in society like men. What a man can do, a woman can do too. Why discriminate against women? The prejudice that exist in our society and globally against women affects men too because in one way or the other, all women are related to men. Be it as grandfather, father, uncle, brother, son or husband. Therefore, while practicing biases against women, it affects men in another. This, therefore affects the entire society.

# MoneyMaker Pumps Boost Small Scale Farmers

By Julius N. Uma

**S**mall scale farmers in South Sudan have adopted the use of MoneyMaker pumps as part efforts aimed at eradicating widespread hunger among communities.

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He, however, said it is important for the farmers to know how to utilize the pump. “If the moneymaker pump is not used the way it is supposed to be, the efficiency and effectiveness of the pump will not be realized by the farmer,” said Abraham.

Currently, Nova Farm Industry Co. Ltd are

the authorized distributors of MoneyMaker pumps in South Sudan. The unique technology is a product of KickStart International, a U.S-based non-profit social enterprise with mission to uplift millions of people out of poverty quickly, cost-effectively and sustainably. The company also trains farmers and beneficiaries on how to use the pump. “Having the product is not important. The most important thing is to know how to use it because it will help you meet your goal’s desires,” stressed Abraham. Currently, small scale farmers in 33 African countries are using this technology. This is coupled to the fact that an estimated

A treadle pump drip irrigation demonstration in Wunrok, South Sudan (vsco photo)



20 million small scale farmers in Africa have access to sufficient renewable water resources to adopt KickStart technology on their farms and turn them into profitable businesses that generate and income year round.

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# South Sudan Women Mps Learn Experiences From Kenya, Rwanda



**A** cross-section women representatives from the Revitalized Transitional National Legislative Assembly undertook exchange and learning visits to Kenya and Rwanda to share experiences and learn skills from counterparts in the two nations.

While speaking in Kenya, South Sudan's Parliamentary Affairs minister, Mary Mawai said South Sudanese women worked hard to attain 35% affirmative action. "Maybe you might have heard that we have 35 percent affirmative action for women in South Sudan, it was not just given to them, they worked hard to deserve it, during the war women contributed a lot," she said. "They were taking care of their families and making some shelters to accommodate them, providing health services in terms of nursing wounded soldiers and even cultivating to get food and mobilizing food to send to soldiers".

According to the minister, when the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was being negotiated in 2005, women pushed for affirmative action, at 25% by then, to be enshrined in the country's constitution. "When they negotiated peace in 2005, that time women pushed for their percentage to be enshrined in the constitution and it was 25%," said Mawai. She added, "As conflicts continued in South Sudan, our contribution was also there for peace implementation and as such, we have added another percentage, we are now at 35% for women affirmative action."



The undersecretary in the Parliamentary Affairs ministry, Kutiyote James Francis lauded the Kenyan government for allowing them learn, stressing that acquired knowledge would be put to good use. “For us in South Sudan, we come from a very challenging background already and we want to learn, we want to have ideas, we want to have that knowledge that can help transform the system into a very strong system that can help build the country because we rely on our friend across the region,” she explained.

The UN Women’s program officer for peace and security, Shukuria Syed, said her organization strives to empower women in South Sudan for good governance. “UN Women is always ready to empower women leaders in South Sudan for good governance and I request my colleagues to take this opportunity very seriously so that we can learn,” she remarked. “I will be there with you to help you implement whatever we take from here”. Monica Juan, a participant, appreciated UN Women and Community Empowerment for Progress Organization (CEPO) for organizing the study tour. Juan said she learned procedures expected to be followed by parliamentarians. “We are supposed to know more about the system of the government and about our rights as a women members of parliament,” she stressed.

Separately, the women parliamentarians also visited Rwanda’s capital, Kigali, for a tour to study the democratization process and how women bodies operate.

Speaking on arrival in Kigali, the director of gender and democracy in South Sudan’s parliamentary affairs ministry, Jackeline Novello appreciated UN Women and CEPO for organizing the parliamentarian study tours for women lawmakers. “I thank the people who made this program a reality, UN Women South Sudan in collaboration with the CEPO and we hope similar programs will continue with women parliamentarians to deliver effective work,” she said.

