Hope, Pain & Patience
Hope, Pain & Patience
The Lives of Women in South Sudan

Edited by Friederike Bubenzer and Orly Stern
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This book is a timely study of an issue of vital importance to Southern Sudan at this critical juncture in the political, economic, social and cultural evolution of the country. It is my firm belief that every society is built on the foundations of a coherent system, whose logic is deeply rooted in its culture, and on the basis of which functional roles are defined and allocated to various categories of community members – men, women, children, elders and leaders. Culture, which provides the normative framework for the social order, is an embodiment of values that have evolved over a long period of time and enjoy wide acceptance and conformity among the members of a community. While cultures are dynamic and change with the imperatives of experience, they also provide predictable standards for prescriptive behaviour. The result is a normative system that is intrinsically conservative and reinforces conformity and continuity. Change then takes the form of discrete reforms, with occasional revolutionary reforms, prompted primarily by crises of grave magnitude. This is the challenge facing Southern Sudan today, having been devastated by half a century of intermittent wars.

In traditional Southern Sudanese society, the overriding goal on which the social system was based was immortality through progeny and the continuation of the male line. The lineage and the clan are essentially male-oriented institutions. The value of women and children was seen largely
in terms of how they contributed to this overriding male-oriented goal. Immortality through procreation accounted for such institutions as the ‘ghost marriage’ by which a relative who dies before marrying has children begotten by a relative living with his ‘ghost wife’, and the ‘levirate,’ whereby a widow cohabits with a relative to bear children in the name of the dead husband. Indigenous Southern Sudanese societies, however, displayed an ambivalent attitude toward women. On the one hand, women are crucial to the overriding goal of procreation, carrying and nurturing babies in their womb, and nursing and protecting them at the most vulnerable phases of infant and childhood life. This makes for a particularly emotional attachment of sons to mothers and husbands to wives.

Perhaps because of their profound influence on men, sons and husbands, and considering the inequalities of the system against them, especially the institution of polygyny, which provides a breeding ground for competitiveness and jealousy, women are feared as intrinsically divisive and subversive to the male-oriented values of the lineage and the clan. Husbands and sons are therefore conditioned to guard against the awesome influence and divisiveness of their wives and mothers, which threaten the unity and solidarity of the lineage and the clan.

While the inequities of the system provided grounds for tension and conflict, these societal values were sacrosanct, and were reinforced by emphasis on communal unity and solidarity, with a strong sense of personal and collective dignity and pride in the culture and its social order. Since no alternatives were open to the disadvantaged members of the community, specifically women and children, conformity was the norm.

If, as I have argued, radical changes come as a result of dramatic events that challenge the old order and dictate the search for a new logic to justify reform, then the wars that have raged in the South since independence in the 1950s must be a powerful justification for re-thinking the social order and the distribution of roles. These wars have shattered Southern societies, affected women, and transformed their place in society. In many instances, men, especially those who were uprooted as internally displaced persons or forced across international borders as refugees, lost their centre of gravity and fell by the wayside. Women, especially mothers, stepped in and assumed the role of the breadwinners and heads of households. With the breakdown of the old order and its stratifying logic, families began to fall apart, and divorce (traditionally abhorred and exceedingly rare) became commonplace – often the result of desertion rather than legally and socially established procedures. It is hard to put the puzzle of the traditional order back together. The search for a new logic to the social order has become imperative.

Hope, Pain and Patience documents a traumatic transition, a societal breakdown, and its impact on women striving to make ends meet under devastating circumstances. In the process, and on the positive side, women have explored and discovered new opportunities for self-advancement, especially in areas previously closed to them. The political leadership in the South, during and particularly after the war, has also responded positively to women’s demand for equality by promoting women into important roles and ensuring their adequate representation at all levels of decision-making. This is a vital part of the new logic, necessitated by social upheaval and devastation, and of the demand for the reconstruction of society based on new values, that should ensure equitable allocation of power and resources without gender-based discrimination.

This book is a major contribution, and should be viewed as a piece in a puzzle that still needs further documentation towards a comprehensive appreciation of what the people of Southern Sudan have gone through, and the challenges facing them in building the future. It should be widely read and reflected upon deeply.

Francis M. Deng
UN Under-Secretary-General, and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide
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Friederike Bubenzer and Orly Stern
Introduction

Even if you are young you can do something. You can grind sorghum. Your father and brother and husband have gone to the war so if you remain at home looking after the family you are also fighting. You are taking care of the children and the people who are suffering. You dig the garden and take some to the war and some for the children. Some of us were really soldiers fighting and some of us were looking after the children, but we are all soldiers, we are all fighting. (Joice Moyeta Monday, former combatant, Central Equatoria)

The roles played by women during South Sudan's long liberation struggle (1955–1972 and 1983–2005) have largely gone unrecognised and undocumented. Countless women joined the liberation struggle in the South, responding to a political situation that directly affected their families and communities. Women left the comfort and security of their homes to fight for freedom, democracy, equality and dignity. As well as taking on important support roles in the armed forces, women acted as teachers, nurses and farmers, while continuing to raise their children and ensure the well being of their families.

In attempting to understand how women experienced and were affected by violence in Sudan, Jok Madut Jok (2007: 206) states that 'The war in Sudan has affected women in more and different ways than men, but beyond the usual ways in which such state-sponsored violence affects women and children – through rape, abduction, sexual slavery, and labour exploitation'. During the war, the lives of women in South Sudan and in exile were characterised by hunger and violence, including large-scale sexual violence, and an increase in disease, including HIV and AIDS. It is important, therefore, to recognise the ways in which women suffered during the war, and to acknowledge and document their contributions to the war effort.

Furthermore, women's involvement in the war has had a significant impact on traditional gender roles, a development that has the potential to alter the social structure of the country as a whole. As men joined the army, women were forced to take full responsibility for their families and began to hold responsibilities that had previously been in the exclusive domain of their fathers, husbands, brothers and sons.

Life in the post-conflict period continues to be challenging, as women try to carve out meaningful lives in a context of tenuous peace. South Sudan is still one of the poorest and least-developed countries in the world, and women in particular continue to face major challenges. South Sudanese society remains highly patriarchal: school enrolment for girls is still significantly lower than enrolment for boys; the country's maternal mortality rate is among the highest in the world; domestic and sexual violence are prevalent; and although a quota has been introduced to increase the number of women in government, there are not enough women who are sufficiently qualified and experienced.

The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) was founded in the aftermath of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, with the aim of contributing to the building of fair, democratic and peaceful societies in Africa. The Institute has been working with partner organisations in South Sudan since 2004 to develop strategies aimed at overcoming the many divides that characterise this scarred yet hopeful society.

In 2009, the IJR hosted a small group of Sudanese fellows as part of its annual Transitional Justice in Africa fellowship programme. In the many discussions that were held as part of the programme, the extent to which women have been, and continue to be, left out of most social, economic and political processes in South Sudan became glaringly obvious. A review of the existing literature pointed to a meagre body of research and analysis...
Introduction

The IJR’s work in South Africa and elsewhere has shown that examining history allows us to critically interrogate decisions made in the past, and to understand how those decisions continue to influence the present. Such an examination is a vital part of educating ourselves to make informed choices as we participate in building peaceful, democratic societies.

In our view, documenting history and enabling people to study it closely is an essential step in preventing future generations from repeating the mistakes of the past. As South African author and anti-apartheid activist Antjie Krog states, ‘Above all we need our memories restored after a past of conflict. We need to be aware of all the memories, of victims and perpetrators alike; we need to understand that every single one of them is hurt in a particular way’ (2004: 56). In order to learn to live together after a period of sustained conflict, it is crucial to collect and create an inclusive historical narrative. If there are no coherent and cohesive texts that document people’s experiences and memories, this process becomes impossible.

This then is the motivation behind this book: to document the stories of women in South Sudan, seeking to understand their roles and experiences during the civil wars, and in the years since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement; and to add to the small but growing body of literature that is documenting South Sudan’s conflict, with the intention of contributing to the country’s budding reconciliation process.

A focus on gender is an indispensable dimension of reconciliation at both official and institutional levels. Gender-sensitive processes that include men and women equally and at all levels are more successful than those that do not (Bloomfield, et al., 2003). The studies described in this book reveal that South Sudanese women have had limited access to peace negotiation processes, and that they have limited power and representation in government and other decision-making bodies. The exclusion and marginalisation of women from these processes limits the extent to which they are able to voice their concerns and interests, and in turn excludes and alienates them from the nation and the state. Given the pivotal role that women play in South Sudanese society, this alienation and non-participation runs the risk of severely hampering the national healing and reconciliation project that is so vital to the building of a prosperous South Sudan. In other words, reconciliation is impossible when half of the population is not included in decision-making processes. For reconciliation and healing to take place, the particular ways in which women have been hurt by the war and continue to be undermined by the nature of patriarchy in South Sudanese society must be acknowledged and addressed. For these reasons, women must have a seat at the tables at which the future shape and vision of South Sudan is negotiated.

A brief history of South Sudan, 1899–2011

In 1899 the governments of Britain and Egypt began joint rule over Sudan through what became known as the Condominium Agreement. Although the agreement provided for joint and equal rule by both partners, Egypt’s position as a British protectorate prevented it from autonomous rule over Sudan. Essentially the agreement recognised Sudan as belonging to Egypt, and that it was to be administered by British officials on behalf of the Egyptian king. The British-dominated Anglo-Egyptian administration governed Sudan from 1899 to 1956 as a British colony, although the governor-general was appointed by Egypt. The colony consisted of two distinct and separate entities, North and South Sudan. Arabism and Islam were encouraged in the North, while the South was left to develop along traditional African lines. During this time the North advanced politically and economically, while the South remained isolated and underdeveloped (Deng, 2010).

In 1953, elections took place in Sudan to establish the independent parliament. However, Northern administrative policies excluded the South from active participation in decision making with regard to the future administration of the country. Discontent spread across the South
when Northerners were appointed as senior army and police officers, administrators and teachers. In 1955, a mutiny erupted at a military garrison in Torit (CCR, 2006), and soon spread to other garrisons across the South. A year before independence was to commence, civil war broke out between North and South as Southerners feared that the North would dominate their newly independent nation. Deng (2010: 58) explains, ‘By then, not only had the South consolidated a legacy of resistance to slavery, Arabisation and Islamisation, but the separatist colonial policy and the influence of Christianity and elements of Western culture had reinforced a distinct Southern identity. This resulted in the formation of two contrasting visions for the nation by the administration in the North: an Arab-Islamic vision for the North and a secular Black African vision in the South.’

Sudan’s first civil war lasted 17 years, saw millions of people killed and sent further millions to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. The South Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM) led the armed struggle with its military wing, the Anya Nya. Sara Basha (2006:11) explains that, ‘As the violence escalated, political differences between the representatives of the government and the representatives of the southern people became sharper. As the cycle of war persisted, the challenge of building a unified sovereign state became more formidable.’

In 1972, after an extensively mediated peace process, led by the World Council of Churches, the Sudan Council of Churches and the African Council of Churches, the Addis Ababa Agreement was signed between President Nimeiry’s Government of Sudan and the SSLM. The agreement gave the South regional autonomy. The agreement also promised the Ngok Dinka tribe of Abyei (an area located between North and South, which had been annexed to the North during the Anglo-Egyptian occupation), an opportunity to decide by referendum whether to belong to the South or the North. For a short while, the agreement seemed to turn the sentiments of Southerners away from their separatist aspirations towards a genuine commitment to unity. However, fearful that the South might still be an obstacle to Islamisation, President Nimeiry used propaganda to manipulate internal differences in the South, including making allegations of Dinka domination and calling for the division of the South into several regions, as a means of weakening and fragmenting the area (Deng, 2010).

The failure of Nimeiry’s government to honour key elements of the Addis Ababa Agreement, including his refusal to hold the Abyei referendum, and the imposition of Islamic Law on the whole country in 1983, plunged Sudan into its second civil war. This was exacerbated by Nimeiry’s attempt to take control of oil fields located on the North-South border, important economic resources for the South. The period also coincided with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Sudan and in other Muslim countries. In explaining why Sudan returned to war just nine years after the Addis Ababa agreement, Jok (2007: 250) states, ‘One of the tricks to attain a quick agreement was to sweep under the carpet all of the atrocities and crimes against humanity committed during the first round of war, to prevent the peace negotiations from getting bogged down on issues of seeking justice for the victims of the seventeen-year-long war. It was argued that focusing on such issues would only derail the negotiations: the best solution was to try to forget these crimes and violations and focus on reconciliation. As became clear soon afterwards, people never forget such crimes: they are most likely to avenge their loved ones and destruction of their property…It only served as a spoiler for what was already a fragile peace.’

The new rebellion, known as Anya Nya Two, instigated a renewed liberation struggle aimed at building a ‘New Sudan’ that would challenge Arab-Islamic hegemony over the country and not just over the South. This struggle was led by the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement and Army (SPLM/A). The SPLM/A was established in 1983 under the charismatic leadership of Dr John Garang de Mabior who defected from the Sudanese army with a plan of creating a pluralist system named a ‘New Sudan’. By early 1983 Garang had recruited 3 000 rebel soldiers into the SPLM to oppose military rule and Islamic dominance of the South. Rather than advocating for Southern autonomy, the SPLM demanded that a united Sudan become a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-ethnic democratic state. The brutal war that started later that year marred Sudan for 22 years. Although the war began in South Sudan it eventually reached as far as the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile State, which are much further north. It saw an estimated two million people killed by war, famine and disease. During this period, more than 80 per cent of the country’s population was displaced both internally, to neighbouring countries and around the world (US Committee for Refugees, 2001).
Finally, after a lengthy period of negotiations, the Government of Sudan and the SPLM signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) on 9 January 2005, bringing the second civil war to an end. Mediated by the East-African Regional Development Organisation, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the World Council of Churches, the CPA was soon hailed as the peace agreement of all peace agreements by analysts in the international community. Among the main resolutions of the CPA was the division of the country into two distinct parts, the North and the South, with the ten southern states put under the administration of the SPLM, through the establishment of the government of Southern Sudan. During a six-year interim period (from 2005 to 2011), the South was to share in a newly created government of national unity for Sudan as a whole, in which the president of the Government of Southern Sudan would also be the vice-president of Sudan. Three transitional areas namely Abyei, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile, which lie between North and South Sudan, were temporarily placed under special status with a joint administration, including representatives from both parties. Further elements of the agreement pertained to long-standing issues around security arrangements, wealth and power sharing. The culmination of the six-year interim period would be a landmark referendum at which the Southern electorate would be given the opportunity to decide whether to remain part of Sudan, or secede from a united Sudan. At the same time, the oil-rich border state of Abyei, where an unresolved border conflict has been raging for many decades, would hold its own referendum. Similarly, South Kordofan and Blue Nile state would hold so-called popular consultations to assess the CPA and determine whether it satisfactorily reflects the aspirations of their people.

On 31 July 2005, three weeks after being sworn in as the first president of South Sudan, John Garang was killed in a helicopter crash. Garang's death occurred shortly after he had appointed a new government. Many say the accident happened at the worst possible moment, given that the government of national unity had not yet been created and the government of Southern Sudan had not had time to establish itself. Shortly before his death, Garang had appointed Salva Kiir, a long-time SPLM leader with a strong support base, as his deputy. Kiir took over Garang's position as head of the SPLM and president of South Sudan, a position he still holds.

On 9 January 2011, the long-awaited referendum took place in South Sudan during which the Southern electorate was given the opportunity to vote for cessation from the North or to remain unified. The 60 per cent turnout threshold required for a valid vote was reached several days before the end of the polling period. In February 2011, it was announced that more than 99 per cent of Southerners had voted in favour of secession. As news of the imminent birth of Africa's youngest state spread around the world, its political destiny became clear: the overwhelming majority wanted independence and though the road ahead remains a difficult one, Southerners appear ready to walk it together.

Women's roles in the war
Judith McCallum and Alfred Okech (2008) have paid tribute to the Kateeba-Banaat, a battalion made up exclusively of women volunteers trained by the SPLA in Ethiopia. Although this battalion was described as a formidable force, the SPLA's high command refused to assign them to the front lines after their first battle in Njoko. Instead, the battalion was given the task of supporting the fighting troops, supplying ammunition and treating men wounded on the battlefields.

As detailed in Chapter 2 of this volume, the SPLA's general policy was to keep women combatants away from the front lines and given auxiliary roles, providing logistical and administrative support, gathering intelligence and carrying ammunition and medical supplies to the front lines. Many women contributed to the war effort in official and unofficial support roles as cooks, porters, nurses, translators and administrators. Perhaps just as importantly, women contributed on the ‘domestic front’, caring for families and communities, and taking over the roles that had traditionally been held by men who were away fighting the war.

John Garang's personal belief was that women should not form a major front-line contingent as the opposition forces’ combatants were primarily men. Garang argued that as the war was predicted to last a long time, the SPLA should ‘keep back’ and protect women so as not to sacrifice future generations (HSBA, 2008). The SPLA went on to decree that women should not fight on the front line, but should rather ‘actively procreate’ as their contribution to the war effort, in order to repopulate society and make up for the millions of lives that were being lost in the war (Jok, 1999). As discussed
in Chapter 3 of this volume, this policy decision had some unfortunate unforeseen consequences.

Unlike other rebel groups on the continent, the SPLA prided itself on its policy of not harming civilian populations. The SPLA prohibited sexual violence through its code of conduct, The Sudan People’s Revolutionary Laws, Punitive Provisions 1983. The punishment for members of the SPLA who committed rape was death by firing squad. Despite the policy, rapes by SPLA soldiers did occur (Human Rights Watch, 1993).

In 1991, Riek Machar, one of the first members of the SPLA, broke away from the movement, calling for a focus on self-determination for the South. He took with him much of his support base among the Nuer. After this split, a state of lawlessness ensued. Although the split lasted only until 1994, brutal ethnic conflict led to a phenomenal escalation in violence. As discussed in Chapter 3, violence against women became a tactic used deliberately by the warring tribal factions. No woman was immune to this (Jok, 1999).

The challenges that remain

South Sudan is, in many ways, making an entirely new start. Even before the war, the region had little infrastructure, and the decades of conflict destroyed what little existed (MSF, 2008). As several chapters in this book highlight, South Sudan has few tarred roads, a crippling shortage of qualified health-care staff and infrastructure, a defunct educational system and a fledgling government tasked with meeting the urgent needs of its people.

The end of the war ushered in a degree of stability that has enabled many refugees and internally displaced people to return home and begin rebuilding their lives. In January 2011, the Carter Centre estimated that 150 000 people returned from North Sudan to the South in the 10 weeks preceding the 2011 referendum. They were among the approximately two million Southerners who had settled in the North during the conflict. These returnees told observers that they feared losing their citizenship and rights in North Sudan, as well as other forms of retaliation, if Southern Sudan were to vote for separation. Others said they had a sense that it was time to come home to build their new country. However positive this massive return of refugees is, many have neither homes nor families to return to, and may thus add to the already significant strains on South Sudan’s limited social, political and economic infrastructure.

South Sudan faces the challenge of a ‘triple transition’: a political transition; a security transition (such as disarming former combatants and assisting them to reintegrate into society); and a socio-economic transition (to address large-scale poverty, service-delivery needs and economic reforms (Geopolity, 2011)). Managing risks and expectations in the period following the referendum will form an important part of South Sudan’s path to peace and stability. The challenge is significant for this conflict-scarred nation. Of the 8.2 million-strong populace, 51 per cent live below the poverty line (that is, they have less than the US$ 1.25 per day stipulated by the World Bank as the minimum level of income necessary to achieve an adequate standard of living). Only 27 per cent of South Sudan’s population is literate, and in 2009 it was estimated that there were 52 students per teacher and 129 students per classroom in South Sudan. South Sudan’s health indicators are among the worst in the world: the infant mortality rate of 102 per 1 000 live births, and the maternal mortality rate of 2 054 per 100 000 live births, bear testimony to this (SSCCSE, 2010).

The political situation in the South remains fragile and many of the root causes of the war have not been resolved. The threat of conflict reigniting is a real concern, particularly in relation to border demarcation in the contested areas of Abyei and the oil fields of Unity and Upper Nile States.

Conflict over access to resources such as land, water and cattle is fuelled by tribal allegiances. The age-old tradition of cattle theft is rife across South Sudan. For many in the South, cattle represent wealth and status, and having a large and healthy herd is important. When raiders were armed with spears, cattle raids resulted in minor injuries, but the proliferation of small arms across the southern states has made them lethal. The number of deaths resulting from cattle rustling increased steeply in the run-up to 9 July 2011, the date when South Sudan would declare its independence, with humanitarian agencies stating that violence, political tensions and rampant poverty could severely challenge the viability of peace. South Sudan’s disarmament programme has to be prioritised to prevent further deaths.

Oil plays a major role in the Sudanese political sphere as well as in its economy. In 2009, oil represented 98 per cent of South Sudan’s total annual revenue, while, for the North, this figure was 65 per cent (EIA, 2010). Approximately 75 percent of Sudan’s total oil reserves are located
in the South but the infrastructure to pipe, process and export oil to other countries is located in North Sudan, and run through to Port Sudan, located on the Red Sea. South Sudan’s reliance on oil revenues underscores the need for cooperation and negotiation with the North, as part of the post-referendum resource governance regime. The European Coalition on Oil in Sudan (ECOS), a coalition of 50 European organisations working towards peace and justice in Sudan, suggests that a new agreement will have to consider two options: a continued revenue-sharing regime between North and South, or a payment scheme whereby the South pays transport and management fees for the use of Northern infrastructure (De Kock, 2011).

Although the Darfur area is geographically situated in North Sudan, the political impact of the situation there, where a fierce internal conflict between rebels and Northern government forces has been ongoing for almost a decade, has, and will continue to have, a very real impact on Southern Sudan. In 2003, this conflict started when two rebel groups in Darfur, namely the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) took up arms against the Sudanese government (and its proxy militia group the Janjaweed) accusing it of oppressing non-Arab Sudanese in favour of Sudanese Arabs. International media attention, and a series of highly publicised human-rights campaigns, has contributed to raising awareness about Darfur and has put the conflict in the public eye. In 2004, the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon referred to the war in Darfur as ‘the world’s largest humanitarian crisis’ (UN, 2007). However, this focus on Darfur has cast a shadow over the lower-level but also worrying violent conflicts brewing in the South.

On 14 July 2008, the International Criminal Court (ICC) charged Sudanese president, Omar Hassan al-Bashir, with seven counts of crimes against humanity and war crimes committed since 2002 during the conflict in Darfur. In 2010, a second arrest warrant was issued with three added counts of genocide. This was the first time in the history of the ICC that an acting head of state has been indicted. What makes this even more controversial is the fact that Sudan has not ratified the ICC’s Rome Statute, nor does it recognise the ICC’s jurisdiction. The indictment is hotly debated among community leaders and policy makers in North and South Sudan. Many feel that the timing of al-Bashir’s indictment obstructs Sudan’s peace and democratisation process. Soon after the ICC announced the charges against al-Bashir, the Arab League issued a statement rejecting al-Bashir’s indictment, and the African Union stated that it would not co-operate with the ICC over the arrest warrant.

These deeply entrenched and highly complex political, economic and social challenges affect the lives of men and women in South Sudan on a daily basis. However, as the chapters in this volume explain, women face an additional and unique set of challenges. Despite efforts by the government of South Sudan and international organisations aimed at empowering women, including advocating for higher levels of school enrolment of girls and introducing a quota system for women in government, this deeply patriarchal society is strongly resistant to changes aimed at empowering women. Women’s vulnerability has increased in the post-conflict era as high levels of unemployment among men, widespread psychosocial trauma and feelings of demasculinisation stemming from changing gender roles, has brought about an increase in violence against women. In the face of these and other formidable hurdles, many South Sudanese women are nonetheless rising to the challenge. Some of their stories are told in the following pages.

The book in outline

In Chapter 1, Orly Stern describes the institution of marriage in South Sudan. She explores the critical part that marriage plays in South Sudanese society, and documents how practices such as polygamy, the payment of bride price and ghost marriages affect women. Stern examines the ways in which marriages are entered into and negotiated, and explores the consequences of the dissolution of marriages when death or divorce occurs.

The contributions made by South Sudanese women to the second Sudanese civil war are examined in Chapter 2. Lydia Stone summarises the experiences of women who were combatants and of those who played essential support roles for the liberation movement. The chapter profiles women who were in the SPLA and those who joined other armed groups. It also describes women’s experiences of the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme, which is assisting former combatants to reintegrate back into civilian life.

In Chapter 3, Anyieth D’Awol discusses the experiences of women who survived sexual abuse and details the horrors and consequences of being a
rape survivor in a highly patriarchal society. She discusses the response of South Sudan’s two legal systems, and the ways in which victims of sexual violence are left without crucial support.

In Chapter 4, Jolien Veldwijk and Cathy Groenendijk describe the lives of women who have turned to sex work as a means of economic survival. Speaking to women at a number of brothels in Juba, the authors highlight the hardships faced by these women, the circumstances that led them into sex work and the environment in which their livelihoods are sustained.

In Chapter 5, Nada Mustafa Ali documents the lives and experiences of women living with HIV in South Sudan. Exploring the socio-economic, political and cultural context within which women live and the factors that increase their vulnerability to the virus, Ali explores the many challenges that HIV-positive women face, the abuse they suffer and their hopes for the future.

The lives of South Sudan’s mothers are described by Jolien Veldwijk in Chapter 6. Veldwijk explores some of the effects the war had on South Sudan’s mothers, documenting their experiences during the war, and examining their situation in the post-conflict period. The chapter discusses the needs that mothers have, the support that is available to them, and the types of support that are lacking.

In Chapter 7, Jane Namadi discusses the contributions made by South Sudanese women in the provision of social services both during and after the war. The chapter focuses on women in the health and education sectors, and explores the way in which the war resulted in women taking on new roles as teachers, nurses, doctors and auxiliary staff. The chapter provides an overview of the current state of service delivery in South Sudan, and outlines the contributions and sacrifices made by women as they keep South Sudan’s skeletal health and education systems alive.

In Chapter 8, Asha Arabi examines the contributions of women working in the political and leadership sphere in South Sudan. The chapter explores the affirmative action quota stipulated by the interim national constitution and its perceived impact to date, and goes on to examine the extent to which gender stereotypes and conservative societal structures limit women’s participation in political processes at both local and national levels.

Chapter 9, by Orly Stern, looks at South Sudanese women and the diaspora that came about as a result of the war. The chapter documents the circumstances in which South Sudanese women left their homes, and describes the journeys they embarked on to escape the war. Stern examines these women’s lives in refugee camps and in foreign cities, and documents some of the challenges they faced.

Readers may find that certain statistics quoted are not consistent throughout the book. An editorial decision was made not to standardise the statistics in order to reflect the different sources drawn on by the authors, and the fact that the dearth of research on the country means that reliable, verifiable national data is simply not yet available. Authors invested significant amounts of time travelling across the country to obtain their data and to collect information on previously undocumented issues. Since very little research and analysis has been produced about women in South Sudan to date, much of the content of the chapters was drawn from the author’s own findings. If factual errors have been made, we apologise for this.

This collection does not seek to speak on behalf of all women across South Sudan. Rather, the authors sought to speak to and work with a cross-section of women, to begin to make sure these voices are heard. Given the complex root causes and the diverse range of issues that have contributed to shaping the Sudanese conflicts, this has not been an easy feat. Often women interviewed were asked to relive painful memories or describe in detail the harsh circumstances of their day-to-day lives. In many instances, women feared reprisal for speaking out, and their anonymity had to be guaranteed before they could share their stories with us. This highlights the levels of violence women have experienced during and after the conflict and the fact that, as yet, the protection and support they ought to be receiving is non-existent.

In 2002, UNIFEM conducted a major international assessment of the impact of armed conflict on women and women’s role in peace building. In describing the process of conducting the research for this assessment, then-UNIFEM Director Noeleen Heyzer wrote: ‘I was prepared to find bitterness and hatred among the women who have experienced such horrific violence and loss, and pervasive trauma, but in many places I found strength. I met women who had transcended their sorrow and discovered in themselves the courage and will to rebuild their lives and communities.’ By and large, the authors’ commissioned by the IJR to write the chapters in this book had the same experience. Many of the women they met told
Hope, Pain and Patience

their stories in the hope that they would in some small way contribute to the improvement of the lives of the women of South Sudan.

We are enormously grateful to these remarkable women – those who told their stories and to the authors who sought out, listened to and documented the narratives, often at their own expense and in difficult circumstances. The excitement with which this book has been anticipated all over the world has been humbling and incredibly motivating. It has underscored the importance of such initiatives. We hope this book will contribute to the process of bringing to the fore some of the world’s most important untold stories – the stories of the women of South Sudan.

ENDNOTES

1 Currency conversions reflect values as of August 2010.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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<tr>
<th>Acronyms</th>
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<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome</td>
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<td>ARV</td>
<td>antiretroviral</td>
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<td>CCC</td>
<td>Confident Children out of Conflict</td>
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<td>CPA</td>
<td>Comprehensive Peace Agreement</td>
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<td>DDR</td>
<td>disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration</td>
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<td>DRC</td>
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<td>ECOS</td>
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<td>GBV</td>
<td>gender-based violence</td>
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<td>GIZ</td>
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<td>HIV</td>
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<td>ICC</td>
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<td>prevention of mother-to-child transmission</td>
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<td>WAAF</td>
<td>women associated with the armed forces</td>
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<td>World Health Organization</td>
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South Sudan chronology
1820–2011

1820–1881  Turko-Egyptian rule.
1881–1898  Mahdist rule.
1899–1955  Anglo-Egyptian rule.
1955  The beginning of the first Sudanese civil war (later known as Anyanya 1), sparked by a mutiny in Torit, Eastern Equatoria.
1956  Sudan achieves independence from Anglo-Egyptian rule.
1963  Launching of Anya Nya guerrilla movement in South Sudan. Declaration of war against Northern government troops operating in the South.
1978  Oil discovered in South Sudan.
1983  Second civil war begins. The SPLA/M is founded and led by John Garang. Islamic law is introduced across Sudan by President Nimeiri. SPLA/M Code of conduct The Sudan People’s Revolutionary Laws, Punitive Provisions is established that prohibits the use of sexual violence by its members.
1989  Sudanese government is overthrown in a coup; Omar al-Bashir takes over as president.
1991  SPLA/M splits into two groups: Torit (led by John Garang) and Nasir (led by Riek Machar and Lam Akol).
2002  Ceasefire agreed between Sudanese government and SPLA/M. Machakos Protocol signed to end the war.
2003  Darfur conflict begins and escalates.
2005  Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed between the SPLA/M and the Sudanese government. John Garang is sworn in as the vice-president of Sudan in July. Garang dies in a helicopter accident in August and is succeeded by Salva Kiir Mayardit. Interim Constitution created, giving significant degree of autonomy to South Sudan. Autonomous government is formed in South Sudan.
2008  Quota system introduced that reserves 25 per cent of seats in local and national government for women. Tensions rise and fighting breaks out over border demarcation in disputed oil-rich town of Abyei.
2009  North and South Sudan accept ruling by arbitration court in The Hague over shrinking the disputed Abyei region, thus placing the major Heglig oil field in North Sudan. Warrant of arrest for Omar al-Bashir issued by the International Criminal Court for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur.
2010  National elections; women are allowed to vote for the first time.
2011  Referendum in January in which the people of South Sudan vote in favour of full independence from North Sudan.
Perhaps more than any other aspect of life in South Sudan, it is marriage that shapes a woman’s experiences, her status and her responsibilities. Marriage is one of the central institutions shaping society, binding families and communities, and ensuring continuity of the South Sudanese way of life and culture. To understand all the other facets of women’s lives in South Sudan, it is necessary to understand the pivotal role that the institution of marriage plays, the various practices that relate to it and some of the changes it has undergone as a result of the social upheaval created by the war.

South Sudanese society is strongly traditional and deeply patriarchal, and this is clearly evident in the institution of marriage. The roles and positions of both men and women within a marriage are clearly defined and strictly enforced: men are the heads of households, holding positions of authority within their families; women are subservient to their husbands, with their roles focused on the home and the rearing of children. While not equal, this division of roles and responsibilities was intended to ensure a clear allocation of tasks, and to guarantee that all were taken care of, protected and supported. In practice, the system often leaves women extremely vulnerable, with little recourse in cases of abuse or when husbands fail in their duties of support and protection.

