

An Examination of the Implementation of the Legal Provisions for the Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflicts in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal State, South Sudan

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Abstract – The study mainly looked at an examination of the implementation of the legal provisions for the protection of children’s rights in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal State and it proposed strategies for effective implementation of children’s rights in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal State. Purposive sampling was used to select the study sample of 120 respondents (who included 104 local community members and 16 key informants). Quantitative data analysis was based on 104 questionnaires for the local community members. Qualitative data was gathered from the key informant responses. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Content analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. The findings revealed that most of the works on child protection is done by International and local organizations. The government is not very visible in working hand in hand with these organizations to implement laws on the protection of the rights of children. The findings also revealed that the government has got limited capacity in implementing provisions on child protection. There is a gap in drafting and enforcing laws to protect children in armed conflicts. It is true as well that protection procedures have not been observed at the grassroots level, despite the positive finding that there are standard operating procedures on how to deal with children affected by armed conflicts, although more emphasis is required on the protection of child rights in general. Generally, the results showed that protection of children’s rights in Wau is poor and Government efforts to implement child protection policies and programs at state levels remain low although protection by NGOs and International Organizations like the UN and its agencies was comparatively acknowledged. The proposed strategies for effective implementation of children’s rights in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal state included; the need for more collaborations between the International organizations, NGOs, and government agencies which was suggested by the majority of the study respondents. Other strategies included: the promotion of community-based child protection mechanisms, introduction and establishment of child protection desk offices at all administrative levels in Wau, and practically implement binding South Sudanese laws and updating the penal code on protection of children urging that laws were enacted but their level of implementation is still poor. The paper recommends greater collaboration among all relevant stakeholders in the country on children's affairs to ensure that legal provisions on children's protection are effectively implemented and adhered to. Child Protection resources should be diversified to cover the different areas of child protection.

Keywords – Children, Legal Provisions, Children Protection, Armed Conflicts, South Sudan.

I. INTRODUCTION

South Sudan turned into an independent state in 2011 when she separated from Sudan after almost 40 years of civil war. However, the new state has drowned in ceaseless contentions since December 2013. The struggles which are inside the country itself, are principally political, yet will more often than not incline towards ethnic lines (Kate, 2015). Armed conflict-related deaths, injuries, the annihilation of property and schools, hunger, uprooting of families, torture, and other forms of cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment, abuse, and exploitation have purportedly been common in the nation (Deng, 2018; Nafziger et.al, 2013). More than 2.7 million people have been displaced inside the nation's boundaries or in neighboring nations, and a larger part is children (UNMISS, 2018; UNHCR, 2016). Children constitute 70% of the country's refugee population (UNHCR, 2016). According to the report by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) (2016), half a million children have reportedly fled their homes since the outbreak of violence in December 2013, most children are not in school they are frequently casualties of assaults in hospitals and schools, more than half (5.1 million) of the 9.6 million people affected by armed conflicts in the country are children with mass abductions and recruitment of children by armed forces and armed groups a common practice especially the boys as child soldiers, messengers and spies, and girls as cooks and sex slaves. The report additionally showed that the unrests in South Sudan since 2013 have prompted a decrease in the nation's GDP and an increment of domestic debt, for example, from 0% in 2011 to 12% of the GDP toward the finish of 2014. The expense of violence regulation in South Sudan has been assessed at 22% of the nation's GDP, as the nation keeps on being plunged into active conflict (ACERWC, 2016). Children of all ages continue to suffer greatly from the consequences of the armed conflicts within the country compared to adults (Nafziger et.al, 2013).

