

CSRF Meta-Analysis: Gender

This Research Repository has been compiled by the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (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, and it is categorized by “theory focus” and “practice focus” to enable easier exploration of specific topics. The CSRF has conducted a meta-analysis for eight theoretical categories, analysing a selection of relevant, key literature and extracting some of the most salient questions for donor-funded programming. This meta-analysis provides an overview of literature available on the gender in South Sudan.

The CSRF is implemented by a consortium of Saferworld and swisspeace and supports conflict-sensitive aid programming in South Sudan. The United Kingdom, Switzerland, Canada, the Netherlands and the European Union have joined forces to develop shared resources through the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility in South Sudan.

Introduction

The literature on gender in South Sudan focuses on gender inequality across different sectors (e.g., education, justice, politics) and gender-based violence (GBV). Post the Sudan wars, patriarchal values have become more entrenched contributing to harmful social norms that has led to normalising violence and gender inequality across the country. Women and men are negatively affected as a result of these norms with most available literature highlighting the impact on women, girls and children compared to the research on men and boys.

Prior to the outbreak of armed violence in December 2013, researchers explored topics such as women’s empowerment, livelihoods, and more importantly equal education for girls. The literature also studies the role of women in peacebuilding and state-building, including their role in politics and contribution to the implementation of the various peace agreements.

A special focus of the post-2013 literature is on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and more explicitly on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) committed by parties to the conflict.

The questions below were developed with the aim of connecting current gender trends, exploring the role of women in politics and peacebuilding, the interplay between conflict

Go to the source

Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (2022). [Gender norms, conflict sensitivity and transition in South Sudan.](#)

Ensor, Marisa (2022). [The Meaningful Participation of Women in Solving Our Common Crises: Gendered Perspectives on Climate Change and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus.](#)

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

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

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

and gender, SGBV and CRSV and access to justice thereof, and the relations between gender dynamics and education.

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

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

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

Society in South Sudan is still widely patriarchal. Culturally ascribed gender roles are prevalent across communities and structure access to political, financial, and other resources for men and women. Traditionally, men are the breadwinners and heads of the household, making decisions on private and public matters. Women tend to the house, farm, and focus on care work, and are generally not perceived as decision-makers in the public sphere. While these traditional beliefs are practiced differently across the clans and tribes, in recent history, women are considered as nurturers and caregivers.

Go to the source

Atem, Aluel & Eva Lopa (2023). [Young Women in Political Institutions in South Sudan: Lessons from lived experiences.](#)

Inclusive Peace (2023). [Entry Points for Women's Engagement in Peacemaking Efforts in South Sudan.](#)

Atem, Aluel & Paula Itoo (2023). [Women and Girls in the Informal Economy in South Sudan: Understanding forms of organizing and support systems.](#)

Soma, Esther (2020). [Our Search for Peace: Women in South Sudan's national peace processes, 2005 – 2018.](#)

Mayai, Augustino (2018). [Improving Gender Equality Quota Implementation in Post-conflict South Sudan.](#)

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

At the same time, gender roles and relations are dynamic and have evolved over time. Not only does South Sudan have a history of women elders and spiritual leaders, but also politicians, humanitarians, combatants, and women's associations.

In the recent past, various agreements and legislation have been shaped by and contributed to an improved legal status for women in public and political life: The Addis Ababa Agreement in

1972 enshrined equal citizenship rights for men and women; the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 earmarked a 25% quota for women across all government institutions, albeit this was only partially implemented; the 2005 transitional and 2011 interim constitution stipulated equal rights for women and men in public life; and the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in 2018 even raised the quota for women in the transitional government to 35%.

Albeit important, these stipulations are oftentimes not enforced or symbolic in nature. There seems to be a lack of true political will for women's empowerment in politics; some women candidates are simply nominated to meet the quota rather than running on an independent political agenda.

In public life too, most women, especially in rural and remote areas, still do not enjoy the same rights as men. Reasons for that reach from weak state institutions safeguarding these rights, to a lack of education (see question 4) and awareness among communities, the importance of customary law as a source of authority (see question 2) and traditional gender dynamics that still prevail.

2. What role does sexual and gender-based violence play in South Sudan?

Sexual and gender-based violence in South Sudan is prevalent and the result of harmful and unequal gender norms. The protracted and violent nature of the conflict and crisis has contributed to normalisation of violence including militarised masculine behaviours among men and boys, intimate-partner violence (IPV) and CRSV.

Whereas traditionally discussed in the context of conflict, a growing conceptual distinction has emerged between conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) specifically, and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) more broadly:

CRSV was especially prevalent during the second (1983 – 2005) and third (2013 – 2018) civil wars

and persists today in the face of widespread localised violence in South Sudan. It is used as a weapon of war by all parties to the conflict, both state and non-state actors.