As with all aspects of life in South Sudan, the civil wars (1955–1972 and
1983–2005) impacted significantly on the institution of marriage. Rapidly changing circumstances and resulting shifts in gender dynamics affected marriages, and the parts that women and men played within them. While there were some very positive changes for women, arising from the increased independence and responsibilities that they took on during the war, there were also negative developments, such as rising levels of domestic violence, and an increase in early marriages arranged by impoverished families seeking to accrue bride price.

In the current post-conflict period, when so many aspects of life in South Sudan are in transition, and South Sudanese people are being exposed to so many new influences, the institution of marriage, too, is shifting and adapting. This period, in which new policies and structures are being established, provides an opportunity to effect changes in marriage practices that are prejudicial to women, and to allow the legal institution of marriage to reflect the values of the newly independent state.

This chapter seeks to gain an understanding of the lives of married women in South Sudan, exploring the significance and meaning of marriage within South Sudanese culture. It sets out the respective roles and responsibilities of men and women within marriage, and examines the ways in which these were altered by the war. It goes on to describe the marriage process, the ways in which marriage partners are selected, as well as the crucial role and far-reaching effects of practices such as bride price and polygamy. The chapter then discusses early marriage and other circumstances in which some South Sudanese women are forced to marry. Violence within marriage is also explored. Finally, the chapter considers the effects on women of the dissolution of marriages by divorce or death.

The research for this chapter was based on a review of existing literature, as well as reports and publications by various humanitarian and media organisations. Between December 2010 and February 2010, interviews were conducted with a number of women, and in-depth interviews were held with two of these to try to gain a deeper understanding of the institution of marriage, women’s views on marriage and the effects of different marriage practices. Given the personal nature of the subject matter, several interviewees preferred not to be named, and a decision was then made to use pseudonyms for all interviewees. For this reason, details about the date and place in which interviews were held have also not been included.

The institution of marriage in South Sudan

In many respects, marriage holds a different place in South Sudanese society to that which it holds in the West. In South Sudan, a marriage is not understood as an arrangement between two individuals and the culmination of a love affair. Rather marriage is a social institution, involving whole families, that ties together separate kinship groups (Benesova, 2004). Power and wealth are often important factors guiding the choice of a prospective partner, with marriage playing a part in helping a family to increase their social status. Thus, the institution of marriage shapes the social relations of entire communities, conferring on marriage a central and critical place in society.

Not surprisingly, this impacts on the ways in which marriages operate. Since marriages are family arrangements, families have a say in who their family members should marry. Once a couple is married, the wider social networks still significantly influence the marriage. For example, extended families often play a role in guiding children’s formation, and may provide financial support if needed. As will be shown, extended families certainly have a financial as well as a social stake in ensuring that marriages remain intact. Thus marital disputes are perceived as community problems rather than as private issues (SMLS, 2008). This can have both positive and negative implications for women. While on the one hand, it means that supportive relatives have an interest in assisting couples to resolve their problems, it can also mean that, for the sake of social cohesion, relatives prevent women from seeking to escape serious marital problems, such as domestic violence.

In terms of finances, marriage has significant implications for individuals, families and communities. Perhaps the most important aspect of this is that men have to pay a bride price in order to marry. Bride price is a crucial economic feature of South Sudanese society and, as will become clear throughout the chapter, it has many possible ramifications. Significant sums are paid in bride price, which can be important sources of income for families, and the need to afford bride-price payments gives men an important motivation to accumulate wealth. Furthermore, the acquisition of several wives is seen as important for socio-economic advancement, as many wives can bear many daughters, who in turn can bring in many cattle from bride price when they eventually marry (Beswick, 2001). Rose Akol, one of the women interviewed for this chapter, describes the central relationship
between marriage and wealth as follows: ‘Lives are structured around cows, marriage and children: cows give you marriage, marriage gives you children. Therefore there is a circle.’

As in many African countries, civil law and customary law operate concurrently in South Sudan. Civil law is the formal written law of the country, codified in legislation, and drafted by parliament and other state structures. Customary law is the country’s indigenous body of law. It is unwritten, and shifts and evolves to meet changing circumstances (SMLS, 2008). Customary law varies between tribes and clans, and there are over 50 of these in South Sudan, each with their own systems and laws pertaining to marriage. It has been argued that it is ‘impossible to identify a single concrete set of practices relating to marriage and assume that this definition accords with all marriage practices in South Sudan.’ (SMLS, 2008: 52). However, despite the differences, there are also many commonalities. It is some of the more common elements that this chapter attempts to examine.

Civil law in South Sudan guarantees equality to women under Article 20(1) of the 2005 Interim Constitution, which states, ‘Women shall be accorded full and equal dignity of the person with men.’ In contrast, many aspects of customary law are inconsistent with women’s rights and relegate women to a lesser status, particularly in the realm of marriage and the family. Unfortunately, despite the protection afforded to women by civil law, customary law remains the dominant body of law in most parts of the country. This is partly because, as of 2010, there were very few civil law courts and structures around the country, and partly because few citizens have any real knowledge or experience of civil law. The result is that the provisions of customary law continue to flourish, and these tend to discriminate against women.

**Gender roles within marriage**

Central to an understanding of marriage in South Sudan, is an awareness of the respective roles that men and women play within society. The distinct roles played by men and women are clearly understood by all, and children are socialised into these from birth. Behavioural conventions are strictly enforced and anyone breaking the mould is subject to intense societal pressure.

Women in South Sudan typically marry around the age of 18, while men usually marry between the ages of 20 and 25. Most young men and women live with their parents until they marry. Many married couples stay with their families until they have had two or three children of their own (SMLS, 2008). For most women this means being under the authority of their father and then of their husband, without ever having an opportunity to become independent.

As mentioned, South Sudanese culture is deeply patriarchal. Men are the heads of their households, and hold positions of authority and power within their families. They have final decision-making power in the family on all matters of importance. Women are expected to be subservient to their husbands, and to be obedient to their husband’s male relatives, even if these are young children (Seligman & Seligman, 1932). According to one interviewee, a married woman has the status of a child. She cannot own property or goods, and all of her possessions are considered to belong to her husband. A wife is supposed to show her husband devotion and to respect him (Benesova, 2004). Men typically control food in the household and, since it is believed that men need to eat more to make them strong enough to protect their families, the men usually receive the largest share at mealtimes. In impoverished families, some women never get to eat meat, and seldom receive a fair share of the food that is available (Ward, 2005).

The responsibilities and duties of South Sudanese wives are onerous. Wives tend to work an 18-hour day that revolves mainly around food production, obtaining water and fuel for the household, maintaining the home and caring for their families, including being sexually available to their husbands (Gachago et al., 2003). A wife’s key responsibility is the bearing of children, and since contraception is rarely available, women have little control over when and how many children they conceive. Women are expected to be the primary caregiver for their children (SMLS, 2008).

Husbands are expected to be the providers: a husband is supposed to take care of his wife, build her a house, help her cultivate the fields, provide her with cattle, and care for the livestock (Benesova, 2004). Traditionally, families did not need hard currency, however money is increasingly being used in South Sudan, and it is seen as a man’s responsibility to earn money and bring it home (SMLS, 2008).

There is strong pressure from the community for husbands and wives to
fulfil their duties within marriage. However, the sanctions for not fulfilling one's obligations differ for men and women. Women who fail in their wifely duties face a variety of punishments ranging from being reprimanded to being beaten by their husbands (Benesova, 2004). Men can get away with neglecting their responsibilities far more easily and are seldom censured.

A number of the women interviewed felt that their husbands do not adequately fulfil their roles, and leave women to do the bulk of the work. For example, Mary Nyahuak commented: ‘Husbands don’t do much. Traditionally he’s supposed to cultivate farms and care for animals. In recent years they have lost their roles as men. They sit and talk and drink local brew. Women do the hard work’ (Interview). Another interviewee, Nyiel Chol, echoed this view: ‘She is in farm, and looks after the house. He eats and sleeps and comes home drunk. Women do most of the work.’ Women complained that when their husbands do work, they do not bring all their earnings home, but rather spend money on non-necessities, such as alcohol. Several women indicated that, despite not having enough money to meet their family’s basic needs, their husbands would not allow them to seek work outside the home (Ward, 2005).

Many aspects of the traditional South Sudanese way of life began to shift during the war. Among these shifts were changes in the roles that men and women played within marriage. As described in several chapters in this volume, a large number of men left their homes and joined the war effort, or went to seek employment elsewhere, leaving their wives and families behind. South Sudanese wives suddenly found themselves acting as heads of their households, holding positions of independence and responsibility that were new to them. Women started to secure jobs outside of their homes in order to fill the gaps left by men in essential services and to secure money for their families (Tumushabe, 2004). These changes, caused by necessity, gradually began to affect the rigid division of responsibilities between men and women, and husbands and wives.

The war created avenues for women to assume greater levels of responsibility. Many women contributed to the war effort, largely in support roles, with certain women rising to leadership positions in the independence movement. These opportunities for increased female independence and power began to affect the rigid power dynamics within marital relationships. Interestingly, the war also created some alternatives to life as a wife for women, an option that had never really existed before. Beswick describes one particular woman in the military who ‘acquired the right to remain unmarried, for being in the military differentiated her from other women by making her an honorary male’ (Beswick, 2001: 42). The war also removed many of the cultural deterrents and social checks that had previously influenced people’s behaviour. In time, sexual mores were affected and behaviour such as adultery increased (Beswick, 2001). All of this affected marital dynamics.

After the end of the war, the effects of these shifts continue to be felt. Some men returning from the frontlines felt disempowered by seeing women occupying the positions they used to hold. This contributed to the development of a ‘crisis of masculinity’ (Benesova, 2004: 4), which it can be argued may be playing a role in the rising rates of domestic and sexual violence.

Life for an unmarried woman

Remaining single is not regarded as a real option in South Sudan, particularly for women. Unmarried women are scorned, not taken seriously, and are considered lowly by society. Mary Nyahuak laments that unmarried women tend to be called names and are constantly accused of inappropriate behaviour, such as using sexual means to advance in their careers (Interview). Revealing the deeply entrenched prejudices against unmarried women, another interviewee requested that her real name not be used in the chapter, and when asked for a reason, she replied that as an unmarried woman, her opinions and views would not have legitimacy. She felt it would be better that she remained anonymous so that her views would not be received as those of a mere unmarried woman.

This prejudice extends to divorced women as well. Mary Nyahuak is a bright, well-educated young woman who aspires to be involved in politics. At the time of her interview, Mary was in the process of deciding whether to divorce her husband who had been extremely neglectful, abandoning her and their child for a number of years. Although she wants to divorce him, Mary explained that if she is not married, she will not be eligible to hold a position in government. In South Sudanese politics, the husband’s family nominates a woman to parliament, and therefore single women cannot be political representatives. For a woman like Mary to fulfil her political
ambitions, she has to remain married. Mary explains, ‘I want to be a role model to Sudanese women, but single women can’t be role models. Being unmarried with a child is a terrible thing in that culture. I won’t be able to be a role model’ (Interview).

Given the importance of being married and the stigma that unmarried women face, much value is placed on a woman’s marriageability. The actions of unmarried women are strongly influenced by the fear of losing their value as a potential marriage partner, a situation that can have seriously negative consequences. For example, women who are not virgins, even if this is because of rape, are perceived as less desirable. This means that many women do not report rape or seek post-rape assistance, preferring to keep their ordeals a secret. This contributes to a strong culture of silence and shame around rape, and as a sense of impunity for rapists.

Sadly, in South Sudan, the perception exists that educated women are less eligible for marriage. There is a fear that educated women will be less ‘traditional’ and thus more difficult to control. As a result, some families are reluctant to educate their girls, worrying that education might devalue them and make them less lucrative in terms of bride price (Beswick, 2001).

The marriage process
Selecting a partner and negotiating a marriage
Traditionally, many clans in South Sudan allow young people their choice of spouse. In theory, although a bride needs her family’s approval, young women are free to marry any man who can produce a suitable bride price (Seligman & Seligman, 1932). Young men, on the other hand, often had less say in their choice of marriage partner. Requiring cattle for bride price, and generally dependent on their male relatives to provide these cattle, a man would seldom flout the wishes of his relatives, as they could refuse to provide the bride price (Seligman & Seligman, 1932).

Also in theory, marriage cannot take place unless a woman is willing to marry the man, although in practice, women are often placed under considerable social and parental pressure to opt for their preferred candidate (SMLS, 2008). Cases of girls being forced to marry, or being severely beaten to ensure that they give their ‘consent’, are not unusual. Forced marriages are discussed in more detail below.

With regard to the courting process, generally, a young man will approach a woman he likes and try to garner her interest. Only once he is confident of her interest in him, will he approach her family to ask for her hand (Ward, 2005). One interviewee described the way that this used to work in the rural areas: ‘They used to have traditional dances in villages. A man would spot a girl and would approach the girl at the dance. Then he would find out who her family is. The following day he would go to her house. He would tell the family.’ When a man indicated to a woman’s father his interest in marrying his daughter, ‘the girl’s father set a date for the coming together of the two families. On that date, the young man has to bring with him a small table, a sheet, serviette, a white handkerchief and a locally made food cover called a “tabag”’ (Rashid, n.d.). All of this represents the initial engagement.

Rose Akol is a young unmarried woman from the Shilluk tribe, who lives a relatively modern lifestyle in Juba, the capital of South Sudan. During her interview, Rose noted that her parents are considered ‘very liberal’. She explained the way in which the courting and marriage negotiation process works for more urban women like herself. Rose said that she dates men, but that she will only bring a man home if it is serious enough that they are considering marriage. If she is serious about someone, she will first inform her mother about this, and her mother will begin to find out about him – to ascertain whether he is from a good family and who his kin are. When the couple are ready to negotiate marriage, she will inform her aunt that the man is interested in marrying her, and that she loves him in return. Rose said that dates men, but that she will only bring a man home if it is serious enough that they are considering marriage. If she is serious about someone, she will first inform her mother about this, and her mother will begin to find out about him – to ascertain whether he is from a good family and who his kin are. When the couple are ready to negotiate marriage, she will inform her aunt that the man is interested in marrying her, and that she loves him in return. Her aunt will then arrange a meeting with her mother at the aunt’s house, during which her aunt will inform her mother about the proposed marriage. Her mother then informs her father and uncles, who plan a meeting with the man’s family to start negotiations around the bride price.

Bride price
As noted, in most South Sudanese marriages a groom’s family pays bride price to the bride’s family. ‘Cattle are exchanged in order to compensate the bride’s family for the loss of a family member. Concurrently, the new bride is expected to “replace the cows” of her husband’s family by giving birth to many children’ (Burton, 1978: 398). It is the act of paying bride price, rather than a marriage ceremony, that actually renders a couple married. Bride price is payable in instalments, over an extended period, and a marriage is
Bride price can be extremely costly, with the amount depending on the social status of the two families involved, and on factors such as a girl's beauty and her level of education (Marial, 2010). Bride price is usually paid in cattle, although sheep, goats, beads, hoe-heads and ornamental spears can be demanded as well (d'Olivier Farran, 1963). Rose Akol commented that bride price has become increasingly expensive, sometimes being set as high as 200 head of cattle (Interview). If several men wish to marry the same girl, Beswick (2001) reports that a form of bidding can take place, with the highest bidder marrying the girl.

To help the groom raise the required bride price, his family and even his friends may contribute cattle. These cattle are then distributed among the bride's family members, thus sealing the bonds between the two extended families and making the marriage a communal arrangement (d'Olivier Farran, 1963). However, as mentioned, giving extended families a stake in marriages can have problematic consequences — such as families encouraging women to ignore marital problems or abuse, thus making the continuation of the marriage more important than ensuring the well being and protection of the wife. There have also been instances in which, in an attempt to afford bride price, men have resorted to cattle rustling. Cattle rustling is an ongoing source of insecurity in South Sudan, and has resulted in countless deaths and ongoing feuds between communities (Marial, 2010).

For sons, age determines the order of marriage — the eldest son is given the first priority when it comes to using the family's cattle for bride price (Burton, 1978). Bride price is a significant motivator for young men to work and earn money, so that they have funds with which to buy cattle. Although any cattle that a young man buys form part of his family's herd, rather than belonging to him individually, the young man does gain the right to assert his opinion about how the cattle should be used, including whether it should be used to pay bride price for himself, his siblings or other male relatives (Burton, 1978).

In theory, bride price symbolises a family's pride in their girls and helps to ensure that a girl's new family values and respects her. However, despite these positive ideals, the practice has a number of negative consequences. For example, some hold the view that women are sold in exchange for bride price, and that the payment of bride price justifies any treatment that a woman's new family may wish to dole out. A report in the Sudan Tribune records instances in which husbands have refused to pay their wives' medical expenses, and in extreme cases have even allowed women to die untreated, arguing that as they have already paid the bride price, the woman's parents should pay her medical costs (Marial, 2010).

In situations of financial pressure, families sometimes marry off their daughters at a young age using the bride price as a way of gaining some financial relief. This can involve pulling girls out of school or acting in other ways that are contrary to girls' best interests. For example, as discussed in Chapter 9 of this volume, during the war, some South Sudanese families in Kakuma Refugee Camp tried to prevent girls from being resettled as refugees in the West, preferring them to remain in the terrible conditions in the camp, rather than risk losing the bride price if they left (DeLuca, 2009).

South Sudanese weddings

Although it is the payment of the final instalment of the bride price that officially renders a couple married, various ceremonies and traditions mark the marriage event. These may take place over a period of days, months or even years.

Wedding ceremonies vary significantly from tribe to tribe. For the Nuer, for example, the most prominent ceremonial element is the ritual cutting of the bride's hair, while among the Dinka the ceremonial handing over of the bride to her husband followed by the slaughtering of an ox is the important feature (d'Olivier Farran, 1963). Mary Nyahauk explained that, in her community, when a man's family has finished paying the bride price, the woman is handed over to her in-laws. Cows are slaughtered at the bride's parents' home where there is singing and dancing prior to her departure. Then women from her father's side of the family escort her to the home of her in-laws (Interview). Those who live a more modern lifestyle in South Sudan's cities often celebrate with both a traditional and a church wedding, although the church ceremony is seen as a mere formality.

During the first week with her husband's family, a bride is known as the 'guest wife' and during this time she is served by her new family members and does not serve others. Gradually she takes on more of the housework, until she is fulfilling her full duties as a wife (Benesova, 2004). Even after
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these ceremonies have been completed, marriage is considered to take place in stages, and for some tribes, a marriage is not finalised until the bride has born at least two children. Upon the birth of a third child, the marriage is considered ‘tied’, and at this point, the wife and the children are accepted as full members of her husband’s clan.

**Polygamy**

The practice of polygamy is prevalent, legal and widely accepted in South Sudan. In particular, polygyny is practiced – whereby a man can have more than one wife. A South Sudanese man can marry as many women as he can afford to pay bride price for, so the number of wives often depends on a man’s wealth.

Where a man has several wives, each of them often has their own house, kitchen and fields, making each wife effectively a self-sufficient economic sub-unit (Beswick, 2001). The husband is supposed to support each of these homes, providing financially and ensuring that there is shelter and sufficient cattle and land for food production. However, some men take on several wives even when they are not in a position to adequately support them, leaving some or all of their wives poor and struggling to provide for their children.

Something seldom documented is how difficult life can be for a woman in a polygynous union. Apart from problems around support and maintenance, polygynous marriages can be extremely difficult and unsatisfying for women in more personal ways. Men with several wives often do not regularly see and ‘satisfy’ their wives. Generally a woman who is one of three wives would sleep with her husband no more than ten nights a month while a woman who is one of six wives might get no more than five nights a month with her husband, although this is subject to variation. Writing in the 1970s, E.E. Evans-Pritchard speculated that this led to an increase in adultery in South Sudan (Evans-Pritchard, 1970). One interviewee conveyed how difficult living in a polygamous marriage can be, saying, ‘It is hell to see your husband with another woman’.

Another negative effect of polygyny is the spread of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. If one member of a polygamous family network contracts HIV, the rest of the family network is put at risk. Concurrent sexual partnerships have been an important driving factor in the HIV pandemic across the African continent and this often takes place in the context of polygyny.

With modernisation, some people mainly in upper classes have moved away from polygyny. In particular, educated women have become less likely to accept polygyny, refusing to allow their husbands to take on additional wives (Beswick, 2001: 49). Some interviewees argued that modernisation would probably have ended the incidence of polygyny had it not been for the war. Mary Nyaluak explained that the war halted the modernisation process in some ways because, when people were attacked and the war began to pose a direct threat to their way of life, communities sought to cling to their traditional values and practices, including that of polygyny. During the war years it was seen as practical for women to be aligned to men for protection, and this at the very time when a great number of men were absent or had been killed. Polygamous marriage became an appealing practical option for some. A perception also existed that more men than women were being killed by war, and that men should take several wives to ensure that all women had husbands (Interview, Mary Nyaluak).

**Forced marriages**

Despite the supposed freedom that South Sudanese women have, to choose who they wish to marry, several common practices prevent women from making their own choices about marriage.

**Early marriage**

Early marriage happens often in South Sudan, with girls as young as 12 years old being married off. As mentioned, families sometimes give their young daughters over for marriage to benefit from the bride price their daughters can fetch. Young girls are frequently married off to much older men, who are more able to afford a higher bride price (Ward, 2005). Once married, girls have to reside with their husbands, take on the domestic duties of a wife and give up their lives as young girls.

Perhaps the most harmful consequence of girls marrying at a very young age is that they are deprived of education. Once married, girls are usually taken out of school. As Rebecca Hamilton (2011) notes, ‘Weighing the choice between the costs of keeping a daughter in school versus the benefits...
of marrying her off, families in impoverished rural communities usually choose the latter. And, as is the case worldwide, early marriage correlates strongly with early school dropout.’ Early marriages also tend to stand in the way of girls receiving an education, as perceptions exist that it is unwise to spend money on school fees for girls who will shortly belong to, and work for the benefit of, another family.

Early marriages can also play a part in fuelling domestic violence as young girls are less likely to know how to manage a household or relate to a husband, particularly if the man is much older (Ward, 2005). Early marriages also tend to increase the chances of birth complications, as young girls’ bodies may not be mature enough to carry and deliver a child. Difficulties with weaning children also occur more frequently, as young brides are less likely to be educated and therefore may be unaware of the importance of breastfeeding and good hygiene around their newborns.

Unsurprisingly, many young girls are highly resistant to marriage. The South Sudanese media is rife with reports of girls running away or committing suicide to avoid forced marriages. For example, in October 2010, a 17-year-old schoolgirl in Wulu County killed herself with a shot to the head after being forced by her family to marry. The girl’s family were called in for questioning by the county commissioner but were soon released, and no further investigations were made – a sad indication of society’s acceptance of these kinds of occurrences (Manyang, 2010).

Early marriage was very prevalent during the war, for a number of reasons. The dire economic conditions put families in a position where they desperately required early bride price (Ward, 2005). Many people expected the war to last for a long time, and anticipated that most men would eventually go to war and that few would return. Girls were therefore married off as early as possible so that, even if their husbands went to war and did not return, the bride’s family would have secured the bride price and ensured that their daughter would be provided for by her husband’s family. Finally, girls were frequently abducted from refugee camps and either forcibly married or sexually violated. In both cases bride price would be forfeited, and girls were therefore married off early in an attempt to prevent families from potential loss of income (Fitzgerald, 2002).

Since the end of the war, steps have been taken to put an end to the practice of early marriage. Legislation passed in South Sudan now sets the marriageable age at 18 years, and states that all females have the right to be protected against early and forced marriage (Hamilton, 2011). However, despite this, early marriage remains common.

Other forced marriages

A woman who is raped, and is thus no longer a virgin, is considered ‘spoiled’ and unlikely to find a husband. As a result, when unmarried South Sudanese women are raped, the families of the victim and the perpetrator often enter into negotiations, and the rape victim is often forced to marry the rapist. In fact, men sometimes rape so that a woman will be forced to marry them, knowing that, once a woman is no longer a virgin, her family will no longer be able to demand as high a bride price. Mary Nyaluak explains:

A man spots a girl coming from the river. A group of men then capture her [and the first man] has sex with her against her will. As soon as they have had sex, then they are considered to be husband and wife. He then sends a message to the family saying ‘don’t search for the girl, she is now my wife’. She will then be returned to the family with cows, and will then be considered to be married. (Interview)

There are also other circumstances in which women are compelled to marry. If someone commits an offence, an unmarried female in their family can be compelled to marry a member of the aggrieved family, to facilitate reconciliation between the families. Wife inheritance, discussed in greater detail below, is another practice in which women are compelled to marry.

Some measures have been taken to tackle the practice of forced marriages. For example, Lakes State parliament passed a provisional Act prohibiting forced marriages. Unfortunately, this law is reportedly not recognised by communities, and has thus had little effect (Manyang, 2010).

Violence in marriages

As head of the household, it is seen as acceptable for a South Sudanese husband to ‘discipline’ his wife and children (SMLS, 2008). For a man to beat his wife is seen as quite normal in South Sudan, and it is considered by many men to be entirely appropriate (Ward, 2005). A county judge in
Dilling County explained that if a husband beats his wife ‘he is trying to refine her; women don’t experience it as violence’ (quoted in Ward, 2005: 47). Many women buy in to this too – women from Malual Kon in Aweil East County explained that they believe domestic violence is justified because ‘women are like children, they need to be disciplined’ (quoted in Ward, 2005: 33). However, domestic violence often goes much further than what are perceived as minor ‘disciplinary’ beatings, but few studies have been done on the prevalence rates of domestic violence in South Sudan. The little research that does exist suggests that violence is widespread and frequent.

Several factors fuel domestic violence in South Sudan. Clearly, the social acceptability of domestic violence, and the lack of consequences for men who abuse, allows it to prevail, as does the low status of women in society. Alcohol abuse is another significant factor (Ward, 2005). The difficulty of obtaining a divorce, discussed below, also means that women are compelled to remain in violent situations, allowing domestic violence to thrive (Ward, 2005).

The war may also have played a part in fuelling domestic violence. High rates of domestic violence are attributed to disempowerment, ‘war trauma’ and frustration among men (Gachago, et al., 2003: 8). As indicated, many men returned from the front to find that their wives had taken over the jobs and the roles that men traditionally held. Their resultant frustration and disempowerment is said to have contributed to the rising rates of domestic and sexual violence. For example, in one study ‘many men admitted forcing themselves on their wives not because they really felt like having sex, but in order to “service them well” so that their manhood, already pinched on economic grounds, does not face the same state on the sexual front’ (Jok, 1999: 438–439).

There is little recourse for women in violent relationships. The law does not protect women from domestic violence, although the government of South Sudan has pledged itself to passing legislation and enforcing specific laws around this (Garang, 2011). The almost defunct state of police and judicial systems means that any protective laws are hardly enforced, and women receive little assistance and protection from state structures. Customary law and customary courts, too, offer little protection. Although women have the right to appeal to a customary court if her husband’s abuse is beyond what is considered ‘reasonable’, at most her husband might be fined a goat or cow as punishment by the customary court, in the hope that this will deter him from further violence (Ward, 2005). According to one interviewee, men sanctioned in this way are usually allowed to return home with the woman and little is done to protect her from further violence. Many women are therefore afraid of reporting their cases, as doing so might further enrage their husbands, who might beat them further, deprive them of food or punish them in other ways (Ward, 2005).

Not only do the legal structures fail to prevent domestic violence, family members and neighbours will do little to stop violence either, claiming that it is a domestic issue and that they cannot intervene. Yet, as one interviewee noted, if a wife runs away from a violent home, she will have no place to run to. If she goes to her family, they will talk her into returning to her husband, as family reconciliation and the continuation of the marriage is seen as the main priority. In cases of particularly extreme domestic violence, families might try to talk to a husband, appealing him to temper his violence.

Marital rape is reportedly also common in South Sudan. However, coerced sex within a marriage, no matter how violent, is not considered rape, and is therefore not prohibited by the law. Section 247 of the 2008 Penal Code Act clearly states that, ‘Sexual intercourse by a married couple is not rape, within the meaning of this section’. In her interview, Mary Nyaluak explained that men in South Sudanese marriages unilaterally decide when to have sex, and will proceed to do so, whether or not the woman concurs. She also said that if a South Sudanese woman alleged that she was being ‘raped’ within her marriage, people would accuse her of ‘being naive’ or of ‘using modern words’ that are not applicable to their culture.

**Divorce**

Although divorce is technically possible in South Sudan, it is highly discouraged and extremely rare. Given that extended kinship ties are created by marriage, divorce means not just the separation of a couple, but the dissolution of bonds between extended kin – a very drastic state of affairs. Families and tribal elders will seek to deal with marital problems without resorting to divorce. As mentioned earlier, this can have both positive and negative consequences for the married couple.

If separating becomes their only option, either partner may seek divorce. Divorce procedures vary: Dinka couples have to appear before a customary
court, while Shilluk couples can get divorced by agreement alone, and without a court process. Under customary law, the return of the bride price to the husband and his family finalises the divorce (Farran, 1963). The amount of bride price to be returned depends on the number of children the woman has borne during a marriage, the more children, the lower the amount returned (SMLS, 2008). The requirement that bride price be returned is one of the factors that makes it so difficult to get divorced. Often the bride-price cattle have already been distributed among a woman's relatives, and they will try any means to convince her to remain in the marriage so that they won't have to relinquish part of their wealth (SMLS, 2008: 55).

Where a divorce takes place, children remain with the father or his family, as they are considered part of his lineage (Seligman & Seligman, 1932). Extremely young children are allowed to remain with their mother after a divorce, until they are between three and seven years old (SMLS, 2008: 54). The fact that women lose their children provides another significant disincentive to them getting divorced.

Given the difficulty of obtaining a divorce, couples sometimes separate without formally getting divorced. However, in a situation like this, the woman is usually far worse off. The man can remarry, as polygamy is legal for men. The woman, on the other hand cannot remarry, and if she becomes involved with other men, she will be accused of being an adulterer. Any man that she sees can be fined for adultery, and if she has children with a new partner, the children will ‘belong’ to her former husband. In fact, a man who has paid bride price for a woman is considered the father of all her children, regardless of who their biological father is. A biological father who does not pay bride price is given no stead in relation to any children who may be born (Seligman & Seligman, 1932). In order to change this situation and marry the woman, a prospective suitor will need to pay off the original husband. This creates a significant disincentive to men considering becoming involved with a separated woman, and means that the woman may be alone for the rest of her life.

Mary Nyaluak’s story clearly illustrates some of the problems described above. Her husband moved to the US when she was pregnant with their first child. Although they were not officially married at the time of his departure, a marriage was subsequently negotiated between their families, and his family paid bride price to Mary's father, legally cementing their marriage. Her husband was not expected to remain in America for very long, but Mary was repeatedly disappointed, as he time and again made promises of returning and then failed to come back. He barely kept contact with her and their relationship began to sour. After his first year away, he provided no maintenance for her or their child who was born shortly after his departure. After a number of years, with almost no word from him, Mary began to move on with her life, and in time began to see other men. On receiving this news in America, Mary's husband began sending abusive emails accusing her of being an adulterer and a prostitute. Mary badly wanted to move on with her life – there were even other men who were interested in marrying her – but because he had paid bride price for her, so many years before, she was held hostage.

Finally, Mary decided to go to court to end this situation. In January 2010, Mary opened a court case in South Sudan to try to end the marriage, in which she alleged that she is married by name only, and that there is no support, communication or real relationship between her and her husband. She emailed her husband informing him that the first hearing was on 7 January 2010. A week later, he wrote to inform her that she should stop the court case as he was returning home to resume their marriage. He returned a month later, and they saw each other for the first time in six years and he met his daughter for the first time. Mary is now expected to enter into a marital relationship with a man she now hardly knows, and who had treated her so badly for so long. At the time of the interview, Mary was trying to decide whether she could manage this, or whether to divorce him, an option that society was pressuring her to reject (Interview).

Adultery is a criminal offence and is taken very seriously in South Sudan. In the past, punishments for adultery were brutal – men convicted of adultery could face mutilation, having their ears, upper lips, hands or even genitals cut off. An offender could buy indemnity from punishment by paying a woman, or 20 spears to the husband of the woman he was in an adulterous relationship with. Women were not mutilated, but they were severely beaten, ‘logged’ or cut with knives for committing adultery (Seligman & Seligman, 1932).

Over the years, punishment for adultery has become less harsh. Today, Section 266 of the Penal Code Act, sets out the criminal offence and the punishment for adultery as follows:
Whoever, has consensual sexual intercourse with a man or woman who is and whom he or she has reason to believe to be the spouse of another person, commits the offence of adultery, and shall be addressed in accordance with the customs and traditions of the aggrieved party and in lieu of that and upon conviction, shall be sentenced to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or with a fine or with both.