As indicated by ACERWC (2016), children can be the essential casualties of a conflict, or secondary casualties as observers of infringement submitted on others, or both. ACERWC (2016) noticed that African states are not doing what's needed to decrease or stop the impacts of conflict on children. In South Sudan, despite the existence of child protection mechanisms, they are frail to address all the child protection concerns in the country. Complying with both the national and international legal provisions for the protection of children in situations of armed conflict is not fulfilled, yet South Sudan is among the most conflict-affected countries on the African continent, registering profound child rights violations (ACERWC, 2016). The 2011 Transitional Constitution and the Child Act of 2008 are the main legal instruments in the country for protecting the rights and ensuring the welfare of children in armed conflict but they are commonly abused. The study was guided by the following definitions of a child, children's rights, and armed conflicts. The 2011 Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan characterizes children as each individual underneath the age of 18 years (Government of Southern Sudan, 2011). This definition was taken on from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) ratified by South Sudan, which is an internationally acknowledged instrument or reference archive on children. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) defines children's rights as human rights of a child, for example, a right to association with both parents, access to all the basic needs, and freedom from all sorts of discrimination (UNICEF, 2019). The term armed conflicts have been conceptualized by different scholars. Stewart (2013) noted that an "armed conflict" exists "whenever there is a resort to armed force between States or protracted armed violence between governmental authorities and organized armed groups or between such groups within a state. According to Breadcook (2013), armed conflicts are defined as a political struggle between two or more parties seeking to gain control of all the country's resources. By seeking to gain control of the country's resources, a full range of children's rights, including social and cultural as well as political and civil rights are violated.

The study was conducted in Wau town, Western Bahr el Ghazal State located in the Bahr el Ghazal region in the northwestern part of South Sudan. The communities targeted were Balanda and Jur Chol as these were the most affected communities in Wau town. The area was selected because of a history of a shift of its political landscape from a peaceful one to one of the conflict-prone areas that have been plunged into violence leaving many civilians including children displaced and experiencing all sorts of violence. Furthermore, Wau town, Western Bahr el Ghazal State is reported to be among the areas in the country that have been most affected by the armed conflicts, and a series of violations have been reportedly committed against children since the start of the civil war in December 2013. Despite the efforts in place by the government of South Sudan and international organizations to safeguard children's rights in the country, violation(s) of children's rights in the country is still persistent (UNICEF, 2016). The study mainly looked at an examination of the implementation of the legal provisions for the protection of children's rights in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal State and it proposed strategies for effective implementation of children's rights in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal State. The study is particularly important to South Sudan because it will help the government to fulfill its obligations of protecting children since it will provide key information critical in the designing of legal provisions to prevent violation of children's rights. The

government of South Sudan has just ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child and therefore this study is timely to provide a basis for strengthening child protection laws and to identify gaps in the implementation of laws and policies that protect children as well as drafting effective legal provisions in support of protection of children in all ways and at all levels especially during conflicts. NGOs will be able to come up with more projects on the protection of children. The study is hoped to also stimulate further research and it is expected to be used as reference material during literature review in future research studies on children.

II. LEGAL PROVISIONS FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN SITUATIONS OF ARMED CONFLICTS IN SOUTH SUDAN

2.1 Ratified International Instruments

2.1.1 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

South Sudan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Perianes, 2017), which implies that the international standards to promote children's rights must be deciphered in its domestic law (Lansdown, 2005). The CRC document is based on just four foundation principles: children should be free from discrimination; government policies should be based on the best interests of the child; children should survive and develop to their full potential and children's views and perspectives are important and need to be heard. However, in conflict and post-conflict situations as the case in South Sudan, children are usually vulnerable to all the human rights violations. Articles 38 and 39 specifically focus on the rights of the child in armed conflicts and post-conflict situations. Equal rights for every child are recognized in the convention, and it is acknowledged that all children have the right to the satisfaction of their basic needs and beyond. The Convention goes through the rights of the child in detail and recognizes that not only do the children need attention in peacetime, but they are also in need of protection from violence during armed conflicts (Harju, 2013). Article 38 concentrates specifically on children who are affected by armed conflict and obliges member states to respect and to ensure respect for rules of International humanitarian law applicable to them in armed conflicts which are relevant to the child (CRIN, 2019). The same article indicates that a child younger than 15 years can't take a direct part in hostilities (Ibid). It proceeds to specify that member states ought to abstain from selecting children younger than 15 years to their armed forces, and rather give need to the most seasoned individuals/ oldest (ibid). The convention urges the member states to find all possible ways to ensure that children who are affected by an armed conflict are helped and protected (ibid). Article 39 stresses that member states shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of armed conflicts, and such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment that fosters the health, self-respect, and dignity of the child (ibid).

