



South Sudan: Leaders of Peace (LOP)

End of project evaluation



2,122

trained in healthcare and MHPSS support in 2024

F: 30.7%; M: 63.9%

Project overview

Building on the *Women and Girls for Change* programme (2016–2021), HealthNet TPO continues to emphasise the positive role of women and girls in advancing sustainable peace in South Sudan. *Leaders of Peace (LOP)* is a five-year project (2021–2025) implemented under the Dutch National Action Plan IV (NAP-IV) on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325) and funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The project is delivered through a consortium led by Plan International, bringing together HealthNet TPO, PAX, Assistance Mission for Africa (AMA), and EVE, and combining expertise in mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), gender equality, advocacy, and peacebuilding.

In South Sudan, HealthNet TPO leads implementation across Terekeka, Juba, Torit, Panyijar, Yambio, Aweil, and Magwi counties, working closely with local women’s groups, community leaders, and institutions. The project contributes to South Sudan’s peace process by strengthening women’s psychosocial wellbeing, leadership, and meaningful participation in peacebuilding, while addressing the gendered impacts of conflict.

LOP aims to create an enabling environment in which women and girls from diverse backgrounds can live free from violence, realise their rights, and actively shape inclusive and sustainable peace. Central to this approach is the strengthening of community-based psychosocial services and mechanisms that support resilience, collective care, and social cohesion at the local level.



The LOP consortium works towards three core objectives:

1. Improved implementation of policies and regulations on gender-based violence (GBV) and the protection of women and girls, including access to psychosocial support and self-care;
2. Shifts in attitudes and social norms within civil society that promote gender equality and the inclusion of women and girls;
3. Increased and more effective participation of women and girls in leadership, decision-making, and peacebuilding processes.



“One of the most important changes we have experienced is recognising our value as women, and especially as Indigenous women. This self-recognition has helped us strengthen our self-esteem and stop accepting certain forms of violence that used to be seen as normal. Now, we understand these are forms of gender-based violence, and we are raising our voices, sharing our knowledge, and helping other women do the same.”



Through these efforts, Leaders of Peace demonstrates how MHPSS can function not only as a pathway to healing, but also as a catalyst for women’s leadership and social transformation, advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda in South Sudan.



Context

South Sudan is the world's youngest nation, having gained independence in 2011 after decades of civil war. Since then, the country has continued to experience intercommunal violence, displacement, and chronic humanitarian crises. The state remains fragile and fragmented, with weak governance structures, ethnic and religious divisions, and cyclical conflict over land, resources, and political power.[1]

Women and girls face some of the highest rates of violence globally: over 65% have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, more than twice the global average. Child marriage is widespread, and girls' school completion rates remain among the lowest in the world.[2] Civic space is severely restricted, and women are largely excluded from decision-making and economic participation. The cumulative effects of conflict, poverty, and displacement, worsened by climate change and environmental degradation, have generated immense wellbeing needs, from physical safety and access to healthcare to psychosocial recovery and community cohesion.[3]

HealthNet TPO's Leaders of Peace (LOP) project operates within this challenging landscape, embedding psychosocial support and peacebuilding interventions in community systems. By training psychosocial focal points (PFPs), facilitating couple engagement groups, supporting school-based Champions of Change, and strengthening informal justice mechanisms (ABC courts), the project advances healing, prevention, and advocacy from the grassroots. It works with traditional leaders and local authorities to address harmful practices such as early marriage and bride price, and to promote inclusive governance.

South Sudan's communities, though affected by trauma and social fragmentation, remain remarkably resilient. The project builds on this resilience through dialogue, trust, and adaptation, recognising that local structures — such as elders, chiefs, and community courts — are key entry points for transforming both interpersonal and structural violence. In this context, LOP's relational and grassroots MHPSS approach becomes not only a tool for individual recovery but also a foundation for restoring collective wellbeing and social cohesion.



LOP Approach

The following section outlines HealthNet TPO's methodological approach in South Sudan: the principles, strategies, and models that connect psychosocial wellbeing with peacebuilding in the Leaders of Peace (LOP) project.