As with most other aspects of South Sudanese life, men and women are treated differently around the issue of adultery. E.E. Evans-Pritchard, who wrote in the late 1960s, noted that it was socially acceptable for South Sudanese men to have affairs, but not for women to do so (1969). Ward, writing more recently, makes the point that despite the law making it illegal for men to commit adultery, a woman cannot really open an adultery case against her husband, as in a country where polygyny is the norm, men are not really capable of adultery (Ward, 2005). In contrast, a woman accused of adultery will be held in prison for 24 hours while an investigation is carried out. If she is found to have committed adultery, she may be sentenced to a few months in prison with the option of paying a fine instead. In practice, women tend to not have an income, and can seldom afford to pay fines, so they are likely to serve a prison sentence (Ward, 2005).

**Widowhood**

Given the great number of men who died in the war, hundreds of thousands of women were widowed. Sadly, many of the traditional protections and safeguards for widows were not sustainable during the war, leaving many women in difficult positions.

One issue that created significant problems was that of inheritance. In South Sudan, women do not have the right to own anything (Ward, 2005). On the deaths of their husbands, women therefore cannot inherit their husband’s property. Included in ‘his property’ is anything the woman herself has earned that forms part of his estate. Widows therefore find that their financial well being is left to the discretion of their deceased husband’s family. In this context, widows often get evicted from their homes. For the large numbers of war widows, problems around property have been significant sources of concern.

For many South Sudanese tribes, death does not break the marriage contract – only the return of bride price that can break the contract between man and wife (Seligman & Seligman, 1932). Thus if a woman bears any children after her husband's death, regardless of their biological father, the children are said to be the deceased's children; they will carry on his lineage, and they are said to carry his spirit and will be taught to worship him as an ancestor.

There are several consequences for women that flow from this. One example is *wife inheritance*. When a man dies, his widow is ‘inherited’ by the deceased’s brother or another close male relative of the deceased (Seligman & Seligman, 1932). The widow is still considered to be *married* to the deceased, and his brother or relative takes over the role her husband played, supporting her, having intercourse with her, and fulfilling his duty to provide her with children. Any children born are considered children of the deceased. As death does not dissolve a marriage, a widow is not considered ‘free’ or unmarried, and is therefore unable to remarry. Without wife inheritance, the widow could be left without a husband or male protection and support for the rest of her life. The practice is thus intended to maintain the marriage bonds between the extended families of the couple, and to provide a social safety net for widows by ensuring that they can rely on their in-laws for continuing protection and support (Beswick, 2001; SMLS, 2008).

In many ways, however, the practice proves unfair to women, who are given no say as to whether they wish to be ‘inherited’. A widow may have to relocate and join a new family as one of many wives – and is often not a welcome addition to the new family. The chosen brother or relative might not have the financial means to support an additional wife, adding financial strain. In addition to this, a wife who is inherited can bring HIV (this is an increasing problem as men die of AIDS) or acquire it from the new sexual network.

Interestingly, the practice of wife inheritance decreased during the war. Although countless women were widowed, it seems that more nuclear-type families started to develop, and a greater number of first wives refused to allow their husbands to take additional wives, including inherited ones. As a result, many abandoned the practice of wife inheritance, leaving their relatives’ widows unassisted. In one study, widows reported feeling abandoned and suffering as a result of the fact that they had not been
inherited’ (Beswick, 2001). This illustrates the complexity of these practices, which while harmful in some ways, can also serve important social purposes. These complexities must be taken into consideration in the drafting of new laws and policies.

Another interesting practice is that of ghost marriages. In a ghost marriage, a woman marries a deceased man. As per an ordinary marriage, bride price is exchanged between the family of the deceased and the family of the bride. Ghost marriages take place in the name of men who have died without having had a son to carry on their name and lineage. Sons in South Sudanese families marry in age order, so without ghost marriage, the death of an older son before he married could potentially delay the marriages of the younger sons indefinitely. To prevent this, a ghost marriage is arranged, and cattle that would have been allocated for the deceased’s marriage are used to pay for a ghost marriage. Children born of ghost marriages are known as ‘children of the ghost’.

Conclusion

Marriage is a central feature of South Sudanese life, binding together kinship groups and wider communities, and forming the basis for much of the regulation of society. The status of a woman and almost all aspects of her life are influenced by marriage, making this the paramount institution in determining a woman’s well being.

In the transitional period since the ending of the war, new laws and policies are being drafted to regulate the newly formed state, and to set it on a course of equality and increasing respect for human rights. It is hoped that as part of these developments, policies will be created that will make women more equal within marriage and allow women to play more active roles in society, outside of the confines of marriage. While South Sudanese cultural practices have enormous value and must form the basis of the newly independent state, those aspects that are harmful to women should be modified to align with the principles on which the new state is based. It is with the rules of marriage that some of the biggest challenges relating to this will arise, and where, if successful, the biggest improvements to women’s lives will be seen.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


In the final months before South Sudan’s referendum for independence, held in January 2011, the streets of Juba were lined with banners urging voters to opt for secession, and the South Sudanese looked excitedly toward the day when placing their votes in the ballot box would help to determine their future. One billboard that looked down on the road, carried a picture of John Garang, the late leader of the independence struggle; it read, ‘The final walk to freedom. Our fallen heroes and heroines did not die in vain’.

The fact that the billboard acknowledged the contribution made by women to the war effort is significant. Many claim that the lot of women has improved in recent years, and refer to the fact that 25 per cent of seats in South Sudan’s new parliament have been reserved for women – an achievement that many attribute directly to John Garang, a great champion of women’s rights. But has the contribution that the women of South Sudan made during the war really been recognised?

This chapter examines the contributions made by women to the second Sudanese civil war (1983–2005). The chapter profiles women who were combatants and those who took on essential support roles. It shows that, while there were female fighters, the majority of women who were active in the war took on supportive roles: carrying supplies, cooking, caring for the wounded and for children, and a range of other duties. These women, and
many of the men they served alongside, did not consider support roles to be secondary. Indeed, such women insist that they were combatants, fighting on a different level, and should be recognised as such. The chapter focuses on women who were part of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) and of other groups that deployed larger numbers of female soldiers.

The chapter looks at the post-conflict disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programme – designed to integrate former combatants into civilian life – to assess whether the programme is meeting the needs of women who took part in the war. It shows that women are well represented in the DDR programme, despite the fact that many were reluctant to leave military life, and often did not demobilise voluntarily. In conclusion, the chapter looks briefly at future prospects for the women who took part in the war.

Many South Sudanese women were interviewed for this chapter, including members of the SPLA who participated in the war as armed combatants, and those who played support roles; women in the Southern Sudan Police Service; participants in the DDR programme; and women who are now civilians. A combination of focus groups and individual interviews were conducted in Juba, Rumbek, Bor and Nasir. It was interesting to note that many of the women were comfortable speaking in broad terms about the South Sudanese liberation struggle, and the roles of women during the war, but when questioned about their own lives and experiences, they seemed almost puzzled as to why anyone would be interested in their story. It was as though they could not understand why their particular story of war and hardship should be more significant than anyone else’s.

Additional interviews were conducted with staff from the Southern Sudan Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission (SSDDRC), senior officers from the SPLA, security experts in South Sudan, and staff from the UN and other international agencies involved with the DDR programme. In some cases, respondents asked that their full names not be used, and where women’s personal stories are recounted, a decision was made to use first names rather than surnames to enhance readability. The list of interviews cited appears at the end of the chapter.

Although the war may be described as a battle between the north and south of Sudan, the complex reality is that many groups with differing agendas were involved. While the SPLA remained the largest and most dominant military force in the South, numerous other factions existed that were aligned with either the SPLA or the Sudanese government’s army, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), or which switched allegiances depending on what would further their cause.

The geographic spread, and the number of armed groups that were involved in the Sudanese war meant that battles were not fought on one front but on many, with different parties controlling different areas in South Sudan at different times. The war was characterised by a series of skirmishes and firefights, which led to occupations of towns or areas, rather than long, running battles. This meant that there was not a ‘frontline’ to which fighters were sent. Rather combatants would be intermittently involved with attack and defence, and with the transitional phases of the war (Interview, Southern Sudan security advisor). Nevertheless, the South Sudanese regularly talk about a ‘frontline’ when discussing those who carried out armed attacks, and for this reason, the term is used in this chapter.

South Sudanese women and combat
Historically, and in the present, the prevailing culture in relation to conflict in South Sudan has been one of men as warriors and women as chattels or assets that should be kept away from combat duties. While there were some female warriors in South Sudan as far back as the nineteenth century, women’s contributions to war efforts generally took place away from the frontlines (Beswick, 2000).

The question of whether South Sudanese women fought on the frontline in the second Sudanese civil war elicits equally vehement responses, both affirmative and negative. Typically women respond in the affirmative, and men deny that women took part in fighting. The truth seems to be that there were notable female combatants who fought on the frontlines, but these were a small minority. Most women participated behind the frontlines, fulfilling essential support roles.

The SPLA flirted briefly with the idea of using women as fighters. The Kateeba Banaat (literally translated as ‘The Girls’ Battalion’) was formed by the SPLA in 1984 as an all-female fighting force. Although its existence was relatively short-lived, it is spoken of in folkloric terms. Elizabeth Deu Aguin, who is now an MP for the town of Bor in Jonglei State, joined Kateeba Banaat in February 1984 as a 20-year-old:
I wanted to join the SPLA, because last time, in Anyanya 1 [the first Sudanese civil war, 1955–1972], the girls who were left behind without joining the fighting were really suffering. They were just tortured by the Arabs and they were raped and so on. And we didn’t want that to happen again. That is why we say it is better to join SPLA so that we suffer with them instead of suffering in the hands of Arabs. (Interview, Elizabeth Deu Aguin)

Elizabeth explained how she walked for two weeks from Bor in South Sudan to Itang in Ethiopia where she, along with approximately 300 other unmarried girls, ranging from 14 to 20 years of age, were taken for training. They trained in Bilpam and Bongo, often alongside male trainees. At times the male trainees enjoyed a sense of healthy competition with the women, but more often they questioned their abilities as fighters:

They were not happy to have women with them because it is not in our traditional culture. They said ‘You are only women. Who brought you here? What are you to come and be a soldier? By the way, you cannot even shoot, you will not shoot.’ They ignored us and we could not accept what they said. We felt ignorant but what could we do? They were not happy; they kept saying ‘Kateeba Banaat you are going to cry.’ It was just an agitation. But the women didn’t cry in that way. It was just sympathy. When you see your brother is being beaten you cannot tolerate it…When some are killed you sympathise. It was sympathy that led one or two ladies to cry. They were not crying because of fear. It was the situation. (Interview)

In the end Elizabeth was not destined for the frontline. She and five of her companions were selected to go for training as secretaries in Addis Ababa. In time, the Kateeba Banaat was ordered to carry out its one and only attack. It was on the town of Njoko. The attack failed and, perhaps for this reason, the SPLA hierarchy decided that the unit should not be sent to the frontline again (McCallum & Okech, 2008). Although subsequent female battalions were established, their members were given auxiliary roles such as providing logistical and administrative support behind the frontlines (Interview, Brigadier-General Michael Majur Aleer).

The question of whether to place women on the frontline is one that is hotly debated in armies throughout the world. One of the arguments against it is that women do not have physiological capabilities comparable to men’s, but anyone who has seen South Sudanese women performing their daily duties, such as carrying jerry cans of water for several miles, may see this argument as spurious. Former combatant, Janet Bulen Mofatta, made the point that the women who were with her in the Moroto training camp were more physically capable than the boys (some of whom were as young as 12 years old) who trained alongside them (Interview, Janet Bulen Mofatta).

A more complex argument against having women fighting on the frontlines, and one which resonates with the South Sudanese experience, is that the sight of an injured woman fighter is more likely to provoke consternation and lower morale than that of an injured man (Grossman, 2009). This argument was echoed by many interviewees in South Sudan, one of whom explained, ‘It is one thing if a man dies. If a woman dies we may cry all day.’

**Keeping up the reproductive front**

For the late John Garang, leader of the SPLA during the war, the decision to keep women away from the frontline was based on a long-term strategy for the war. He believed that the war would endure for decades. With this in mind, and with so many dying in combat, it was essential that the population levels of South Sudanese be maintained. To achieve this, women had to be kept away from the fighting so that they could keep up the ‘reproductive front’. Many of the women interviewed for this chapter referred to John Garang’s reproductive policy when talking about how they perceived their roles and duties during the war. By and large, they framed this as a positive policy that respected the vital roles of women both in the war and for the future of South Sudan:

The late John Garang told us, told all the girls, ‘They say people are now dying and if you insist to be in a fighting place then there will be nobody to produce children. You should leave the fighting and go and produce children so that they can replace those who are dying.’ It was a message to all the girls. That is why they withdrew themselves from the fighting, one by one. (Interview, Elizabeth Deu Aguin)
Indeed many of the women interviewed complained that because the war kept them separated from their husbands so much, they were prevented from having as many children as they would have wished. Many women described how they had travelled to the frontline specifically to see their husbands and to become pregnant.

**Women on the frontline**

Of course, not all women agreed that their role was to reproduce. Some women went to extraordinary lengths to fight alongside their male colleagues. Janet Bulen Mofatta is one such woman. Today a lance corporal in the SPLA military police, Janet is a small woman with a cherubic face, who hails from the small Abukaya tribe of Western Equatoria. In 1996, she was 16 years old and working as a cook for an NGO, when she was arrested by the SPLA in her home town of Maridi while cycling to work. The five soldiers who arrested her took her to the SPLA camp where she was beaten with a stick and questioned about why she had not joined the SPLA. For Janet the reason was simple, she had never been asked to join, and since her NGO job provided a reasonable standard of living, she had never felt compelled to do so. Janet was forcibly recruited into the SPLA.

After being held for two days, Janet was allowed to go home to tell her family that she was joining up, and to collect her belongings. Janet’s uncle objected to her recruitment, but her parents agreed she should go. Although she had been subjected to harsh treatment, Janet claims that she wasn’t scared or angry. ‘The SPLA were my people and I was willing to go with them. They had taken me, so I wanted to see what they would do with me. I wanted to see it through’ (Interview, Janet Bulen Mofatta).

Janet was trained in Maridi for six months, and then taken to Moroto, Uganda for a further eight months. In Moroto, Janet was one of only 48 women among hundreds of men. She and the other women were expected to attain the same level of military skills as the men, including the use of small arms and artillery. At the end of this training period, Janet was upset to be told that her male colleagues were to be deployed for an assault on Yei, and that she and the other women would not be permitted to take part in the attack. Instead they would perform duties such as cooking and caring for the wounded.

I wanted to put into practice everything that I had been taught, and see it to the end. My aunt was also there with me and we decided that we had to go and fight with the men. We got up early the next morning, and said that we were going to collect water. But instead, we sneaked out of the camp and went on the road ahead. We waited until the company had passed us, then we followed them. (Interview)

By the time the two women were discovered, it was too late to send them back. So the leader of the force, Commander Gier Chuang Aluong (Minister of Internal Affairs at the time of writing), allowed them to continue with the group. The assault on Yei was carried out by three companies, each approaching the town from a different direction. According to Janet:

We arrived at five in the afternoon and began the attack. We had to dig ourselves into trenches for protection. When my AK became too hot to continue shooting I used the PKM machine gun instead. It was so loud it damaged my ear, and even today I sometimes can’t hear from that ear. All I could think was that I was there to kill and I prayed to God that I would survive. (Interview)

By 5:00 a.m. the following morning the SPLA had taken Yei and the remaining government forces had surrendered. Janet claims that not only were the women as brave and fierce as the men around them, but their presence actually spurred their male colleagues on. Brigadier Aluel Ayei Chath who, at the time of writing, was the most senior female officer in the SPLA, explains:

Women encourage men who are fighting, because if a woman is on the frontline it encourages him. If a man sees a woman on the frontline he will not be a coward, he will not feel like he can turn away from the enemy. When the women decide to die, the man cannot refuse, because later on after the war they will laugh at him. (Interview, Aluel Ayei Chath)

Janet’s performance in the assault on Yei did not go unnoticed. Although she was not permitted to return to the frontline, she worked closely with John Garang for the remainder of the war, travelling throughout South
Sudan. Aged 30, Janet was childless at the time of our interview and had only recently married. This is considered very late for a woman in South Sudan, and reflects one of the many impacts that the war had on women combatants.4

**Women in other armed groups**

Other armed groups in South Sudan did not have the same policy of keeping women away from the frontline. In areas where other armed groups were also active, more women took part in frontline combat.

Now in her sixties, Nyakal Kuech Duop has lived through both of Sudan’s wars. She is a formidable woman with an irreverent sense of humour, who commands great respect in the community. Born in Nasir, in Upper Nile State, Nyakal felt compelled to join the fight against the North because, ‘The Arabs called us dogs and treated us as dogs. It led to everybody going to war, including the women’ (Interview, Nyakal Kuech Duop).

Nyakal was 20 years old when she fled to the bush in Blue Nile State, with her husband and her baby strapped to her back. Her husband was killed in the fighting, and Nyakal remained in the bush, living under trees, sleeping in the open, battling with malaria and avoiding the regular aerial attacks. She and others like her lived among the fighters. At that time the boundaries between the roles of men and women became blurred. ‘Life at that time was very dangerous for everyone. The women were no different from the men. As women our duties in the field were different, but then so were the men’s duties. Everything was mixed’ (Interview, Nyakal Kuech Duop).

That Nyakal fought alongside her male companions cannot be doubted; she talks in detail about the weapons she used, and fluidly demonstrates how she handled them. Life that was already difficult became harder still in 1991 when the SPLA split into two factions. Coming from Nasir, Nyakal and her companions were loyal to Riek Machar, the challenger to John Garang’s leadership. When Machar’s attempt to take over the leadership of the SPLA failed, he formed a breakaway faction, which Nyakal became part of. According to Nyakal, the troops who were loyal to Machar struggled for resources, with reduced food and medical supplies. Nyakal described how she and her companions would hunt for food and sometimes go without for days. As Nyakal talks about these times her expression becomes clouded, and it’s clear that she finds some memories too difficult to recount.

After the war, the armed group that Nyakal belonged to was integrated into the SPLA as part of the Juba Declaration. Nyakal was transferred to the newly formed police service, and now serves as a police officer in Dording, a village near Nasir. Many women who, like her, were transferred from the SPLA to the police, wildlife, prison and fire services have expressed discontent as they did not choose to be transferred, and feel they have been pushed out of the military. Nyakal, on the other hand enjoys her new role. ‘It feels like a rest. Soldiers have no rest, not even in peacetime. But now I have a position of respect in the community and I can relax’ (Interview).

**Not frontline, but combatants all the same**

As stated previously, the vast majority of women were not involved in the war as fighters, but provided logistical and other forms of support roles such as cooking, carrying and caring for the wounded. As Brigadier Aluel Ayei Chath explains, however, the women who acted in these support roles were also considered combatants:

> When we were in the bush we divided the work into two. Three quarters of the ladies took care of the frontline soldiers, the children, the widows, orphans and disabled. A quarter of them were soldiers like me. The three quarters, they were civilians but they were also soldiers. At that time, everybody was a soldier – even if you are not trained, you are a soldier. You know how to look after yourself, you know which direction you are going to. Everybody was a soldier. (Interview, Aluel Ayei Chath)

A similar sentiment was echoed by almost all of the women interviewed. Even those who remained far from the frontline considered themselves fighters. As Joice Moyeta Monday, a woman from Central Equatoria explained:

> Even if you are young you can do something. You can grind sorghum. Your father and brother and husband have gone to the war, so if you remain at home looking after the family you are also fighting. You are taking care of the children and the people who are suffering. You dig the garden and take some to the war and some for the children. Some of us were really soldiers fighting
and some of us were looking after the children, but we are all soldiers, we are all fighting (Interview).

This expanded definition of ‘soldier’ or ‘combatant’ is shared by some men, though not by all. Anthropologists Sharon Hutchinson and Jok Madut Jok assert that in Dinka and Nuer culture, women are regarded ‘less fully as persons, or complete human beings’ and that this perception is magnified in ‘the context of militarised glorifications of the raw masculine power of guns’ (Hutchinson & Jok, 2002: 105). However, one attitude common among men is that, far from denigrating the supportive roles played by women, they agree that these contributions were essential to the war effort, and that they could not have survived without them.

In many respects, women’s daily routines during the war mirrored those of peacetime; they collected water and firewood, prepared food, cared for children and sustained the daily necessities of life. However, in addition, they also carried food, ammunition and medication to the frontlines, and would return with wounded combatants who they cared for, or had to bury if they did not survive. One of the most important roles for women was to clear up after a battle, and gather resources for their comrades. Ammunition stocks took priority, and several women interviewed claimed to have carried up to 50 kilograms of ammunition from the scenes of raids.

Although the majority of women served as cooks, carriers and carers, women also performed a variety of other roles, many of which were highly dangerous. For example, some passed themselves off as civilians and smuggled guns and vital medical supplies to fighters (Focus groups). Joyce Richard Piapia, an Azande woman, was about 20 years old, and living in Western Equatoria when she left for two years of training with the SPLA in Moroto, Uganda. Joyce and her female companions were by far the minority but learned all the same skills as their male counterparts. When the time came for them to be deployed, Joyce, too, was denied an opportunity to go to the frontline. Instead she was given the task of intelligence gathering. Posing as a trader, Joyce would travel to Khartoum in North Sudan to buy clothes, which she would then sell in South Sudanese villages. Throughout her travels, she would gather information that would be fed back to her father, who was a senior SPLA commander:

When you are a woman other women will make friends with you and be very open. In Khartoum I could make friends with the Ministers’ wives and they would just open their mouths automatically, and talk with another woman. In the villages I would sit with my children, and there you could learn what the people thought, what was happening, and who was moving from here to there. (Interview, Joyce Richard Piapia)

As with many of the other women who performed supportive roles, Joyce insists that she was as much a combatant as anyone who fought on the frontline, ‘I am not fighting with a gun, but I am fighting with my mouth’ (Interview).

Recruitment – a matter of choice?

Women joined the war for many reasons. Many joined because they agreed with the SPLA’s aims and ideology. Some joined out of desperation, as a means of ensuring their protection or survival in a country that was desperately poor, and where resources were scarce. Others joined because they were forced to. Joice Moyeta Monday was a 12-year-old girl in Central Equatoria when the soldiers came to her village:

They took my father, mother and elder brother with them to carry their equipment, so we remained alone at home. Later that afternoon the soldiers came back. Many of the children were alone without their parents, so the soldiers slept in our compounds. They told us they wanted to eat food. We had chickens and goats, and they started to slaughter and eat these things. Then there were no adults left to carry their things so they took us with them, we young ones. They left the very small ones at home. We were helping them because they were in trouble also. We carried their things and we stayed in the bush for four days without food and we suffered a lot. When my father returned home, I was not there so he started to follow where they had taken me. On the fifth day the soldiers left us to return back, but I was so tired I couldn’t reach home and I just waited in the bush. My father came and he found me and carried me back home. (Interview)
Joice went on to work for the SPLA. The story of her initial recruitment is familiar and is repeated by many women. Although her initial recruitment was forced, today she speaks dispassionately about the aspect of coercion, claiming that ‘it wasn’t a case of choice; at that time everybody had to do what they could’ (Interview).

Victoria Adhar Arop

Although women in the SPLA were prevented from taking part in frontline combat, that did not mean they were excluded from climbing the ranks. Victoria Adhar Arop’s outstanding contribution to the SPLA’s war effort saw her promoted to the rank of brigadier by the end of the war.

In 1982, as a widow in her 30s, Victoria, with her four children, undertook the three-month trek from their home in Wau, to a refugee camp in Dimma, Ethiopia. Once there, Victoria, a trained nurse, was tasked by the SPLA with looking after the camp for unaccompanied boys. She recounts:

There were 38,000 children. It was like Juba – but Juba is small in comparison! When I arrived it was in a terrible condition. There were no latrines, and the faeces were all over the ground, and the flies were spreading infections. So I and the other women began digging latrines, and teaching the children how to use them. We would dig them, and when they were full we’d cover them, and keep digging more. (Interview, Victoria Adhar Arop)

Victoria, who at that time carried the rank of sergeant, worked tirelessly to improve the conditions for the boys in her care, battling outbreaks of measles, meningitis and whooping cough. The special representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees who came to visit the camp was impressed by how self-sufficient the camp had become:

We had trained them [the boys] how to make bricks for building. They were taught how to make dressings, give injections and cook for themselves. They were very active. They went to get the grass for the roof of the huts, and to gather the firewood. (Interview, Victoria Adhar Arop)

Thousands of boys who lived in Dimma will always remember Victoria as the woman who transformed their lives. Abraham Awolich, a Dinka man who now runs a Sudanese NGO in the United States, recalls how he arrived at Dimma when he was eight years old, having left his family behind in Bor, in Jonglei State and walked, along with thousands of other boys:

By the time I arrived in Dimma I was very weak, with bruised feet from all the walking, and very emaciated. We almost starved on the road, and got sick from drinking dirty water. By the time we arrived, we were exhausted and very weak. We met Victoria on the second day. She was running the feeding centre which also had primary health care. I remember her explaining the kind of food we were going to eat [a high-nutrient mix provided by the US Agency for International Development]. We had never had food like that before and we were afraid to eat it. But she made us comfortable. (Interview, Abraham Awolich)

As the time passed, Abraham observes, Victoria became more than just the camp manager to the boys:

She was doing almost everything. The relationship that we had with her was one of a mother and her children. She did almost everything for us. She had a medical team that she organised. She selected some of the older children who came with us, and she trained them, and they were the ones who were actually doing the feeding. Some of them were cooking and giving it out, and she was there to monitor and supervise. That was her role. If you were in a serious situation she would take you in, and take care of you on a daily basis, give you individual attention. If a child got very sick Victoria would sometimes cry, but she was always very upbeat and energetic. I never saw her show a sign of being tired. But knowing now how it must be to look after so many children…But she didn’t want to show that. If she wasn’t there, there’s many of us who wouldn’t have survived. (Interview, Abraham Awolich)

Sickness and hunger weren’t the only dangers for the boys in Victoria’s care. She also had to protect her young charges, the oldest of whom were barely 16, from the SPLA soldiers who would sometimes come to the camp looking
to recruit the older boys. On those occasions she would steadfastly refuse the soldiers. However, knowing that they would return during the night when she wasn’t there, she would instruct the older boys to leave the camp, and spend the nights hiding in the forest. When the soldiers entered the dormitories, the sleeping boys they’d find were too young to take (Interview, Victoria Adhar Arop).

Victoria was a soldier at heart, and maintained a strong desire to take part in frontline combat. She finally persuaded John Garang to allow her to attend a training academy in Bongo, Ethiopia where she spent a year studying warfare with 539 other soldiers, six of whom were women. However, despite graduating seventeenth on the course, Victoria was denied frontline duty. Aged 41 at the time, she was told that she was too old, and would not be able to keep up. Instead, Victoria returned to a warm welcome at the boys’ camp back in Dimma.

When Mengistu’s regime fell in Ethiopia, the hospitality the refugees had experienced there soon evaporated, and anti-Mengistu rebels began attacking the refugee camps. Victoria organised the evacuation of the boys’ camp at Dimma, sending the older ones ahead on foot while she persuaded the UN to lend them vehicles to transport the youngest and sick children. The operation lasted for days. Victoria refused to leave the camp until all the children were out. They then began the perilous journey to the east of Jonglei State where Victoria had been instructed to take the children. Their destination, Pakok, was under the cover of trees, and would hide them from aerial attack. After spending several months in Pakok, the camp had to move again. It took Victoria several months to finally deliver her young charges to the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya.

However, that was not the end of Victoria’s contribution to the war effort. By this time promoted to the rank of captain in the SPLA, Victoria was given orders to lead a polio-vaccination campaign in Northern Bahr El Ghazal State, using vaccines provided by the UN. As the polio vaccines needed to be kept at temperatures below 10°C, this was no small task in a state without roads, and where temperatures can reach 50°C. With a squad of soldiers, Victoria spent the remaining six years of the war travelling throughout the state on foot, delivering the vaccination drops to children in remote villages, fastidiously keeping records of her work, while avoiding the aerial attacks by the Northern forces.

When the war ended, Victoria was elected as a representative to the South Sudanese Assembly. In 2005, she was promoted to the position of brigadier. Of her time spent during the war, she says, ‘Some people may say, “why were you promoted and you did not go to the frontline?” But I went to the frontline! That was the frontline’ (Interview, Victoria Adhar Arop).

After the war: disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration

In the past two decades, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) has become an integral feature of post-conflict reconstruction, and has been used in 60 countries (Muggah, 2009: 6). The UN DDR Resource Centre defines the purpose of DDR as follows: ‘Through a process of removing weapons from the hands of combatants, taking the combatants out of military structures and helping them to integrate socially and economically into society, DDR seeks to support ex-combatants so that they can become active participants in the peace process.’

Broken down into its component parts, disarmament can be described as the collection, documentation, control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons of combatants; demobilisation is the formal and controlled discharge of combatants from armed forces and armed groups; and reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status, gain sustainable employment and income and re-join their communities.

Previous DDR programmes have been criticised for their failure to address the needs of women, and much has been written on this subject since the early 2000s (see, for example, Bouta, 2005; De Watteville, 2002; Douglas & Farr, 2004; and Farr, 2002). This criticism is largely justified. In Sierra Leone, for example, the DDR programme initially adopted an approach that relied on combatants handing in weapons to be eligible for programme entitlements. However, since many female combatants did not have weapons, they were prevented from participating in the programmes and from receiving DDR benefits. Even when this approach was changed, the programme still focused on combatants, excluding women who had played supportive roles (Bouta, 2005). Similar problems have been encountered in several other countries. Furthermore, DDR programmes that have allowed
women to take part, have been criticised for limiting women’s reintegration training options to ‘sewing and sewing and sewing.’ Since many DDR programmes consider the restoration of security to be the principal focus, the inclusion of women in these programmes, and especially those who played supportive roles, is often viewed as being of secondary importance.8 This failure of DDR programmes to adequately provide for women was addressed in the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 of 31 October 2000, which, ‘encourages all those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependants.’

DDR practitioners planning for DDR in Sudan were very conscious of how previous programmes had failed women. UN Security Council Resolution 1590 of 24 March 2005 that established the mandate for the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS), expressly stipulated that assistance would be given for the establishment of a DDR programme that gave ‘particular attention to the special needs of women and child combatants’.

A brief history of DDR in South Sudan
The war in South Sudan officially ended in 2005 when the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed between the Government of Sudan and the SPLA.9 As part of the security arrangements provided for in the CPA, it was agreed that no armed group should be allowed to exist other than the two major forces, the SPLA and the SAF.10 Numerous armed groups throughout South Sudan opted to join the SPLA, and in total, approximately 50 000 members of other groups were accepted into the SPLA, and a further 16 000 were integrated into the police, prisons and wildlife services.11 This was significant because the other armed groups had many more female combatants in their ranks. There was, therefore, an unprecedented influx of women into the SPLA. At the same time, the SPLA began to pay salaries to its soldiers for the first time. Although payment was sporadic, and often delayed for months at a time, joining the army became an option for earning a living – an attractive prospect in a country that offers few economic opportunities.

A commitment was made in the CPA to conduct DDR in Sudan, and that the programme would be gender sensitive.12 While the CPA did not specify exact numbers to be demobilised, national institutions, the UN and the international community came to the decision that 182 900 candidates should access the DDR programme, with equal numbers coming from the SPLA and SAF (Vrey, 2009: 61). The CPA stipulated that the DDR process would be led by national institutions. International partners would play support roles only. In the South, it was decided that the SSDDRC would be the key organisation.

The DDR programme has been criticised for getting off to a slow start (Vrey, 2009). By 2009, although child soldiers and children associated with armed groups had begun the demobilisation process, the process for adults had not yet started. The slow progress has been blamed on many factors including delay in transfer of donor funds (Atem, 2009), infighting within institutions (Interview, UNDP staff member) and the need to start from scratch with regard to institution and infrastructure building (Interview, UNMIS staff member). A change in key personnel and a shift in programming saw DDR for adults finally being rolled out at the end of 2009, almost five years after the CPA had been signed (Vrey, 2009).

