Supporting Sustainable Peace in Blue Nile State through Gender-Responsive Natural Resource Governance, Inclusive Conflict Resolution Mechanisms and Climate-Resilient Livelihoods

Background

After years of protracted armed conflict in Blue Nile State, the Juba Peace Agreement offers an opportunity to embark on a process of reconciliation, peacebuilding, and sustainable development. Sustaining fragile peace at this critical juncture requires urgent investment to rebuild governance systems, economic structures, and relationships between and among communities, many of whom have been trapped in the crossfire of conflict.

As outlined in the Agreement, the transition to inclusive peace requires careful attention to environmental concerns, as conflicts often center on tensions over access to or control over natural resources. The precarious situation is exacerbated by the worsening impacts of climate change. Across Sudan, rainfall has become more erratic and dry spells longer or more frequent, leaving communities who depend on reliable access to water and fertile land more vulnerable to risks of poverty, food insecurity, and violence.

The emerging conflict-climate risks do not impact everyone equally. Women, who play important roles in natural resource management but remain marginalized in decision-making and economic structures, are often disproportionately impacted by changes to the environment and related conflicts.

The economic and political exclusion of women not only limits the potential of communities to materialize peace dividends, but also exposes women to elevated risks of gender-based violence. Threats to women’s safety are made worse by increased scarcity of natural resources when women face exposure to risk in remote areas (such as during water and fuelwood collection) as well as in private spaces (for example when women are unable to fulfill their prescribed gender roles).

Building sustainable peace in Blue Nile therefore requires a concerted approach to address tensions over natural resources while promoting the leadership and essential capacities of women in natural resource management and conflict resolution. Recent experiences have shown that inclusive natural resource governance and management interventions are a strong entry point for women’s participation in peacebuilding. At the same time, specifically targeting women in the development of climate adaptive livelihoods can contribute not only to economic recovery for women, but to the resilience and stability of entire communities.
The Project

The joint UN project “Supporting Sustainable Peace in Blue Nile State through Gender-Responsive Natural Resource Governance, Inclusive Conflict Resolution Mechanisms, and Climate Resilient Livelihoods,” aims to promote sustainable peace in Blue Nile State by (1) strengthening the socio-economic stability of conflict-affected communities to cope with linked climate-conflict challenges; and (2) supporting gender-responsive, participatory, and inclusive governance and conflict resolution mechanisms to prevent and peacefully resolve natural resource-related disputes.

To achieve its objectives, the project activities will focus on interventions in three key areas:

1- Climate-resilient livelihoods and socio-economic infrastructure

Sustainable economic recovery, the interventions in this area will support viable and climate-smart livelihood options for women and men (60 percent target beneficiaries will be women) as well as targeted investments in socio-economic infrastructure development prioritized by communities.

2- Protection and access to justice

Recognizing the importance of safe and reliable access to natural resources in order to sustain livelihood opportunities for women, the project will include a special focus on women’s protection and access to justice. Interventions will include the establishment of “one-stop centres” designed to address the comprehensive needs of gender-based survivors as well as training of security and justice sector personnel to prevent and manage cases of gender-based violence.

3- Inclusive governance and conflict resolution

To strengthen natural resource governance at the community level and enhance capacity to prevent or resolve natural resource-related conflicts, the project will support or establish community-based mechanisms for natural resource management, with women representing at least 50 percent of leadership roles. Interventions will include a facilitated community-led process to identify common environmental challenges and jointly identify actions for addressing these challenges. The project will also seek to link community level peacebuilding efforts to state initiatives through women-led dialogue forums and local peace centres.

Timeline and Scope

This 30-month project (August 2021 – January 2024) is supported by a USD 4 million grant from the UN Peacebuilding Fund and will be delivered in Al Kurmuk, Baw and Geissan localities in Blue Nile State. It will be jointly implemented by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN Women) in partnership with locally based organizations and in close collaboration with the Government of Sudan.

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