2.1.2 Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict

South Sudan ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (UN, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflicts, 2021). The optional protocol urges states not to enlist children younger than 18 years to send them to combat zone (ibid). The optional protocol likewise requires states not to conscript soldiers beneath the age of 18 years. States should go to all potential lengths to prevent recruitment and use of children in hostilities, and they ought to deactivate children under 18 years conscripted or used in hostilities and provide them with physical, psychological recovery services and help their social reintegration (ibid).

2.1.3 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and its Optional Protocol

South Sudan ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or degrading Treatment or Punishment and its optional protocol. Article 2 of the convention requires member states to take measures to end torture within their territorial jurisdiction and to criminalize all acts of torture (UN Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, 2021). The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or degrading Treatment or Punishment helps states meet their obligations under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or degrading Treatment or Punishment. Under the Protocol, member states shall agree to establish an independent National Committee on Prevention against Torture to carry out the functions laid down in the protocol such as conducting inspections of all places of detentions and closed environments, among other functions (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2021).

2.1.4 The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

South Sudan ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its optional protocol (Xinhua, 2019). The ICCPR requires states to protect and respect their citizens' civil and political rights, such as the right to political participation, equality, freedom of thought, religion and expression, and freedom from torture and other inhuman treatment (UN, 2019; Xinhua, 2019).

2.1.5 The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

South Sudan ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and its optional protocol (Xinhua, 2019). The ICESCR is crucial to enabling people to live with dignity and covers important areas of public policy such as the right to work under fair and just conditions and an adequate standard of living as well as access to social security, health, and education (UN, 2019; Xinhua, 2019)

2.1.6 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights

South Sudan ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. It is a legally binding treaty that is intended to promote and protect civil, political, economic, social, and cultural as well as other human rights and basic freedoms of peoples in the African continent (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (LSE, 2016)

2.2 National Legal Framework

2.2.1 The 2011 Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan

The 2011 Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan provides for the rights of children and therefore, violations of children's rights cannot be justified under whatever circumstance. Article 17 of the constitution is much concerned about the Rights of Children such as the right to life, survival, and development, right not to be subjected to exploitative practices or abuse, nor to be required to serve in the army nor permitted to perform work which may be hazardous or harmful to one's education, health or well-being, right to be protected from abduction and trafficking, among other rights (ACERWC, 2016).

2.2.1 The Child Act of 2008

The South Sudan Child Act, 2008 came into force after the Presidential signature on 13th October 2008 (Doek, 2014). The main purpose of the Child Act is to guarantee the child's right to life, survival, and development; to education and well-being; to health; and to protection from abuse conflict (ACERWC, 2016). The Child Act also contains comprehensive provisions on protecting the rights and welfare of children in armed conflict (ibid). On the protection of children in armed conflict, the Act focuses on providing guidelines for conscription or voluntary recruitment into armed forces (ibid). It obliges the State to guarantee that no child is recruited or used in military or paramilitary activities (ibid). It likewise accommodates protection, rehabilitation, and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups (ibid). Article 31(4) further obliges the State to guarantee that children's rights are ensured as per the arrangements of this Act and international humanitarian law (ibid).

III. METHODOLOGY

The study was descriptive. Descriptive research designs answer how and what questions. There was a need to ask questions such as, 'How are the legal provisions for the protection of children's rights implemented in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal State?' 'What are the proposed strategies for the effective implementation of children's rights in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal state?' The study used a mixed-method approach where both qualitative and quantitative techniques were employed. The quantitative approach to research is suitable for generating statistical data while the qualitative approach to research can easily capture non – quantifiable data. The study was conducted in the city of Wau. The local community members constituted the primary respondents for the study. The key informants constituted the officials from the community such as the local council leadership. Purposive sampling was used to select the study sample of 120 respondents (who included 104 local community members and 16 key informants). Primary data was obtained from the local community members and, additional information was obtained from the key informants for this study. Secondary data was collected by reviewing literature related to the subject under study. Data collection methods for primary data included Interviews (both Face to Face interviews with the local community and Key Informant Interviews with the key informants – local council and other officials in the community).