Go to the source

Russo, Jenna (2022). [UN Peacekeeping and the Protection of Civilians from Sexual and Gender-Based Violence](#).

Amnesty International (2022). [“If you don’t cooperate, I’ll gun you down”: Conflict-related sexual violence and impunity in South Sudan](#).

UN Office of the SRSG for Children and Armed Conflict (2022). [Briefing Paper: Strengthening responses to conflict-related sexual violence against boys deprived of their liberty in situations of armed conflict](#).

Ellsberg, Mary et al. (2021). [“If You Are Born a Girl in This Crisis, You Are Born a Problem”: Patterns and Drivers of Violence Against Women and Girls in Conflict-Affected South Sudan](#).

Cone, Devon (2019). [Still in Danger: Women and girls face sexual violence in South Sudan despite peace deal](#).

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](#).

Leonard, Cherry et al. (2010). [Local Justice in Southern Sudan](#).

Albeit women and girls are the main survivors, often subjected during attacks on villages, there are documented cases of CRSV against men and boys in South Sudan as well.

Contributing factors are an absence of the rule of law, the normalisation, acceptance and weaponization of (conflict-related sexual) violence, but also the increasing economic insecurity as a direct result of conflict (see question 3).

SGBV more broadly is tied to prevailing gender dynamics and can range from everyday physical and psychological violence to more structural forms such as political disenfranchisement or discriminatory access to health, justice and education.

Women and girls are the main survivors of SGBV: whether this concerns domestic violence¹, forced or early marriage², or impaired access to political institutions (see question 1), education (see question 4) and justice.

The widespread practice of forced or early marriage in particular poses a serious challenge for SGBV-related programming in South Sudan. Many families marry their young daughters, and to a lesser extent sons, out of political or economic interests. Bride dowry in the form of livestock provides material support for extended households, enabling male family members to either have the means to marry themselves or restock their herds affected by flooding, drought and armed conflict. Furthermore, marrying into influential families provides enhanced political standing.

Men and boys are also survivors of SGBV. Prevailing notions of masculinity for example lie at the heart of forced conscription into the army or recruitment into armed groups. Men who refuse to join or to engage in violence face social stigmatization and exclusion.

In any case, access to justice remains a challenge for all survivors of SGBV and CRSV. This is due to social stigmatization, unresponsive institutions³, and a weak rule of law.

Moreover, customary law plays an important role as a body of law in both statutory and chief courts. Grown out of the structure of South Sudanese society, it emphasises collective

¹ [A survey by the International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#) found that around 75% of the respondents experienced intimate partner violence (n = 2,105) and 46% reported gender-based violence within their household in the past year (n = 3,084).

² [According to World Bank data from 2010](#), around 9% of girls are married by the age of 15, and 52% by the age of 18.

³ Especially with regard to CRSV, perpetrators are often members of armed forces or armed groups controlling the territory where the survivors reside. Chiefs and statutory courts are therefore rarely able to indict and enforce rulings against members of security forces and armed groups and filing a complaint might put the victim in danger.

political and economic interests by the community over individual ones. While in principle egalitarian in nature and empowering in other legal instances, customary law oftentimes leaves survivors of SGBV and CRSV at the losing side of court-decisions.

Similarly, state services that address the mental and physical traumas of CRSV and SGBV survivors are underdeveloped. At the time of writing, these are almost exclusively provided by NGOs.

To this day, the most reliable and accessible sources of mental support for CRSV and SGBV survivors remain social and cultural practices by family members, friends, and other institutions such as the church. However, their role is ambivalent. Since they are themselves part of the wider sociocultural context and influenced by prevailing gender dynamics, they can also adopt exclusionary stances vis-à-vis survivors, especially with regards to sexual violence.

In sum, SGBV is not only tied to conflict and sexual violence in nature (i.e., CRSV) but interwoven with the social fabric and institutions in South Sudan. A fact that needs to be accounted for in all activities across the Humanitarian, Development and Peacebuilding (HDP)-nexus.

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

Traditional divisions of labour and related gender dynamics in South Sudan sometimes change in the context of conflict.

As described under question 1, in peacetimes, the gendered division of labour puts men in the role of breadwinner, decision maker and protector of the family and its assets (e.g., farmland, livestock). Women on the other hand tend to be seen as housewives, caretakers, and auxiliary workforce.

In times of conflict, this can change with consequences for families and the wider community. Conflict-induced losses and hardship sometimes force women to transition to the role of breadwinner and head of the family. Either because their husbands are caught up or killed in conflict, incapacitated, or missing. Or because the conflict deprives the family of their traditional source of income and livelihood (e.g., farmland or livestock),⁴ usually taken care of by young men.