The tour, Novella said, was in line with the Parliamentary Affairs ministry’s strategy to promote women leaders’

participation in politics and the democratic process. “So, we promote women leaders to enhance their visibility through organizing these study tours to other countries with high representation of women in parliament,” she stressed, adding, “We had these activities to network our South Sudan women parliamentarians with Rwandan women to learn how the democratization works and also what women regional bodies are doing.”

Lawmaker Redanto Veronica said she learned about experience of the Rwandan parliament in state-building and how women attained high numbers in the house. CEPO’s executive director, Edmund Yakani said the Rwanda was an opportunity for female parliamentarians to discover their role in effective participation in transitioning the society in South Sudan from violence to peace and security. “Women parliamentarians recently appointed to the national legislature in South Sudan have a big role to play in making peace and security happen in South Sudan,” he said. The lawmakers’ study tours to Kenya and Rwanda was organized by UN Women.





# Include women in decision-making processes: Governor

Sarah Cleto Hassan Rial is a South Sudanese politician and human rights activist serving as governor of Western Bahr el Ghazal State.

The only female governor appointed by President Salva Kiir on June 30, 2020 spoke to Santino Magut on wide range of issues.

By Awaate Alison Onesimus



**Q: Your Excellency, it's a pleasure to speak to you. Why do you think it is important to observe International Women's Day every March 8?**

**A:** Thank you Santino Magut. In my view, I think International Women's Day is an important day to all of us as we celebrate the successes of the women. That is what we should be looking at from the positive side and map out the future on what we should do ahead as women.

**Q: This year's International Women's Day will be based in the theme; 'Break the bias'. What would be your interpretation of this phrase?**

**A:** That's a good question. Usually, I believe society is biased against women as it is always assumed that women are not capable; they are not educated enough, and they are supposed to be in the kitchen and to bear children only. That concept has gone into people's minds for a long time as people do not believe in us as women. That is basically my understanding and we want to tell the world that such biases should be eliminated. This message should go to our fellow men that what they think is not always the case. My advice to my sisters out there is that we should work to break such bias and further take steps to work side by side with our brothers though it is hard to consider us, despite the fact that the law give us a right.

**Q: How, in your view, can gender stereotypes be tackled in society?**

**A:** Well, in my view, there should be many ways of addressing gender stereotypes and part of it should start from the family. Children should be cared for equally because, in most of our cultures, some people look at girls as sources of income and resources. That is why it has to start from families. All children are equal and they should get equal care and education. I am saying this because we have seen many cases and violations of girl child rights. For example, some parents send boys to better schools far away and keep girls behind and closer to them because they think when a girl is far, she will get spoiled, forget the culture and the family loses resources. My country mates, when we encourage such negatives attitudes on our girls, we are destructing the future of the nation. It is not about wealth, but shaping her to become a leader in society. Stop it! Immediate resources on her aren't bigger than dreams which you are supposed to support as her parent. Such a stereotype is bad and should be stopped.

**Q: What role can women play in achieving peace and stability?**

**A:** Women in South Sudan have a great role to play in achieving durable peace in this country. They have to be given space and included in decision making [processes]. Of course, they have been contributing in peace processes. When we reflect back to how South Sudan attained her independence, women constituted the larger number of population who voted for separation. Can this larger number of the nation be ignored and we think we are making the right peace? Not, of course!

Women have a heart of sympathy. We accommodate all as our children in the circle of care in our hearts and no women loves to see a child going for wars and be killed.

It is women that are affected most by civil wars and conflicts. We are urging that women voices should be allowed to be heard and included in decision making.

**Q: What, in your view, is the future of young women in South Sudan?**

**A:** The future of our women is bright. But, it will be brighter when society understand that women are not only meant for domestic work, only bear children, but are able and can do great things like men. I'm saying it again! The future of our young women can be brighter if a girl child if given equal care and opportunities like a boy child. They are our children. I want all of us to put our hands together and take further step forward in terms of giving consideration to girl child rights. I'm emphasizing this because I have seen it as a big issue impacting communities negatively. We need to help and support programs mitigating the early unwanted pregnancies and forced marriages.