At the heart of the approach are Psychosocial Focal Points (PFPs); community members trained and mentored by HealthNet TPO to act as first responders to psychosocial and protection needs, particularly for women and girls. Through regular coaching, supervision, and peer exchanges, PFPs facilitate dialogue sessions, identify and refer survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), and **bridge community structures with available health and protection services.**

HealthNet TPO also trains and accompanies couple engagement groups, creating safe spaces where both women and men reflect on gender roles, family dynamics, and shared responsibility in preventing violence. These groups help challenge harmful gender norms within households and communities. As Emmanuel Mojo, HealthNet TPO's MHPSS Project Manager, explains, *“men who initially opposed women's participation began taking on domestic responsibilities previously considered ‘women's work.’ This visible shift reduced stigma and opened pathways for women's broader community involvement.”*

In collaboration with teachers and school administrators, HealthNet TPO builds the capacity of **youth facilitators through the Champions of Change initiative,** enabling them to raise awareness about gender equality, psychosocial health, and peaceful coexistence among peers. The organisation also works directly with **traditional leaders and members of ABC Courts,** providing gender-sensitivity and trauma-informed training to help them address domestic disputes and community conflicts with fairness and empathy.

Annual Women's Gatherings, organised and facilitated by HealthNet TPO and consortium partners, offer intergenerational spaces for reflection, collective healing, and advocacy. These gatherings culminate in communiqués presented to government representatives, ensuring that local women's priorities influence national agendas.

Across all these levels, HealthNet TPO plays a facilitative and capacity-building role: training, mentoring, and accompanying community actors to ensure that MHPSS and peacebuilding activities are contextually grounded, inclusive, and ethically based. This trust-based approach transforms women and youth from recipients of support into mobilisers, facilitators, and advocates, making psychosocial recovery both an entry point and a driver of sustainable peacebuilding.



LOP Implementation

This section describes how HealthNet TPO operationalised the Leaders of Peace (LOP) approach across South Sudan, translating the project's methodology into concrete community actions through training, supervision, and partnership with local actors.

The LOP project follows a Theory of Change structured around three interlinked pathways:

1. **Creating a protective environment** for women and girls.
2. **Changing community attitudes** toward gender, peace, and psychosocial wellbeing.
3. **Enabling women's participation** in governance and peace processes.

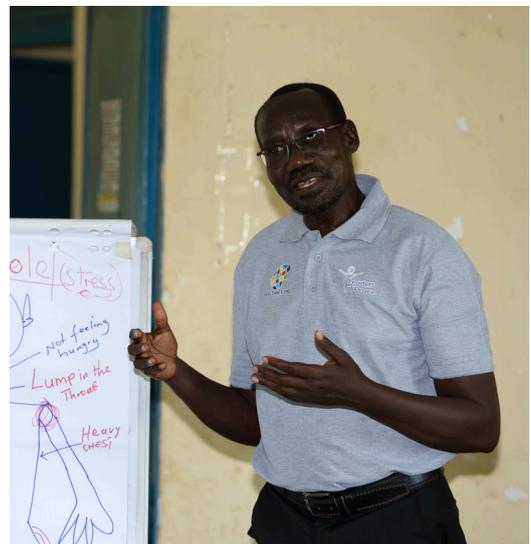
Implementation begins with community entry and dialogue, led by HealthNet TPO's field teams in coordination with local chiefs, elders, and religious leaders to ensure cultural alignment. This process establishes trust and maps existing resources and informal protection systems, laying the groundwork for activities that build upon (rather than replace) traditional practices.

Using its participatory **Resource Mapping and Mobilisation (RMM)** approach, HealthNet TPO ensures that interventions are grounded in local realities and promote community ownership. Through RMM, the project:

- **Conducts community mapping exercises** to identify, describe, and analyse individual and collective mechanisms that affect wellbeing.
- Facilitates the **creation of networks** across households, community groups, and institutions to strengthen social cohesion and collective action.
- **Organises strategic workshops**, where community mobilisers develop joint action plans for short- and long-term goals.

- **Provides training and mentorship** to build the technical and leadership capacity of key community figures.
- **Supports locally led implementation**, with community actors carrying out agreed actions or referring cases for specialised services when needed.

Throughout implementation, **HealthNet TPO provides continuous capacity building, supervision, and technical oversight** to Psychosocial Focal Points (PFPs), women's groups, youth networks, and local authorities. All interventions adhere to the IASC MHPSS Guidelines and the UNDP GBV Pocket Guide, ensuring quality, ethical standards, and a survivor-centred approach. Regular case management meetings create safe spaces for PFPs to raise complex issues and receive guidance from technical staff and peers.



