



**South Sudan Democratic Engagement, Monitoring and Observation Programme  
(SSuDEMOP)**

**Report**

**Assessment of Women's Understanding of the Public Finance  
Management Reform Process in South Sudan**

**July 2021**

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## Introduction

Public Finance Management is an integral element of good governance. Reforms in Public Finance Management are of great importance in ensuring transparency and accountability in management of public resources. South Sudan is at a critical moment in the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS). Reform in economic and resource management in the country was identified as one of the critical areas to be addressed during the transitional period as mean of restoring peace and stability in the country. Chapter four (4) of R-ARCSS is entirely dedicated to proposed reform in economic and resource management. Therefore, conversations on PFM reform processes must include all segments of the society and key population groups such as women.

The current PFM reform process in the country is predominantly anchored on recommendations of the IMF and World Bank Assessment done in late 2019 and early 2020. The objective of the assessment was to carry out a rapid review of the PFM systems to identify priority areas for reform in anticipation of the World Bank support to the Government of South Sudan following the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) and discuss the key Public Finance Management (PFM) reforms identified by government of South Sudan as part of R-ARCSS. This process provided a number of recommendations for South Sudan to implement in order to regain credibility and benefit from different facilities provided for member states by IMF and World Bank.

The principle recommendation of the assessment was the establishment of oversight architecture to drive the PFM reform process in the country. This process is lead by national Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning and involves several other national institutions; ministries directly involved of PFM, Bank of South Sudan, Audit Chamber, Anti Corruption Commission and a seat for Civil Society representation of which SSuDEMOP was invited to occupy at the level of Oversight Committee, which is the top most organ of the PFM reform architecture. Therefore, SSuDEMOP undertaking this assessment with support of UNWomen is an effort towards mainstreaming gender into the PFM reform process and as part of the organizations mandate – Creating awareness for civic participation and serving as the link between the PFM reform process and civic groups including civil society organization.