I believe society is biased against women as it is always assumed that women are not capable; they are not educated enough, and they are supposed to be in the kitchen and to bear children only.

**Q: What would be your International Women's Day (IWD) message?**

**A:** I want to tell my sisters, the strong women of South Sudan, you are great! Let's put our heads higher and take the lead to break the bias. Let us not be relegated in the back always. That is not our place rather. We need to think for the future and tell South Sudanese we are capable of working together with our fellow brothers to build our nation. As women, we are leaders at home, and everywhere. Why should we be unfairly left behind always? As a female governor, I need the support of all women. By being a female governor, I'm not only representing the party, but I firmly stand to represent the women.

**FACT FILE:**

*Sarah Cleto Hassan Rial was born on November 10, 1967 in Western Bahr el Ghazal. She attended the College of Social and Economic Studies, at the University of Juba, graduating with a B.SC in Statistics and Demography in 1991. In 1996, she obtained an M.A. in Political Science/Professional Development from The American University in Cairo, Egypt and an M.A. in Program for Women in Politics and Public Policy, at the University of Massachusetts Boston in 2006.*

# “Women are Stakeholders in Peace Deal Implementation”

*Hon. Esther Ikere Eluzai Ladu the Undersecretary in the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare. On the occasion to mark this year's International Women's Day (IWD), the experienced government official spoke to Julius N. Uma about the women enterprise development fund, gender equality, women roles in peace building as well as the 35% affirmative action for women. Below are the excerpts.*



**Q: What is your own understanding of 'Break the bias', the global theme for this year's International Women's Day (IWD) occasion?**

**A:** Thank you. I think the International Women's Day is an important event for us as women in general, but as a country, it marks an opportunity for us to look into our own milestones, particularly the achievements as well as the challenges that women face in leadership. When you talk about bias, we mean bias in the cultural context, economic, political and social, which inhibit women's development as well as empowerment. When we talk about breaking the bias, we are thinking into all spheres of life. So what do we exactly do to break the bias? Of important relevance to us is the political sphere. The revitalized peace agreement has progressive gains for women in leadership and women negotiated for gender provisions in the agreement and came out with very important threshold. One of the threshold is the 35% women representation across all levels and I think this gives us opportunity to break the bias in political spheres. And after the reconstitution of government,

we have come to realise that there is progress in women participation, but bias still exists in institutions of political recruitment. Many political parties claim they don't have women, others claim that women in other political parties are not qualified enough, but these are the bias we are talking about in the political spheres. We know, for sure, that there are women in political parties who don't make decisions in their parties, but we are calling for advancement of women representation in the political spheres.

So, we need to break the bias of not achieving the 35% for women in political parties. This can only be done through advocacy, recognising our achievements and working hard towards more concerted efforts to ensure we achieve the 35%. And as the gender machinery, we

have taken that into consideration.

To break the bias in the political sphere, we are developing an affirmative action law, which will enhance women's participation in leadership, but also ensure achievement of the 35% as we work for more. That's one bias we are trying to break in the political sphere. The word bias is relevant in the context of South Sudan because discrimination and marginalisation of women still exist in institutions of political recruitment.

**Q: To what extent have we achieved in the 35% women affirmative action in the Revitalised Agreement on Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS)?**

**A:** I think there is progress and we want to recognise our government for the opportunity and the platform recognising the efforts and struggles of women in liberating this country. I think our government deserves credit for this. At the same time, having the 35% included in the constitution of the SPLM [Sudan People's Liberation Movement] gave way for the discussions in the negotiations and that led to the 35% being adopted in the revitalised peace agreement. And with the reconstitution of the

**The revitalized peace agreement has progressive gains for women in leadership**



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Transitional Government of National Unity [R-TGoNU], we have achieved a lot. We have one female speaker, which is even beyond the 35% and we acknowledge that. We have 26% representation of women as national ministers, which is less than the 35%. Among the governors, we only have one female governor, making only 10%, which is very low. Among the members of parliament, we so far have 31%. That's a good step and we want to work for more. Among deputy governors, we have 30% (three deputy governors in the country). Some progress has also been made in states. In the state ministerial portfolio, you find that it ranges from 18-29% across these states and we are working for more. We have, therefore, come to realize that the 35% has not yet fully been achieved.

