**Report of Project Launch Held on April 29, 2022, in Wau, Western Bahr El Ghazal State**

**Project Title: Community Action for Peaceful Resolution of Housing, Land and Property (HLP) Disputes and Conflicts**

1. **Objectives of the Project Launch**

The project launch, which marked the first project-wide activity, intended to convene local, state, and national government, as well as customary authority, women, youth, and other stakeholders on peacebuilding centered around housing, land, and property issues in Wau, Juba and Rubkona as pilot counties aimed to:

* 1. Foster national ownership and buy-in of catalytic peacebuilding efforts on HLP in South Sudan at both the county level and national level;
  2. Stimulate interest, and discussion of HLP challenges in South Sudan with critical stakeholders;
  3. Engage key stakeholders in project processes and interventions for efficiency of implementation and sustainability of interventions; and
  4. Identify gaps and determine next steps

1. **Preparatory Activities**

In preparation for the launching of the project, the Technical Working Group convened to decide on stakeholders and delegates to be invited to the launching and engaged, dates of the event. In the days preceding the launching, an advance team drawn from IOM, FAO and UNMISS mobilized, consulted, and engaged women, youth, local and state government as well as customary authorities in Wau County and municipality. The purpose of this activity was to achieve the objectives listed in the preceding paragraph.

1. **Stakeholder Inclusive Participation and Inputs**

The project launching event organizing team ensured that the key beneficiaries of the project, women and youth were well represented and participated fully in voicing the HLP issues they as a group face, but also those that are encountered by the county and Western Bahr el Ghazal State as a whole. Customary authorities from the county and payams as well as local government authorities were also represented. The state of Western Bahr el Ghazal led by the govern and relevant ministries (state Ministry of Housing, Land and Public Utilities, Ministry of Peacebuilding, Ministry of Local Government and Law Enforcement, State Ministry of Gender, Child, and Social Welfare) was equally represented.

Thus, women and you as key beneficiaries of the project, and a cross-section of the society and land governance as well as administrative structures were represented in the project launching. This was intended to ensure that principal stakeholders and HLP players do understand the project, its objectives, target beneficiaries, expected outcomes, and take ownership of it.

The project technical group also ensured that key relevant institutions, UN agencies, dignitaries, and other organizations critical for the project were represented in the launching. Some of the key representatives included:

* At the opening of the event, the Governor of Western Bahr el Ghazal State, UNDSRSG, the Undersecretary of the National Ministry of Peacebuilding, dignitaries, participants including women, youth, and other vulnerable groups, as well as religious leaders were represented.
* Agencies and organizations represented included IOM, FAO, UNDP, UNMISS, WBeG State Government ministries, Wau County Authorities, CSOs (CEPO, CARDO and Land Alliance, women association, youth union, and Customary Authorities from the County.
* As the host of the event, the representative of Wau Municipality officially welcomed the delegates, and participants.

1. **Key Highlights from stakeholder engagement**

In his welcoming remarks, the representative of Wau Municipality pointed out that HLP issues are some of the major challenges faced by the municipality and the state, and that the municipality would collaborate with the partners in solving land issues.

The event was kick-started with a drama presentation by a youth group comprised of young women, young men, persons with disability involving men and customary leaders. The Youth Drama Group (Peace and Unity Kingdom)

* The play highlighted multiple HLP rights issues mostly affecting vulnerable groups in society. This included:

- Displacement to the PoC;

- Inheritance issues (widow’s land illegally sold by her brother-in-law);

- Use of fake land document, sale of (a widow’s) land to multiple buyers, registry issues; and

- Issues of vulnerability to loss of HLP assets faced by women, youth, and persons living with

disability.

*Project Highlights* - The youth presentation of HLP issues in the society of the county was followed by highlights of the project presented by IOM. The highlights informed stakeholders, state, and local government as well as other stakeholders and beneficiaries on:

* The funding approach of the donor (PBF), which invests in catalytic manner where is uses lessons learned from pilot projects to scale-up (currently in investment in three areas namely Juba, Wau, and Rubkona).
* The highlights also pointed out entry points including engaging in supporting the process of review of legal frameworks (relevant to HLP).
* That the project would be implemented in close partnership by IOM, FAO and UNMISS and relevant authorities.
* The fact that housing, land, and property present major problems was elaborated upon particularly in the context of movement of people (displacement, return, relocation etc.) as well as in anticipation of elections. Then the presentation further pointed out that:
* Inaccessibility to land due to conflicts could prevent some people to return to their areas (of origin or habitual residence).
* HLP rights may be denied to others, like women and youth or based on ethnicities because of existing social norms. If people are prevented from returning to their land because of what and who they are, then it could create tension and conflict.
* The project would address HLP issues through supporting statutory system for governing HLP (mostly in urban/gazetted areas) by:

- strengthening capacity for county land authorities, and for responsible ministries

- reforming/amending the Land Act, 2009 (and other land related legal frameworks)