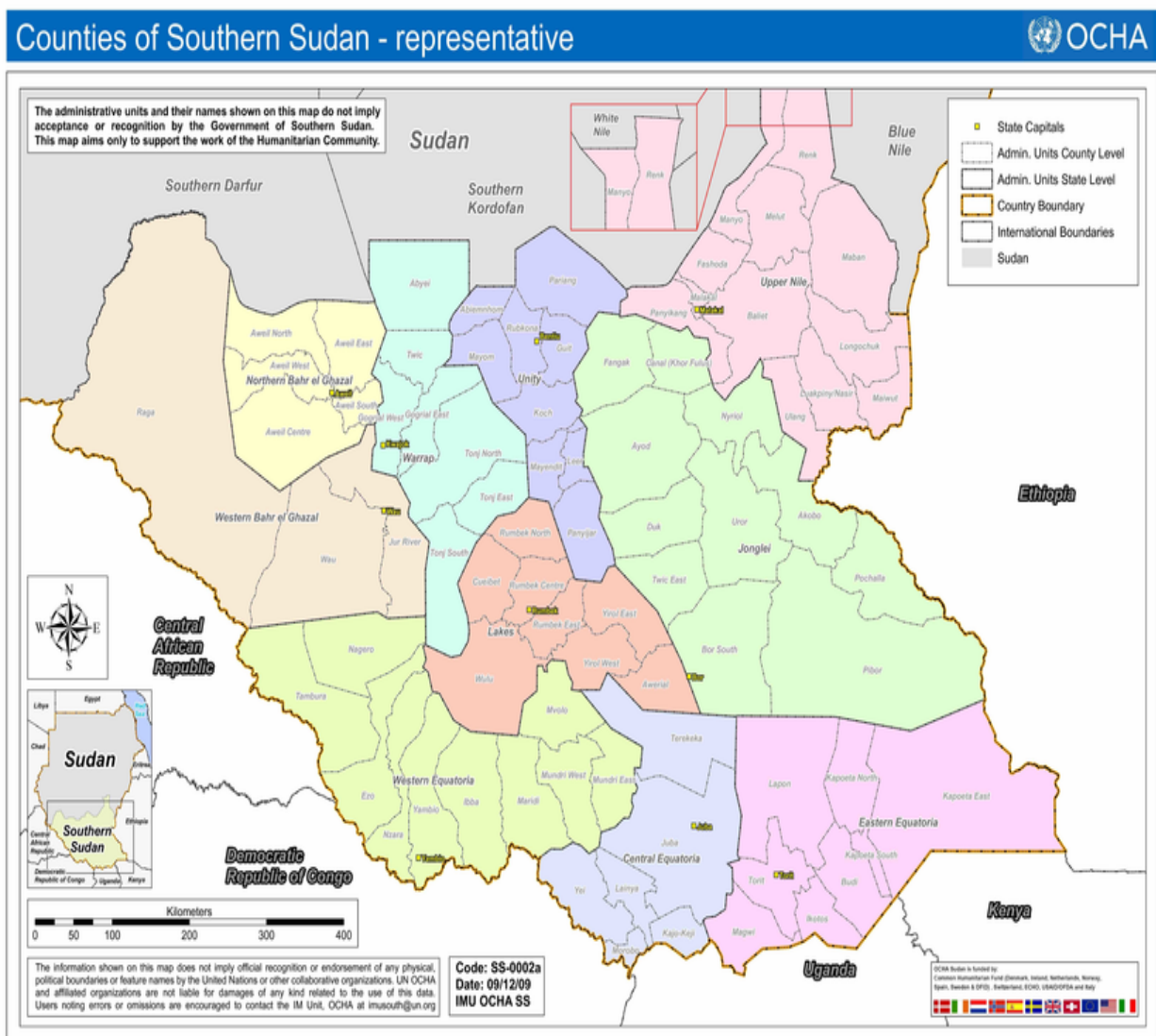
This assessment is intended to evaluate women’s understanding of Public Finance Management (PFM), Public Finance Management Reform Process (PFM-RP) in South Sudan and generate practicable recommendations to enhance women’s participation in the PFM reform process. The assessment was designed to provide an overview and overall knowledge of the PFM-RP among South Sudanese women from different walks of life and provide recommendations to effective women’s involved in specific aspect of the process. Findings of the assessment will inform programming within SSuDEMOP and UNWomen. This report may also be used by other partners who are interested to engage and enhance women participation in the PFM reform process.

The assessment considered specific elements of PFM (the process, budget and taxation). Besides knowledge and information about PFM and PFM reform processes in the country, the assessment looked at understanding of budget process and its importance, taxation system and revenue collection. These elements of PFM were considered due to their direct impact and relationship to public and public participation. Women are an important component of the society and must be meaningfully involved in different aspect of the society. Leaving women behind is detrimental to development, peace and security. A country that does not pay attention to the interest of women stands to lose.

## Scope of the Assessment

The assessment targeted participants from different sectors including women from public and private sector, CSOs, professional associations, political parties at national and state level. This assessment was conducted through one-on-one interviews with key informants in Juba and at state level. A total of 200 women were interviewed across the country, twenty (20) from each state. This report is therefore developed based on the findings presented in the data compiled from the ten (10) states.

The assessment questionnaire focused on three main themes namely: 1) General information on PFM and PFM reform process; 2) Information on National Budget; and 3) Information on Taxation and Revenue collection. As important elements of PFM, the report will focus on the findings but most importantly expound on the analysis and recommendations for each section. It is important to note that this assessment did not look at structural aspects of PFM, which would include assessment of systems and institutional capacities.



## Methodology

The assessment was conducted through one on one interview with key informants, some in person and others on phone. The state level focal persons were instrumental in identifying the participants and linking them to the lead consultant and the assistant consultant through phone. The information collected was then compiled in form of “Compiled Data” from State Level. This was capture under specific themes in form of a summary and analysis of the answers received from the key informants. This was then later summarized into a precise 6-page document that reflects an overall picture of the responses.