**Q: How best, in your opinion can we tackle common stereotypes about women in today's societies?**

**A:** Stereotypes may either be true or not true, depending on one's cultural upbringing. Socialisation has impacts on an individual's life. The way you are brought up, cultures you grow up in and how you are brought up really matter in your life. Culturally, we have some cultural inhibitions which mostly favour men than women. So, don't be surprised to find that most of our leader have these cultural inhibitions, which have been transferred from the cultural and family environments to the work place. And so these stereotypes continue to follow us.

As the gender machinery, one thing we have come to realize is that men are our partners, change agents, but we can also work together with men as stakeholders in promoting gender equality. So, one thing the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare has done is to develop men engagement strategy for the Republic of South Sudan. We cannot do it alone without our men and we know they can also be champions, although we currently have many leaders whom we identify as champions in advocating for gender equality and women's empowerment. Having in place a male engagement strategy will serve a better purpose for us.

**Q: The revitalised peace agreement calls for the establishment of women enterprise development fund. What is your take on this scheme and what type of women enterprise fund should we expect to see in terms of its autonomy?**

**A:** I think the women enterprise fund is one of the gains in the peace agreement and the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social

Welfare is mandated to spearhead the process of establishing the fund. We did some groundwork to understand the context of the enterprise development fund in Africa and we looked at the Kenyan, Bangladesh and Indian enterprise development funds. But what we are saying is that copy and paste does not work for us in South Sudan. We need a model that is workable for the Republic of South Sudan. In this case, we have designed a women enterprise model and now trying to consult at the national and state levels. We are doing a lot of advocacy and trying to educate women about what kind of enterprise development fund they want to see established. We are looking into small scale (micro-businesses), medium and large scale enterprises because there are women across these categories. But the majority of women fall under the micro enterprises. Women, for example, are still selling tomatoes, greens and vegetables in the market. They get little profit, eat them and for they remain in the same businesses for years. Their businesses do not grow. We are, therefore, comprehensively looking at that. The kind of women enterprise development fund for South Sudan will be one that will elevate poverty and empower women to



expand and grow their businesses. We are also trying to look at fund that is provided with 100% seed capital from the government. We need ownership. For example, the Kenyan enterprise fund is successful because the government spearheaded it, providing 100% seed capital. This led to the growth of women enterprise development fund in Kenya. So these are the models we are now designing. This year, we are doing a lot of consultative workshops at national and state levels, educating women about the fund. We want to hear their views and also want to look at how the fund will be managed. Which firm will establish this fund, the management experts operating this fund for a certain period while South Sudanese are being coached to efficiently run these women enterprise development fund.

**Q: What role, in your view, can women play in maintaining peace and security?**

**A:** Thank you, I think women have played a great role and they have critically shaped this country's history. Women have played various roles. They were ex-combatants, involved in the negotiations and supported the army by cooking for them. Women have played various roles. And I think you have seen the role of women in peace building. In the current peace process, which resulted into the revitalised peace agreement, women played a number of roles. Women went through different representation. Women from political parties, civil society, academia and faith based organisations were all there as observers during the negotiations. That led to the women being recognised as signatories to the agreement. We are stakeholders in the agreement and in its implementation. Women has also done a lot in peace building. Peace, as you know, is not something you bring from above. Women are playing a lot of roles in building peace within families and communities. At the national level, women have done a lot of activities in terms of peace building and conflict resolution. They have also done a lot of trainings and advocacy as part of efforts towards peace building. The first face-to-face meeting between President Salva Kiir and Dr. Riek Machar was through the advocacy of women. They were able to bring the two leaders together to come and greet themselves and sit down on the negotiation table.