* It will support customary system (important in the rural areas where majority of South Sudanese land and people are) for governing HLP, and by strengthening capacity of customary authorities. Some of the customary positions (chieftainships) have been inherited, others elected to the positions or appointed by politicians. These dynamics open windows for HLP related grievances.
* The project would work with both formal (statutory systems) including downstream reform strategy for institutions, laws, as well as the customary land tenure systems.
* It would support establishment of alternative land dispute resolution mechanisms (where they do not exist);
* Enhance tenure security of communities by raising awareness on their rights to HLP;
* Align customary laws with international human rights and norms;
* Discuss HLP issues with concerned communities and find the way of moving forwards;
* Recognizes that formal system will not be strengthened overnight, so it will enhance alternative dispute resolution mechanisms; and
* Facilitate stakeholder led identification of HLP issues and building consensus on resolution of those issues, including series of stakeholder engagement.
* Peace dividends areas including agricultural extension services, legal aid (to facilitate access to HLP for disadvantaged groups), renovation or construction of communal infrastructure and asset within communities through the stakeholder diagnostic processes would be supported with technical backing from the partners (IOM, FAO and UNMISS).
* These processes and implementation of the project would involve engagement of government institutions, faith-based organizations, other stakeholders, beneficiaries etc.
* Inclusivity and stakeholder led, and human rights approaches is key in the project.
* The project will ensure that it builds capacity that will remain beyond its lifespan so that the efforts that will be advanced are sustained.

*Highlights of the findings of the assessment of HLP issues* - The project highlights were followed by an overview of the assessment of HLP issues in the county with a focus on the Wau Municipality. Findings of an initial assessment conducted on issues of land governance, administration, dispute settlement by the court, and state ministry was highlighted.

* The assessment was intended to examine HLP in relation to customary land tenure and laws governing access to HLP in the county/state, issues related to inheritance, and succession in the county. However, the assessment ended up in Wau Municipality as it was not possible to access payams outside the municipality.
* The assessment found out that:
  + Issues of land in WBeG managed at the state level by the Ministry of Housing, Land and Public Utilities not at the county.
  + There are supposed to be county land authority, payam land councils, and boma land committees (as provided for in the Land Act, 2009).
  + In conclusion, the land issues in the municipality are attributable to maladministration in the State Ministry of Housing, Land, and Public Utilities.
  + The State land administration conducts survey on community land without consultation of the local communities affected, and those surveys are not based on need.
  + Allotment of plots are done to enrich individuals for instance one person may be allocated multiple plots (even ten pots) which sell later.
  + Land administration committees in the state are not provided for in the Land Act.
  + Absence of land governance and land oversight bodies was another key finding.
  + Currently disputes over registered land go state land administration, but they should go to the high court.
  + Encroachment by one community that renames the land they occupy from other communities was observed.
  + If these HLP issues are inadequately addressed, it will threaten harmony and peace (in the county, municipality).

Voices of stakeholders – The project highlights and the overview of the findings of the assessment of HLP issues opened the way for remarks from key stakeholders at the county, state, and national levels as well as from the delegates. The following remarks were the highlights:

Remarks of the representative of Wau County

* After welcoming the state governor, the paramount chief underlined importance of launching the project by referring to the day as an important day for the state of Western Bahr el Ghazal.
* The colonialists recognized existence of communities in their locations and provided road infrastructure to serve them there. Those places were named according to the tribes that lived there. Now, people coming from their ancestral land and occupy the land of other communities and name such places in their own languages. They even change names of the dead on the graves to the names of their relatives
* The genesis of the land issues in Wau dates to 2012 when there was issuance administrative order for relocation of Wau county HQ to Bagari
* There is encroachment of the community by the Wau municipal council without consulting with the people.
* To reduce these conflicts, the new HLP project should put in place a suitable mechanism that fosters open and transparent dialogue among all the stakeholders.
* We do not want any more problems/conflicts in Wau County we want the land issues to be resolved the paramount chief concluded.

Remarks from the Local Government, Wau County

* Land dispute is the greatest problem in Wau County for example in northern and eastern parts of Wau County.
* For this reason, land allocation has been postponed till a committee is formed (local order)
* Another problem is that Wau Municipality extends into the county areas causing disputes between the county and the municipality, as such, there is issue with the boundary between Wau municipal council and Wau County.
* Further, there is land dispute on Raja Road, which is currently being addressed.

Remarks from the State Ministry of Housing, Land and Public Utilities)

* After appreciating the agencies that formulated the project (being lunched), because it will help the ministry, the director went on to say that the challenges of land in the county are not from the State Ministry of Housing, Land and Public Utilities which has land dispute committee in place.
* The local chiefs cause the common land dispute when they use the article in land act, which say the land belongs to the community whereby these chiefs can call for the surveyors to go and demarcate the land as they wished.
* The director stressed that if there are people in need of land, they should apply and will get land, and that if the agencies/partners need support from the ministry it is ready to give.
* He encouraged citizens to fully complete the process and documentation of their land-deeds.

Remarks by the representative of FAO

* Intervention of the project is to ensure that peace leads to proper land utilization.
* The role of FAO is to support land tenure security and utilization.
* This year WBG became third after Western Equatoria with 126% food production, and Eastern Equatoria with 89% and WBeG with 84% an improvement from 77% in 2021.
* Pledged to work together to enhance agricultural production in the state.