Informed consent was sought from the respondents and permission to carry out the study was obtained from the relevant authorities in the study area. Other ethical considerations included ensuring the confidentiality of information and identity of respondents and acknowledgment of works of other researchers through referencing. The data collection instruments included; Questionnaire (for the local community members) and aKey Informant Interview Guide (for the Key Informants). The questionnaire entailed close-ended questions based on a four – Likert scale of response options (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Agree, Agree). The key informant interview guide was used to gather additional in-depth data, from open-ended questions, to supplement data gathered from the questionnaire. Questionnaires were checked for completeness by the research team. Quantitative data analysis was based on a total of 104 questionnaires that were complete, for the primary respondents considered for the study. Qualitative data was gathered from Key Informant Interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Content analysis was used to analyze qualitative data.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Implementation of the Legal Provisions for the Protection of Children’s Rights in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal State

The study sought to examine the implementation of the legal provisions for the protection of children’s rights in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal State. Table 1 below provides the study findings as per the responses gathered from the local community members. SA stands for Strongly Agree, A – stands for Agree, DA – Disagree, and SDA – strongly disagree.

Table 1: Implementation of the Legal Provisions on the Protection of Children’s Rights in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal State

N=104	SA		A		DA		SDA		Mean	Std. Deviation
	*Freq	%	*Freq	%	*Freq	%	*Freq	%		
The government is working hand in hand with humanitarian organizations to implement laws on child protection.	13	12.5	30	28.8	47	45.2	14	13.5	2.936	.95460
Laws have been drafted and always enforced to protect children in armed conflicts, protection procedures have been observed at all levels to ensure socio-economic security	12	11.5	17	16.3	47	45.2	28	27	2.292	.62173
Perpetrators of violence against children have been held accountable	10	9.6	9	8.7	57	54.8	28	26.9	2.578	.98104
NGOs are mostly doing the work of building capacity among institutions to protect children during armed conflicts, and carrying out other child protection activities	47	45.2	36	34.6	12	11.5	9	8.7	2.833	.71125
There are standard operating procedures on how to deal with children affected by armed conflicts	41	39.4	40	38.5	11	10.6	12	11.5	2.168	.90960

Source: Primary data, 2020. *frequency

According to the results in Table 1 above, the majority of the respondents 45.2% (mean =2.936) disagreed that the government is working hand in hand with humanitarian organizations to implement laws on the protection of the rights of children, 13.5% strongly disagreed while only 12.5% strongly agreed and 28.8% agreed to the statement. This shows that government institutions in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal state have not been visible in the implementation of laws on the protection of children.

The study established that most of the works on child protection is done by International organizations i.e., UNICEF, UNMISS, IOM, and Local NGOs. However, it should be noted that the Ministry of Gender, Child, and Social Welfare is the coordinating body for the rights of children and focal ministry for child protection with 3 of the 6 directorates having clear linkages to child protection namely, child welfare, social welfare, and gender.

Unfortunately, there is little evidence that such institutions have developed the necessary strategies to monitor the implementation of the national Child Act, 2008. However, a representative from UNICEF reported that “*South Sudan is in the process of establishing the Child Welfare Council as a strategy to monitor the protection of children’s rights*”. This could be a step forward in child protection, but challenges related to resources and support from the political leaders must be dealt with including making inclusive and equitable decisions at all levels from the grassroots.

Findings showed that the government has got limited capacity in implementing provisions on child protection. The majority of the respondents strongly disagreed (45.2%) and disagreed (26.9%) that laws have been drafted and always enforced to protect children in armed conflicts. It is true as well that protection procedures have not been observed at the grassroots level, leaving such vulnerable groups of people (the children) be affected by insecurity. A representative from Inspire Africa submitted that:

The government has not done enough to build capacity among institutions to protect children in armed conflicts, currently, capacity building is majorly done by institutions such as UN agencies and CBOs to strengthen child protection and raise awareness among civilians on violation of children’s rights. (Key Informant, Wau)

Another representative from an NGO highlighted that:

The government cannot be working in collaboration with NGOs to protect children because most of the children are being recruited into the national army, yet impunity is widely recognized per the established reports. (Key Informant, Wau)

