

South Sudan Holds First National Workshop to Develop Action Plan for Maputo Protocol Implementation

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South Sudan has taken a historic step toward advancing women's rights and gender equality with the successful conclusion of its first national consultative workshop aimed at developing a National Action Plan (NAP) for 2025–2030 to facilitate the domestication and implementation of the Maputo Protocol.

The workshop, held from July 31 to August 1, 2025, at Palm Africa Hotel in Juba, brought together 65 key stakeholders, including officials from national ministries, gender focal persons, civil society organizations (CSOs), women's rights organizations (WROs), youth groups, academia, media representatives, UN agencies, and development partners.

Organized with financial support from the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in partnership with the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, and the Global Voices Organization (GVO) South Sudan, the event aimed to:

- Raise awareness and promote national dialogue on the Maputo Protocol;
- Strengthen partnerships and coordination among actors working to advance women's rights;
- Generate background information to support the drafting of a comprehensive and actionable NAP;

- Commemorate the 22nd anniversary of the Protocol’s adoption by the African Union in July 2003.

South Sudan ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, known as the Maputo Protocol, in June 2023, demonstrating its commitment to promoting women’s and girls’ rights. However, participants acknowledged that progress toward domestication and implementation remains slow. Critical issues include:

- Gender-based violence, harmful norms, and systemic discrimination;
- Stigmatization surrounding reproductive health;
- Low literacy levels among women, among the lowest in the region;
- Delayed implementation of the 35% affirmative action provision in the Revitalized Peace Agreement;
- Weak enforcement of laws, limited funding, and sluggish legislative reform processes.

In a powerful closing statement, Narumanga Jolly, Young Women and Communications Assistant at GVO, emphasized the urgency of action:

“We, the 65 key stakeholders—including government officials, civil society, women’s rights organizations, international NGOs, UN agencies, academia, youth representatives, and the media—gathered in Juba for South Sudan’s first National Consultative Workshop to develop the NAP for 2025–2030. We reaffirm South Sudan’s commitment by ratifying the Maputo Protocol in June 2023. Still, progress remains slow. As we mark two years since ratification, it is imperative to renew our commitment and take concrete steps to embed the Protocol’s provisions into our laws, policies, and institutions, and to implement them fully.”

The Maputo Protocol provides a robust legal framework covering several domains, including:

- Reproductive health and rights;
- Education and literacy;
- Freedom from violence and harmful practices;
- Political participation and leadership.

Despite these protections, significant gaps persist, such as delays in legal reforms, the pending Family Law Bill, the non-criminalization of marital rape, and incomplete implementation of the 35% affirmative action policy for women.

At the conclusion of the workshop, participants adopted several strategic actions:

1. Conduct state-level consultations to finalize the NAP for Maputo Protocol implementation.
2. Establish a joint national reporting mechanism, led by the Ministry of Gender, to streamline regional and international reporting on human rights.
3. Enhance collaboration between national and regional stakeholders through platforms like the Gender Equality Forum.
4. Provide targeted capacity-building for institutions and individuals involved in implementation and reporting.
5. Promote legal and policy reforms, including reviewing the Transitional Constitution, Penal Code, and aligning the Child Act (2008) with the Protocol.
6. Translate and disseminate the Protocol into Arabic and local languages to raise community awareness.
7. Create a Maputo Protocol Domestication and Implementation Working Group (MDI-WG) to meet regularly and monitor progress.

Narumanga Jolly emphasized, “We emphasize shared responsibility among all stakeholders—from policymakers and legislators to traditional leaders, civil society, and community members—to join forces and prioritize the domestication and implementation of the Maputo Protocol. The time to act is now. South Sudanese women and girls deserve nothing less.”

This workshop signifies a pivotal moment in South Sudan’s pursuit of gender equality and women’s rights. With a clear roadmap and collective commitment, the challenge now is translating momentum into concrete policy reforms, coordinated action, and tangible results.

As the country prepares for constitutional transformation and upcoming elections, stakeholders have reaffirmed their vision: South Sudan’s future must be gender-just, inclusive, and rooted in the respect for the rights and dignity of all its citizens.