

## Gender in South Sudan

### Research Repository Guide

This Research Repository has been compiled by the CSRF to assist donors and aid workers in South Sudan to better understand the context in which they work. The repository is searchable by key words, but is also organised into eight categories to enable easier exploration of specific topics. CSRF has conducted a meta-analysis for each of the eight categories, analysing a selection of relevant, key literature and extracting some of the most salient questions for donor-funded programming.

### Understanding the Literature

The literature on gender in South Sudan tends to focus on gender inequality, gender-based violence, and gender justices with a general emphasis on women. Prior to the outbreak of armed violence in December 2013, researchers have explored dynamics relating to women's empowerment, livelihoods and more importantly equal education for girls. The literature also studies the role of women in peace building and state building including their role in politics and contribution to the implementation of the peace agreement. Literature from the post-2013 crisis is more/less available. A special focus of this literature is sexual and gender-based violence (sgbv), gender security and violence against women by parties to the ongoing armed conflict. Some recent publications put sgbv in a broader socio-political, economic and historic context of

#### Go to the source

Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development, et al. (2018). [Conflict and Gender Study – South Sudan Addressing Root Causes Programme.](#)

Care International (2016). [Inequality and Injustice: The deteriorating Situation for Women and Girls South Sudan's war: Progressive Gender Analysis, 2013-2016.](#)

Martin, Ellen (2011). [Gender, Violence and Survival in Juba, Southern Sudan.](#)

Mulukwat, Kuyang Logo & Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (2017). [Gender Norms, Conflict, and Aid.](#)

South Sudan. The questions below were developed with the aim of connecting current gender trends, exploring the implications of the institutions and peace building initiatives on gender relations, the prevalence of GBV and the push for gender justice, and better understanding the relationship between men and women in relation to a division of labour.

1. **What are the structural dimensions of gender inequality in South Sudan?**
2. **How does gender relate to formal education in South Sudan?**
3. **How do traditional concepts of a division of labour relate to and change through armed conflict?**
4. **What role does sexual and gender based violence play in the current conflict?**

1. **What are the structural dimensions of gender inequality in South Sudan?**

South Sudanese societies are traditionally patriarchal, enshrining men as heads of household and as the main decision makers in society, while women are expected to be submissive. In the traditional division of responsibilities, men – mostly married men - engage in the public sphere, whereas women

focus on activities at home. However, South Sudan also has a history of female elders and spiritual and political leaders.

Gender norms and relations are dynamic and have gradually evolved. This evolution is reflected in legislation and peace agreements, and in the increasing number of female civil servants, politicians and women working in civil society, media, academia and the business sector.

#### Go to the source

Aldehaib, Amel (2010). [Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Viewed through the Eyes of the Women of South Sudan.](#)

Bubenzer, Friederike et al. (2013). [Opportunities for Gender Justice and Reconciliation in South Sudan.](#)

Erickson, Jennifer & Faria, Caroline (2011). ["We want empowerment for our women": Transnational Feminism, Neoliberal Citizenship, and the Gendering of Women's Political Subjectivity in Postconflict South Sudan.](#)

The 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement stipulated equal citizenship rights for men and women, and some women were subsequently appointed to political and administrative positions. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005 provided a 25% quota for the representation of women in government institutions at all levels, which was only partially implemented.

The Interim Constitution of 2005 and the Transitional Constitution of 2011 guarantee equal rights for men and women in public life. Despite legislation on gender equality and more women active in the public and political sphere, men continue to dominate power and key decision making processes.

Many South Sudanese women, particularly those living in rural areas with no or limited formal education, continue to experience unequal gender relations as formal legislative requirements are not necessarily practiced and due to the reproduction of gender inequality through more traditional concepts of society and gender-relations. The continuing role of customary law as a source of national law is seen by some as reproducing gender inequality. (*More on customary law, gender and gender based violence in the justice section.*)

## 2. How does gender relate to formal education in South Sudan?

Historically, the majority of South Sudanese boys and girls were not formally educated. There were few schools up to the early 1980s. However, it was not only limited educational facilities that restricted school enrolment; formal education was and still is to some extent unpopular among some agro-pastoralists and pastoralists who associate formal education with loss of manpower, military conscription, moral decline and the alienation of children. Those that were enrolled in formal education were largely male. In recent years, the enrolment rate of children in formal education has increased, particularly amongst girls at the primary level in urban areas.

#### Go to the source

Ali, Nada M. (2011). [Gender and Statebuilding in South Sudan.](#)

Burton, John W. (1985). [Christians, Colonists, and Conversion: A View from the Nilotic Sudan.](#)

Human Rights Watch (2013). ["This Old Man Can Feed Us, You Will Marry Him." Child and Forced Marriage in South Sudan.](#)

Despite the increase in girls' enrolment in schools, women and girls face a number of challenges in accessing and remaining in formal education in South Sudan. These obstacles include the resistance of some families to educate girls, as some parents, particularly in agro-pastoralist communities, fear that in school their daughters will become pregnant or become too independent and self-assertive. In many

families, girls play roles in domestic work including water fetching, collecting firewood, washing clothes, cooking, babysitting and support agricultural production and livestock keeping. Accordingly, sending girls to school constitutes a loss of labour and an increased burden of work on mothers. Pressure to marry at an early age also results in many girls dropping out.