Remarks by the representative of UNDP

* Applauded the improvement in food production of WBeG State.
* Remains committed in supporting the state of WBeG in addressing HLP issues it faces.

Remarks by the German Ambassador

* Highlighted that PBF is about reconciliation and a community-based approach with emphasis on youth and women.
* Because issues highlighted under the project affect everyone and not the agencies leading in the implementation, everyone should be involved in it and should feel that they are addressed.
* Therefore, it should be a project for the local community and by the local community.
* The project is an opportunity for peace, economic development and on the path to prosperity and higher food production.
* Peacebuilding project is an opportunity for economic development, and opportunity for higher food production.

Remarks by the SRSG

* If a community decides to have peace, they will have peace. So, the people should take ownership of their future
* The UN is not here to create peace for the people, but to facilitate peace, help with tools and approaches to facilitate peace. The people of SSD will have to desire, seek, and keep the peace to allow development to take place.

Remarks by the State Ministry of Peacebuilding

* WBeG is a peaceful state and security is not a problem.
* Peace starts from home and goes to other places and the ministries.
* You heard what the chief of the county of Wau said (about land disputes).
* If we do not resolve land conflicts, we will not have peace in the country.
* No people are returning I call upon the agencies to join hands with the governor of the state in bringing people back to their areas.
* She encourages United Nations to implement the project as soon as possible to reduce the risks of violence especially now that IDPs are returning to their homes.

Remarks by the National Ministry of Peacebuilding

* If it is not about land what else would have brought us here, land is everything.
* The poorest person on earth is that person who does not have land.
* The people of WBeG can make transformation.
* The people of Wau are lucky because the transformation is beginning with them.
* The required peace, and the prosperity we need comes from the people of WBeG.
* The project gives an opportunity to move forward and move away from all the things that have affected the people in relation to HLP.
* He acknowledged that they requested that all PBF projects should be launched so that stakeholders should participate, take ownership, for sustainability, and stressed that the project is for the people and not the UN.
* It is important that the Ambassador of Germany as a donor of PBF is present as this is a milestone in ensuring the partnership in peace continues.
* He challenged South Sudanese to love their country and realize that peace will not be brought by one person, dialogue among themselves and work closely with the Ministry of Peacebuilding to support dialogue and push people to exist and live together.
* That the people must water the thorn for the sake of the rose flower and forget the past for the sake of peace in South Sudan.
* This will create enabling environment for other projects.
* UN should do it together with us the people of South Sudan and we must be accountable.
* By launching the project, the people are lighting a candle in the dark and move forward.
* He challenged the participants to find a new line of moving forwards -dialogue among themselves.
* He said the ministry (PB) will support a pace building act that will go to the community levels.

Remarks by the Governor of Western Bahr el Ghazal

* Felt honored that Wau was one of the locations where the peace project was coming.
* She emphasized that people in WBeG were number one, as they made a big jump (in food production) within a year.
* She appreciated the PBF and stressed that land is one of the drivers of conflict in South Sudan.
* She appealed for support through the relevant ministries – saying that peacebuilding is crosscutting in PB, HLPU, LGLE.
* She emphasized that the state needs public awareness on HLP which is a problem.
* The state has technical staff who will lead the way as politicians will not last long therefore technical staff will lead in the implementation of the project.
* She stressed that either the returnees go to their areas of origin, or the state will work to find places for new homes for them.
* She was grateful to all international organizations like IOM with whom they have collaborated on creating durable solutions for displaced people, UNDP for agricultural issues, UNMISS, CARDO, CEPO and chiefs for all the work.
* Gender discrimination is a tiny proportion of discrimination women face particularly in land ownership. She emphasized the need for pushing policies that are gender sensitive as the system of South Sudan is still male dominated. She then called upon women to ensure that their voices are heard and that those in the legislative assembly should ensure that all laws that are passed are gender sensitive
* Thanked the delegates, the youth, UN agencies, the media all those who came for the event, and declared the project officially launched.

1. **Communication, Documentation and Visibility**

The project launching communication, documentation and visibility was planned and executed Media and communications Unit that ensured participation of national and local (state level) media outlets including South Sudan Television, Radio Tamazuj, and others. A press release was made, and interviews conducted following the conclusion of the conclusion of the launching event.

A video crew dedicated to capturing highlights of the project launching event ensured full coverage of the event but also daily life in the municipality as it relates to HLP. The video is under editing and will be available once that is completed.

1. **Conclusions**

The project launch was successful as the target number of composition (ensuring women and youth are well represented) was achieved. The level of engagement by the representatives of a cross-section of the beneficiary communities was very high. The participants understood the project, welcomed it, and expressed its relevance in relation widespread HLP, disputes and conflicts in their municipality, county, and state. The national Ministry of Peacebuilding and other key stakeholders recommended that a scale-down stakeholder consultation and engagement be conducted in the remaining two counties of Juba and Rubkona on a later date.