It was agreed that DDR would be carried out using a phased approach. The first phase targeted 35 000 candidates, and focused on special-needs groups (SNGs). According to the UN Development Programme’s Social Reintegration Team Co-ordinator, Esther Waters, SNGs include women associated with the armed forces (WAAF), elderly combatants, and disabled combatants (children being dealt with under a different stream) (Interview, Esther Waters). Interestingly, an SSDDRC leaflet also includes in its definition of SNGs, ‘women soldiers below the rank of officer’ and ‘non-combat support personnel who are on the SPLA payroll’.13

The candidates for DDR in South Sudan were not self-selecting; rather, lists were drawn up by the SPLA on the basis of agreed criteria. Although the SSDDRC and the UN contributed to the formation of the criteria, the SPLA alone drew up the final lists of DDR candidates. The lists included individuals who had been in other armed groups, and had joined the SPLA subsequent to the signing of the CPA.

Numerous organisations, including the United Nations and various other international agencies, have contributed to different aspects of the DDR programme. After being demobilised, DDR candidates receive livelihood
training, as well as basic literacy and life skills. The training period may last for three months, at the end of which candidates may be supplied with a small-business start-up package or other material to help them along their chosen career path (Interview, GIZ staff member). DDR candidates are entitled to a ‘DDR package’, which consists of SDG860 (SDG800 is provided in cash for the individual, and SDG60 is for transport to return home after demobilisation; the amount is approximately equal to US$360), plus non-food items with a (Juba) market value of about SDG500 (US$210), and a food ration to provide for a family of five for three months (Vrey, 2009: 64).

The slow start to the programme has caused frustration and hardship for many participants. However, despite the delays and frustrations, the female DDR participants interviewed were grateful for the material support provided by the DDR programme, and for the opportunity to develop their literacy and livelihood skills.

Women in the South Sudan DDR programme

At the start of the DDR programme, a needs assessment was conducted to assess the needs of women going through the process. The programme’s organisers made sure that there were female staff members at each site, that there was a separate space for women to congregate in, separate toilets and facilities for women, and that there were female-appropriate reintegration packages. At the reintegration training centres, childcare facilities have been provided so that women are free to take part in classes, and older children are permitted to sit in the literacy classes and study together with their mothers (Interview, Esther Waters).

As of February 2011, 11,022 people had entered the DDR programme. Of these 5,399 were women, meaning that an impressive 49 per cent of DDR participants in the early stages of the programme were women (UNDP, personal correspondence). This should not be a surprise considering that the programme defines female ex-combatants and WAAFs as part of the SNGs and therefore a priority for entering the programme. However, it is a stark and encouraging contrast when compared with DDR programmes that have taken place in other parts of the world. As Esther Waters put it, ‘The issue of women being included in our programme is not an issue’ (Interview).

To understand why so many women are going through the DDR process, it is necessary to understand the particular context in which the process is taking place. Firstly, the SPLA is not viewed, by itself or by the international community, as a guerrilla army that needs to be disbanded upon the signing of a peace agreement. On the contrary, they see themselves as having fought a just war, with the CPA having hailed the beginning of an interim period leading to the secession of South Sudan. The need of the new country to establish its own army, coupled with the continuing hostility between the North and South, and the uncertainty generated by this interim period, means that, at present, the SPLA has little interest in downsizing. In fact, the reverse is true (Small Arms Survey, 2011: 4). The Director of the SSDDRC, William Deng Deng, explained:

It is good for the two armies [SPLA and SAF] to reorganise themselves because they have to bring out a certain number who are not educated, who are old, who are women and children. You bring them out so you can replace them with educated young men. So it is a continuous thing in the world. Every army in the whole world they do that. Every two or three years they say ‘Okay, we have to replenish, taking these out and these in.’ So it is normal in post-conflict. You must have that. (Interview)

Secondly, although the SPLA hierarchy is wary of the sensitivities of the international community when it comes to egalitarianism and gender issues, there can be little doubt that it views DDR as an opportunity to shed a tranche of female soldiers. This is particularly the case for those who joined the SPLA after the signing of the CPA, as part of the integration of other armed groups (Benson, 2009).

Thirdly, since child-bearing is so highly valued in South Sudan, it is common for young women in the army to be pregnant or breastfeeding. This is another reason why the army is keen to remove them. In 2009, General Oyay Deng Ajak, the then SPLA Chief of General Staff remonstrated, ‘In an infantry unit, you get in one division, a brigade of women calling themselves SPLA. When they go to the parade you find a mother of five children with a crying baby on her back and an AK rifle in her hand. There is no army like this in the whole world’ (Benson, 2009: 5).
Hope, Pain and Patience

Gender and DDR specialist Vanessa Farr has warned about the possibility of DDR being used to dismiss women who may actually prefer to stay in the armed forces, ‘When demobilisation is voluntary or phased, women are likely to be over-represented in the troops that are instantly dismissed. This should not always be assumed to be their first choice, particularly in an environment where securing other paid work is difficult’ (Farr, 2002: 23).

Her analysis is confirmed in South Sudan where many of the women on the DDR programme have complained about being forced onto the programme against their will. As one interviewee said, ‘They don’t ask us whether you want to go here or there. They put the paper before you, and you have to follow it. If they say you have to go to DDR, you go to DDR. They gave us only SDG860 [US$360] last year at…[the demobilisation site]. Are you really going to survive up to now on that money? When you are looking after children, how are you going to survive?’

**What about the women associated with armed forces?**

The term WAAF was coined by DDR practitioners to define those women who were not combatants, but whose lives were intrinsically involved with, and dependent on, the armed forces. This involvement has to have been such that they were cut off from civilian support structures, and that a ceasefire may result in a complete change to their means of survival.17 UNMIS defines WAAF as women who ‘play non-combat roles within military that are essential to the maintenance of the armed group or force, including as informants, porters, informal health care providers, cooks, cleaners, and concubines’ (UNMIS, n.d.: 1).

However, the term WAAF has become confusing and contentious in South Sudan’s DDR programme. As illustrated in the preceding sections, most South Sudanese women who took part in the war, and performed the duties described above, would define themselves as combatants. Indeed women who performed these non-combat duties make up the majority of the women who are enrolled in the DDR programme as ‘ex-combatants’. Many have held ranks, and have demobilisation certificates signed by their commanding officers confirming their combatant status. In Lakes State, ten women interviewed, who were enrolled as ex-combatants, all described their roles in the army as wives, cooks, carriers and nurses. One United Nations Development Programme data collector confirmed that most women who were sent to the demobilisation centres as ex-combatants described their duties in the SPLA as cooks and carriers. Esther Waters from UNDP says, ‘The WAAF will always refer to themselves as female combatants, and I think they should be allowed to do that. There were female ex-combatants who never fought, and WAAF who did fight, so there are no clear distinctions’ (Interview).

Adeng Malok is the gender advisor for the SSDDRC. She recounts how, in 2007, she was assisting with the pre-registration process:

I kept asking ‘I need WAAF, I need WAAF’ and I explained to them what WAAF meant. Then on the third day some of the women were just hanging around and they came to me and said ‘Will you register us? We think we are what you’re asking for. We are the WAAF’. But their names were not on the list. So I took a different paper and I wrote a list, and I took the WAAF forms and noted ‘Not on the list but I believe they’re WAAF’. There was this particular man who was not on the list…he wanted to be an ex-combatant but the SPLA has not written his name. He started screaming and crying, ‘You cannot write these women down. They’ve been hanging around here. They have nothing to do. They just give birth. They go from man to man. They’re common prostitutes. (Interview)

The response of this man is not unusual. Esther Waters explained, ‘People can’t understand why, for example, a widow of someone in the SPLA is not eligible for DDR, but someone who had sexual relations with various soldiers is. It’s difficult in South Sudan because so many people are eligible’ (Interview).

The SSDDRC however insists that there is still a particular category of non-combatant women who were involved with the war effort, who need to be given special access to the DDR programme as WAAF. In 2010, in response to the confusion over who were WAAF and who were combatants, the SSDDRC and the UN drew up an identification checklist which would assist them in defining and identifying WAAF. It sets out the following criteria for being WAAF:18

- must not be on the military payroll
- must not be married or cohabiting or supported by her husband at this time
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- if widowed, must not be cohabiting and supported by deceased husband’s family
- must be over 18 years old
- must have been providing essential support services for the military
- must have been living in the barracks or within the immediate vicinity of the military
- must have been moving around with the military, and not residing with her community

The SPLA has been especially reluctant to identify with the notion of WAAF. Adeng Malok explains, ‘SPLA from the beginning has never accepted this term. They would say, “we didn’t have this. You are making our army look bad.” Even today they will not accept it’ (Interview, Adeng Malok). It seems that one of their main problems with the use of this term is the implication that the SPLA might have followed the practices of other notorious African rebel armies such as the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone, with regard to abducting women as sex slaves or ‘bush wives’. Such an inference is a grave affront to an army that considered itself to have high moral standards and a strict code of conduct regarding women, civilians and prisoners of war.

Dealing with stigma

One of the lessons learned by DDR practitioners throughout the world, is that women who have taken part in war may suffer from stigma when attempting to reintegrate back into their communities after the conflict is over. This stigma, coming from families and communities, is targeted both at those who have been combatants and those who played support roles. Vanessa Farr writes:

Women who have seen active combat are likely to be even more marginalized than other women in society under reconstruction: they do not occupy a position that can be easily reconciled with predominant gender ideologies, and so militarized women pose a unique set of challenges in the demobilization phase. (Farr, 2002: 8)

Some WAAF in South Sudan report that they have been made objects of scorn for being in the military. DDR planners in South Sudan have created activities in the reintegration phase of DDR that seek to address the stigma that may be attached to these women. One such activity takes place at a training centre in Juba, run by Lucy Arkello, known to all as Mama Lucy. In this programme, WAAF are trained in skills such as tailoring, cooking and food-processing. Half of the course participants are WAAF, and the other half are women from the local community. It is hoped that putting ex-combatants in contact with other community women, and giving all the women similar treatment will ease the reintegration of WAAF back into society. Awareness raising and sensitisation campaigns are also being run with communities to counter the effects of stigma.

It must also be noted that many women taking part in the DDR programme claim not to have experienced any stigma at all. Although their actions in joining the war were initially questioned, attitudes changed during the course of the war. Elizabeth Deu Aguin, the MP from Bor, remembers:

At the beginning they called us prostitutes. They would say, ‘Why are you running after men? Is it because your boyfriend has gone to the bush and you are running after him? You are now a prostitute.’ It was because they didn’t know what we were proposing to do. But after they saw what we did they respected us. Only if they see you later on, they will accept what you are doing. (Interview)

In South Sudan, the SPLA are viewed as heroes and liberators. Therefore the majority of women taking part in DDR are, as Esther Waters of the UNDP put it, ‘loud and proud’ about their involvement with the SPLA (Interview). Indeed, most of those interviewed declared that they would return to the army tomorrow if given the opportunity.

However, not all women who were involved with the SPLA or other armed groups find that their status has improved. A 2005 survey of WAAFs conducted by UNMIS found that many women who were associated with the military during the war were left destitute as a result of their involvement (UNMIS, 2005). A typical situation may be that a woman went along with the military to be with her husband but when he died, and without the means to return to her family, she was obliged to form a relationship with another soldier as a means
of survival. Such a union may have been considered a marriage by the woman, but the informality of the relationship meant that when the war finished, the man was able to abrogate responsibility for the woman and she, along with her children, was abandoned. Many women in such situations find it impossible to return to their families, and are obliged to struggle on alone. One woman interviewed for this chapter was unmarried when she joined the SPLA, and by the end of the war had four children. Returning to her home without a husband, and therefore with no bride price payable, she was rejected by her family and now survives alone. Sadly her case is fairly typical.

**Hopes for the future**

Life has changed since the end of the war. Some women interviewed for this chapter expressed a sense of loss related to the camaraderie they had enjoyed with their compatriots during wartime. They say that since the signing of the CPA, people in South Sudan are now more concerned with their own affairs. Most women are very happy to have peace. However, many feel let down by what peace has brought. In the words of ex-combatant, Celina Kukwa Sarafino:

> Over the radio we heard John Garang say that after the war there would be work for everyone and work for the ladies. But now they are downsizing the SPLA, and we are old and without education. We didn’t go to school and we didn’t get certificates. All the qualified teachers were at war or they had gone to refugee camps. We don’t have degrees, and we don’t have diplomas because we stayed in the country during the war. (Interview)

Almost every woman interviewed said that their biggest hopes were to have better futures for their children and opportunities for education.16 The thirst for education is potent among the women who went to war. It is called out for by the majority of women who are entirely illiterate, and by those who do hold qualifications but wish to extend their knowledge. Although 25 per cent of parliamentary seats have been reserved for women, many of those who took part in the war complain that these seats are being taken up by educated women who spent the war in the diaspora, returned to Sudan only after the signing of the CPA, and ‘have not spent one night in the bush’.

**Conclusion**

Few places in the world have witnessed as much suffering in the last few decades as South Sudan. Almost all the women interviewed expressed confidence that the forthcoming referendum would bring about an independent South Sudan and a happier, more prosperous life. Such confidence in the perceived panacea of independence is troubling, and raises the concern that these women may be let down once again by the next phase of their homeland’s troubled journey. However, the women who gave so many years of their lives to the war in South Sudan see their happiness as intrinsically linked to their country’s independence. When asked why she didn’t smile while having her photograph taken, Nyakal, the formidable fighter of Nasir who had survived two Sudanese wars explained simply, ‘I cannot smile until Southern Sudan is free’ (Interview, Nyakal Kuech Duop).

ENDNOTES

1 For a detailed history of the conflict and various factions, see (Johnson, 2003).
2 A 2002 report by the UK’s defence ministry claimed that muscle-strength, endurance and power are 30 to 60 per cent lower in women than in men (Ministry of Defence, 2002: 4). This argument is countered by Gunderson and Zeigler (2005) in Moving Beyond G.I. Jane.
3 This phrase was originally coined and used pejoratively by Jok Madut Jok (1999). Vanessa Farr (2002) describes this obligation being placed upon women in other conflicts throughout the world. See also Chapter 3, this volume for some of the unforeseen repercussions of this policy.
4 Barth highlights that this situation occurs in conflicts throughout the world; frequently the lack of children for female fighters is compounded and prolonged by ‘extreme life situations over long periods of time, disease, lack of health services, and lack of proper nutrition’ (2003: 41).
5 For a detailed history of DDR, see the ‘Introduction’ in Muggah (2009).
8 This quote is from a contribution to an online debate on gender and DDR. See <www.un-instraw.org/forum/viewtopic.php>.
9 Muggah (2009: 3) refers to those DDR programmes that focus on security as having a ‘minimalist’ approach, whereas those that also use DDR as an opportunity to enhance development are referred to as having a ‘maximalist’ approach.
11 CPA, Chapter IV, Security Arrangement 7(a).
12 Figures provided by Lt Gen Oyay Deng Ajak, SPLA Transformation Workshop, 23 March 2009.
15 Currency conversions in this volume reflect values as at August 2010.
16 Ibid.
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Female combatants in South Sudan’s civil war


UNMIS. 2005. Assessment of women associated with the SPLA and female combatants in the SPLA. Report prepared by Southern DDR Interims Authority, the UN DDR Unit, and the Southern Sudan Psychosocial Programme, Sudan, 7–30 October.

The woman cried ‘sibu ana, sibu ana’ (‘leave me, leave me’). The men did not stop. Instead they called her ‘sharamuta’ (‘prostitute’) and four men raped her. They beat her, hit her, kicked her. The smell of blood and alcohol filled the air.

This is not an unusual story. Many thousands of women were raped and sexually assaulted during South Sudan’s brutal civil wars. In the long years of war, when violence was a common feature of everyday life, sexual violence became pervasive, perpetrated against women from all sectors of the population by soldiers and civilians alike. The attacks were often violent, cruel and sadistic. Sexual violence became another layer of insecurity that plagued the lives of South Sudan’s women. It remains a terrible legacy of the wars.

Although much of this has improved since the signing of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the relative peace is tarnished by the fact that women remain unsafe. As in other post-conflict situations, high levels of sexual violence continue to sully the lives of women and girls, destroying the well-deserved sense of security that should have come with the end of the war. While some steps have been taken to prevent sexual violence becoming entrenched as a societal norm, these are insufficient. In a society that is
highly militarised, where guns and force are equated with entitlement and power, women remain at risk both inside and outside their homes.

Rape has devastating consequences, physical, psychological and emotional, for survivors, their families and entire communities. In addition, South Sudanese society stigmatises those who have been raped. The fear of such stigma promotes silence about rape, and discourages girls and women from seeking assistance. Their silence creates a culture of impunity in which perpetrators are able to violate women without being held accountable. Thousands of women in South Sudan suffer silently, unsupported, ashamed and carrying the long-term burden of these cruel acts into the future.

It is hoped that this chapter will contribute to ending this silence. The chapter describes the sexual violence that occurred during the civil war, locating this within the growing international phenomenon whereby rape is used systematically as a weapon of war. The ongoing sexual violence of the post-conflict period is explored, as are the factors that continue to make women vulnerable. It is argued that the basic and assumed inequality between men and women, and the shifts in sexual norms caused by the chaos of the war are primary drivers of sexual violence.

In a society that offers little support to rape survivors, and where health systems are sparse to say the least, sexual abuse creates particular problems and challenges, and these are outlined briefly in the chapter. Finally, civil and customary law operate concurrently in South Sudan, and although civil law should take precedence in cases of rape and sexual abuse, customary law tends to be more widely practised, often to the detriment of women, contributing to a culture of impunity for perpetrators.

The content of this chapter derives mainly from interviews and focus-group discussions held with women from various backgrounds. A number of women, local and foreign, were interviewed in local markets, and key-informant interviews were conducted with government officials, the staff of international and local NGOs as well as the staff of various UN agencies and the peacekeeping mission. Details of interviews and focus-group sessions cited are listed at the end of the chapter.

Rape as a weapon of war and its increasing use around the world

Sexual violence has always occurred in war. Throughout the ages and in every corner of the globe, where there has been war there has been rape. In the past, sexual violence was seen as an unfortunate by-product or ‘side effect’ of war. A drunken soldier would rape a local woman; a rowdy youth would take advantage of the lawlessness to have his way with a girl. Since time immemorial, soldiers have perceived rape as one of the spoils of war, much like looting.

However, the way in which sexual violence occurs in war seems to have changed in recent years. Evidence emerging from several conflict situations suggests that there has been a shift in the way that sexual violence is understood and carried out. What has become clear is that sexual violence is more often being used in an intentional, widespread and systematic manner. Put differently, rape is being used as a weapon of war (Buss, 2009).

Forms of sexual violence in conflict have varied: there were ‘rape camps’ in Bosnia; gang rapes by groups of child soldiers in Sierra Leone; abduction and sexual slavery (or forced marriage) in Liberia. Rape was used as an instrument of genocide in Rwanda and, at the time of writing, brutal gang rapes were being committed by the many armed groups operating in the Democratic Republic of Congo, each of which is thought to have a ‘signature rape’ which communicates to all that a particular group was in the area. In each of these conflicts, there is evidence that commanders encouraged sexual violence, instructing their men to rape female members of enemy populations. In other words, there is clear evidence of extreme and brutal forms of sexual violence being used intentionally as a means to achieve military objectives (see Buss, 2009; Nolen, 2005; Wood, 2007).

There are many reasons why armed groups might use sexual violence in this way, and why it is an effective strategy: Firstly, rape terrorises populations. If armed groups reach towns and villages, and violently rape all the women, word spreads quickly. Other communities will flee in advance, thus allowing armed groups to enter empty villages, encountering little resistance, free to pillage as they please. Secondly, rape is used to punish populations for supporting enemy groups, and to provide a disincentive to anyone tempted to provide such support. Thirdly, in traditional patriarchal societies, where a man’s role is understood to include the protection of women, raping women
is an effective means of communicating with men – as men suffer greatly as a result of their perceived failure to protect their wives and daughters. Rape, used in this way, is in effect men communicating with other men, using women’s bodies as a tool with which to do so. And finally, rape is cheaper than bullets, making it an effective weapon, particularly for poorly resourced armed groups (UNOCHA, 2008).

It is within this context that the high levels of rape that took place during South Sudan’s wars must be considered.

**Sexual violence during South Sudan’s civil wars**

Sudan’s two long civil wars (1955–1972 and 1983–2005) occupied nearly 40 of Sudan’s 54 years of independence from British rule, which ended in 1956. There is a general lack of information regarding the extent of sexual violence during the war. No comprehensive research has documented the extent of sexual violence during the long years of war, and existing studies have had limited sample sizes and contain little statistical analysis. There are, however, reports of rape being perpetrated by all of the different armed factions, and the Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment reports that many armed groups intentionally and routinely used rape as a tactic during the war (HSBA, 2008).

Interestingly, when John Garang formed the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) in 1983, he prohibited rape and enforced a code of conduct among troopers. The punishment for members of the SPLA found guilty of rape was death by firing squad, as stated in The Sudan People’s Revolutionary Laws, Punitive Provisions, issued by the SPLA in 1983. The SPLA prided itself on its policy of not harming civilian populations, and many rebel movements in Africa had been known to do. However, despite this policy, rapes by SPLA soldiers did occur (Human Rights Watch, 1993). Sometimes when soldiers knew they were to be transferred, they would rape women, safe in the knowledge that they would soon be leaving the area and were likely to escape detection and punishment (Jok, 2002). There is also evidence that soldiers believed that they deserved a sexual reward for the sacrifices they had made during the war, and that this gave them the right to take whatever they wanted (D’Awol, 2008).

Between 1991 and 1994, internal rivalries within the SPLA led to a split in the movement and for a few years the state of lawlessness and sexual violence increased markedly. Brutal intertribal fighting also led to an increase in sexual violence, which was used as a weapon between the warring tribal factions, and no woman was immune. The killing and violence aimed at women and children increased to a point where it could be said to have become standard practice (Jok, 1999).

Most of the women interviewed for this chapter reported that during the war they had either experienced rape themselves, or had family members and close acquaintances who had been raped. Lucia Kitali, for example, was 14 years old when she was raped by soldiers:

My sister is married to a soldier from Paulino Matip’s [troops] and I went to visit her. That day I did not find her there. I was on my way home and a friend of my sister’s husband, Baboya, helped me and said that he will walk me to the road. It was already late by then…about 8pm. Three other soldiers came and we were walking to the road. One of them said to Baboya to go and find me a motorcycle because it was too late to take a bus and they will stay with me.

As soon as Baboya was far, they pushed me into the bushes nearby. I was so scared I was screaming immediately. One of them hit me…then I was on the floor with two holding my arms and legs and they began to take off my trousers, and when I screamed again he hit me on my mouth and told me to stop or he will hit me again. Two of them held me down and one of them raped me, and when I screamed he hit me on my head. Then the other came on top of me and I screamed again, and he closed my mouth with his hand. Then the third one was coming and I fought so hard I escaped… I ran to a house with people with nothing on except my shirt and I could not speak. I could only cry and they kept asking me what happened, what happened… and I told them. (Interview, Lucia Kitali)

At a certain point in the war, a decision was made by the SPLA that women combatants should be kept away from the frontline. John Garang and the SPLA decreed that, as their contribution to the war effort, women should actively procreate to repopulate the society and make up for the millions of lives that were being lost (Jok, 1999). However, while creating a new ‘front’ on which women could contribute to the war effort, this decree also
created conditions for the wanton and unchecked abuse of women. With reproduction understood as a contribution to the war, sex was soon seen in this way too, leaving women sexually vulnerable to both enemy troops and their own husbands (Jok, 1999).

**Changing sexual norms and increasing sexual harassment**

Sexual norms and behaviours changed radically during the war years. Before the war, strict rules governed sexual behaviour. Communities enforced these rules, and violations were strongly censored by community pressure and influence. Much of this began to break down during the years of war. The mass displacement of people that happened during the war took millions away from their traditional homesteads and ways of life. Although, as mentioned in Chapter 1 of this volume, communities tried to cling to traditions as offering some order in the chaos, scattered communities could no longer exert the same level of influence, and customary laws and practices were forced to change as people’s increased mobility led to new sexual networks. Husbands, who were away at war for several years, sought sexual relationships in new areas, as did women who were displaced, widowed or left alone for years on end. Acute poverty led many into transactional or survival sex (see Chapter 4, this volume).

A key example of the ways in which the war impacted on traditional gender dynamics relates to the great value South Sudanese culture places on the ability to perpetuate one’s lineage. Before the wars, the protection of women and children, who were seen as ‘the pillars on which the ancestral line is built and maintained’ was of paramount importance (Deng, 2006: 13). However, while men’s responsibilities as the protectors of women and children were reinforced during the early stages of conflict, these later became ‘twisted into justifications for targeting these vulnerable groups within ‘enemy’ populations’ (Hutchinson & Jok 2002: 84). Some militant groups saw the killing of women and children as a legitimate tactic aimed at disrupting enemy lineages and preventing their future survival (Hutchinson & Jok, 2002). Rapes were perpetrated to impregnate women from enemy populations; that is, rape began to be used as a tactic to change the ethnic make-up of enemy groups from within (HSBA, 2008). This violence spiralled to still further extremes when the protectors later began to turn on their own women and children in an effort to prevent them from being impregnated or killed by enemy troops.

Many incidents of sexual violence were due to anger at the actions of opposing groups and their perceived supporters. According to Deng Tiel Kur, Chair of the Legislative Committee in the Southern Sudan Legislative Assembly, much sexual violence was prompted by revenge and retaliation, and the will to inflict as much pain and suffering on the enemy as possible (Interview, Deng Tiel Kur). However, the rapid changes in sexual norms and behaviours may have contributed to normalising high levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence.

It must also be noted that it was not just members of the armed groups who were guilty of rape; rape perpetrated by male civilians also increased. In enduring almost 40 years of conflict, South Sudan became highly militarised and traumatised. Militarised conceptions of masculinity developed, and masculinity became equated with the use of violence. This increased the levels of sexual violence against women (Hutchinson & Jok, 2002).

**Drivers of sexual violence in post-conflict South Sudan**

These shifts in sexual norms continue to be felt in South Sudanese society in the post-conflict era. A growing body of research has begun to show that heightened rates of sexual violence experienced in war do not disappear when the conflict ends. There are several examples of sexual violence increasing post conflict, or remaining at the high levels attained during war (see, for example, Jewkes, 2007; Meintjes, et al., 2002; and Mock et al., 2004).

While peace has officially prevailed in South Sudan since 2005, sexual violence continues unchecked and at extremely high levels. It is difficult to determine the actual extent of sexual violence because no research has been done that covers the country as a whole. Nevertheless, in a study conducted by the Small Arms Survey in Lakes State in February 2007, it was found that ‘more than one in ten households reportedly experienced a sexual assault’ and ‘one-third…involved a firearm’ (Garfield, 2007b: 2). According to a Gender Officer for UN Women (Interview, Joy Zacaria), South Sudan’s Ministry of Gender, Social Welfare and Religious Affairs has initiated a study on the prevalence of violence against women.

Several factors fuel sexual violence in South Sudan, some of which are outlined below.
Women’s status in society

Probably the key underlying cause of sexual violence is the fact that South Sudan is a deeply patriarchal society. Men are seen as the dominant gender and hold positions as heads of their families. Although Article 32 of the Interim National Constitution of Southern Sudan enshrines the ‘equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil, political, social, cultural and economic rights’, in general, women are seen as inferior to men, and South Sudan’s system of customary law entrenches inequalities between men and women. Domestic and other forms of gender-based violence are the norm, with physical reproach being seen as an acceptable means of punishing one’s wife.

These are precisely the conditions in which sexual violence thrives – sexual violence happens as a result of power relations that presuppose men’s control over women. The basic assumptions that tend to govern gender relations in South Sudan place women in lesser and subservient positions relative to their male counterparts, and stigmatise those who experience sexual abuse more than those who perpetrate it. It is these basic assumptions that facilitate violence against women.

Sexual violence in the home

Men’s positions as decision makers in families and communities, extends to the view that men determine whether and when to have sex, a situation that heightens women’s vulnerability to sexual abuse.

This was heightened during the war. The militarised masculinities that developed, coupled with the misuse of women’s wartime reproductive responsibility exacerbated the situation where husbands felt entitled to demand sex, using violence if they chose.

Both legally and culturally, married women in South Sudan cannot claim that they have been raped (Interview, Deng Tiel Kur). Section 247(3) of Southern Sudan’s Penal Code Act 2008, states that ‘Sexual intercourse by a married couple is not rape, within the meaning of this section’. Therefore an act of sexual violence that takes place within a marriage is not legally considered rape.

There are clearly times when non-consensual sex within a marriage should legally be considered rape, particularly when coupled with violence that falls under the various other provisions of the Penal Code, such as severe bodily injury and intimidation. Rape that is coupled with such violence can be prosecuted in terms of these other criminal provisions – but not as rape. However, the reality is that regardless of the levels of violence that women suffer in the home, civil courts rarely deal with these issues. Rather, they are dealt within families in ways that often fail to address the needs and safety of women. Community and family structures resolve the issue with regard to the well being of the collective, ensuring compensation and/or reconciliation, rather than by considering the protection and welfare of the main victim. Husbands are seldom punished or restrained from access to their wife, allowing acts of violence to be repeated. Family honour is thus prioritised over the protection of women.

It is not only within marriage that domestic sexual violence is a problem. Several women and girls interviewed reported that they had been sexually violated by other family members, neighbours and community members. Again, family and community reconciliation is commonly prioritised over the well being of the victim. Poni Elizabeth recounts:

It was Tuesday and I just came back from school at about two o’clock. No one was home yet; my mother went to the market as usual. I was starting the fire for the cooking and our neighbour called to me to come to his house. He lived only a few houses from ours. When I went, he told me to come in. I was not sure, but he was known to my family so I went in. Immediately he told me he wants me and he came to me. I was young, maybe 13 years. I did not know what to do, and I was very scared. Then he forced himself on me. I was crying, but he didn’t care, and I kept on crying and crying. When he finished he left me in the room and told me not to go. My father came back home and when my mother told him of what happened to me he got very angry with me and he beat me. Then he told me that I cannot stay in his house anymore and that I have to go back to the man’s house. I just remember begging him. I told him that he is my father, and I was sorry and I wanted to stay at home and be with my mother. But he took me back to that house. (Interview, Poni Elizabeth)

In practice, families or communities often choose to settle matters of sexual violence themselves, finding what they see as conciliatory solutions, rather than facing a civil or customary court process. These steps are taken in order to avoid the woman and her family having to face the public stigma that is linked
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with sexual abuse. One solution is that the victim is forced into marrying her rapist, a solution that clearly violates a host of women’s human rights.

Rape as a means to initiate marriage

Women in a focus-group discussion reported that in the years following the signing of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, women and girls became fair game for sexual harassment. According to the group, sexual advances are now made openly to women on every street corner, in bars, restaurants, offices and on the streets. The women in the focus group expressed the view that such sexual harassment and the increase in sexual violence are strongly related (Focus group, 5 August).

One of the outcomes of rape in South Sudan is that girls can be compelled to marry their rapists – often as a step towards reconciliation. One of the reasons for this is that women who have been raped become less eligible for marriage, and are considered ‘tainted’ or unmarriageable (Mennen, 2008). A participant explained, ‘In our tribe, the Bari tribe, when a girl is raped, she has no choice anymore and she has to marry him, also because they try and make it public. There will be no love, but she herself will accept the man because no other man will accept (to marry her).’ (Focus group, 5 August).

Participants in the focus group went on to explain that when a man is interested in a woman, and the woman does not reciprocate his interest, the man can rape the woman and compel her to marry him. One woman reported that after a woman had rejected a man’s advances, the man said to the woman, ‘I can just force you and you will be mine and there is nothing you can do.’ Most of the focus-group participants stated that they, a family member, or a person that they knew had been raped and made to marry the rapist. One woman stated she could name up to thirty women in this situation. One elderly Latuka woman summed up the situation this way:

Rape is an aggression used to get a woman that does not want a man. It is an aggression against the woman, because he can do it and that is why they always do it. He forces her to be with him by taking away her choices and the result is an unhappy marriage and violence. Many men keep on forcing women after that, which means that they just enjoy having the control over women and not just because they need to get married. (Focus group, 5 August).

Focus-group participants explained that when a woman has been raped, the bride price that she can demand is reduced. Sometimes, young men who cannot afford the bride price force the situation, so that the girl and her family have no choice and no ability to bargain, and the bride price is lowered (for more on this, see Chapter 1, this volume).

Apart from marriage, other conciliatory solutions include compensation from the family of the rapist to the family of the victim – a solution that is seldom of any benefit to the victim herself. In all these instances, the perpetrator is not punished criminally, and does not receive jail time or a fine, thus increasing perceptions of impunity. Unfortunately, as discussed below, neither of South Sudan’s legal systems adequately protect women from such abuse.