Go to the source

UNDP (2021). [Study on the Traditional and Changing Role of Gender and Women in Peacebuilding in South Sudan.](#)

Gómez, David Felipe et al. (2022). [Negotiating Disarmament – The Gender Dimension: Barriers to the Inclusion of Women in Disarmament Negotiations.](#)

Luedke, Alicia E. & Logan, Hannah F (2017). [‘That thing of human rights’: discourse, emergency assistance, and sexual violence in South Sudan’s current civil war.](#)

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

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

While this new role comes with greater responsibilities and decision-making power for women, it usually does not relieve them of time intensive duties at home (e.g., fetching water, collecting firewood, cooking, washing, weeding fields, milking cows). In this sense, conflict has compounded women’s situation by doubling their workload rather than leading to their emancipation from traditional gender roles in South Sudan.

At the same time, men who lose their traditional source of income or are unable to do heavy work end up relying on their wives’ income. They sometimes also resort to jobs usually associated

⁴ While men tend to engage in heavy work such as clearing forests or fields, women tend to do the time intensive work such as weeding.

with women, such as weeding grass, burning charcoal, and cultivating vegetables.

What is more, this change in roles bears the potential for further intra-familial conflicts: during past civil wars for example, some men refugees and IDPs who could not find work struggled to accept their wives as the main breadwinners. This accounted for an increase in SGBV.

In times of conflict, women are not only passive bystanders but have also taken up arms and fought alongside men in the past: examples are women combatants within the ranks of the Sudan's People Liberation Movement (SPLM) during the second civil war (1983 – 2005).

Moreover, they play an important role in enforcing notions of masculinity that link men with violence (e.g., ridiculing men who reject to engage in armed violence, see question 2).

HDP activities in South Sudan need to consider these gender dynamics in situations of conflict. Whether these are in disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR), accounting for the role of women combatants, or livelihood programs that are sensitive to changing divisions of labour as result of conflict.

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

Historically, enrolment rates among South Sudanese boys and girls were low and up to the early 1980s schools were not available in each village. Access to education has changed over the past decades and enrolment rates have increased. While male students still make up the majority, girls and young women have started to access formal education nowadays.

Still, numerous challenges exist for boys and girls seeking formal education in South Sudan: On the supply side, protracted crisis and conflict have left around half of all schools dysfunctional and depending on the area, schools are few and far away from students' home. This exposes them to greater risk on the way there and back. Furthermore, tuition fees and other school-

related expenses mean that formal education is still unaffordable for many families – a fact that contributes to socioeconomic inequalities between poorer families and more affluent parents who can send their children to private schools in South Sudan or abroad.

For young women in particular, underdeveloped sanitation and water facilities pose an additional problem for menstrual hygiene management (MHM).

Go to the source

Rift Valley Institute (2022). [Child Labour, Education and Commodification in South Sudan.](#)

Howe, Kimberly et al. (2022). ["Education is like light. The opposite is darkness." Education and Female Youth in Displacement in South Sudan and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.](#)

Logo, Kuyang Harriet (2021). [Gender Equality and Civicness in Higher Education in South Sudan: Debates from University of Juba Circles.](#)

Oxfam (2019). [Education-focused Gender Analysis Case Studies: Pibor and Juba, South Sudan.](#)

Munene, Ishmael (2019). [Bridging the Gender Gap through Gender Difference: Aiding patriarchy in South Sudan education reconstruction.](#)

UNESCO (2018). [Global initiative on out-of-school children: South Sudan country study.](#)

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

On the demand side, prevailing gender norms and popular prejudices pose serious barriers for girls, and to a lesser extent for boys, who want to go to school. This is especially the case in more rural areas and among pastoral and agro-pastoral communities.

In the past, formal education for boys was associated with a loss of manpower and schools perceived as sites of military conscription.

For girls likewise, some parents see schools as having an immoral influence where daughters become pregnant or emancipate themselves from their families.

In general, for many families sending their children to school means a loss of labour at home and for the wider community (e.g., children support in house, fieldwork or community defence). At the same time, formal

education, including education of girls, promises better-paid jobs and is increasingly seen today as having positive impacts on the livelihoods of families.

The fact that formal education, including higher education increases bride prices, reflects the growing recognition of the importance of girls' education. Albeit this further contributes to the commodification of girls and young women in connection with the practice of early marriage.

To this day, gendered access to education remains an important concern in South Sudan. It is driven by an underdeveloped education system with different consequences for boys and girls, widespread prejudices (albeit this is diminishing) and an underappreciation of girls' education. Practitioners across the HDP-nexus need to be aware of how their programming impacts education perspectives.

[Further publications on international engagement in South Sudan are available in the CSRF Research Repository.](#)