There were fewer responses of 11.5% (strongly agree) and 16.3% (agree) which confirmed drafting and enforcement of child protection laws. The findings prove that the level of enforcement of laws to protect children in armed conflict is largely poor in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal State, especially at Payam and Boma levels. Only organizations dealing with the protection of children’s rights are seen enforcing these laws. Only 9.6% (strongly agree) and 8.7% (agree) of the respondents respectively agreed that perpetrators of violence against children have been held accountable while the majority of the respondents strongly disagreed (54.8%) and disagreed (26.9%). Following this, a respondent from the peacekeeping mission said that:

...the issue of accountability depends on the perpetrator, military persons and others from organized forces seem to be more protected escaping law and legal procedures. Sometimes even other individuals equally go free at times because of lack of enough evidence to pin them. (Key Informant, Wau)

In other words, results indicate that violence against children is practiced with a lot of impunity and the lack of consistent reporting mechanisms makes it even more difficult. This explains why child labor, abuse, and exploitation are on the increase in South Sudan as per the report by UNICEF (2016). There is no independent body in South Sudan to which children can report rights violations or which can undertake investigations into rights abuses. Another key informant (a representative from Kids Alive NGO) said that:

...neither the government nor its forces have protected children in their best interests. Children are not protected from conscription, recruitment in the army, exposure to violence, and attainment of the right to health and education is still a nightmare. (Key Informant, Wau)

It was however acknowledged by the majority of the respondents who strongly agreed (45.2%) and agreed (34.6%) that NGOs, the UN, and its Agencies mostly are doing the work of mobilizing and integrating child soldiers, sponsoring education, and

providing health services to displaced children including building capacity among institutions to protect the rights of children. Similarly, the majority of the respondents strongly agreed (39.4%) and agreed (38.5%) that there are standard operating procedures on how to deal with children affected by armed conflicts, although the disagreeing percentage of 10.6% (disagree) and 11.5% (strongly disagree) shows that more emphasis is required on the protection of child rights.

Generally, results show that protection of children’s rights in Wau is poor and Government efforts to implement child protection policies and programs at state levels remain low although protection by NGOs and International Organizations like the UN and its agencies was comparatively acknowledged.

4.2. Proposed Strategies for Effective Implementation of Children’s Rights in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal State

The study sought to propose several strategies that could be adopted for the effective implementation of children’s rights in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal state. These strategies were adopted to enhance, promote, and reinforce the existing laws. Table 2 below shows the response rates from the respondents on the proposed strategies for effective implementation of children’s rights in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal State.

Table 2: Proposed Strategies for Effective Implementation of Children’s Rights in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal State

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
• Promote Community Based Child Protection Mechanisms (CBCPM)	24	23.1
• More collaborations between international organisations and government agencies	35	33.7
• Implementation of binding south Sudanese laws and update the penal code	23	22.1
• Establishment of child protection desk offices at all levels	22	21.1
Total	104	100

Source: Primary data, 2020

The findings in table 2 above indicated that 23.1 % of the respondents suggested the promotion of community-based child protection mechanisms including enriching the civil society so that they reach out to communities by creating awareness and sensitization about protecting the rights of children. Also, 33.7% of the respondents proposed the need for more collaboration between international organizations, NGOs, and government agencies. They should make every effort, including through the media to trace the parents or guardians of any displaced or abandoned child and to return the child to the place where he or she ordinarily resides for parents to take the primary custodian of their children. Respondents mentioned that in most cases support to the children has been single-handedly handled by NGOs and International Organizations but all parties must join hands to enforce the implementation of the CRC and national laws as it is the Government’s role to provide long-term support, safety, freedom, and wellbeing of children, including psychosocial support to children victims of all sorts of violence during armed conflicts.

In addition, 21.1% of the respondents suggested that there should be the introduction and establishment of child protection desk offices at all administrative levels in Wau because they will help to improve on reporting mechanisms and collection of firsthand information especially in remote areas on the patterns of child abuse. Also, 22.1 % of respondents argued that it’s important to practically implement binding South Sudanese laws and update the penal code on the protection of children urging that laws were enacted but their level of implementation is still poor.

V. DISCUSSION

According to the findings in Table 1, it was established that NGOs, the UN, and its agencies were the major key players in laying down strategies to help in the implementation of legal provisions for the protection of children's rights. Child protection provisions like the Child Act of 2008 are existing but there is a challenge of enforcement and a lack of government readiness to act.