Ongoing insecurity

Although the country is no longer officially at war, insecurity, death, displacement and violence have continued in South Sudan in the post-war period. This ongoing insecurity is a major contributor to the continuing violence against women.

Three studies on violence and victimisation in the post-conflict period, (carried out in Lakes State, Jonglei and in Central and Eastern Equatoria) confirm that insecurity is still a dominant reality in South Sudan (Garfield, 2007a, 2007b; Schomerus, 2008). In 2009 alone, more people were killed in South Sudan than in Sudan’s Darfur region, where an active war is still ongoing (Rice & Tran, 2010).

The population of South Sudan is still heavily armed. This directly affects women’s security, with a high number of sexual assaults involving weapons. Poorly managed attempts at addressing the proliferation of weapons have been counterproductive. For example, the badly run ‘civilian disarmament’ process, which was aimed at decreasing the number of arms circulating among the civilian population, had devastating effects on certain communities that were unready for it and unwilling to co-operate. Successful civilian disarmament requires that civilians be disarmed simultaneously, something that those implementing this campaign failed to do. Once enforced in one area, neighbouring communities used the opportunity to raid the cattle of those communities that had been disarmed. Severe unrest broke out (Garfield, 2007a). Jonglei, Eastern Equatoria and Lakes States
were the most extreme cases, with civilian disarmament leading to large-scale fighting and a high number of deaths. According to gender equality activist and member of Southern Sudan’s Legislative Assembly, Beatrice Aber (Interview), aggrieved parties abducted women and children during this time, subjecting them to sexual violence and abuse.

Cattle rustling has also increased since the end of the war. When coupled with the high proliferation of arms still prevalent in communities, cattle rustling has become deadlier and more politicised. Inter-tribal clashes have also continued, often the result of disputes over resources such as land and water (HSBA, 2007). In this context, women become pawns in the hands of warring communities, being abducted and often raped by cattle raiders and fighting tribesmen. Inevitably, further retaliatory raids and abductions then occur (Schomerus, 2008; Interview, Deng Tiel Kur). In 2009 for example, hundreds of women in Jonglei State were abducted in retaliatory attacks between the Lou Nuer and Murle communities.

Large-scale rape and killing of women and children took place. Reconciliation conferences followed, but not only were women not invited to participate in these forums, but the issue of abductions was never acknowledged. Representatives focused only on stolen cows and guns. Women who had been abducted were returned home as part of the solution. However, the perpetrators were not held accountable for their actions, and in particular were not made to account for acts of sexual violence against abducted women (Interview, Beatrice Aber). Since the end of 2009, there has been a decrease in such incidents.

Poverty and the high cost of living
The influx of aid workers, investors and developers into the highly undeveloped South Sudan, has had a dramatic effect on the economy in the years since the war. Given the lack of industry and road infrastructure, almost all goods have to be imported into South Sudan as little is manufactured there. This has resulted in an extremely high cost of living, with prices becoming extremely inflated. Unemployment rates are high, and there are limited employment opportunities, leaving many desperately poor.

The cost of living has made life extremely difficult for poorer women in South Sudan. The sudden and significant spike in the costs of meeting basic needs has left many women unable to support themselves and their children.

This has made women dependent on men regardless of how abusive the men might be, leaving women open to repeated sexual violence within domestic situations, and unable to challenge this due to their financial dependency.

Poverty and the high cost of living also forces women into situations where they are vulnerable to attack, such as working in markets or in distant fields. In addition, a large number of women have been forced into prostitution and transactional sex and sexual violence against commercial sex workers is rife (D’Awol, 2008; see also Chapter 4).

Sexual violence and foreign women
The changes in South Sudan’s economy, particularly the presence of large-scale foreign development and investment, have also attracted a huge influx of women from neighbouring countries into South Sudan. Many of these women are desperately poor, have few social networks and often find themselves in particularly vulnerable situations.

Anti-foreigner sentiments are strong in South Sudan. The derogatory term, ‘Wei Weis’, meaning ‘You’ in Swahili, is often used to address non-Sudanese who originate from neighbouring East African countries. The term is dismissive and implies that these people do not matter. According to one South Sudanese market trader, many South Sudanese complain that foreigners from East African countries come to South Sudan to take their jobs, bring HIV, seduce local men and to steal married men from their Sudanese wives (Focus group, 8 August). As a result, foreigners are subjected to violence and aggression and receive little sympathy or assistance from local people.

Sophia Kia, a 45-year-old Ugandan trader, tells her story:

I was a trader in Juba [Southern Sudan’s capital city]. I used to sell fruits and vegetables. Sometimes I wash clothes and business in Juba is okay, anything can bring money. I work in Juba since 2007 because of my children here in Uganda. I have four children. My first-born is almost 21 and my youngest is 7 years. I work and send to them the money.

But Juba is not good. That day me and my friend we were coming from the market. I gave a lot of money to my brother who was coming back [to] Uganda. We were with him at his place. On the way coming back to our
Many foreign women earn a living as sex workers in Juba and a high proportion of South Sudan’s sex workers are foreigners. Foreign sex workers are subjected to high levels of sexual abuse and violence. For example, in one interview conducted, a man reported that he recently witnessed a soldier pay about $1002 for a few hours with a foreign woman, which he paid in advance. The client was unsatisfied by the woman’s performance so he called his soldiers to all have their way with her. The woman was gang raped by ten men (Interview, SPLA soldier, 8 August).

The high proportion of foreign sex workers, has created a perception that foreign women come to South Sudan to work in the sex industry (Focus group, 8 August). While it is true that some do come specifically to engage in the sex trade, many more come to find jobs, trade or start businesses – most of the produce in the markets in Juba comes from Uganda. The implications of this false perception on male attitudes and women’s vulnerability are significant, and can be seen as a contributory factor to the high levels of sexual violence experienced by foreign women.

Foreigners who fall victim to sexual violence tend to receive even less assistance and support than South Sudanese women. Sophia Kia’s story recounted earlier illustrates this. After she and her friend had been gang raped, another man approached and the rapists ran away. On asking their names, their rescuer realised that the two women were not from South Sudan and he then backed off, telling them to go away and offering them no further assistance. The next day the two women boarded a bus and returned to Uganda (Interview, Sophia Kia).

When foreign women report sexual violence, they get little relief from the police or the justice sector. When asked whether she thought about reporting the incident to the police, one Ugandan rape victim replied, ‘No. I don’t have “walaga” (immigration papers) and I cannot go to the police to report this. So I came back to Uganda. At the border we paid a fee and came into Uganda.’ (Interview, anonymous Ugandan woman).

Sometimes prejudices against foreigners are even used to justify harmful acts against local women. Some South Sudanese women have attested to being beaten and raped while being called a ‘Wei Wei’. The men then claim that they did not realise that the women were Sudanese and would not have committed these acts if they had known (Focus group, 8 August).

Alcohol abuse
Research from around the world has linked alcohol abuse and sexual violence. In the years since the war, levels of alcohol abuse have risen steadily in South Sudan.

Women in a focus group reported that in most rape cases that they knew of, the perpetrators, including husbands, family members, military and strangers, had been under the influence of alcohol. In another focus group, participants reported that men in uniforms harass them, particularly when they are intoxicated. One of the women interviewed in Juba said:

My husband gets drunk; he comes home and beats me up for no reason and sometimes he sleeps with me by force. When the children cry for me, he
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turns on them and beats them up saying, ‘Do you think I am not your father that you only cry for her!’ One day he beat me so badly, I went to report him to the police. They told me this is a domestic case and that I should just go home and stay there. (Interview, Poni Elizabeth)

The effects of sexual violence

It is well known that sexual violence devastates victims, and can have significant, long-lasting physical, psychological and social effects. In a country such as South Sudan where the health and social systems have been devastated by war, those who survive sexual violence often have nowhere to turn for medical assistance or other forms of support.

Physical effects

Rape usually involves several physical injuries including broken bones, cuts, bruises and genital such as including vaginal tearing. When children or elderly women are raped, the risk of serious physical injury is even greater. Outside of urban centres, health services are scarce and poorly resourced. This means that, even if they are willing to seek help, many victims of rape are not able to access medical attention.

One particularly terrible consequence of violent forms of rape is traumatic fistula:

Traumatic fistula is an abnormal opening between the reproductive tract of a woman or girl and one or more body cavities or surfaces, caused by sexual violence...It is a result of direct gynaecologic trauma, usually from violent rape, mass rape, including forced insertion of objects such as gun barrels, beer bottles and sticks into a woman's vagina. The brutal rape can result in genital injury and can lead to the formation of a rupture, or fistula, between a woman's vagina, her bladder, rectum, or both. (Americans for UNFPA, n.d.)

There has been no comprehensive survey of the prevalence of fistula cases in South Sudan, but it is reported to be high, although many cases are also caused by birth complications. At the time of writing, there were no doctors in South Sudan who could treat fistulas, despite the fact that the surgery required is relatively simple. According to Jessica Gorham, Gender Advisor for the UN Population Fund (Interview), doctors are sometimes brought in from outside the country to deal with these cases, but the demand far outweighs the need.

Rape also brings the risk of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. The risk of contracting HIV during coerced sex is far higher, as forced sex makes genital injury and trauma more likely (De Waal et al., 2009). Adolescent girls are especially susceptible to contracting HIV through rape, because their vaginal mucous membranes haven’t acquired the cellular density that develops later, and which provides something of a barrier to HIV.

In cases of rape, HIV infection can be prevented through post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), a course of antiretroviral drugs that must be started within 72 hours of exposure to the virus. PEP is available in teaching hospitals in Juba and Wau, and at a few other sites. However, there are large parts of the country where PEP is not available, and women have no access to this crucial protection. Information about the availability of PEP is extremely limited.

Rapes sometimes result in pregnancies, which bring a range of physical, psychological and social consequences for both the mother and the child. The rate of pregnancy as a result of rape in South Sudan is unknown.

Psychological effects

Even with immediate support, the psychological effects of rape can be terrible and can persist for years. Unfortunately there is little psychological or psychosocial support available for victims of sexual violence in South Sudan.

Immediate psychological effects may include unpredictable and intense emotions, jumpiness, nightmares, difficulty concentrating and affected appetite. Many suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder following a rape, which gives rise to depression, low self-esteem and may lead to victims having suicidal tendencies.

Studies have suggested that survivors of sexual violence are more likely to put themselves at increased risk of abuse later in life, are more likely to engage in unprotected sex, have multiple partners and to abuse substances. All of these behaviours also place them at increased risk of HIV infection (De Waal et al., 2009).
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Social effects
As discussed earlier, high levels of stigma are directed at victims of sexual violence in South Sudan. Victims are often blamed for what occurred. Fearing this stigma, many rape victims chose to remain silent. Families weigh up the need to punish abusers with the social cost of disclosure, and in the end often opt to protect the victim and the family’s reputation (Interview, Deng Tiel Kur).

The silence maintained by rape victims reinforces perceptions that men can rape with impunity, and it often exacerbates the victim’s health or emotional problems.

How women cope
When women were asked how they cope with sexual violence, they replied that they cope because ‘there is nothing else we can do’. Sexual violence is so common and is experienced by such a large majority of women that women think less of why they face the abuse and focus more on surviving from day-to-day, caring for their children and fulfilling their many responsibilities (Focus group, 5 August).

There are no shelters for abused women in South Sudan. Cultural and social solutions provide little emotional or psychological support for victims. Women have little or no understanding of their rights and tend to accept sexual violence as the norm (Fitzgerald, 2002). It is crucial that women be empowered to understand their rights, and to address the way that cultural norms and values, which traditionally prevented sexual abuse and violence, have been eroded and corrupted by the war, leaving gender relations in disarray and women in extremely vulnerable positions.

Sexual violence and South Sudan’s legal systems
Two parallel legal systems operate in South Sudan: civil law and customary law. Having said that, each ethnic group has its own customary laws which differ from region to region and from community to community, so in some ways it is misleading to talk of a single system of customary law. However, broadly speaking, it is true to say that both bodies of laws have legal authority, operate in different ways, and are supposed to govern different substantive areas, working alongside each other, each with their own particular purview.

Gender equality is protected by civil law. Article 20(1) of the 2005 Interim Constitution of Southern Sudan, the highest ranking piece of civil legislation, affirms that ‘women shall be accorded full and equal dignity of the person with men.’ However, Article 174(1) of the Interim Constitution also states that ‘The institution, status and role of traditional authority, according to customary law, are recognised under this Constitution’ and Article 175(1) states that ‘Legislations of the states shall provide for the role of traditional authority as an institution at local government level on matters affecting local communities.’ Justice of the Supreme Court of Southern Sudan, Reuben Madol, admits that this has led to complications and contradictions, because customary law does not recognise that men and women are equal before the law. The laws and remedies applicable to rape also differ in statutory law and customary law. Technically, if there is a contradiction between the two bodies of law, statutory law should prevail (Interview, Reuben Madol). In reality, this is not what usually happens.

Certain accepted cultural practices in South Sudan do contradict the civil law. For example, in terms of Article 247(2) of the 2008 Penal Code Act, a person below the age of 18 cannot give consent to sexual intercourse. Intercourse with someone under this age is thus defined as rape, and is punishable with a fine and a prison sentence not exceeding 14 years. However, in practice, early marriages (which include sex) are a common and accepted occurrence. This is one example of the way in which the law does not align with common practice in the country. Part of the problem is that statutory laws are being drafted and passed by parliamentarians who are not necessarily well equipped to understand the implications of these laws. In a context where women are not empowered to know their rights, and cannot use statutory law to defend themselves against outdated or discriminatory customary practices, such inconsistencies add to a culture where citizens tend to disregard the statutory laws, particularly where these pertain to sexual offences.

Serious crimes such as sexual violence are supposed to be dealt with using civil law, and the 2008 Penal Code Act in particular. According to Article 247(1) of the Penal Code Act, sexual intercourse without consent is considered rape. The punishment for the offence of rape is 14 years imprisonment, and the perpetrator may be liable for a fine. Civil law holds that perpetrators are to be punished and tried for sexual violence and that
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the protection of the woman is a paramount consideration.

Customary law plays a major role in South Sudanese society and governs all aspects of family life, cultural life and traditional events. As mentioned, customary laws differ from region to region and from community to community, and are not codified, that is, they are unwritten and change over time in response to changing circumstances. Customary law strives to make all members of society abide by the principles of peaceful co-existence. The ideals of unity and harmony in community relations are central (Deng, 2005). Unfortunately, customary law does not serve the interests of women, and in particular women who have been victims of sexual violence.

Customary law deals exclusively with the civil aspects of offences and ignores the criminal aspects, focusing more on compensation and reconciliation than on punishment. Customary law does not focus on the protection of the victims, leaving them and other potential victims at risk. Many argue that customary law trivialises the pain, trauma and the negative consequences that victims of sexual violence suffer, and adds to the culture of impunity.

Customary courts are presided over by chiefs or traditional leaders. Most of the chiefs that preside over the disputes are men, and most of them hold conservative views on the roles and rights of women in the community. Culturally accepted gender inequalities prevent these courts from really addressing sexual violence. They fail to adequately protect women or provide mechanisms for redress, particularly those that would be significant enough to act as a deterrent (Mennen, 2008).

In general, community reconciliation is valued more highly than the well being and protection of the individual. Thus, in situations of domestic sexual abuse, couples are often instructed to reconcile and work things out, and this takes priority over the future safety of the victim. In situations of rape, if compensation is ordered, it is often made payable to the family rather than to the rape victim. For example, Mennen (2008: 14) cites two rape cases heard in Lainya Customary Court, which ordered one perpetrator to pay SDG500 (US$180) to the husband of the victim, and in the case of an unmarried woman, SDG300 (US$110) was paid to the parents of the victim.

Although civil law should deal with sexual offences, the reality is that few cases of sexual violence appear before any courts or authorities. Of the tiny number that do, by far the largest proportion is decided using customary courts and customary law. Part of the reason for this is that the majority of South Sudanese people, particularly those in rural areas, have no knowledge of the civil law system. The civil law system lacks both infrastructure and capacity; civil courts are simply not accessible to most people, particularly outside of urban areas. High Court Judge, Abraham Majur Lat, concedes that in most places, judicial structures are only just being established and do not yet function effectively (Interview, Abraham Majur Lat). Many smaller towns and rural villages have court buildings, no electricity and a shortage of basic supplies such as stationery, making it difficult to operate a functional court. There are severe shortages of trained personnel in the civil court system, including judges, clerks, lawyers and legal-aid services. Therefore, outside of the major urban areas, the formal court system is largely unavailable, and cannot adequately fulfil the important role of prosecuting and sentencing perpetrators of sexual violence. In this context customary law tends to be the only practical option for dispute resolution. In some situations, customary laws and customary courts are evolving in a way that combines customary and statutory elements (Mennen, 2008).

Law enforcement and the sense of impunity

The fact that sexual violence is seldom prosecuted and punished allows perpetrators to act with impunity. Where perpetrators know that they can act in this way and face few consequences, they continue to do so freely. Such impunity is a major factor in sexual violence, and the law and the state are simply failing to act as a deterrent.

Quite apart from the role of the customary and civil courts, the police and law enforcement is weak and limited in South Sudan. One of the problems is a lack of training. According to the Security Arrangement Protocol in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, members of other armed groups were integrated into the SPLA after the ending of the war. As a result, tens of thousands of poorly trained and undisciplined soldiers were integrated into the SPLA. As part of the security-sector reform process, the SPLA had to be downsized and transformed from a guerrilla force into a conventional professional army (D’Awol, 2008). Paul Mayon, Southern Sudan’s Minister of Internal Security, explains that soldiers were demobilised in large numbers and shifted into the other institutions, including the police and prison services. As a result, a number of poorly trained personnel were integrated into the police (Interview, Paul Mayon). And, as one Human Rights Officer
from the United Nations Mission in Sudan put it, poorly trained police 
lack an understanding of human rights, leading to a weak administration of 
justice (Anonymous interview).

According to Ester Issac Baya, a police officer in one of Juba’s police 
stations, special protection units were created in 2010 in an attempt to 
provide women and children with direct access to police officers who are 
trained in and aware of their special needs and rights. These units aim to 
provide a range of interventions including legal aid and protection, medical 
care, psychosocial support and counselling. Staff at these units will be 
trained in how to deal with sexual offences (Interview, Ester Issac Baya). 
Unfortunately, the establishment of these units has been slowed by a lack 
of police capacity. At the time of writing, they had not yet been established 
in all police stations in the capital city, nor were they available in large areas 
outside of Juba (Interview, Jessica Gorham).

Police should be the first point of contact for victims of sexual violence. 
Unfortunately, most of the police in South Sudan are insensitive to the 
needs of women who have been victims of sexual violence. Women in a 
focus group discussion in Juba said that reporting domestic abuse (including 
marital rape) to the police does not usually lead to issues being resolved. 
Police officers tend to refuse to deal with these matters, saying that 
domestic issues do not fall under their jurisdiction (Focus group, 5 August). 
In interviews, women explained that when they have tried to report sexual 
violence cases to the police, not only are the cases not taken seriously, but 
the women are blamed for the incident, and some had even been arrested 
for adultery (Focus group, 8 August). Male police in particular tend to be 
sensitive, blame victims, or fail to understand the acute sensitivity of a 
post-rape situation. An insensitive response from police can be a significant 
disincentive to women reporting sexual violence, hence contributing further 
to the sense of impunity enjoyed by perpetrators.

Signs of hope

In the years following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, 
South Sudan has attempted to improve the conditions for women. The 
Interim Constitution of Southern Sudan enshrines the rights of women 
under Article 20, and mandates at least 25 per cent representation of women 
in all levels of government. It also guarantees equal rights to women and men, 
although this is somewhat compromised by the constitutional recognition 
given to customary law. The Southern Sudan Legislative Assembly has 
enacted several other laws, many of which have important implications for 
women’s rights.

Government institutions that will play a crucial role in the promotion 
of women’s rights have been developed. The government of Southern 
Sudan has established a Ministry of Gender, Social Welfare and Religious 
Affairs which also operates at state level, and is tasked with the promotion 
of women’s rights. It has appointed a presidential advisor on gender and 
human rights whose role is to advise the president on gender issues and to 
keep the president abreast on this issue. According to Abuk Payiti, former 
member of parliament, there is a gender committee within the Southern 
Sudan Legislative Assembly that tries to ensure legislation that is passed 
through parliament is gender sensitive. Progress has also been made in the 
establishment of independent commissions, including the Southern Sudan 
Human Rights Commission, which is tasked with promoting and protecting 
the rights of the people of South Sudan, and this includes monitoring 
violations of women’s rights (Interview, Abuk Payiti).

However, despite these important steps, the high levels of sexual 
violence in South Sudan, suggest that significant strides need to be made 
before women’s rights are a reality in South Sudan. Until women are both 
socially and economically empowered, and inform themselves of their 
rights, national laws and mechanisms will have little effect on women, and 
the disjunctures between the local and national levels, and the statutory 
and customary systems will persist. Many argue that inadequate steps have 
been taken to tackle gender equality at the local level, with the result that 
few changes are actually felt by women on the ground. Women’s status in 
society remains low, and the means by which women can seek protection 
and redress for violations remain inadequate.

Conclusion

Given the significant role that gender inequality plays in fuelling sexual 
violence, the promotion of women’s rights and the improvement of women’s 
status in society is an important step in combating sexual violence. The
culture of violence created during the war, continues to manifest itself in  
high levels of violence against women in the post-conflict period. This must  
be tackled in the new South Sudan. Until each person, and in particular each  
woman, is secure, it cannot be said that there is true peace in South Sudan.  

ENDNOTES  
1 Unless stated otherwise, all translations in this chapter are from Arabic as spoken in Juba, South  
Sudan.  
2 Currency conversion in this volume reflects values as at August 2010.  

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FOCUS GROUPS  
Women from various tribal backgrounds, Juba, 5 August 2010  
Women traders, Juba, 8 August 2010
If you can’t use your hands to make a living, you also have a vagina you can use. It is just another part of your body that serves as a means to an end (Focus group, 14 August).

During the long years of South Sudan’s wars (1955–1972 and 1983–2005), many thousands of women were driven into commercial sex, as all other means for survival, protection and support disintegrated. Women traded sexual services for money, food or protection in a bid to stay alive.

In the post-war period too, with endemic poverty, limited economic development, and few income-earning opportunities, many women are still forced to sell sex to survive. Sex workers in post-war South Sudan are an extremely vulnerable group. Their work is difficult, often dangerous, and involves substantial health risks. Sex workers earn extremely small amounts, working long hours in unpleasant conditions. They cannot rely on the support and protection of the state, and are often harassed, attacked and even raped by police. For most, there are few realistic prospects of finding alternative employment.

In this chapter, an attempt is made to offer some insight into the commercial sex trade in Juba, the capital of South Sudan. It describes the lives of sex workers in the city, focusing partly, but not exclusively, on the
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stories of three women – exploring their experiences and documenting the problems and challenges they face. Although each sex worker’s story is unique, the three short biographies that follow paint a picture of the commercial sex industry in Juba, and describe some of the typical sequences of events that lead women into this life. The chapter then provides an account of conditions in the main brothels in Juba. This is followed by an analysis of the drivers of prostitution in South Sudan, including a brief profile of the sex workers’ main clients. The particular challenges faced by sex workers in Juba are described, including responses to them by police and other state officials. Finally, issues of child prostitution and human trafficking are briefly considered, and some suggestions are offered on the priorities for those wishing to assist sex workers in South Sudan.

Little action has been taken to improve the lives and circumstances of Juba’s sex workers, and at the time of writing, nothing was being done to assist them to find or create viable alternative employment. One reason for this is the scarcity of research on the industry and the people in it. It is hoped that, in highlighting the realities experienced by some of these women, this chapter will play a role in accelerating the provision of assistance to sex workers in the city, and in South Sudan as a whole.

Methodology

While researching this chapter, female researchers visited four of Juba’s brothels, where they conducted interviews and focus groups with over a hundred women and girls in July and August 2010. Those interviewed were asked about their backgrounds, the circumstances that led them into sex work, and about their lives and experiences as sex workers. They were asked about their working conditions, their problems, their health, violence that they experience, and how police and other state officials treat them.

To maintain the privacy and safety of respondents, the names of all sex workers quoted have been changed. Where necessary, key details in their life stories have also been altered to ensure that there are no negative legal consequences for them. Other details about the interviews cited are provided at the end of the chapter.

Conducting this research was challenging for several reasons. Firstly, since commercial sex is illegal in South Sudan, the brothels are guarded and protected by their owners. Although one of the researchers lives in Juba, and regularly works with child sex workers, gaining access to brothels was not easy. ‘Lodge owners’ or ‘supervisors’ – that is, brothel owners and pimps – had to be identified and their permission had to be obtained before the researchers were allowed entry. In one instance, the researchers were severely threatened by lodge supervisors and clients, who suspected the researchers of trying to persuade the girls to leave sex work. Fortunately, the situation was defused, and the research was able to continue.

Secondly, language was an obstacle, particularly when interviewing Sudanese sex workers who did not speak English. At times, male translators had to be used. This complicated the interviews, as respondents did not always feel safe answering questions. Thirdly, as researchers it was difficult to maintain a scientific and objective distance when confronted with the utter desolation and horror in which these women and girls live and work. Finally, almost no other research has been conducted on the sex trade in South Sudan, so the bulk of this chapter is based on the authors’ fieldwork, and supported by more general academic writing on the issue of prostitution.

Prostitution in Juba

In 1972, prostitution was made illegal in Sudan. In Khartoum, the government began to enforce a legal decree that all single women must be married (Spaulding & Beswick, 1995). As part of this order, all brothels were shut down. Sex workers were married off in ‘mass weddings’ that took place in fields where women were forced to pick husbands and marry them (Interview, a bishop in the Episcopal Church of Sudan). At that time, many of the sex workers in Khartoum were from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) or Ethiopia. They were either deported or moved to Juba where the laws concerning prostitution were less strictly enforced. The number of sex workers in Juba thus increased significantly in the 1970s.

Prostitution flourished in the city throughout the second civil war, fuelled by widespread poverty and increasing desperation. Many women were forced to engage in commercial or transactional sex, trading sex for food and other basic goods.

The number of sex workers in Juba spiked again after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, which ended the war and made
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Juba the capital of South Sudan. An influx of funds for development in the new capital attracted peacekeepers, aid workers and investors from all over the world. Located in the far south of Sudan, Juba is not far from the borders of Uganda, Kenya and the DRC. Women from these countries flocked into Juba hoping to find work, but many found themselves with no option but to enter the sex industry instead (Mayom, 2010).

At the time of this study, our research indicated that there were at least 2,000 women and girls active in prostitution in Juba. A large proportion of them come from South Sudan's neighbouring countries. Most operate from large brothels, and a few work independently in selected clubs, restaurants and camps popular with 'khawadjas' (white foreigners). Some women use hawking as a pretext to move from door to door, selling or making appointments for sex with the 'mundukuru' (shopkeepers from North Sudan) and office workers. Others work in restaurants, or run kiosks or hair salons, but also engage in commercial sex to supplement their income. Some sex workers rent rooms for their rich clients who visit periodically from Khartoum or Dubai. Ethiopian sex workers tend to work in hotels, restaurants and dance clubs during the day, and then operate as sex workers at night.

Three sex workers in Juba

Kiden, Rosemary and Jennifer are three sex workers in Juba. Their stories are not out of the ordinary. Most of the women interviewed had similar lives, filled with misfortune and heartache, and painted a bleak picture of the devastating realities facing Juba's sex workers.

Kiden from South Sudan

Kiden comes from Nimule, one of the southern-most towns in South Sudan, very close to the Ugandan border. She is 16 years old and belongs to the Lulubo tribe. Her mother was widowed with six children, and later remarried. Kiden told the research team that her stepfather was physically abusive. When she was 14 years old, her stepfather had tried to force Kiden to marry an older man, but she refused. Her refusal led to a physical altercation during which her stepfather stabbed her with a knife, seriously wounding her. After this incident, she ran away to Juba. Her mother helped her get a lift to the capital in a lorry.

When Kiden arrived in Juba, she was able to live with her aunt for a while, assisting her by serving tea at a teahouse. However, her aunt died of cholera, and her uncle soon decided that he too wanted her to marry. Again Kiden refused marriage, and again she ran away. She joined a group of young girls who live on the streets in and around Konyo Konyo market in Juba. The living conditions at the market are abominable. Large numbers of people, most of them internally displaced, live at the back of the market in makeshift huts made of cardboard and grass. Women brew alcohol to sell, working all day long, stirring alcohol in barrels so large that the women have to stand and lean over them in order to stir. The brew requires continuous stirring, which means that the brewers constantly inhale alcohol vapour. The vapour affects their minds and their health, and many of these women are too busy or even forget that they have children, and leave them to wander around the market in gangs.

Kiden's group used to sleep on benches in the small illegal bars or in the market stalls, and they would search the garbage for food. Many began drinking at a young age as their mothers' brew was readily available to them, and water was not. The girls begged and ran errands for money, moving around in groups of five to ten. They smoked, drank, stole from the shops, and fought with each other and with other gangs in the market. Some evenings they worked in the bars. Life in the market was particularly dangerous at night. The street boys there formed a gang called the Niggers. These boys pressured the girls for sex, sometimes forcing them. After a while many of the young girls discovered they could earn money for sex – something they were often compelled to do anyway. Many of the girls eventually moved into the brothels as sex workers, as life at the market was dangerous and unsustainable.

After living at the market for a few months, Kiden was approached by a woman who gave her the equivalent of US$50 to sleep with a man, renting one of the rooms in Gumbo brothel for them. She says that the sex was very painful, because she was still a virgin. Another man came by to ‘comfort her’ and to ‘use’ her long term and he paid her US$120 to be with him for ten days. Kiden sent half of that amount to her mother, and used the other half for rent and food. Since then, she has lived and worked at Gumbo brothel.

Kiden services an average of three to five clients a day. She used to have a regular client who she called ‘husband’. She says she tries to use condoms all
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the time, and says she even tries to use two but sometimes men refuse to use them. When this happens, she shouts for the owner of the lodge who sends the customer away. She finds sex very painful, and wonders if the condoms are causing an internal infection.

According to Kiden, life is safer at Gumbo brothel than it was in the market. It is still far from safe, however. One day she was raped and stabbed by a group of boys in the corridors of one of Gumbo’s lodges. She shouted and her landlord arrived with a pistol and saved her life. Despite the dangers, there is at least an element of protection, and Kiden expressed a relief that she has a bed to sleep in and is able to make money on a regular basis.

Rosemary from Uganda

At the time of writing, Rosemary was 25 years old. She comes from northern Uganda. Her parents were killed by the Lord’s Resistance Army (a rebel group that has terrorised northern Uganda for years, killing, abducting and terrorising local communities). When her parents died, Rosemary had to drop out of school and get married to ensure that she and her siblings would be provided for – a responsibility which fell to her as the oldest sibling. In 2009, after a long illness, her husband died and her life began to fall apart. Rosemary and her two children were forced to remain with her husband’s family. However, his relatives mistreated Rosemary and provided little support for her and her children. Eventually a relative raped and impregnated her.

It became apparent to Rosemary that there was no future for her with her in-laws. Her cousin convinced her to leave her children with their grandparents, and move with her to Juba, to work as a waitress. Rosemary and her cousin arrived in Juba in early 2010, at which time she was two months pregnant. She was not able to find a job in the hospitality trade as she had hoped, and with nowhere else to turn, she joined the many other northern Ugandan sex workers working at Gumbo brothel.

In the beginning, Rosemary was able to make sufficient money. However, at the time of her interview, she was over seven months pregnant. Clients no longer wanted to have sex with her, and she was struggling to make ends meet. Rosemary rents a room for US$40 per month, but has not paid rent for a while. She now tries to earn money for food by doing laundry, running errands; otherwise she relies on handouts.

Rosemary has tested positive for HIV. She plans to take antiretroviral medicines when she gives birth, in the hope that this will prevent her baby from becoming infected.

Jennifer from Congo

Jennifer came to Juba from the province of North Kivu, in the DRC. At the time of writing, she was 30 years old. Her parents are no longer alive and she has five children of her own, one of whom is with her in Juba. Her other four children are in the DRC living with her brothers. She has been away from the DRC for many years, and does not know how her children are doing.

Years ago, Jennifer married a Ugandan soldier from the Uganda People’s Defence Force who had been deployed in the DRC. He already had a wife in Uganda. When he returned to Uganda, he took Jennifer with him. His existing family did not welcome his new Congolese bride, and Jennifer was treated badly. When her husband died, her life in Uganda became unbearable.