LOP Implementation

Couple engagement groups, facilitated and mentored by HealthNet TPO staff, have proven especially effective in communities where male opposition might otherwise limit women's participation. Through structured dialogue and role modelling, men are encouraged to share responsibilities and act as advocates for women's rights, reducing stigma and strengthening household and community cohesion.

Advocacy within LOP operates at multiple interconnected levels:

- **Local:** women's groups and PFPs, trained and supported by HealthNet TPO, engage with chiefs, ABC Courts, and Special Protection Units (police trained on GBV) to promote gender-sensitive bylaws and enforcement of women's rights.
- **County:** project partners work with local councils to influence service provision and community protection mechanisms.
- **National:** the Annual Women's Gathering in Juba, facilitated by HealthNet TPO and consortium members, brings together community women leaders, ministers, parliamentarians, and the Vice President for Gender to present key advocacy priorities.
- **Regional:** through consortium partners, selected women leaders represent grassroots perspectives in African Union forums, linking local realities to continental WPS dialogue.

This tiered advocacy model ensures coherence between local action and systemic influence. Community-level dialogues and bylaws inform county and state processes, which in turn connect to national and regional platforms such as the Annual Women's Gathering. The process demonstrates how psychosocial recovery and empowerment at the community level can evolve into policy engagement and structural transformation.





Cultural Transformation and Sustainability

LOP recognises that in South Sudan, **sustainability depends on anchoring transformation within respected governance and cultural structures.** To this end, HealthNet TPO trains and mentors chiefs, religious leaders, and ABC Court members to integrate gender-sensitive and trauma-informed approaches into their decision-making and dispute resolution practices. By equipping these influential figures with psychosocial and gender-awareness skills, the project strengthens the legitimacy and reach of protection and peacebuilding efforts.

Capacity building for continuity is a central strategy. Members of couple engagement groups and graduates of the Champions of Change initiative are supported to continue awareness-raising independently. Several groups have initiated self-sustaining activities, such as communal farming and savings schemes, to fund their work after project closure. **HealthNet TPO staff continue to provide remote mentorship and link these groups to local authorities and civil society networks to maintain momentum.**

The project also deliberately tackles stigmas linked to gender roles. In many communities, a man seen walking with his wife or helping with household chores risks ridicule. Through repeated community dialogues, peer modelling, and public advocacy led by couple engagement members, these norms are gradually shifting. It is becoming increasingly acceptable for men to share domestic responsibilities and to support women's participation and leadership within households and public life.

For LOP, **psychosocial recovery is both an entry point and a driver of peacebuilding.** Addressing emotional distress, rebuilding trust, and strengthening relationships and local leadership are the foundations upon which inclusive governance and sustainable peace can be built.

Through this approach, HealthNet TPO's investment in capacity and culture change ensures that healing, equality, and peace are mutually reinforcing and locally sustained.



“
My engagement has empowered women to become more vocal about their rights, leading to a decline in gender-based violence and greater reporting to community authorities.
”
Joko Jackline,
Psychosocial Focal Person





Bibliography

[1] [Timeline: South Sudan's history at a glance](#)

[2] United Nations. (2025, October). South Sudan at risk of return to war, UN investigators warn. UN News. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/10/1166218>

[3] United Nations in South Sudan. (2025, March 24). Empowering Women, Transforming South Sudan: UN's Commitment to Gender Equality. United Nations.

[https://southsudan.un.org/en/291472-empowering-women-transforming-south-sudan-uns-commitment-gender-equality#:~:text=Gender-based%20violence%20\(GBV\)%20remains%20one%20of%20the%20most,experiencing%20physical%20and%20sexual%20violence%20in%20their%20lifetime.](https://southsudan.un.org/en/291472-empowering-women-transforming-south-sudan-uns-commitment-gender-equality#:~:text=Gender-based%20violence%20(GBV)%20remains%20one%20of%20the%20most,experiencing%20physical%20and%20sexual%20violence%20in%20their%20lifetime.)



HealthNet TPO

is an international non-profit organisation that works on the structural rehabilitation of health systems in fragile states. Our mission is to strengthen communities to help them regain control and maintain their own health and wellbeing.

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