It is important to note that this assessment was purely a qualitative exercise, which was intended to be precise and provide practical recommendations to inform programming for SSuDEMOP and UNWomen. Again considering the sensitivity of the issue, the consultant was advised to only keep details of the key informants for the period of data compilation just incase of any clarification. Otherwise, the participants requested to take part in the exercise on condition of anonymity. The questionnaire was divided into three broad sections with specific questions under each section. These were intended to present the issue in different dimensions to facilitate easy understanding.

## Findings

### Understand Public Finance Management and Public Finance Management Reform Process in South Sudan

Most women interviewed seem not to understand what Public Finance Management (PFM) Reform Process means and others were hearing about it for the first time. All the state level participants responded by admitting that they have not heard anything about such a process. Same to those in Juba with exception of few who have either participated in the SSuDEMOP led discussions during the sessions with Women Technical Working Group on PFM or Citizens’ Working Group on PFM, which are both being hosted by SSuDEMOP.

Other women mainly those working with CSOs could guess and provide some scanty information as to what they know about PFM reform process. They gave responses such as – “process of accountability for public money,” “paying salary arrear” “bringing back the stolen money” “accounting for oil revenue in a transparent and open manner” others said “it about dollar rate and prices of goods in the market” “efforts to utilize public resources well” but majority always conclude by asking the question of “how is public money exactly being used” and this in most cases was in reference to oil revenue. Who benefits from the oil money? How much does the country earn from oil proceeds? These were some of the questions being asked. What the women find not to be adding up is the fact that South Sudan is an oil rich country yet salaries are not paid timely and they delay for so many months.

When asked if such a process is of any impact on them, some of the women say the reforms will help reduce prices in the market and regulate exchange rate. Once dollar rate is regulated, then they will be able to afford basic needs for their families. Meaning, according to their understanding, the PFM reform process will impact them through market regulation and regulating exchange rate for US dollars. However, majority of the women interviewed don’t know how they can be involved in the process and also do not know who is involved in the process. Though few mention that the economic cluster, central bank and the ministry of finance were the institutions involved in the PFM reform process, none considered themselves as actors in the process. Their answer to the question of who is involved in the process was basically a guess because these are the institutions that handle money and dollars in the country.

## Knowledge of the national budget and Opinion of Gender Responsiveness of the Budget

All those interviewed across the ten states seem to have an idea and have heard some information about the national budget, however they don't have full information regarding the budget process. Only few know about national budget and also know that budget is supported to have a cycle and follow a fixed financial calendar. When asked further, majority of women clearly only have basic information about the budget (both national and state budgets). Few women among the participants/key informants know that budget is a tool for allocation of national resources for government institutions and chapter one of the budget is salary. Most of the women heard this information from hear say and have never even seen the national budget or state budget documents.

Many of the women interviewed mentioned that, it's through the budget that public servants get paid. The budget relates to the public because it is what determines salaries. Some of them have their spouses serving in the public service or the women were public servants at one point in the past and decided to leave in search for greener pastures. However, majority of women did not have clarity on how the national budget relates to them. All they could say is that the budget is important so that the country can operate well.

When asked about the financial year, many have no idea but few knew about financial year being a fix person but were not sure if this is the case in South Sudan. Others were responding to this question using their knowledge of what happens in the neighboring countries. Very few and mainly those working for government and CSOs knew that the financial year is supposed to end on 30th June each year and begin 1<sup>st</sup> July though the country does not adhere to the financial calendar. Majority confirmed that they do not follow the budget conversations and almost all did not even know when the conversation begins. All they hear is that the budget has been passed but did not follow any aspect of the conversation. One remarked that "not knowing the budget process in this country is not only a problem among the women but even men and some who work for the government do not understand the budget process". All the 200 women interviewed have not seen the budget document both national and state budgets.

There is not clear information among the women as to who develops the budget. Different responses were received. Others said it is parliament, some said the ministry of finance while others said council of ministers. These answers also came from the state level. Only few at Juba level were sure that the ministry of finance develops the draft budget then present to council of ministers before it goes to parliament for debate and approval. However, no body talked of the role of the president in causing the budget process and ascending to the budget. Few complain that the budget is not gender sensitive and their reason is because the ministry of gender is not well funded like the other ministries headed by men.