**Q: What would be your final message to the women of South Sudan as we join the rest of the world to commemorate the International Women's Day (IWD)?**

**A:** The International Women's Day is a very important platform globally and nationally. It give us an opportunity to look at our achievements, challenges we are facing and the ones we anticipate to come forward. This will help us develop advocacy strategies of how to address some of these challenges, ensure that we build consensus within the country and have a common agenda for women's participation at all spheres. My message to the women is that we should recognize our achievements nationally. Right from the liberation struggle, we have achieved a lot as women. We need to appreciate our government and continue working together with our development partners to advance the course of women in the Republic of South Sudan.

# ‘Women need savings culture to boost incomes’

By Awaate Alison Onesimus

Ms. Reja Gladys Joseph is an Economist with more than 8 years of professional experiences, having previously worked for Charter One Bank, Institute for Social Policy and Research, Action Against Hunger UK, International Organization Development Limited-UK and the Ebony Center for Strategic Studies, a think tank in South Sudan. The Voice of Women’s editor, Julius N. Uma interviewed Reja, who currently teaches Economics courses at the University of Juba (UoJ).



**Q: On March 8, South Sudan will join the rest of the world to mark International Women's Day whose theme is 'Break the bias'. What is your interpretation of the theme for the women day's event?**

**A:** Break the bias means, a world that is diverse, equitable and inclusive. A world where difference is valued and celebrated (Susan Heaton-Wright, Nov 2021). To me, break the bias means empowering and encouraging our fellow women to work extra hard for positive contributions in the world.

**Q: As an academia, what are possible ways can we explore to overcome common stereotypes about women in today's societies?**

**A:** First of all, I think honesty and openness are key notes of change. We should also create an inclusive environment for women; foster growth

We should respect women because they are our mothers, sisters, wives, daughters, aunts or grandmothers.

mindset right from childhood; stop judging women on their personal style rather than outcome; celebrate female breadwinners; and office housework should not be left to women. These include, administration, tea making and office messengers' duties, among others.

**Q: A provision in the revitalized peace agreements calls for the establishment of women enterprise development fund. Why do you think this initiative is important to women?**

**A:** It is important for women to be economically empowered to contribute to their families (payment of children schools' fees, medical bills and balance

diet). At the community level, women can be able to contribute cash for community events. At the national level, women can contribute to the GDP [Gross Domestic Product] that will be used by the government to provide services to the people when they are engaged in productive businesses (both formal and informal). Boosting the banking sector; the scheme can enable women to cultivate culture of savings that will require them to open bank accounts at the commercial banks. The banks can use the savings as loans to boost the businesses and production in the country.

**Q: What type of fund would you want to see in terms of autonomy?**

**A:** The type should be development finance loans. This can be access through selected commercial banks that are independent. Women can form groups based on their productive engagements/ businesses.

**Q: What inspired you to take up the teaching profession and what challenges do**

**you encounter in the course of doing your job?**

**A:** My father and mother inspired me to the teaching profession, because both contributed to human development. As for me, I need to contribute to nation building through human development at the high level to produce qualified human resource for evident based policies formulation I also aspire want to be part of the change we want in South Sudan and the world. I need to walk the talk of women empowerment as well as to encourage female students to succeed with their male counterparts. As such, I strive to instill positive thoughts of hard work for development. There are better

alternatives for development and these include, investment in retail business and agriculture that are self-generated through savings and investment. However, there are challenges. These include, inadequate teaching infrastructures; unequipped lecture halls, tools (projectors, computers and internet). Secondly, the large number of students (Over 230 students) per lecture, which makes it difficult to monitor students' activities. For example, a student once told me how he disliked women naturally. I told him, 'A woman is teaching you, therefore, you need to like them. We should respect women because they are our mothers, sisters, wives, daughters, aunts or grandmothers. A woman is not a commodity to be liked or disliked. She is significant at all levels. As a professional, we set rules that guide our lecture for the semester. This helps me to control and monitor students who attend the lectures.

**Q: Over the years, girls' enrollment in schools have been lower compared to the boys! What message do you have for the girl child?**

**A:** The girl child is the pillar of the development in the nation. Be focused and determined to achieve your dreams. Don't allow people undermine you. Believe in your abilities and prove them wrong.