The UN through UNICEF, UNMISS, IOM, Save the Children, and other NGOs like Kids Alive South Sudan, Inspire Africa, among other local and international organizations have tried to perform their advocacy role together with the local populace but the political environment appears to be a stumbling block to all these efforts. Both the local and international organizations were acknowledged for their role played in promoting the socio-economic security of children, providing educational support, protection of children's rights through capacity building specifically to the institutions working with the children and awareness creation, provision of health care, food security, and nutrition.

Table 1 further indicated that there are standard operating procedures on how to deal with children affected by armed conflicts. However, their implementation and other child protection policies especially among government agencies are still covering a very limited scope. The government has got limited capacity in implementing provisions on child protection.

Results further indicated that perpetrators are in most cases walking free while some have not been identified due to lack of enough evidence for their verdict. Meanwhile, the CRC is largely invisible, and the implementation of the children's Act of 2008 has not been apprehended particularly in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal State. Nevertheless, children's rights continue to be violated even though the conflict has been controlled to the degree that common social activities can be resumed in some parts of the country.

In addition, results showed that there is no independent body in South Sudan to which children can report rights violations or which can undertake investigations into rights abuses and enforce the legal provisions of the Children's Act. For example, participants i.e., some local community members said that they had been aware of ongoing violence against children in areas within and outside Wau and reported to the authorities, but no action seemed to have been taken to prevent or investigate the attacks. Thus, to a larger extent, the laws and policies that protect children have not been apprehended in favor of promoting children's rights.

Many proposed strategies could be adopted to strengthen the effective implementation of children's rights in Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal state. These included: Promotion of Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms (CBCPM), more collaborations between international organizations and government agencies, Implementation of binding south Sudanese laws and update the penal code, and Establishment of child protection desk offices at all levels.

It was suggested that when Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms (CBCPM) are promoted, they will make efforts to enforce the implementation of child protection policies and enhance strategies like tracing the parents or guardians of some displaced or abandoned children and keep clear records on child abuse that will later be useful in monitoring, evaluation, and implementation of policies to protect children.

According to the study, the establishment of child protection desks at all administrative levels in Wau town should be a priority. In doing this, an improvement in reporting mechanisms and collection of firsthand information especially in remote areas will be enabled. More rigorously, respondents suggested that more collaboration between international organizations and government agencies are needed because this will facilitate implementation of the legal provisions with the common agenda of protection of the rights of children, also given the fact that NGOs and the civil society currently have a wide reach and scope in communities than the government.

VI. CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Children and other national laws and policies was identified to be largely poor in Wau town, Western Bahr el Ghazal State coupled with a lot of challenges such as lack of institutional capacity i.e., funds, personnel, and infrastructures. Conflicts have made children suffer not only in the short run but also long-term effects like emotional stress and physical damages. Therefore, based on the results, there is the absence of aggressive means of implementing national laws and policies that protect the rights of children in Wau town, Western Bahr el Ghazal State. This puts many children vulnerable to the rights violations such as recruitment in the army, being killed, rape, and other forms of sexual abuse, among other

rights violations. Children are suffering within their communities largely due to a lack of enough capacity to protect them by both the government and other humanitarian actors.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Parties to the conflict should be made to understand and respect the laws and norms of children during a conflict situation. Perpetrators when identified should be made to account for their actions by bringing them to court and if found guilty should be penalized with heavy punishments to prevent further violations and abuse against children.
- The support provided by the UN and other renowned organizations in child protection should go ahead to focus on identifying the attackers and bringing them for conviction besides verifying the reported numbers that leave perpetrators with the freedom to continue with their actions.
- Non-government organizations that are involved in the development practice have done a remarkable job in protecting children during armed conflicts but should ensure that children are involved in decision-making so that their voices continue to be heard especially on matters affecting them. This could be done by outreach programs in schools and other learning centers to get ideas on proper implementation strategies designed to protect children.
- Child-friendly programs and desk reviews need to be established and made available at community levels to provide information, skills, and other services needed to protect children. By doing this, firsthand information including getting an accurate number of children affected could easily be established for appropriate actions and follow-up.
- More efforts need to be done in the guidance and counseling of children affected by armed conflicts by reaching out to more communities for wider coverage.

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