## Knowledge of taxation in the country and importance of paying taxes

Most of the women interviewed know that South Sudan collects some form of taxes but do not know or understand the taxation system in the country. They know that the National Revenue Authority (NRA) officials collect taxes at the airport, city council, state and country authorities collect taxes from NGOs, and traders in the market or at the boarders. Other also said that the army and police also collect taxes at roadblocks or fines by traffic police especially in Juba. But they do not know the amount or percentage being taxed, the calculation to arrive at the figure and where does the money go.

In regard to tax collection in the country, generally the women feel that the tax collection system in the country is confusing and not clear. There are always several taxes being collected at different levels but the system of collection and utilization is not clear to many. Their biggest fear is exploitation by different groups that claim to collect taxes at different levels. When asked about importance of paying taxes, all agree that it is important to pay taxes but other are saying that since they do not know what is done with the taxes collected and other know that this money ends in pockets of some few people, they feel that as long as the system is unclear, its not worth it.

## Analysis

### Understand Public Finance Management and Public Finance Management Reform Process in South Sudan

On the question of understanding the PFM reform process, from the response received, it is evident that the limited or absence of understanding and information regarding PFM reform process is a shared concern. This is evidenced by the response of the women who were interviewed. Some have an idea about PFM but not about the reform process. Their focus was on revenue from proceeds of oil sale. There seems to be no much attention or information regarding non-oil revenue. One could tell that all the women interviewed have an idea that issues around handling public finances especially the oil revenue requires transparency and accountability. This came in form of a question. Where does the oil money go? Who benefits from the oil money? How can they benefit from the money as well? Their concern was about having share of the resources.

This is a clear indication that if given the opportunity, these women could contribute in setting priorities and this could be in form of services and they were asking – how can this money accord their children good schools, roads and hospitals? From the findings above, there seems to be interest to know about the process but the information seems scarce and away from reach of women. This attitude provides a conducive environment for any information and the eagerness demonstrated by the women presents an opportunity for future programming and awareness around this issue. Since the PFM reform process is still gaining momentum, it will be easy to identify easy entry points for women.

However, the information gap that exists is understandable. Since the beginning of the PFM reform process, there has not been adequate public information regarding the process and not many partners are willing to support such engagement. The limited information is not only among women but even within the civil society and political actors in the country. SSuDEMOP and colleagues from Okay Africa have been the only civil society organizations that have had public conversations intended to give information to the public regarding the PFM reform process in the country. When people get to understand the process, they tend to see the importance. Others try to draw the connection between implementation of R-ARCSS and the PFM reform process and they believe it is vital.

## Recommendation

1. Design more programmes to intensify advocacy around PFM reform process, raise awareness and include the public particularly women in the conversation. Such programmes should be keen on reaching out to different sections of the society including traders in the market and link to the national PFM reform architecture. This will help build confidence in the process, restore hope for accountability, put more pressure and increase demand for transparency for public resources. But most importantly contribute to amplifying women's voices on PFM reforms.
2. Continue to facilitate a process that will gather views and opinion of women regarding the ongoing PFM reform process and feed directly into the PFM reform process eg the work Women Technical Working Group and Citizen's Working Group did on tax exemption.

## Knowledge of the national budget and Opinion of Gender Responsiveness of the Budget

From the findings, it is clear that most women have limited knowledge about the budget and the budget process. Having limited knowledge may serve as an obstacle and may not allow women to see opportunity for gender mainstreaming in the budget process. However, the budget process as stipulated in the Public Finance Management and Accountability (PFMA) Act 2016 has several entry points that could present opportunity for women. Advocacy for women's interest may not achieve the desired results and end up as an emotional advocacy due to limited information about the entire process. In order to put up an effective and targeted advocacy, an in-depth analysis of the budget process may be necessary.