Jennifer then moved to South Sudan, where she started a small business. However, after being robbed twice, she was left destitute and unable to continue her business. Unsuccessful at finding other employment, Jennifer saw no other option than to make a living in the sex trade. She went to Gumbo brothel, where she began to work.

Jennifer never enjoys sex; she just sees it as a way to make money. She makes around US$8–12 per day. Her daily rent at the brothel is US$4 and she uses the rest of her earnings to buy food. She does not make enough to send money home to her children, something that is a source of great concern for her because this was her sole purpose in moving to South Sudan. Jennifer is planning to move to the back part of Gumbo brothel where she will have to pay only US$60 a month, as her current rent is unaffordable for her. When she cannot pay, the landlord beats her and locks her in her room. Jennifer does not drink or smoke. When she is not servicing clients she merely sits and talks with the other women or sleeps.

Jennifer shares her room with her 8-year-old son. Her bed is separated from the rest of the room by a curtain. Her son sleeps in front of the curtain. She hopes that her son does not hear her having sex or being beaten up by the landlord, but she does not know for sure.

Jennifer has three regular clients with whom she does not use a condom,
because they are regulars and she ‘loves’ them. Many other clients also refuse to use condoms. Jennifer explains that they beat up sex workers, or rob them of their telephones and valuables if they even suggest using condoms. She says that Sudanese men can be abusive and they call the sex workers hurtful names such as ‘shara muta’, an offensive term for prostitute in both Dinka and Sudanese Arabic.

Jennifer suspects that her husband died of AIDS, although she is not certain about this. She was tested for HIV while she was still in Uganda and was found to be positive. She was put onto a regimen of antiretroviral treatment (ART), which she was fortunate to receive as Ugandan hospitals do not normally provide such treatment to foreigners. When Jennifer first arrived in Juba, she went to the Juba Teaching Hospital to ask for a prescription for ART, but the hospital refused to supply her with medication, and informed her that she needed to return to the hospital where she had been tested for HIV in order to continue her treatment. Jennifer had no money for transport and, as she was unable to make the journey home, she is no longer receiving ART. It is extremely dangerous to interrupt ART as the virus then develops resistance to the medication, thus compromising the chances of treatment being effective if resumed later.

**Juba’s brothels**

A large proportion of Juba’s sex workers operate from one of Juba’s many brothels. Most of the brothels are large complexes consisting of unlit buildings divided into little rooms. Without exception, the compounds are crowded, dirty and unpleasant. They are foul places for women to live and work. Some of Juba’s main brothels are described below.

**Gumbo brothel**

Gumbo is one of the biggest brothels in Juba. An estimated 400 to 600 women work here as sex workers. As one crosses Juba Bridge over the Nile River at the outskirts of the city, there are many small stalls selling items such as food, clothes and tea. Cut through these stalls, and a large mango tree marks the entrance to the brothel. Under the tree, men drink, eat and play chess with the ‘lodge owners’, while preparing to visit the lodges.

Gumbo brothel is a compound that consists of dozens of ‘lodges’. The lodges look like large barns made out of iron sheeting. Surrounding the brothel complex are army barracks and enclosures containing cattle, guarded by cattle keepers. There is no closed sewer system, and small streams of human waste flow between the lodges. Here, too, garbage collects, piling up each day. The smell is strong and offensive.

Within each lodge are courtyards housing bars and cheap eateries, where women and clients sit on plastic chairs. These bars are dirty and uncomfortable, loud rap music blasts out while barmaids sell drinks. Sex workers linger here to meet and attract clients.

Within each barn-like lodge, thin bamboo walls divide the space into small rooms, often no bigger than two to three square metres each. A lodge can contain up to 24 rooms. There are both ‘daily rent’ and ‘monthly rent’ lodges, where women rent space in which to live and work. The cheapest rooms in the ‘daily rent’ category are US$4–6 per night. These contain beds made of bamboo and thin mattresses without sheets. The floors are made of mud or sand, although some women have covered them with carpets or linoleum. The more expensive rooms (US$6 per night) have cement floors, and a proper bed with sheets. If sex workers cannot afford to pay the daily rent, they can move further back in the compound, past the garbage heaps, to small mud huts that can be rented for US$60 per month. The catch is that these back rooms are located in an area in which it is difficult to attract clients. Some of the women in these rooms live there with ‘steady boyfriends’—clients who pay for the rooms in exchange for sexual services.

All the women living and working in a lodge share one shower and one latrine. Some showers have running water but others are simply stalls containing a bucket of water. There is no proper drainage system, and the latrine and washing areas are extremely dirty. Sex workers are provided with one jerry can of water per two women per day for drinking and washing their clothes. The women buy their own food in the eateries or food stalls in the compound.

Gumbo does not have a single proprietor; rather there seem to be several lodge owners. It is said that many of the owners are soldiers or police who built the lodges and employ others to manage them. At least one of the lodges is owned by a Ugandan man. Ugandans and Kenyans are often employed in the restaurants and bars, and act as rent collectors for the rooms.

The majority of the sex workers at Gumbo belong to Uganda’s Acholi or...
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Langi tribes, and come from areas in Uganda that have been overrun by the Lord’s Resistance Army. Some come from Kenya or the DRC, and there are some young Sudanese women too – about 20 Sudanese girls between the ages of 12 and 17 share one of the lodges.

**Jebel market brothel**

Jebel market is located about eight kilometres west of Juba centre, on the outskirts of the city. It was established after Central Equatoria State’s government demolished Custom market in 2009. (The government often demolishes markets, as these communities, which operate according to their own laws, are considered undesirable. Custom market has since been re-established as discussed below.) The research team estimates Jebel market to be the largest of Juba’s markets, with hundreds of traders selling a variety of wares in large corridors or avenues.

Jebel market brothel is partially incorporated into the goods market. To reach the brothel section, clients have to pass through the market stalls. Jebel is the largest brothel in Juba, with an estimated 600 to 800 women and girls making a living as sex workers. The majority of Jebel’s lodges are owned by Sudanese soldiers and Ugandan expatriates. At the time of writing, the market stalls and the lodges had recently been reconstructed, after the latest government demolition.

Jebel contains more lodges and corridors than Gumbo brothel. As with Gumbo, lodges are made up of large enclosures divided into small rooms by bamboo partitions. Jebel has over 15 lodges, each accommodating between 40 and 60 women in rooms that are between two and three square metres each. When women first arrive, they are allocated a room. Generally, after they have familiarised themselves with their new surroundings, the women move on to different rooms. Most of the rooms are rented out by the night, but there are also ‘monthly rent’ rooms, which are cheaper. As in Gumbo brothel, these rooms are located further away and therefore attract fewer clients. The lodge owners and supervisors also live in these back rooms.

Jebel is overall a cleaner brothel, probably because of the presence of business people in the area. There is also a health clinic nearby. The market, which incorporates the brothel, has its own system of law and governance. An elected chairperson (also known as the sheriff) is in charge of security and welfare. He has authority throughout the whole market compound.

Traders and lodge owners uphold the market’s rules, and the chairperson ensures that other residents or visitors do not violate their rights, and that no one steals from anyone working in the market. This system makes the compound relatively safe. However, despite this, police officers often raid the market in search of guns. Sex workers report that, during these raids, police rape and steal from the sex workers.

Most of the sex workers in Jebel market are from Uganda, but there are also several women from the DRC, Kenya, and some from South Sudan. About 200 underage sex workers between the ages of 12 and 17 live together with other younger sex workers in a large lodge known as the Homestead. Focus-group participants report that at least 80 children under the age of 12 live in the brothel with their mothers or other caregivers. Some of the older children are reportedly already sexually active and becoming involved in prostitution.

**Ton Ping**

Ton Ping (peanut seed) is one of the smallest brothels in Juba; it consists of only 50 rooms. A prominent Sudanese man owns the brothel, and has employed a relative to manage the brothel and collect daily rent from its tenants. It is located close to the government’s ministry buildings and the US Embassy, and is visible from the main street. Ton Ping is a more expensive lodge and women pay around US$10 per night for rooms. At the time of writing, business was thriving and there was a range of clients of mixed races and nationalities, many of whom visit on a regular basis. Some of the wealthier clients collect the sex workers and take them back to their hotels.

Mary, one of the sex workers, explains, ‘We have all kinds of clients; NGO-workers, Filipinos, “khawadjas” [white foreigners], and more. Our clients come here because it is safe and peaceful at Ton Ping. There are a lot of rich people in this area’ (Interview). Women here see as many as ten clients a day. A locked door and a client’s shoes or slippers at the entrance indicate that the woman is with a client. The women working in Ton Ping were mainly from northern Uganda, and all were over the age of 18.

Despite the fact that this brothel is more upmarket than the others, it is by no means luxurious. It consists of three large buildings arranged in a U-formation, each containing several rooms. The buildings are constructed from mud and wattle, and have corrugated iron roofs and doors. Colourful
curtains hang in the doorways. There is a large grass hut in the middle of the compound, littered with empty beer bottles. The smell of incense attempts to disguise any offensive odours. At the time of writing, there was only one pit latrine shared by all of the sex workers, which was almost full and smelled terrible. However, despite this, residents were quick to say that conditions at Ton Ping were much better than at all of the other brothels they knew of.

Juba’s other brothels
There is a range of other brothels around the city. For example, Custom brothel is bordered by Custom market, an army barracks and Juba University. The brothel is owned and protected by soldiers. Custom market is an illegal market, meaning it has no authority from the government to operate. It was demolished in 2009, but has since been re-established. Its brothel houses between 400 and 600 women. Built on top of a levelled-off rubbish dump, the stench in the brothel is overwhelming. The brothel is extremely dirty, run-down and congested with hardly any space for movement. The rooms are made of mud, with mats and plastic sheets as roofs, which leak badly when it rains. Its narrow corridors are lined with rotting mats. Children play in these corridors, while their mothers work. Between the clusters of mud rooms there are restaurants, and many of the girls that work in these restaurants by day, work as prostitutes at night.

Gudele brothel is located close to the new settlement of Gudele where many internally displaced persons have settled in recent years. About 200 to 400 sex workers are based in Gudele brothel, and most of these women are South Sudanese. Most of the brothel’s sex workers are very young, and many underage girls are reported to be working there.

Rock City brothel, situated nearby, is reported to house mainly Kenyan prostitutes, as is another smaller brothel, situated close to Smart Camp Hotel. At the time of writing, there were reports that a new brothel had been established on the road to Yei, a town 100 miles east of Juba.

Other commercial sex locations
Juba’s commercial sex industry is not confined to brothels. Young Sudanese women sell sex along the Airport-Ministries road. In the evenings and at night, they stand at strategic points, beckoning to passing vehicles to pick them up. More experienced women also have friends at the bus stops that bring clients to them. Sex workers also operate inside hotels and restaurants. Mango Camp, Bros, South Sudan Park, Smart Camp, New York Hotel, Queen of Sheba and Havana restaurants, all known for hosting live music and entertainment, are very popular among expatriates and others. In these establishments, sex workers can solicit foreigners’ custom, or clients from Juba’s upper classes. In some of these establishments, customers can hire a room for around US$20 per hour. African clients pay US$20–40, while white foreigners usually pay between US$50–200, depending on how much time they want. Work in these establishments can be fairly lucrative – girls can earn as much as US$100 a night (Focus group, 17 July).

The drivers of the sex trade
A sequence of tragic events led Kiden, Jennifer and Rosemary into sex work in Juba. Like them, most of the women and girls operating as sex workers in Juba did not enter commercial sex work by choice. Unfortunate life circumstances, a lack of social support and the cruel effects of conflict contributed to leading them there.

Many sex workers worldwide share experiences of poverty, war, child abuse, forced and early marriages, rape and sexual exploitation. Addiction, childhood neglect, a lack of economic alternatives, homelessness, family breakdown and mental-health issues often also play a role in driving them into the sex trade (Macleod, 2006). Some of the key drivers of Juba’s sex industry are outlined below.

War
In South Sudan, the disruption of family support mechanisms, poverty and the depletion of income-generating options, all exacerbated by the war, have led women into the sex trade. This is not unique as the sex industry is often fuelled by conflict and its socio-economic ripple effects. Cynthia Cockburn explains, ‘Many women will have become widows and single parents, dependent on their own earning power to provide for themselves and their children. In the absence of jobs of the kind they can do, training they can get access to, capital, credit and land, many women fall more deeply into the poverty they knew before the war began, prostitution is often their only hope of a living.’
The Second Sudanese civil war began in 1983 and lasted until 2005. Its effects on the South Sudanese population were devastating. Roughly 1.9 million civilians were killed and almost four million people were forced to flee their homes. Many thousands of families were separated, leaving family members unable to locate each other for years, if at all. People had to leave their homes, their land, their means of survival and their support systems. Lacking alternative options, thousands of women turned to commercial or transactional sex, in a desperate bid to survive.

War continues to play a part in driving prostitution even once it has ended. The end of the war in Sudan led to increased security, allowing for the possibility of people returning to their homes and livelihoods. But many have no homes, families or communities to return to, and no means with which to make the journey to their places of origin. Thousands of people are therefore still internally displaced all over South Sudan. In addition, ongoing conflict in the border regions since the 2005 peace agreement has led to further displacement.

In Juba, as of 2007, there were still about 15,000 internally displaced persons living in temporary settlements around the city. Displaced people often live in shacks made of cardboard and plastic which offer little protection during the rainy season. There are few earning opportunities for them, and they often lack the funds to cover their basic needs. Most have no social or other support systems in their new locations. Survival becomes a desperate battle. One option that displaced women have when all others are exhausted is sex work. In the course of researching this chapter, it also became clear that many of the underage sex workers in Juba are internal refugees. Their families, if they are alive, are unable to provide for them, and desperation drives them to enter the sex trade.

The wars in Sudan’s neighbouring countries have also driven many foreign women into Juba’s sex trade. From the information collected on the nationalities of the women who work in Juba’s brothels, it is clear that the wars in the DRC, Uganda and other neighbouring countries led to a flow of women from these countries into South Sudan, and into the sex trade in Juba. Many women fled these wars and came to Juba, where they eventually became sex workers. Many had lost their families and support structures to these wars. A common story told by a number of the Congolese women interviewed at Gumbo and Jebel brothels was that they had married Ugandan soldiers from the Ugandan People’s Defence Forces when they came to fight in the DRC between 2000 and 2009. These soldiers then took their new Congolese wives back to Uganda, and for a variety of reasons their lives in Uganda became untenable, starting a chain of events that led them to becoming sex workers in South Sudan.

**Poverty**

Poverty is arguably the key factor that draws women into prostitution. As mentioned, a great deal of money flowed into Juba when it was declared the capital city of South Sudan. The international community installed embassies, consulates and development agencies in Juba to provide support for the post-war reconstruction process. International investors arrived too, drawn by potential profits promised by the undeveloped land. This increase in investment and money attracted poverty-stricken people from areas around Juba drawn by the hope of potential earnings to be made. Kenyans, Ugandans and Congolese, facing extreme poverty in their homes, also flocked to Juba to find jobs, hoping to support their families back home (Molumba, 2007). However, once there, many found that there were fewer earning opportunities than they had hoped. Many women were eventually drawn to the last remaining income-earning option available to them – the sex trade.

Rosemary’s story, told above, illustrates this perfectly. Facing extreme poverty and exploitation, Rosemary left Uganda and came to Juba to find a better life. She, like many other women from Sudan’s neighbouring countries, had hoped that she could make enough money in the restaurant trade to support herself and send money back to her family. However, she could not find work, and eventually resorted to sex work out of desperation. It seems that many foreign women go into sex work as a temporary measure in order to earn enough money to allow them to return home. This interim plan often becomes a longer-term arrangement.

Some women do come to Juba with the specific intention of earning money in the sex trade. Susan, one of the women interviewed, came from Kenya where her two children, to whom she sends money, are in school. She came to Juba with the main intention of making a living as a sex worker. She has a professional attitude to her work, and is able to support her family from her earnings. She charges US$8 per time and US$24 per night and she
makes around US$200 on a weekly basis. She refuses to have sex without a condom. Among the women interviewed for this chapter, Susan was somewhat of an exception.

Abuse in the family home
A body of research from around the world has shown the linkages between domestic abuse and sex work. Internationally, child abuse, both sexual and physical, is considered a significant precursor for prostitution among girls, and those who have been abused earlier in life are more likely to enter into prostitution than those who have not (Pines & Silbert, 1991). Another common pattern seen around the world is that women and girls run away from abusive homes and enter the sex industry when they can find no other means of survival (Scott & Dedel, 2006).

In almost all of the stories documented for this chapter, there was an element of violence and abuse in the family home, which in some ways propelled the women into leaving their homes, and entering sex work. Both Rosemary and Jennifer were physically abused by their in-laws. Kiden, too, ran away from home because of violence from both her stepfather and, subsequently, her uncle. Another interviewee, Eunice, a 33-year-old from Uganda, divorced her husband in 2009 after he tried to stab her to death when she was sleeping. Shortly afterwards, she left for Juba where she began working as a sex worker. These interviews clearly show a pattern of women and girls fleeing domestic abuse, and eventually ending up in sex work.

War, and its aftermath, tends to lead to increases in such abuse. When a war has ended, men often return home traumatised by war, and frustrated by the lack of jobs, opportunities and basic services. The realisation that women have assumed traditional male roles during their absence only increases their feelings of disempowerment. As a means of reasserting their masculinity and regaining their sense of self-worth, men often resort to domestic and sexual violence. This pattern has been documented in post-conflict settings around the world (see Bouta et al., 2005; Lindsey, 2000). When it gets bad enough, women tend to flee, but the reality is that while girls are vulnerable in abusive homes, they are often even more vulnerable when they leave home. With even less family protection and fewer means of survival, they are easy targets for those wishing to exploit them and often become prime candidates for the commercial sex industry.

Rape and sexual exploitation
There is a great deal of evidence from around the world to support the link between sexual violence and an entry into sex work. Some research suggests that more than 80 per cent of all prostitutes have been victims of sexual abuse in their childhood and youth (Marwitz et al., 1993).

The research showed a clear connection between rape and commercial sex in Juba. Many of the women interviewed, and in particular the younger girls, reported having been raped or sexually exploited before moving into prostitution – often on numerous occasions. For example, before becoming a sex worker, a young woman named Hadiyya was sexually exploited by a man who also sexually abused three other girls now working alongside her as sex workers. Keji, another interviewee, was raped by the father of a child she was employed to take care of. Two other women interviewed, Achan and Ayoo, were sexually abused in their homes when they were younger. All these girls commented that they entered the sex trade after realising that they may as well make money from the sex acts to which they were being subjected anyway.

Some interviews were conducted at Juba’s only centre for female street children, Confident Children out of Conflict (CCC). A drop-in day centre, CCC tries to keep girls off the street by providing programmes to occupy their time during the day. The centre does not have the facilities for the girls to sleep in at night, so the girls return to the street at night, where they remain vulnerable. In the interviews it became apparent that these girls had all been victims of sexual exploitation, and most of them continue to be subjected to this regularly as they do not have a safe place to sleep. The director of the centre explained that many of these girls finally move on to prostitution, as life on the streets and the markets is more violent than life in Juba’s brothels. They make the move to the brothels so as to earn money from the sexual exploitation they are already experiencing.

Early and forced marriages, and marriages without family support
The United Nations Population Fund estimates that in Africa, 42 per cent of girls are married before the age of 18. Similarly, a UN Children’s Fund study on Sudan found that 34 per cent of women aged between 20 and 24 had been married before the age of 18. Girls are often married off to much older men. Economic incentives can play a role in these unions, as the men...
pay a bride price to the girls’ families. Young girls generally have no say on whether they wish to marry and, as one would expect, many are deeply resistant to this, given that marriages mean they must move away from their families, stop going to school and take on the duties of a South Sudanese wife. The threat of such a forced early marriage often causes young South Sudanese girls to run away from home. Away from family, the girls are more vulnerable to entering the sex trade.

In other instances, young girls run away from home to elope with men their families do not approve of. The results can be disastrous. 15-year-old Margaret recounts, ‘I dropped out of school to elope with a man who seemed really kind and sweet. I moved in with him, but now he beats me and makes me work here’ (Interview). Eloping couples may lose the support of both sets of parents, leaving the young couples with no place to live, and no family support to fall back on. In a country devastated by decades of war, family support can be crucial, and the lack thereof can put significant pressure on a marriage. A few girls explained that their husbands had to spend a lot of time away from them in order to find work, leaving the girls to fend for themselves entirely. Many try to find work in the service industry, but this is difficult, because often they have not finished their education and do not speak English, which is a necessary requirement. Finally, some of the girls became desperate and found their way into the sex industry.

**The demand for sex**

Without men looking to buy sex, the sex industry could not flourish. Sex workers stated that their clients include men from North and South Sudan, western aid workers and investors, men from the Middle East and from other African countries. Men from all walks of life use the services. Some work for the government and can be recognisable by their uniforms or cars. NGO-workers are recognisable from the NGO-ID tags they are required to wear in Juba. A large number of soldiers, as well as moneychangers, street vendors and tea sellers, reportedly use the services of Juba’s sex workers. With large numbers of men living, working or stationed in Juba, the demand is high, and this fuels the industry.

Like Kiden, most sex workers have a few regular clients, often referred to as ‘husband’ or ‘boyfriend’. Most women will have two or three of these clients who pay for their services, but who are not required to use condoms. Although many sex workers claim that they don’t have unprotected sex, they often make exceptions for these regulars.

**The daily struggles of Juba’s sex workers**

Life is difficult for sex workers in South Sudan. The struggles are constant and their days are spent trying to meet basic needs. Living and working conditions for most are squalid, and women are subject to violence, robbery and abuse, including by the police. Sex work involves undeniable risks to their health and health facilities and medicines are difficult to access. Below are some of the daily problems and challenges that sex workers encounter.

**Poverty**

Despite the fact that women enter prostitution in order to escape poverty, many of Juba’s sex workers make no more than US$2–4 per day. Sometimes their earnings do not even cover the rent for the rooms in which they work. Margaret bemoans the fact that: ‘There are days that turn into weeks in which there are no clients at all’ (Interview). Many sex workers are plagued by poverty and are unable to make ends meet or to afford the things they desperately need. One of the factors leading to increased poverty among sex workers is that the supply of sex workers grew substantially between 2005 and 2010. A group of Ugandan sex workers explained that when they started working in Juba a few years previously, they could ask US$60 per night per client. However, because the number of sex workers had grown so much, the prices that they can demand have decreased. Sex work is therefore no longer the reasonably profitable option it once was.

**Violence**

Sex workers are extremely vulnerable to violence both in the brothels and on the streets. Many clients are aggressive, and random acts of violence against sex workers are common. In extreme cases the violence is severe. Some customers refuse to pay and beat up sex workers who demand payment. One sex worker complains, ‘Sudanese men don’t want to pay for sex. They threaten us with guns’ (Focus group, 7 August). Sometimes customers beat up sex workers who insist on the use of condoms. At times lodge owners
are able to intervene, but often they arrive too late. It is in the interests of the lodge owners to keep their lodgers safe, and this offers a degree of protection. The police do not offer any protection however, and some also take part in the violence, as shown below.

One scenario reported by several of the women interviewed is that men pay for sex with two prostitutes in a row. When it is time for sex with the second woman, they have recently climaxed and subsequent ejaculation is sometimes difficult to achieve. Eunice explains:

If the man does not ejaculate, he believes the business arrangement has not been fulfilled and he will often refuse to take his penis out of the woman. This is very painful. If the man wiggles, condoms can break. Often there is blood with the semen. This is very scary, but there is nothing we can do about it. If we have a good landlord, he will come to chase the client away when we scream. (Interview)

A shortage of condoms
Almost every interviewee initially claimed she does not have sex without a condom. However, the number of babies and toddlers in the brothels suggests otherwise. When pushed on the question of condoms, the following issues were raised by sex workers.

Firstly, although condoms can be purchased in health-care centres, and some local traders have condoms for sale, condoms are not always available or affordable for sex workers. Adding to this, better quality condoms are expensive. Three condoms cost US$0.40, and sex workers are not always able to afford them. Some interviewees reported that men who claim to represent a local charity, sent to deliver free condoms, still charge the regular price for condoms, calling the payment a ‘transportation fee’. There are some slightly cheaper condoms on the market but apparently their quality is poor; they sometimes break during sex if not sufficiently lubricated or if a client is rough. In Jebel market, female condoms, or femidoms, are available from certain pharmacies, but women rarely use them as men reportedly get very violent if they see them.

Secondly, clients often refuse to wear condoms. One focus-group member explains, ‘Men do not want to have sex with plastic’ (Focus group, 7 August). If the women do not have conscientious lodge owners to protect them, they are sometimes forced to have sex without condoms. A few women confess to having opted to use condoms only at a client’s request, in order to prevent outbursts of violence.

Thirdly, little information is available to sex workers about the benefits of using condoms and the risks inherent in neglecting to use them. Levels of knowledge about condoms and safe sex are thus low among the sex-worker population. Some interviewees expressed concern about the effects that condoms might have on their health. They worry that condoms give them internal infections, and they therefore prefer to have sex without condoms, feeling that this concern outweighs protection from HIV or other sexually transmitted infections.

Abortions, pregnancies and children
Unprotected sex results in unplanned pregnancies. Once pregnant, sex workers need to decide what to do about these pregnancies. It is difficult to continue making a living as a sex worker while heavily pregnant. Pregnant women report having to beg or run errands for other women to eke out a livelihood. Many of the Ugandan women interviewed were very open about going back to Uganda to have abortions. Most of the Congolese women interviewed chose not to abort and to continue with their pregnancies. Sex workers who chose to continue with their pregnancies can deliver at Juba Teaching Hospital and, if they are unable to go to the hospital, there are traditional healers in the brothels who help with deliveries.

In Jebel market brothel alone, focus-group participants estimated that there are about 50 children under the age of 12 years. Jennifer, whose story was outlined earlier, shares a lodge with eight other Congolese women. Between them, they have 15 children, most of whom were born in the brothel. Some of the older children in the brothels are already working as sex workers. There is no proper form of childcare. Babies are placed in small cots behind a curtain in the room in which their mothers are working. If clients protest about babies being in the same room, the mothers leave their babies with neighbours. When children get older, they play outside while their mothers work. If possible, mothers might rent an extra room for their children to sleep in. However, if this is not possible, children continue to share the small rooms with their mothers, often sleeping on the floor beside the bed. Most of the children in Juba’s brothels look severely malnourished
and unwell. Sometimes the fathers of these children are regular clients, or ‘husbands’, but they carry none of the practical responsibilities for their offspring.

Many foreign sex workers have left children with family members in their home countries. Providing an income for these children is one of the main reasons that many came to Juba. For many, sex work is not as lucrative as initially anticipated, and many struggle to earn enough to send money home, something that is reported as a constant source of worry. Keeping in touch with those at home is difficult, particularly as many of the sex workers are illiterate, and postal and other communication services are deficient. Living so far away from their children reportedly causes much heartache for many of these sex workers.

HIV and AIDS

Sex workers are at a high risk of becoming infected with HIV, particularly if they engage in unprotected sex, which many of Juba’s sex workers do, at least some of the time. The research found that many of the sex workers in Juba’s brothels are already infected with HIV, making them an important vector for HIV transmission, both in Juba and around the world.

Juba Teaching Hospital provides ART to those in the later stages of HIV infection. However, the hospital provides medication only to those who were tested for HIV in Juba. As has been shown, most of Juba’s sex workers are foreign nationals and many had tested positive for HIV in their home countries or in transit countries before they came to South Sudan. Several sex workers reported that when they went to Juba Teaching Hospital for treatment, they were told by staff to return to where they were first tested to receive treatment. These journeys can be impossibly long and expensive, particularly as antiretroviral medicines need to be collected regularly and taken continuously. As a result, many have had to stop ART mid-course. This is extremely risky. As mentioned earlier, a break in ART leads to resistance being built up, and severely affects the way the treatment works should it be resumed.

It is well documented that the presence of other sexually transmitted infections significantly increases the risk of HIV transmission and infection. There are extremely high rates of sexually transmitted infections among sex workers, and among some of the groups that commonly utilise their services, such as members of the military. The significant role played by sexually transmitted infections in HIV transmission makes it crucial that these infections be identified and treated as quickly as possible.

However, knowledge about these infections is low among sex workers, and public information campaigns on sexually transmitted infections have not been targeted at sex workers. For the most part, there are no free public health facilities near the brothels in Juba. Private drugstores prescribe and sell antibiotics that treat sexually transmitted infections, but these are very expensive – with a course of treatment costing up to US$200, most sex workers are unable to afford it. This means that many infections are ignored, and continue to play a role in increasing the incidence of HIV infection.

Police and government responses

As noted, prostitution is illegal in South Sudan. However, brothels continue to operate in spite of police knowledge. The illegal status of their work means that sex workers cannot rely on the protection or support of the police or the state when their rights are violated. This makes sex workers extremely vulnerable to abuse, and it allows those who violate sex workers to act with impunity.

Furthermore, sex workers are often harassed, attacked or even raped by police officers themselves. Police raids are often conducted on the pretext of searching the brothels for guns. A sex worker explained:

The policemen make us stand naked outside of our rooms while they search for guns. When they can’t find any they take us inside to rape us and then take our money. (Focus group, 7 August)

Another woman echoed this:

When the police are patrolling for guns and cannot find any, they will rape us and take our money. When we have been raped, we have nowhere to report the rape. Anyone can do anything to you here. We are abused, but we do not speak Arabic or Dinka so we cannot report the rape. And even if you do report the rape, the police will take advantage of you and you become the one to be in trouble. The police officers will ask for number plates, but the police rapes occur at night, which means we cannot see the number plates.
Then the police will tell us to go back to Uganda and that we don't belong in Sudan. (Focus group, 7 August)

Representatives of Southern Sudan’s government also play an active role in the country’s sex trade, as both clients and industry players. For example, an interviewee alleged that the owner of Ton Ping brothel is a prominent government official. When sex workers at Gumbo brothel were asked if they thought they could expect any assistance from the government, participants in a focus group laughed out loud, pointed to the compound around them and said, ‘Why should the government want to stop this? Government officials are the ones responsible and involved in the running of Gumbo. We sleep with them!’ (Focus group, 14 August).

Foreign sex workers face added challenges relating to the legality of their legal status in the country. The Government of Southern Sudan is putting processes in place to register foreigners. All foreigners are required to register with the police to legally remain in the country. However, many foreign nationals, particularly those from Kenya, Uganda or the DRC, enter South Sudan overland without passports, travel permits or any other legal permits, and are considered to be in the country illegally. Registration is expensive, and this prevents many sex workers from registering. It costs US$60, plus an additional US$60 if one does not have a passport or travel permit, and a further US$4 for every day that one delays registering. Registration is crucial however, as without legal documents, foreigners are constantly vulnerable to police harassment and risk deportation.

**Child prostitution**

Child prostitution takes place in almost every brothel in Juba. Some of the brothels have separate lodges where young girls work. Gumbo brothel has big rooms that are used as sets in the production of pornographic movies, and underage girls take part in these, performing sexual acts for the cameras. In addition, 200 to 300 girls live on the streets of Juba. Many of these street girls eventually move into sex work, initially moving off the street and into the brothels.

Omdjuma, a 13-year-old girl who spends her day at the CCC day-centre, tells her story:

> My father is dead. My mother is ‘in dead’ [because she will soon die of alcoholism]. My sister works in a brothel and my brother lives on the street. My other sister is married to an SPLA soldier, but he abuses her. I have nowhere to go, except for CCC and school during the day and the market at night. I have been raped twice in the market and have been sexually abused by businessmen. (Interview)

Because Omdjuma’s 15-year-old sister already works in one of Juba’s brothels, the move from the market where Omdjuma has to endure difficult and violent conditions, to the brothel is a likely move. A CCC staff member commented that:

> Omdjuma suffers from serious depression and we worry every night when she leaves to go back to sleep in the market, she may not come back the next morning. (Interview)

Several factors facilitate young street girls’ movement into commercial sex. For many, the process begins with transactional sex, or the trading of sex for food and other non-monetary items or services. This happens regularly on the markets of Juba, where street children are left to fend for themselves. Children as young as six years old perform sexual acts with market traders and customers in exchange for food, money, soap, mobile phones and other basic goods. Once girls have used sex as a means of trade, the move into commercial sex work is far more likely (Bouta et. al., 2005).