However, norms are changing, and an increasing number of girls and women have overcome these constraints. Education is valued as women with school-leaving qualifications are likely to find better paid jobs. In agro-pastoralist communities, education often translates into a higher bride price, providing an additional incentive for communities to ensure girls are educated. Nevertheless, it is sometimes a struggle for these girls to find husbands because of negative perceptions towards their education. The ongoing armed conflict leading to displacement of millions of South Sudanese limits education of both girls and boys. It is unclear whether female and male students are equally affected by the civil war, by having their education disrupted. Further research could reveal whether, for example, boys suffer more as they may be more likely to be excluded from education as prospective fighters.

### 3. How do traditional concepts of a division of labour relate to and change through armed conflict?

The traditional division of labour is still entrenched in most societies in South Sudan. Young men are usually expected to demonstrate their masculinity through protecting their communities and families, which sometimes equates to structured violence. In agro-pastoralist communities men are expected to protect their animals, while women care for children and engage in diverse household chores. Success in protection but also in warfare increases the social status of male youth. Getting married in agro-pastoralist and pastoralist communities requires livestock, and cattle raiding is one important method to obtain the required number of animals. Women, however, are not only victims of armed violence but are political actors in their own right and can be directly or indirectly involved in fighting, instigating violence or as peace makers. Of recent, women are unprecedentedly involve in combative role with the Arrow Boys in Western Equatoria state.

#### Go to the source

Small Arms Survey (2012). [Women and armed violence in South Sudan.](#)

Sommers, Marc & Schwartz, Stephanie (2011). [Dowry and Division: Youth and State building in South Sudan.](#)

Wright, Hannah (2014). [Masculinity, Conflict and Peace Building: Perspective of Men through a Gender Lens.](#)

Women whose husbands are caught up in conflict or killed on the battle field often become the heads of household and principal breadwinners. As during the earlier civil war, this increases the decision making power of women while not relieving the traditional burden of time-intensive household work. This changing role of women may cause tension: for example, during the past civil war, some male refugees and IDPs who could not find work struggled to accept their wives as main breadwinners, and could account for an increase in gender based violence (GBV).

Some men have taken up incoming generating activities traditionally associated with women such as collecting grass, burning charcoal and cultivating vegetables, challenging the dominant concepts of gendered work divisions. Given this blurring in gender roles, activities such as disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration should not exclude women who have played roles in armed conflict, and activities aimed at empowering women through livelihood programmes should equally include men, being careful about assumptions about what activities are traditionally associated with gender roles.

#### 4. What role does sexual and gender based violence play in armed conflicts in South Sudan?

Since the eruption of armed conflict in December 2013, sexual and gender based violence (sgbv) has increased, especially in conflict affected areas. Women, girls but also to a lesser extent men and boys have become targets for sexual violence in relation to the ongoing armed conflict. Numerous media reports as well as practice and policy publications refer to sgbv by the different parties to the conflict. The increase of sgbv is caused by different factors including break down of rule and law, “normalization” and widespread acceptance of violence, impunity as well as economic insecurity. Poverty and livelihood crisis foster sexual exploitation and abuse.

According to traditional concepts of warfare women, children and elders should be spared violence. Anecdotal evidence suggests that during the past civil war (1983-2005), sgbv and violence against children and elders increased after the split of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) in 1991. Also in the ongoing armed conflict these traditional rules of warfare protecting women, children and elders are not always acted on.

In times of armed conflict and civil war, access to justice for victims of sgbv is even more difficult as the perpetrators are often members of armed forces or armed groups controlling the territory where the victims reside. As chiefs and statutory courts are rarely able to indict and enforce rulings against members of security forces and armed groups, seeking justice is unlikely to be successful and might put the complainant in even greater danger.

Critical academic literature stresses the importance of not narrowly focussing on sexual violence in relation to armed conflict as being a “weapon of war”. Instead, it suggests understanding sgbv in relation to coercive civil-military relations, “structural violence connected with the local political economy of bride wealth and the associated commodification of feminine identities and bodies” (Luedke and Logan 2018). Several recent reports put an emphasis on these structural dimensions of sgbv and point at underlying historic, socio-political and economic aspects of it.

##### Go to the source

Care International (2016). [Inequality and injustice: The deteriorating situation for women and girls in South Sudan’s war: A Progressive Gender Analysis: 2013 – 2016.](#)

International Rescue Committee (2017). [No Safe Place: A Lifetime of Violence for conflict-affected Women and Girls in South Sudan.](#)

Jok, Madut J. (1999). [Militarization and Gender Violence in South Sudan.](#)

Luedke, Alicia E. & Logan, Hannah F (2018). [‘That thing of human rights’: discourse, emergency assistance, and sexual violence in South Sudan’s current civil war.](#)

[Further publications on gender in South Sudan are available in the CSRF repository](#)