From the findings, perception of a gender responsive budget among those who were interviewed is limited to ministry of Gender being financed to the same tune to the other male-headed ministries. This perception is true but not enough to put up a strong advocacy to engender the budget or adopt gender responsive budgeting as a national policy through out the entire budget cycle. The lack of clarity or adequate information regarding budget process and budget in totality can be attributed to several factors including lack of agency among the public/women and inadequate transparency of the government institutions and processes.

From the feedback, majority of the women interviewed seem to know that a national budget is important to regulate expenditure of the government and distribute national resource to be used by different government institutions. They know that it's the budget that will determine how much money the country uses per year. It is the budget that informs activities and plans of the government and pay for all expenses of the government. But this information is scattered, the question of how the budget is developed is not easy for many to answer. Since many have not seen the budget document, they may not be able to see the opportunities that may present it self annually with the development of the Financial Bill.



## Recommendation

1. There is need to generate more timely debate among targeted group of women on budget processes and find avenues to engage strategically and make tangible impact. This kind of engagement will enable women to identify opportunities for women in the budget process e.g. through Financial Bill and also demand/introduce Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) as a principle in the entire budget cycle (planning and execution)
2. Rethink advocacy strategies and tactics for including women's interest in national budget from an early stage and ensure that women engage from a point of knowledge. This can be achieved through targeted training for targeted women leaders, women holding strategic positions in government institutions, women parliamentarians and women in CSOs.
3. Conduct annual gender analysis of the budget to inform choice of advocacy and policy issues for the next financial year.

## Knowledge of taxation in the country and importance of paying taxes

Paying taxes is still not being perceived as a duty and this does not only exist among the women but it's a common view among the public. The role of different institutions collecting taxes and fines don't seem clear among the public. There is limited knowledge as to what is taxation. The women interviewed only focused on some aspects of taxation and did not bring in the fees that are paid for different services in government offices e.g. company registration, assessment of age, fees at the law courts etc. There is clearly no limited information and no interest in paying taxes. All were instead asking about what the money is being used do? Meaning they don't have confidence in the taxation process.

There is a clear miss information and lack of enthusiasm to pay taxes. This may be a contributing factor to the persistent negative relations between tax collectors and the taxpayers. The fact that there is no clarity about the process, where the money is taken and what is done with the money seems to erode peoples' confidence.

## Recommendation

1. Citizens and specifically women need to be educated on taxation system and tax regime in the country to enable them know their rights and protect them from exploitation. Ignorance of the tax system in the country exposes the public to exploitation and women tend to be more disadvantaged. Therefore, tax education is of great importance for women and should be considered as form of rights education for women.
2. There is need to engage the National Revenue Authority to provide clear understanding of the tax regime and clearly define women's interest in the tax system. This could be in form of demanding tax waiver for commodities used by women such as sanitary materials or tax waiver for tea sellers since all are women. A tax waiver on sanitary materials was obtained in the budget for financial year 2018/2019, however, this was only for one year.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the role of civil society and key population groups such as women, youth and trade unions among others is a critical element for a successful PFM reform process in a country. The PFM reform process in South Sudan has gone an extra mile in achieving inclusion by having CSOs represented at level of Public Finance Management Oversight Committee (PFM-OC), Technical Committee (PFM-TC) and creation of the position for a Gender Advisor to the process. While it may seem that the concept of inclusion is being realized by inclusion of civil society representatives at the two levels of the oversight architecture, effectively addressing the interests and the needs of different population groups may require more efforts to create awareness on the importance of PFM reforms among key population groups such as women, youth and CSOs at larger.

The current PFM reform process in South Sudan presents an opportunity for inclusion of women's interest through gender mainstreaming in national macro and micro economic policies and register progress in realization of sustainable development- In this case through implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) number 5, 8 and 10 which are relevant to the discourse around PFM reform process. Considering that the PFM reform process in South Sudan was instituted in June 2020, this assessment report have come at an opportune moment for women and advocates of gender equality. SSuDEMOP's current position as the lead Civil Society Organization on this issue and representing CSOs at the level of PFM-OC, is an opportunity for a longer term engagement with the process for purpose of policy influence, awareness creation and gender mainstreaming at both national and subnational levels and as a responsibility to mobilize civic participation.