**Q: What is your message to the women of South Sudan as they join the rest of the world to commemorate International Women's Day?**

**A:** Happy International Women's Day to all women in South Sudan and globally. Let's empower and encourage each other to break the bias.

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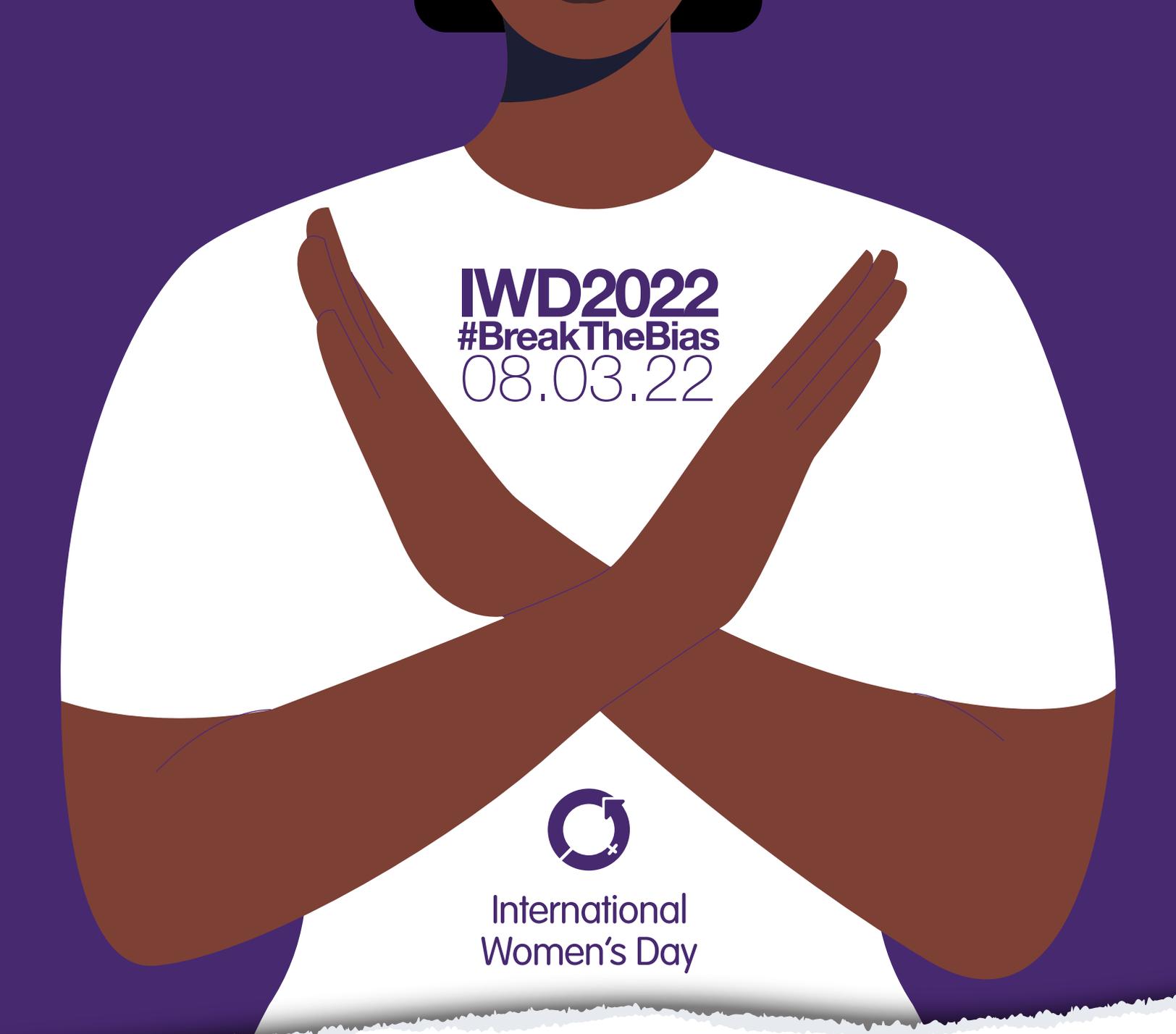


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