Sexual violence is another facilitating factor, something to which the street children of Juba are extremely vulnerable. Repeated subjugation to forced sex has the effect of ‘priming’ children for sex work. Having been the victims of forced sex, particularly where this has happened repeatedly, children might be encouraged to become sex workers. As already mentioned, several of the young sex workers who were interviewed made the point that if they were going to be subjected to these acts anyway, they may as well be paid for it.

The best way to prevent young girls from entering into prostitution is to ensure that there are support systems available to them. Few social services for children are available in South Sudan. CCC, the drop-in day centre described above, plus another centre in Wau, provide vulnerable
children with some social support. However, both of these facilities work under severe financial constraints and receive little assistance from the government or international humanitarian organisations. Instead they rely on donations and struggle to find sustained funding. Until further measures are put in place to ensure that vulnerable children are cared for and kept off the streets, a steady flow of young girls will continue to end up in the sex trade.

**Human trafficking and the sex trade**

Sudan is a source, transit and destination country for men, women and children who are victims of human trafficking. People are trafficked into Sudan for the purposes of forced labour and prostitution. ‘Sudanese women and girls, particularly those from rural areas or who are internally displaced, are trafficked into domestic servitude in homes throughout the country; some of these girls are subsequently abused by male occupants or forced to engage in commercial sex acts’ (US Department of State, 2010: 305).

Traffickers commonly mislead their victims, promising them a certain type of work and entrapping them in another. One sex worker at the Jebel market brothel put it as follows, ‘Some women bring other women and children here to ‘work in restaurants’, but it is to work in the sex camps’ (Focus group, 7 August). The media and humanitarian publications often report on the high levels of trafficking into South Sudan’s brothels (Whisnant, 2007; US Department of State, 2010). However, only two of the women interviewed for this chapter said they had been trafficked into prostitution. The children interviewed for this chapter also stated they had been taken to the brothel by their peers, and had not been coerced into sex work. This brought into question whether levels of trafficking are as high as has been reported, or whether respondents define trafficking in the same way as the media etc. tend to do. It is important to remember that victims of trafficking are often especially vulnerable as they are often illegally resident in a country and thus at risk of arrest for both illegal immigration and prostitution. They are also nearly always bonded or indebted to the trafficker in some way and may fear reprisals if they speak up.

Most of the women interviewed were introduced to the sex industry by other women, who were (or had been) sex workers themselves, and truly believed it to be their last remaining option. For the most part, women reported being brought to the brothels by relatives or friends who sympathised with their situations and wanted to help. Rosemary recalls what her relative told her, when bringing her to a brothel, ‘I brought you for employment but there is no employment, except in prostitution. You have a vagina. Let’s use your vagina to make money’ (Interview).

Another interviewee recalled that the person who introduced her to sex work told her to dress up in tight pants and a revealing top, and to go to one of the brothels. When women enter the brothels dressed like that, lodge owners and supervisors show up with keys, and point the women to the rooms they have for rent.

**Improving the lives of South Sudan’s sex workers**

Most women who come to sex work as a last resort also see sex work as a temporary measure to be endured until a better option is found. Better options are limited, and most will never find other work without outside intervention. There are currently no organisations assisting South Sudan’s sex workers to improve their conditions, insist on their rights, or find ways to leave the profession. Such assistance is urgently needed. To begin with, four priority areas need to be addressed.

The first is alternative income-generating opportunities. Most of the sex workers interviewed said that they would prefer different work. They emphasised that, although they would like to leave the sex trade, they did not see how they could achieve this, as there are no other jobs available, and they had no access to capital to start their own businesses. Unemployment is severe in South Sudan, and its neighbouring countries, and employment opportunities, particularly for those who are uneducated and have had little training, are sparse. Certainly, most of the jobs available in Juba are out of reach for sex workers. There are, however, ways in which South Sudan’s sex workers could be assisted in creating alternative income-generating opportunities. For example, an intervention that has been successful in other settings is the establishment of women’s empowerment groups or co-operatives. Groups are formed and each member contributes a small amount of money per week to a pool. From the money that is saved, each woman in turn takes a loan in order to set up a business. At the same time, the
women set up training for themselves in how to create and run businesses. This approach has been implemented in many countries including Ethiopia, Rwanda, Afghanistan and India (Veldwijk, 2008) and could prove valuable in assisting South Sudan's sex workers.

The second is a policy shift. The police routinely harass sex workers, yet there are no consequences for those who purchase sex; sex workers are viewed as the only guilty parties in what is in reality a two-way exchange. Government policies and laws relating to commercial sex need to be reconsidered; a more balanced approach is needed, with more focus on the protection of the women involved.

Third are measures to prevent women from reaching the level of desperation that makes sex work their only option: steps need to be taken to tackle the drivers of prostitution. A safety net of social support needs to be created in the fledgling state, which will keep women from reaching the point at which sex work is their only option. Priority must be given to the protection of vulnerable children to prevent them from moving into sex work.

Fourth is carrying out further research. More needs to be learnt and documented about the drivers of prostitution, the working and living conditions of sex workers in South Sudan, and the challenges they face. It is hoped that this chapter will be a springboard for future studies.

Conclusion

Juba's sex workers are among the most marginalised communities in one of the world's poorest countries. Ignored or mistreated by the government, the aid community and most of society, they remain exceptionally vulnerable. When considering the enormous and seemingly insurmountable factors that lead women into the sex industry, it becomes apparent that changing their situations will be a huge challenge. However, as South Sudan prepares to become the world's newest country, it is crucial that steps are taken to assist these women to reclaim their lives.

ENDNOTES

1 All amounts quoted in US$ in this chapter would have been paid in local Sudanese pounds (SDG). Currency conversions reflect values as in August 2010.
5 This finding is based on information disclosed to researchers by sex workers themselves. It is hoped that future research will include a detailed prevalence survey and a form of HIV testing.

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Rosemary, brothel worker, 14 August 2010, Juba

FOCUS GROUPS
Focus groups were held on 17 July, and on 7 and 14 August 2010 in Juba.
Theresa is a widow and mother of seven children who lives in Juba, South Sudan’s capital city. She lost her job as a cleaner in a health-care centre when her employers found out that she is living with HIV. Theresa’s husband died of AIDS, but it was only after he died that she found out that he had been HIV positive. Although she was aware that her husband had sexual relationships with other women, Theresa was unable to negotiate safe sex for fear that he would assault her. After her husband’s death, Theresa’s in-laws forced her out of her home. She now lives in a dilapidated hut, with no roof, in a remote part of town. Too poor to improve her living conditions or her diet, she frequently succumbs to bouts of malaria or flu. Theresa’s story is not unique. It mirrors the experiences of millions of women in sub-Saharan Africa whose lives are shaped by the twin plagues of war and AIDS.

Thirty years into the AIDS pandemic there is a strong consensus that it is impossible to conquer HIV without understanding and responding to the gender inequalities and the abuses of women’s rights that both drive the pandemic and diminish the capacities of governments, communities and individuals to mitigate its effects. This is especially true in sub-Saharan Africa and in post-conflict settings.

One cannot underestimate the importance and urgency of focusing on HIV and women in post-conflict South Sudan. After the 1994 Rwanda
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genocide, research revealed that HIV prevalence among women who had experienced rape during the war was 60 to 80 per cent, while prevalence among the general population was just 13.5 per cent (El-Bushra, 2010: 22). On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that conflict can, at times, shelter affected communities from the spread of HIV, while post-conflict settings can create environments that facilitate the rapid spread of HIV. For example, the end of a war can mean the end of isolation for communities, increased mobility from rural to urban areas in search of work, the demobilisation of combatants and the disruption of humanitarian aid to refugees. In addition, a flow of new aid workers, peacekeeping forces and development resources may create power structures that make sexual exploitation more likely (De Waal et al., 2010; Spiegel et al., 2007). As Rachel Jewkes has noted, the experiences of South Africa and Mozambique ‘suggest that there could be substantial risk of HIV spread during the phase of reconstruction after conflict, because usual sexual activity is resumed in a context of economic recovery, infrastructure development, and renewed population mobility.’ Jewkes also argues that post-conflict settings can increase women’s ‘vulnerability to sexual and intimate partner violence’ (Jewkes, 2007: 2141).

In South Sudan, as in other post-conflict settings, several of the above factors come into play and may well contribute to the spread of HIV. There is increased cross-border movement and internal mobility, with the return of refugees and displaced persons, including from several neighbouring countries where HIV prevalence is high. The rapid rise in the cost of living is also creating significant income disparities (Hakim, 2009; SSAC, 2010). Moreover, gender inequality, and lack of health infrastructure in South Sudan could also act as key drivers of HIV.

This chapter documents the experiences of women living with HIV in the city of Juba, and the socio-economic, political and cultural context within which they live. The chapter focuses on the challenges and human rights abuses women face and on their hopes for the future. It also outlines and analyses the South Sudanese government’s response to HIV and AIDS.

In terms of methodology, the chapter is based on a combination of desk research and qualitative field research. The latter includes participant observation, key-informant interviews, in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions. Interviews were conducted with women living with HIV, health-care workers, government and UN officials, and the staff of various international and local NGOs working on HIV/AIDS or women’s rights in South Sudan. Details of interviews cited are listed at the end of the chapter.

Field research took place in Juba, the capital of South Sudan, in July and August 2010. Juba was chosen as the primary research setting for several reasons. The city constitutes an access point to many states and is home to women and men from across South Sudan. As a former garrison town, it epitomises several of the key conditions relating to the interplay between HIV and women’s rights in a post-conflict setting. Juba is also home to South Sudan’s key government institutions, several UN agencies and other key international and local NGOs working on both HIV and gender in the country. Given time and resource limitations, it made sense to seek a more in-depth account of the lives of women living with HIV in one specific place. As such, while some of the findings in this chapter are relevant to women living with HIV across South Sudan, there is no attempt to generalise the findings.

Interviews with women living with HIV took place at the premises of NGOs, and at Juba Hospital. Interviews with sex workers took place in locations where sex workers live and work. Before each interview, the author explained the purpose of the research, and obtained informed verbal consent from respondents. Interviewees were informed that participation was voluntary and not remunerated, and were encouraged to end the interview if they felt uncomfortable at any point. Unless respondents preferred that their real names be used, the names of women living with HIV were changed to protect their identities.

In relation to socio-economic backgrounds, interviewees ranged from women who had had limited or no access to schooling, to women who had received secondary or higher education. Some women were formally employed, others ran small businesses in the informal sector and some were unemployed. The women originated from different parts of South Sudan, and were from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Some had lived in the city throughout the war, while others had immigrated or returned from neighbouring countries or North Sudan after the war ended. The majority of the women interviewed said that they had been, or were currently, in polygynous marriages.

Given the significance of ‘high-risk’ groups in the spread of AIDS,
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interviewees included sex workers and female former combatants, both important high-risk groups. Most of the sex workers interviewed came from the Democratic Republic of Congo but a focus-group discussion also included two South Sudanese sex workers. Interviews were conducted mainly in Arabic and English. The majority of sex workers said they were living with HIV. Interviews and discussions with sex workers were conducted in Lingala, Swahili and French. Two volunteers acted as interpreters for these.

As is the case in other parts of Sudan, HIV is a sensitive issue in the South, particularly outside of the circles of AIDS activists, practitioners and researchers. This sensitivity was heightened in relation to this research, given my background as a Northern Sudanese, and in light of the complex history of conflict and social and economic marginalisation of the South by successive Northern governments. In addition, the fieldwork took place at a critical political moment when the country was preparing for the referendum that resulted in an overwhelming vote for secession for the South. Prior to the referendum, commentators sympathetic to the ruling National Congress Party in North Sudan had used HIV and sex-work-related media reports on South Sudan, to portray the South Sudanese government as incapable of running an independent country. In addition, the federal minister of information threatened that Southerners would not be able to access health care in the North, should they vote for secession. Women interviewed did not openly question my identity, however I grappled with wanting to portray the experiences of women living with HIV in South Sudan, and the challenges they face, while making sure not to ‘other’ these women in the process. In the spirit of solidarity I hope I have managed to do so.

HIV/AIDS in South Sudan

There is a general lack of systematic data on South Sudan. The most recent statistics on HIV prevalence in the South, which date back to 2007, indicate a prevalence of 3.1 per cent (SSAC, 2008). This characterises the region as having a generalised low-level epidemic, which means that prevalence is not confined to high-risk groups such as sex workers, injecting drug users or men who have sex with men, but rather is generalised among the entire population. Prevalence rates vary between states, ranging from as low as 1 per cent in central parts of South Sudan, to as high as 10 per cent in areas that border on high-prevalence countries, such as Uganda (SSAC, 2011).

In 2009, HIV prevalence in adults in Sudan as a whole was reported at 1.1 per cent (UNAIDS, 2010: 195). Of the 260 000 people living with HIV in Sudan in 2009, 250 000 were reported to be adults (over 15 years), and 140 000 of these were women (UNAIDS, 2010: 194–196). Earlier studies have shed some light on HIV prevalence in specific areas in South Sudan, however. A study conducted in Juba in 1995 estimated HIV prevalence among the general population there to be 3 per cent (McCarthy et al., 1995). A behavioural and biological survey conducted outside Juba in 2002 and 2003, with individuals aged 15 to 49, found that HIV prevalence was 0.4 per cent in Rumbek in Bahr el Ghazal province, and 4.4 per cent in Yei (and the surrounding 20-kilometre area in Western Equatoria) – Yei is much closer to the Ugandan border. The study also found that HIV prevalence was twice as high among women than men, and four times higher among women aged 15 to 24 years than among men in the same age group (Kaiser et al., 2006).

HIV has evolved in South Sudan against the backdrop of two civil wars that spanned over four decades, and within a context of marginalisation by successive central governments, which created a weak health-care system with dilapidated health-care facilities (SSAC, 2011; Wakabi, 2008). Furthermore, the lack of skilled medical personnel and management capacity, plus a shortage of funds to pay health workers and to purchase drugs have greatly undermined the health-care system (Rubenstein, 2009). This poses a serious challenge to the development of an effective response to HIV and AIDS. In addition, the government acknowledges that competing national priorities, such as recovery, reintegration, reconstruction, the security agenda and the referendum have diverted attention and resources away from issues related to HIV, health, gender and inequality (SSAC, 2011).

Women and HIV/AIDS in South Sudan

Women’s vulnerability to HIV

In South Sudan, several historical and structural factors combine to increase women’s vulnerability to HIV. Women have undergone harrowing experiences, with many experiencing sexual violence during the war, and as refugees in displaced settings (see Aldehaib, 2010; Ali, 2000; Beswick, 2001; D’Awol, 2008; Fitzgerald, 2002). It has been argued that exposure to sexual violence in conflict situations may, in the long run, contribute to risky sexual
behaviour among survivors and a corresponding increase in vulnerability to HIV infection (Jewkes, 2007). Jewkes argues that exposure to trauma may result in increased sexual risk-taking and a tendency to resort to violence, including sexual violence, in later life.

As mentioned, it is increasingly evident that gender-based violence tends to increase in post-conflict settings. Violence against women heightens their vulnerability to HIV and diminishes their capacity to cope with the disease (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002, 2007; OCHA & IRIN, 2007). Various sources confirm that gender-based violence, is prevalent in post-conflict South Sudan despite the lack of statistics and qualitative studies (Aldehaib, 2010; Aquilina et al, 2006; IRIN, 2010). Easy access to small arms, the ‘hyper-masculinity’ created by men’s experiences as combatants, the acceptability of ‘disciplining’ a wife and of using domestic violence as a means to do so, and the lack of redress for gender-based violence under customary and statutory law all contribute to the prevalence of violence against women in South Sudan (Aldehaib, 2010; Aquilina et al., 2006; Interview, Zeinab Osman). In addition, as the narratives below reveal, the fear of violence often prevents women from negotiating safer sex to protect themselves and their partners from HIV or other sexually transmitted infections.

Moreover, conflict and marginalisation have left South Sudan with among the worst human development indicators in the world. For example, the region has one of the world’s highest maternal mortality ratios, and only 5 per cent of women give birth in health-care facilities. Poverty is rampant, and a recent survey found that over 50 per cent of the people of South Sudan fell below the poverty line. Just one example of the many ways in which women are particularly affected by poverty, is that many families marry their daughters off at an early age for economic purposes, which increases the girls’ vulnerability to HIV. The 2006 Sudan Household Health Survey indicates that in South Sudan 48 per cent of women aged 15 to 19 were married, and in Unity State this figure is as much as 85 per cent (Ministry of Health & SSCCSE, 2006). In addition, women living with HIV tend to suffer both stigma and discrimination, expressed in gender-specific terms. In other words, HIV-positive status often leads to loss of employment and the denial of property rights, leading almost inevitably to a rapid downward spiral into poverty.

Education was almost entirely disrupted by the war leaving South Sudan’s population with very low literacy levels, especially among women. Several interviewees made the point that low knowledge of HIV and HIV prevention methods is closely related to high rates of illiteracy among women. The 2006 Sudan Household Health Survey found that only 45 per cent of women aged 15 to 45 had ever heard of HIV, and that 70 per cent were ignorant about the three main forms of HIV prevention.

Several sociocultural factors further increase women’s (and men’s) vulnerability to HIV. The women interviewed for this research all told stories that reveal how polygyny (the social acceptance of concurrent sexual partnerships for men) and widow inheritance increase women’s vulnerability to HIV infection. These are discussed later in the chapter.

The populations identified as most at risk of HIV infection in South Sudan include refugees, internally displaced persons, street children, soldiers, truck drivers, sex workers, tea sellers, and men who have sex with men (Interview, Florence Bayoa; SSAC, 2011). Women who belong to these groups face multiple levels of social exclusion. Later in the chapter, women from two of these groups, an ex-combatant and a sex worker, give accounts of the challenges they experience as high-risk women in South Sudan.

Women’s rights

Given the links between gender inequality, HIV and AIDS, improving women’s status in society is crucial to successfully tackling HIV in South Sudan. International commitment to supporting women’s health and human rights has never been stronger, including in the context of HIV. In 2010, UNAIDS launched its Agenda for Accelerated Country Action for Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV. The Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria has also launched a gender strategy (Global Fund, n.d.), and increasingly lobbies for attention to be paid to women’s rights and gender equality. In September 2010, the UN Secretary General launched The Global Strategy on Women and Children’s Health amid strong support from world leaders and a wide range of partner organisations. All of these strategies can be made to play a facilitating role in South Sudan.

In addition, Sudan has signed several international human rights instruments that safeguard women’s rights. In these, women are guaranteed
the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health, bodily integrity and security of the person, equality and non-discrimination. The government of South Sudan has also committed itself to achieving the Millennium Development Goals that include addressing HIV and women's empowerment. As part of this, 2010 was declared the year for women and children's health, and measures to increase the political participation of women – a quota system that allocates 25 per cent of seats at all levels of government to women – are being implemented. The 2011 draft Transitional Constitution for the Republic of South Sudan also contains strong commitments to women's rights. As it moves towards the creation of the new state, this is a crucial time for South Sudan. The government has a unique opportunity to ensure that women's rights are integrated into new governance structures and into laws that are being drafted or revised. Integrating a gender and a human rights perspective at the outset has the potential to play a major role in strengthening future responses to HIV and AIDS (Gruskin & Tarantola, 2008).

Government and health services’ responses

Although the government of South Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM), the ruling party in the new country, have demonstrated a strong commitment to preventing and addressing HIV, there are still significant gaps in their response to the pandemic.

Historically the SPLM has shown the political will to tackle HIV and AIDS. In 1995, the late John Garang, the founder and former head of the movement, identified HIV as the most critical threat facing the new Sudan, second only to the war that was still raging at the time. The SPLM held a national HIV conference in April 2001, and launched its policy document, HIV/AIDS Policy and Control Strategies for the New Sudan, in the same year. The SPLM also formed the New Sudan National AIDS Council, which reported directly to the SPLM’s chairperson (GOSS, 2008c).

After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, which officially ended the war, and granted a level of autonomy to South Sudan, the government of South Sudan established the Southern Sudan AIDS Commission. The government then embarked on the development of an AIDS policy, a strategic framework, and several guidelines for HIV prevention, testing and treatment. In 2008, the government launched the Southern Sudan HIV/AIDS Policy (GOSS, 2008b), which at the time of writing was still a working document that was awaiting endorsement by the legislature (Interview, Lul Riek). The HIV/AIDS policy is grounded in a human rights approach, and cites several international human rights conventions, including those that address women's rights.

In terms of service provision, the public-health sector in South Sudan provides a range of HIV services including voluntary counselling and testing (VCT), the supply of antiretroviral treatment (ART), and prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT). VCT is an initial and crucial component of the AIDS response. Apart from making clients aware of their HIV status, VCT forms an important entry point for health care and support services for those who test positive, especially women. The Southern Sudan Voluntary Counselling and Testing Guidelines recommend ‘women-friendly counselling and testing services’ that address access barriers to VCT services, recognising the ‘social and structural barriers to women's access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support’. (Ministry of Health, 2008:10).

In 2008, there were only 30 VCT sites in South Sudan, but steps have since been taken to increase the number of VCT centres. No data is available about the percentage of the population that has been tested for HIV, but it is believed to be low. While VCT counsellors support women who need help in disclosing their HIV status to their partners and others, they do not directly refer clients to civil-society organisations and service providers that support women who face the challenges involved in living with HIV. Admittedly, the capacity of civil society to provide support services is still low in many parts of South Sudan.

When it comes to treatment, ‘first-line’ antiretroviral treatment (ART), is currently available free of charge in 30 HIV treatment centres across South Sudan. Unfortunately, ART facilities are not evenly distributed across South Sudan, and many patients are unable to access treatment. It is estimated that only 1.3 per cent of those in need of ART in South Sudan receive it (SSAC, 2011: 33; Interview, Lul Riek). It is unclear what percentage of those who are accessing ART are women, although it is likely that more women than men are accessing it because of their involvement in prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) programs. At the time of writing, those who required second-line treatment have to travel to Uganda or other countries.
to obtain their drug supplies. This is possible only for a very limited number of people who have the resources to do so (Interview, Evelyn Letio).

A key form of HIV transmission is from mother to child during pregnancy or childbirth. A set of interventions that include ART can significantly reduce this form transmission. The simplest regimen consists of a single dose of Nevirapine given to a mother at the onset of labour, plus a single dose given to the baby after delivery. This is relatively cheap and easy to administer, and is therefore considered appropriate for resource-poor and emergency settings, such as South Sudan. The number of PMTCT programmes is slowly increasing in South Sudan. Antenatal health-care facilities that provide PMTCT increased from just 3 in 2008, to 19 in 2009. In 2009, 13 141 women received HIV testing in maternal health facilities. Of the 265 women who tested positive, 155 (59 per cent) received PMTCT (SSAC, 2011: 25–26). The roll out of PMTCT programmes has been hampered by a shortage in human resources and a lack of infrastructure in most health-care facilities (SSAC, 2011). However, what really impedes the roll-out of a comprehensive and far-reaching PMTCT programme is the low proportion of women who use antenatal health-care services or deliver their babies in hospitals. The reasons for this relate to lack of health services and cultural beliefs that encourage home births.

Another vital element of HIV prevention is the provision of post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) in cases of occupational injuries (such as needle-stick injuries) and for survivors of sexual violence such as rape. PEP is a 28-day course of ART that should be initiated as soon as possible after exposure to HIV, and must be started within 72 hours to be effective. Information on the availability of PEP in South Sudan is limited. South Sudan’s report to the United Nations General Assembly for 2008/2009 indicates that there is a lack of PEP services in South Sudan (SSAC, 2010). A WHO factsheet on South Sudan notes that PEP is available at the teaching hospitals in Juba and Wau (WHO, n.d). However it should be noted that several government policy documents indicate their commitment to increasing access to PEP. In particular, the South Sudan ART guidelines (Ministry of Health, n.d.) instruct health-care providers to offer PEP and emergency contraception to rape victims and women at risk of pregnancy. Moreover, the South Sudan HIV Strategic Framework (GOSS, 2008c) also pledges to raise public awareness of, and access to, PEP to strengthen HIV prevention.

### Contracting HIV in South Sudan

As noted, there are many factors involved in driving South Sudan’s HIV epidemic. The following section focuses on the key issues highlighted by the women interviewed for this chapter. The women’s narratives and voices illustrate some of the contexts in which women have experienced themselves as being vulnerable to infection.

#### Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence is a major driver of HIV in many parts of the world. As discussed above (and in Chapter 3 of this book), gender-based violence was rampant during the conflict in Sudan, and it continues to be widespread, although statistical evidence on prevalence levels is limited. The common perception of domestic violence as normal and acceptable, combined with the lack of redress for gender-based violence in both customary and statutory law, heighten women’s vulnerability and render them less able to protect themselves (Aldehaib, 2010: 1-2; Aquilina et al., 2006: 19; Interview, Zeinab Osman).

Women’s narratives confirm the general consensus that HIV transmission and gender-based violence, including within marriage, are closely linked. Selina, 30, was married to a soldier who abused her, and who hid his HIV status. She found out he had HIV when he was ill and receiving treatment in Khartoum:

My late husband was ill. I stayed with him for three months at the hospital in Khartoum. He told the doctors I was his sister…my husband used to beat me up and did not offer me money to buy food. I used to buy luba and lombo [local cheap food] to eat, and he ate at restaurants. I told my aunt [who works at the hospital] that this person has a medicine that he takes at the lavatory. My aunt asked me to read what is written on the box of his medicine. Once I told her, she told my parents to send money so I can return to Juba. They sent me SDG150 [approximately US$70] so I came to Juba (Interview, Selina).

Most women in South Sudan, including those living with HIV, are unable to turn to the police for protection from domestic violence as they are likely to be ridiculed rather than supported. As one member of a women’s HIV support group said, ‘If you report domestic violence to the police, they
**Concurrent sexual partners**

Concurrent sexual partnerships, especially among married men, constitute a key driver of HIV in South Sudan. These relationships are considered a key driver of generalised HIV epidemics (see Epstein, 2007; Merson et al., 2008; Shelton, 2007). The majority of the women interviewed believe they became infected with HIV within their marriages. Several women reported that their husbands were living with HIV but either did not know about it, never informed them of their status, or informed them only when they were about to die.

Evelyn Letio has been living with HIV for over 20 years. She often works as a motivational speaker, to demonstrate that one can live a long and healthy life with HIV. Evelyn explains how she found out that she was HIV positive:

> When my husband died, being young, many were interested in me. I chose one man. We agreed that before we go far we should both have HIV tests. He told me that he had heard stories…that my husband had died of AIDS. I did not know my husband had AIDS. He was always sick but I thought that because he drank a lot, he was losing weight and his liver was affected…We both [went] for HIV test. I was positive. He was negative. I wanted to bring [my late husband] out of the grave and cut him into pieces. I was in exile in Uganda, working for the Department of Communications. I made up my mind that I must live because of my children. (Interview)

When asked how they thought their husbands had contracted HIV, most of the women interviewed said that they believed their husbands contracted HIV from having several sexual partners other than their co-wives. Polygyny is prevalent in South Sudan. The 2006 Sudan Household Health Survey indicated that women in the southern states were more likely to be in polygynous marriages or unions, than women in North Sudan. In several southern states, the survey found that more than half of women aged 15 to 49 were in polygynous marriages (SGNU & GOSS, 2006: 187).

Regardless of whether a man has one or several wives, however, extramarital relations are almost the norm. Betty, an HIV activist from South Sudan put it as follows:

> Here in the South, married women are in their homes [do not engage in extramarital relationships] but if the man has money, he goes around [has sexual relationships with other women]. He then comes to his wife. If the wife is infected as a result, they say the woman brought HIV to the household. (Focus group, 4 August)

Similarly, a counsellor in the ART clinic at Juba Hospital said, ‘The number of women with HIV is high because women are biologically vulnerable, but also because, at times, one man will have ten partners. If he has HIV he can infect them all. That is how the number of women living with HIV will rise.’ (Interview, Adelinde David).

Jane, 52, is married and has seven children. Her husband, who is a soldier, moves frequently between countries and around Sudan. According to Jane, her husband has other female sexual partners that he sees whenever he travels. Jane had an HIV test after developing a rash on her face in 2008, and received a positive diagnosis. ‘My husband goes around with other women and has many children from other women. Whenever he is ill, he does not go for testing. I said, let only one of us die, not both of us, for the sake of our children’ (Interview).

**Widow inheritance**

Wife inheritance, which is practised in many parts of South Sudan, also acts as a driver of HIV. Several women interviewed believed that they contracted or transmitted HIV through this practice. Wife inheritance involves the ‘transfer’ of a widow to her husband’s brother or a close male relative on the death of her husband. It is believed that wife inheritance immortalises a deceased man, and keeps his name alive, as children born to the widow and her brother-in-law are considered children of the deceased. The practice is also intended to ensure financial security for the wife and family of the deceased man (D’Awol, 2008). Unfortunately, this practice not only robs women of agency and the ability to choose whether and whom they wish to marry, it also increases their vulnerability to HIV.

Anita, a widow who has six children, tells her story:

> I did not contract HIV from my late husband, but from his brother. We lived with him after his brother passed away… I did not know my brother-in-law
had HIV. At the time people did not have this knowledge. After six months I felt I was not okay, so I abstained from sex with him. He passed away. I had fever and other health problems. At the hospital they found I was HIV positive. (Interview)

A widow with HIV may also infect her brother-in-law. Maria, a volunteer at an antenatal care clinic in Juba, said her brother-in-law contracted HIV after ‘inheriting’ her when her husband died. The brother of my late husband inherited me. I was waiting for my HIV test results so I asked him to wait for a little while. I was asked to have another HIV test after the first test. We stayed together. I had contracted HIV from my first husband. Now his brother became infected’ (Interview). Furthermore, women whose husbands have died of AIDS often face stigma in their new households as the senior wives say things like, ‘You killed your husband, you are going to kill my husband’ (Interview, Zeinab Osman).

While it is difficult to change practices like widow inheritance and polygamy overnight, when viewing the serious impact that they have in driving HIV, it seems clear that strategies need to be developed to change these practices in the long run.

Resistance to condom use
Resistance to the use of condoms, and women’s inability to negotiate safer sex further exacerbates the problem of HIV infection (SSAC, 2011). In South Sudan, it is socially unacceptable for women to raise and discuss condom use (Interviews, Lul Riek; Evelyn Letio). Women who do raise this are often accused of being unfaithful and may even risk a violent response.

A participant in a focus-group discussion responded to a question about condom use by saying, ‘If you ask for the use of condoms, it means you are a woman who goes out [has extramarital sex]. They would ask: how did you know [my late husband] was ill so I did not ask for condoms. And I am a house woman, not loose. I cannot say things like “condom”’ (Interview).

Caroline Zacharia, a widow, responded to the question of whether she used condoms with her late husband as follows, ‘No condom. I did not know [my late husband] was ill so I did not ask for condoms. And I am a house woman, not loose. I cannot say things like “condom”’ (Interview).

Similarly, a woman in Yei told a UN staff member, ‘Once you are married, if the man wants sex, you have no other option. If he is positive, then the woman is vulnerable’ (Interview, Joseph Elisa Jibi).

Resistance to condom use increases the risk of HIV infection among all the members of a sexual network, including co-wives. Flora, 34, is another widow whose husband died of AIDS in 2002. Her husband knew he had HIV, but he never disclosed his status to her or to his other wife, who also died of AIDS in 2007. Flora explains that it was difficult to suggest the use of condoms, ‘My husband had another wife who died in 2007, and also had HIV. [Our husband] used to go out with many other women, whom we did not know. At the time, if you talked about condoms you caused problems at home. It means you are doing something bad [having extramarital sex]’ (Interview).

Efforts at promoting condom use often meet resistance at community level, especially in rural areas (SSAC, 2011: 24). Nouna Eiffe, Director of Concern for Mothers and Children in Sudan, an organisation that works in the states of Greater Equatoria and in Bhar El Ghazal, said that when her organisation distributed condoms in a village, men gave them to the children to use as balloons and said that they ‘will not eat “wrapped sweets” regardless of whether they would live or die’ (Interview).

Women’s difficulties in negotiating safer sex and condom use are rooted in dominant gender norms, notions of masculinity and femininity, and the expectations of society. Women defined as ‘good’ are expected not to raise their voice no matter what a man said, [to be] ignorant and silent about sexuality, …innocent and submissive at all times.’ This, writes Riek, ‘derives from [women’s] traditional roles as wives’, where ‘childbearing and satisfying her husband sexually are key expectations for a wife even if she is aware that her husband is unfaithful. Refusing a husband sex can result in rejection and violence’ (Riek, n.d.: 2).

Living with HIV in South Sudan
Life can be extremely difficult for women living with HIV in South Sudan. The challenges are numerous, and there is little support available from the state or in the community. Apart from having to contend with their own feelings and fears about their health, discriminatory laws exacerbate their situations, and these women often face violence, divorce and the loss of economic security. All of these factors limit women’s abilities to cope with HIV, and discourage other women from wanting to know their HIV status.
Stigma and discrimination

Women interviewed for this chapter indicated that there are high levels of stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV in South Sudan. Such stigma is the result of limited public knowledge about the disease, coupled with the prevalence of rumours and misinformation about the sources and methods of HIV transmission (Interview, Lul Riek). Women living with HIV experience stigma in a gender-specific way given that members of the community often describe women with HIV as immoral or promiscuous. As one woman noted, ‘Here in Juba, if a woman gets this illness, they say she is a slut, they say she is loose, just like that’ (Interview, Karla).

Women often find out about their HIV status before their husbands do, and they can face dire consequences if they decide to disclose their HIV status. According to a member of a women’s support group in Juba:

Women often find out first. The man says to the woman, ‘You brought the disease to this home.’ Women find out about their status first because they go to ANC [antenatal care centre] when pregnant. They receive counselling and no woman says no to the HIV test. But men do not accompany their wives or receive a test, and this is a big problem. And when the woman returns to her home, she is beaten and divorced. (Focus group, 4 August)

Fearing these consequences, many women do not disclose their HIV status. Sekina has not told her husband that she is HIV positive. She is on HIV treatment and takes the pills secretly because she fears her husband. Sekina says, ‘I work at a health centre and they bring me the drugs. I put the drugs in my bag and I make sure when I take the drugs he does not see me...I leave the bulk of drugs with my sister, and take them little by little’ (Interview, Sekina).

Individuals with HIV who belong to groups identified as ‘most at risk’ of HIV infection face even higher levels of stigma. Such groups include combatants and returnees, especially those returning from East African countries where HIV prevalence is known to be high. One activist interviewed reported that in 2007 she took a woman who had just returned from Kenya to the hospital for counselling and testing. She recalled that the VCT counsellor told the woman, ‘You people come from East Africa, so you have this disease’ (Interview, Zeinab Osman).

Female former combatants face high levels of stigma as they are often perceived as ‘loose women who bring disease to the community’. This is particularly the case if they are married to ex-combatants. Stigma further discourages them from seeking HIV testing (Interview, Otim Julious). Sekina is a former combatant who was exiled in Uganda, and is married to a soldier who abuses her continually. She says, ‘If I bring up this idea of using condoms it will be a question mark. When he is abusing me, I just keep quiet.’

The abuse that women with HIV suffer can be severe, but it is difficult to report verbal or other abuse as women receive little assistance from police and judicial structures. One of the reasons women don’t turn to the police in these circumstances is that they themselves might face criminal punishment. In the 2008 Penal Code Act, under the section ‘Rape, other Sexual Offences and Offences against Morality’, the Act criminalises the ‘deliberate’ and knowing transmission of HIV and other STIs, and levies penalties of up to 14 years imprisonment, a fine, or both, on the accused. Criminalisation of the ‘knowing infection with HIV’ is highly controversial around the world; activists the world over argue that it is a serious impediment to HIV prevention and treatment.

Lack of economic opportunities

HIV can have harsh economic impacts for women in South Sudan. Discrimination in the workplace based on HIV status combined with discriminatory customary laws, ensure that HIV affects far more than a person’s health. In 2009, the Southern Sudan Centre for Census, Statistics and Evaluation conducted a National Baseline Household Survey among 5 280 households in the ten states of South Sudan. The survey found that 50.6 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line (SSCCSE, 2009: 4). Poverty affects women in a specific way in part because women bear most of the burden of caring for their children. Given their limited access to employment, high illiteracy levels, insecure property rights, lack of legal support, and the lack of a social security safety net, further economic setbacks caused by HIV can be particularly serious for women.

As in other countries around the world, women living with HIV in South Sudan face discrimination in the workplace. Several interviewees reported
a loss of employment due to HIV status. Anita, 38, said her employer dismissed her because they suspected she had AIDS. ‘I used to work as a cleaner at the Lands Administration. They dismissed me because I am living with HIV. I was ill for five days, so I sent someone to tell my employers that my legs hurt and so I needed time off. They told me, “you are one of those sick people”’ (Interview). Since losing her job, Anita and her children have been struggling, especially given that her in-laws have also confiscated her property. She laments:

The problem that causes me severe pain is that responsibility is hard. I am taking care of five children, without the support of a man or family. The house is in a bad state. When it rains, it rains over our heads. Some of our furniture was mined. And I am ill, but I just ignore these problems. At the hospital, they give me treatment that extends my life and makes me strong. But this medicine can only help [when taken] with food. You need food for it to work. But for someone like me, sometimes I do not find food for five days because there is no money.’ (Interview)

Anita’s experience is not unique. Another woman who worked as a cleaner in the Ministry of Health said, ‘When they found out I had HIV they forced me to become a pensioner. They did not pay any benefits or compensation. Now I am ill and [have no income]’ (Focus group, 4 August).

The Southern Sudan HIV/AIDS Policy (GOSS, 2008b) commits the government of South Sudan to ensuring ‘development of workplace policies to address HIV/AIDS related issues including stigma and discrimination.’ However, the government is yet to adopt a workplace HIV policy, and HIV-positive women continue to be discriminated against and summarily dismissed, and little recourse is available.

Another factor that contributes to women’s economic disempowerment and thus vulnerability to HIV is that customary law mostly discriminates against women in terms of property and inheritance rights. Several women said they had lost all of their property upon the death of their husbands. Discrimination under customary law is magnified for women with HIV because they are often accused by their in-laws of ‘killing their husband’. This, at times, leads relatives to reject the woman and not extend the care and generosity that the traditional inheritance laws envisaged (Interview, Florence Bayoaa).

Members of a women’s HIV support group said that ‘if a man dies of AIDS, the in-laws will say the woman killed their son. They take everything from her, sometimes even the children.’ Selina, a 30-year-old widow, explained that when her husband died of AIDS in 2001, she was unable to claim any of their marital property or his pension. As a result, she now lives in a remote area in desperately poor conditions. ‘My in-laws said I should have died with their son. [I did not go to court because] my family said [my in-laws] may harm me. I live in a far area and there is a lot of mosquitoes that cause malaria. I live in a hut’ (Interview, Selina).

While in theory women can take their in-laws to court to try to reclaim their property, in reality it is extremely difficult to do so, especially as most women lack knowledge of legal processes, have almost no economic resources, and often lose the support of their extended family if they take legal action. The courts, and in particular, customary courts, are often biased against women. In one focus-group discussion, the comment was made that ‘if you are able to go to court, then they can tell you that you can stay in the [matrimonial] home and raise your children up. If you do not have proper representation, if you go to court they can say, you killed that man, go away’ (Focus group, 4 August).

The 2011 Draft Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan 2011 recognises customary law and authorities, which, generally speaking, can be said to discriminate against women. However, it is important to note that the draft Constitution also includes provisions that safeguard women’s property rights. For example, Article 16.5 stipulates that: ‘Women shall have the right to own property and share in the estate of their deceased husbands together with any surviving legal heirs of the deceased.’ The Southern Sudan HIV/AIDS Policy (GOSS, 2008b) cites and acknowledges a similar provision in Southern Sudan’s 2005 Interim Constitution. This means that the legal framework under which women’s rights should be protected and respected is in place.

However, in practice, many women living with HIV continue to lose their property after the deaths of their husbands. There are currently no government programmes, and very limited civil-society initiatives that provide legal assistance in such cases.
The experiences of sex workers

According to UNAIDS, ‘HIV infection among sex workers and their clients has long played an important role in the heterosexual transmission of HIV…Their clients have long been recognised as a potential epidemiological bridge to other populations’ (UNAIDS, 2009: 32–33). In South Sudan, and particularly in Juba, commercial sex is recognised as one of the major drivers of HIV. Most of Juba’s sex workers are women. In Chapter 4 of this volume, the number of sex workers in Juba alone is estimated at approximately 2,000, but there are no statistics on the number of clients they have, or about the HIV prevalence among both groups. According to Florence Bayoa, of the South Sudan HIV/AIDS Alliance, rates of infection are believed to be high (Interview). A study in Juba in 1995 estimated that HIV prevalence among sex workers was 16 per cent, and 13.5 per cent among the men who used their services. This was compared to the 3 per cent prevalence in the general population estimated in the same study (McCarthy et al., 1995).

As noted in Chapter 4, many of the sex workers in Juba come from neighbouring countries such as Kenya, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Ethiopia. South Sudanese sex workers tend to be very young girls who work for older women who bring them clients. A Congolese pastor who works closely with foreign sex workers in Juba stated that, ‘If we are talking about 50 [Congolese sex workers], 45 of them may [have] HIV. Now there are some Sudanese [sex workers] who have HIV as well’ (Interview).

Sex workers in Juba face many constraints including stigma and discrimination, gender-based violence, and lack of access to services, including health-care services. Sex work is criminalised in South Sudan and sex workers have a very low status in society. They work in poor conditions, in lodges that allow for abuse by clients. Levels of knowledge about HIV among sex workers are also often extremely low.

The sex workers interviewed said they had almost no access to health-care services. As such, many suffer from untreated STIs, which can increase the risk of infection or transmission of HIV. They also suffer from various other health problems, ‘We suffer from other sickness and microbes, not only HIV. We suffer pain in the back…we get stomach ache, we get malaria because we do not have nets to ward off mosquitoes and we have [other STIs] like syphilis’ (Focus group, 7 August).

Beyond violence related to condom use, sex workers in Juba frequently face violent assault, including sexual assault, often at the hands of soldiers. Kira, aged 27, said, ‘Sometimes [clients] are violent. They threaten us – can beat us and can even remove the pistol’ (Interview).

Sex workers are unable to seek protection from the police because the 2008 Penal Code Act criminalises sex work. This increases sex workers’ vulnerability to coercion, rape and HIV. In the few instances when sex workers report
workers report such abuses, no action is taken. ‘Sometimes when we are beaten, if we report to the police, nothing happens, they leave you in your pain, suffering with your injuries and your wounds and no one takes you to hospital’ (Focus group, 7 August). The government, UN agencies and international organisations acknowledge the violence that sex workers face.

Narratives of hope

Despite the immense challenges experienced by HIV-positive women in South Sudan, the women interviewed told stories of hope and immense resilience. They all said they wanted to improve their lives and hoped to receive training and information on HIV prevention and treatment, so that they can raise awareness in their communities, and demonstrate that women are part of the solution to HIV. Women interviewed for this chapter also showed an interest in research that aims to find a cure or vaccine for HIV/AIDS.

Women interviewed made important suggestions about ways that government and other stakeholders could support them. For example, they suggested the introduction of free legal-aid services for women living with HIV and those who do not have financial resources. The women suggested specific legislation to protect the rights of women living with HIV, including laws to safeguard their rights in the workplace. They suggested the establishment of new services designed to address women’s specific needs, such as a women’s hospital that would focus on treating survivors of sexual violence and women living with HIV, among other health issues.

Women living with HIV identified economic empowerment as a key priority. The majority of women interviewed said they hoped the government and development agencies might be able to provide them with seed money to start small businesses. Lydia, 39, has three children and only a basic education. She is on HIV treatment. She says that she wishes she could, ‘find employment or start a business so I can [have better nutrition and feel better], and so that the children can go to school’ (Interview). The Southern Sudan HIV/AIDS policy (GOSS, 2008b) commits to the promotion and support of income-generating projects, including microcredit projects, in order to sustain the livelihoods of people infected or affected by HIV. Steps need to be taken to implement this.

Some initiatives have already started. For example, members of Mubadurin (‘initiative-takers’), an organisation that supports people living with HIV and other socially excluded groups, started a co-operative. However, they soon experienced problems relating to HIV. ‘Some of us were selling vegetables and fruits, but then people do not buy from us because they [think they can] catch the disease this way. So we decided to start a coal-making business’ (Focus group, 4 August; Interview, Mary).

Conclusion

The stories in this chapter told by women living with HIV highlight how practices such as wife inheritance, polygamy, the acceptance of concurrent partnerships for men and gender-based violence are driving the HIV pandemic. Their narratives reveal the ways in which stigma and discrimination, the lack of economic opportunities for women and the loss of employment and property, further hamper women’s capacity to cope with HIV.

All this is occurring in a post-conflict context where there is an acute lack of infrastructure, and human resources in the health-care sector are terribly scarce, where the government’s capacity is severely curtailed by decades of marginalisation, and where efforts are geared toward maintaining security and meeting the challenge of building a new state and nation. As noted, research on HIV and AIDS in conflict and post-conflict settings suggests that post-conflict societies may experience a rise in HIV transmission and in sexual and gender-based violence. It is crucial that the new government and other agencies are vigilant and aware of this increased risk. In order to meet this challenge, the new government must ensure that its commitment to gender equality remains firm, and address the AIDS pandemic, not only as part of ensuring that the people of South Sudan enjoy the highest attainable standards of health, but as a key aspect of building the new state.

By devising strong interventions that address the structural factors related to women’s vulnerability to HIV, and hamper women’s abilities to cope with HIV, South Sudan can set an example for other post-conflict countries. If such interventions fail to materialise, HIV will continue to spread in South Sudan, and AIDS will reap further suffering and death in a people that are desperately keen to play their part in developing their new country.
ENDNOTES
1 In 2009, Southern Sudan conducted its second survey of women attending antenatal clinics but the results of this survey have not yet been released. In 2010, the government of national unity commissioned the second Sudan Household Health Survey. This is a nationally representative, population-based survey designed to obtain national and state-level data on the prevalence of HIV and its social and demographic variations, as well as information on knowledge, attitudes, and sexual behavior regarding HIV/AIDS. These results should be published in 2011.
2 Poverty is often considered a major driver of the HIV pandemic especially among women (Fenton, 2004). It is important to note, however, that this is not only the case. Research in Tanzania and Kenya (Central Bureau of Statistics (Kenya), 2004; Tanzania Commission for AIDS et al., 2005) has also identified a positive correlation between HIV infection and wealth (see also Shelton et al., 2005).
3 Standard antiretroviral therapy (ART) involves the use of at least three antiretroviral (ARV) drugs to maximally suppress HIV virus and stop its progression. Upon failure or development of resistance to standard (first line) HIV treatment, the WHO recommends switching to a new, second-line regimen (WHO, 2010).
4 Currency conversions are as per average rates during August 2010.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Grace Mayo’s small hand reaches for her mother’s full breast, as she directs her tiny head towards the nipple. With determination she sucks hungrily until eventually her eyes close and she falls asleep. Proudly Grace’s mother looks down at her healthy infant. Grace was born two months ago on a straw mat in her grandmother’s hut, miles from any form of medical assistance. Grace and her mother are lucky to have survived. South Sudan, Grace’s home country, has among the highest infant and maternal mortality rates in the world – as of 2010, one in seven mothers dies during childbirth, and there are 109 infant deaths per 1 000 live births. The child mortality rate is also high: one in nine children die before their fifth birthday (WHO, 2010: 55, 24).

Being a mother in South Sudan is not easy. Women head two out of five households, often carrying the sole responsibility for their children. Raising children in one of the world’s poorest places means that meeting even the most basic needs can be a battle. Plagued by decades of conflict and the resulting underdevelopment, South Sudan has little in the way of infrastructure or social services to support new mothers. The challenges are immense and relentless. Women dream of peace, but drought, hunger, ethnic clashes and poverty rage on.

This chapter tells of three mothers: a woman internally displaced within
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Sudan; an ex-combatant; and a mother who survived the war without having to flee her home. Through these and other stories, the chapter explores the effects of South Sudan’s second civil war (1983–2005) on mothers, documents some of the experiences they went through, and examines the situation for mothers in the post-conflict period. The chapter discusses the needs of mothers, the support that is available to them, and the types of support that are lacking. Finally it explores changing gender roles and responsibilities in a rapidly shifting socio-economic and political environment.

The voices of mothers in South Sudan

The stories told by South Sudan’s mothers are filled with hope. Despite having to face incredible odds every day, South Sudanese women are resilient, and dare to dream of ways to improve the lives of their children. Their stories are tales of bravery, dedication and great perseverance.

Methodology

Interviews and focus groups were conducted between February and November 2010. Over a hundred women participated in eight focus groups, each with between ten and twelve participants. Individual interviews were conducted with 25 women. Most of the interviews were conducted on a farm in Rumbek where an NGO called Women for Women International runs a programme to train over 3,000 women in skills such as vegetable farming to help them provide for their children. Further interviews took place in the compounds of the World Food Programme and the AFEX Group where some of the interviewees had jobs as cleaners and cooks.

The women interviewed were asked a range of questions in order to gain an understanding of their backgrounds, circumstances and experiences. They were asked about their living conditions during the war, particularly as these pertained to motherhood. They were asked about their current circumstances: in what ways things have changed for them now that the war is over, how they look after their children, and if they carry this responsibility alone or with the support of family, community or other networks. The women described a regular day in their lives, and talked about their needs as mothers. Finally, they were asked to describe their hopes for the future and their plans for themselves and their children.

All the women approached were willing to talk and eager to be interviewed. However, most were unaccustomed to speaking about themselves, and had never been asked about their lives before. Many were shy and did not open up until the translator intervened, or until a follow-up interview was conducted – something that was not always possible given the time constraints. There were challenges around translation too, and some of the translators encountered difficulties in interpreting and translating the questions. This was dealt with by reviewing the questions before the interviews and focus groups took place and, in some cases, by using a different translator. Apart from the three women whose stories are told in detail, most interviewees preferred to remain anonymous or gave only their first names. Details of interviews cited are listed at the end of the chapter.

The lives of mothers in South Sudan: three stories

The following three stories are largely representative of mothers across South Sudan, and highlight the challenges, joys and dreams faced by women in this troubled country.

Martha Lek Makur: a war survivor in Rumbek East

Martha lives in a small village in a rural area called Rumbek East. There are no roads leading to her house, and the journey to her home is an arduous one, following narrow overgrown paths past the other small compounds in the village. Martha does not know exactly when she was born. She remembers getting married when she was still young. Martha has five children between the ages of four and seventeen years old.

Martha has eight marks etched on her head. Many of the Dinka people in the Rumbek area have circular marks around their whole heads, but hers are triangular and located only on her forehead. She explains that it is common in Yirol, the area in which she was born, to ‘mark’ girls when they turn eleven as a sign that they have entered adulthood. This process of ‘marking’ is a form of scarification, a traditional body art that uses scars to mark important events in people’s lives, such as their rites of passage or marriage.

Martha is one of many war survivors in Lakes State. She was able to stay in the vicinity of her home throughout the war and did not have to flee, as so many women were forced to do. Her life was difficult during this period, however, as people living in rural areas were forced to live in ‘the bush’ for...
long periods to hide from armed groups. When people talk of ‘the bush’, they refer to areas of dense vegetation in which people lived and hid in small clearings, enclosed and concealed by shrubs and plants. They would sleep on the ground without mats, mothers and children huddled close together. Obviously, they were unable to access basic necessities such as food, soap, bedding or clothes. If soldiers approached, everyone had to flee further into the bush, or risk being caught up in fighting or forcibly recruited into armed groups.

After these experiences, Martha sees her home, the ready availability of salt, sugar and soap, and her children’s health as great blessings. Although life today is still far from easy, she appreciates the changes that the ending of war has brought.

Martha’s husband paid 100 cows as bride price to her family, so that he could marry her and bring her to Barpakanyi, where she lives. When she realised that she was going to be one of eight wives, she decided that she needed to build her own house. This was not very common in her community. With pride she explains how she made her own bricks from mud, and how she and her children built their own brick home. She wanted a real roof, not one made of grass, so she asked her husband to give her a cow to sell. From the proceeds of the sale of the cow, she bought an iron sheet, timber and nails with which to construct the roof she wanted. When her house was completed, her husband brought his other wives to show them her new house, and to inform them that from now on he was going to live with her. The other wives started fighting with Martha, thinking that the husband had favoured her and built her the house. To stop the fighting, her husband explained the situation to his other wives, and encouraged them to build their own homes too. Martha’s explains, ‘My husband wants to be with me the most, because I built a very nice house by myself. And I can take care of myself and my children. I hardly have to ask him for anything.’

Rearing her children is her responsibility alone. Her eldest child, who is 17 years old, is at boarding school in Khartoum. Her husband took him there when he was 16 on the advice of his teachers, who had informed them that he was bright and that they had nothing further to teach him. Two of her other children attend school locally. Unfortunately, there is not enough money for school fees for the remaining two – but they are still young, four and six years old.

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Rebekka Alima Atiir: an internally displaced mother in Pacong

Rebekka originally came from Wulu County in Lakes State. She is a petite woman with a pleasant demeanour and a big smile. When asked how old she is, she shakes her head and explains, ‘I don’t know how old I am. I don’t know in which year I was born. We don’t count years. My parents gave me to a man for marriage when I was still a young girl.’ She looks no older than 20, but has seven children with her husband.

Rebekka has always lived in Wulu County, first with her parents, and later with her husband. However, in 2009, four years after the end of the civil war, a neighbouring clan attacked her clan, and intertribal fighting broke out. Rebekka was forced to flee with her seven children to Rumbek County. Despite having survived years of horror during Sudan’s wars, Rebekka is more concerned about the recent clan violence in her home region. Tears
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Rebekka took her children and started running as far away from the sounds of gunshots, fire and screams as she could. She had time to grab only her clay water pot. Everything else was left behind and lost. Her children were scared, and the youngest ones struggled to walk. Seven hours later Rebekka and her seven children reached Pacong in Rumbek County.

Together with a few neighbours from her old village, Rebekka and her children settled in a camp for internally displaced persons in Pacong. Her husband has visited her there only once since the fighting in their home area ceased. He informed her that they had lost their home and all their cattle – their main source of income. Her husband then left to look for work in the city of Rumbek.

Paccong is a safer place than her old home, but Rebekka and her children have to cope in extremely basic living conditions. At the time of writing, they did not, like most Sudanese families in the area, have a mud hut with a roof of dried grass. Her walls are made of branches and bits of plastic, and the structure did not have any kind of roof until UNICEF donated a plastic sheet that Rebekka used to cover the structure. Her immediate neighbours, other internally displaced persons, live in similar makeshift huts. Rebekka is not sure if they will be able to continue living in the camp, because they are squatting on land that belongs to another community. Rebekka will only be able to build a permanent home there if the clan that owns the land accept her and assign a small piece of land to her.

None of Rebekka’s children attend school because the nearest school is far away and she cannot afford the fees. Rebekka leaves the camp early every morning to go to work on the farm set up by Women for Women International. She takes her youngest child with her, as he is still a baby, and leaves her two older children, aged eight and eleven, in charge of their two younger siblings.

When asked about her vision for the future, Rebekka shakes her head.

The voices of mothers in South Sudan

Margaret Mayeng Deng: an ex-combatant in Pacong

Margaret was one of thousands of children forced into combat during Sudan’s civil war. When Margaret was nine years old, a group of soldiers from the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) came to her village and forcibly removed her from her family. She spent the next 20 years moving around the country with other SPLA combatants. It was years before she saw her family again.

Life as a soldier was harsh. Constantly on the move, troops often slept outdoors without adequate shelter. Food and clean drinking water were usually hard to come by. Margaret and other children were put to work carrying supplies, finding food, cooking, farming, etc. The work was physically very demanding. At various points, Margaret spent time in other countries, including Ethiopia and Uganda, where she was able to go to school and learn some English.

After some time, Margaret married an SPLA soldier. She had ten children, nine of whom she gave birth to while she was with the SPLA. The soldier that Margaret married already had several wives, and was unable to support them properly. She recalls, ‘It was so difficult to find food for my children. We often went to sleep with an empty stomach.’ She was also obliged to find food for the soldiers.

When the battalion she was travelling with was preparing for combat, Margaret would try to find ways to stay behind the battle lines with her children. She did what she could to protect them. Sometimes, when the fighting was fierce and she was unable to escape, Margaret had to fight with her youngest baby tied to her back. Margaret explains that there was no time

She can focus only on the present: her main concern is feeding her children. Food is a constant worry as there is so little available in the camp. Her husband is not there to help her, so she is the sole breadwinner and caregiver for her family. Rebekka says she feels fortunate to have been allocated two plots of land on the farm where she works. The produce from this land provides her with a small income and she can use any vegetables that she is not able to sell to feed her children. Rebekka smiles as she proudly points to five of her seven children, noting that her children are healthier than many other children in the camp. It has not been easy, but in recounting this key achievement, she rejoices and feels proud.
to feel like a mother when she was with the SPLA. ‘I did what I could. I will never take my children into conflicts again, but I had no choice back then.’

After almost 20 years, the regiment she was with returned to Lakes State, and were stationed quite close to the home she grew up in. Margaret managed to locate her parents and her brothers, who had wondered what had happened to her for all of those years. When Margaret told her family what had happened, and described the kind of life that she led, her brothers intervened and succeeded in moving Margaret (who was pregnant at the time) and her children away from her husband and the SPLA, and back into their family home. Margaret’s brothers arranged for a traditional court to grant her a divorce. Margaret explains, ‘Since there was no bride price paid for me to my father, it was easy for my brothers to get the marriage disbanded. My husband was also not able to provide for me and our ten children, which is also a legal reason for divorce according to the local court.’

Margaret is now about 30 years old, although she is not certain of her exact age; she thinks she was 28 or 29 years old when she left the SPLA. Finally, for the first time, she is able to provide a stable home for her ten children. Her family help her, and together they are able to provide enough food, water, shelter and support for her children. The two eldest children attend school.

Despite the suffering that Margaret has experienced, she looks back on her time with the SPLA as a period during which she learned a lot, and she is grateful for the skills that she acquired while with the SPLA. She says, ‘We spent time in foreign countries such as Ethiopia and Uganda. In Ethiopia I was able to go to primary school and I learned to speak English. In Uganda I was able to attend agricultural university. Even though I could not finish my school, I am still more advanced than a woman of my age who never left Sudan. She cannot read and write and speak English. I can.’

Because of her education, she has found a job as a trainer with the agricultural programme run by Women for Women International. During the week, she lives and works on the farm run by the programme, and spends the weekends with her children and family. When she is on the farm, her family takes care of her children, and Margaret uses her wages to provide food for her extended family.

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**Motherhood during the war**

As these three narratives reveal, life was extremely difficult for mothers during South Sudan’s long civil wars. Periods of calm were interrupted by violent attacks, during which whole communities were forced to flee their homes in search of safety. Chaos and confusion reigned as the terrified population tried to find the safest places to hide. In the commotion, family members lost each other, either taking years to find each other, or losing touch entirely. In focus groups and interviews, many mothers described the devastation of losing their children, and feeling helpless to assist them.

While villages were under attack, mothers, children and whole communities had to spend long periods in the bush, concealing themselves as the conflict played out around them. It was impossible to provide healthy and sustainable lives for their children in those conditions.

We had no food. We brought our goats and cows with us, so we could drink the milk, but there was no water. When the mango fruit was growing we could shake mangos out of the tree to eat. But life was difficult. When the soldiers came, they expected us to feed them. But we had nothing ourselves. Some of our children even died when we were hiding in the bush, because we could not feed them. (Focus group, 23 February, Pacong)

The lack of basic necessities made it extremely difficult for mothers to care for their children. ‘When our children were sick, we did not have medication to make them better. We did not even have soap to wash them’ (Focus group, 31 July, Pacong). Malaria, river blindness, worms and other illnesses were rife, worsened by insufficient diets. Many children died in the bush. An interviewee reports, ‘I lost my child, because he was ill when we were in the bush. He kept vomiting, and I did not have any medicine to stop it, and then he died’ (Anonymous interview, 2 August).

For pregnant women life in the bush was particularly harsh. Martha Lek Makur recalls, ‘When I was pregnant, I always had to have water near me and be already in a hiding position. If you are pregnant with a very big belly, you cannot run when the soldiers come. So you need to make sure that you always have a good hiding spot with water nearby so you don’t die of thirst’ (Interview). Several other women recalled being forced to give birth in highly unsanitary conditions, and without the support of traditional birth attendants.
Government armed forces took to burning the villages they had attacked, in order to prevent the return of communities which, they feared, would support the rebels. Those who fled often had no home to return to, their possessions destroyed and their cattle plundered. Over four million people were displaced in this way. Perhaps the most famous yet tragic phenomenon was that of South Sudan’s ‘Lost Children’, groups of thousands of children who had lost their families, and who fled together to neighbouring countries to seek refuge. Many of these children died en route, unable to survive the difficult journey (see also Chapter 9, this volume).

The war also meant that hundreds of thousands of men left their families for long periods, some to join the armed forces, others to try and make a living elsewhere. It therefore fell to women to raise their children and to provide for them alone, a significant burden in difficult times. Women battled to eke out a living during the war as earning opportunities were scarce. In rural areas, farms were ruined and crops destroyed in the conflict and markets, at which women could sell fresh produce or other items, were often not functioning (Focus group, 30 July, Rumbek East). In certain urban areas, some women took their husband’s places in the factories when the men went off to fight. Others became traders, cleaners or cooks, doing whatever was necessary to survive and support their children; some even entered sex work after having exhausted all other options.

Several of the mothers interviewed played active roles as combatants during the war. For example Debora, a mother of five, made bullets and supplied food to soldiers during the war (Interview). These activities in support of the liberation movement were carried out alongside their roles as mothers. Being both a mother and a combatant was challenging.

Christina Ibanez explains how babies crying during military operations puts everyone in danger. ‘In agonising instances, mothers asphyxiated their children rather than disclose to the enemy the hiding place of their comrades’ (Ibanez, 2001: 121). With pain, Margaret Mayeng Deng, whose story is told above, recounted her worry about the fact that her baby might cry at a disastrous moment; ‘I was worried they would make me kill my baby if he cried’ (Interview).

Motherhood post-conflict
After 22 years of fighting, the second Sudanese civil war ended in 2005. Since then, there has been relative peace between North and South Sudan, but many difficulties remain. One focus-group member explains:

Even though the war is supposed to be over, for us the war is still going on. During the war we had to hide in the bush from the Arabs and there was no food. Now we may not have to hide anymore, but there is still no food, because there is no money. We cannot send our children to school as they fight each other. Our circumstances have not really changed. We still cannot provide for our children.’ (Focus group, 3 August, Rumbek)

The costs of living in South Sudan are high, and have rocketed since the peace agreement in 2005, with the influx of aid workers, investors and developers. Rates of unemployment remain extremely high, particularly among women. Even when women do have jobs, their salaries often don’t cover all their expenses. This means that mothers have to be resourceful to meet their children’s needs. Many of South Sudan’s mothers are widowed or have husbands who are ‘old and jobless’ (Focus group, 3 August, Rumbek); the women often have to support their families without help from any other source.

Although North and South Sudan are now officially at peace, the security situation is not entirely stable. Ongoing tensions, often as a result of cattle rustling between groups in the south, and along the border areas to the north, continue to erupt into fighting. Clan warfare, exacerbated by the proliferation of small arms in the country, still leads to regular violence and displacement, and thousands are killed in these skirmishes each year. Added to this, armed flare-ups between the SPLA and other armed groups acting in opposition to the SPLA still affect the safety of the population. Rebekka, whose story is told above, is one of many who have had to flee their homes since the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed. Rebekka’s experiences in the post-war period have been among her most traumatic.

Mothers across South Sudan are now beginning the arduous process of rebuilding their lives and their families. Many have returned to their villages since the civil war ended, and some were lucky enough to be able to return to their own homes. Others have had to rebuild their homes or construct
new ones. An interviewee proudly pointed to her new home, explaining, ‘I rebuilt this myself after we came back from the bush. My sons found me the sticks for the frame and I made the mud to use for the walls. And together we made a roof of dried grass’ (Anonymous interview, 31 July). The majority of mothers interviewed had lost one or more of their children during the war to fighting, hunger or illness. One woman explains, ‘We need to have as many children as possible to replace the ones we have lost during the war. South Sudan needs to be strong and this will only happen if we bear enough children’ (Anonymous interview, 2 August). Most of the women interviewed have between four and eight children.

Many of the women interviewed have a bright outlook on the future. Though times are hard, they are much better than they used to be. ‘We now have access to land and water to grow vegetables. We use these vegetables to make enough money to send our children to school’ (Focus group, 3 August, Pacong). Martha Lek Makur has plans to open a small-produce shop to supply her village with vegetables. ‘There is no market nearby my village. I want to open a small store to sell vegetables to my neighbours’ (Interview). Even though Rebekka still lives with her children in a makeshift shack, she is now able to bring home vegetables that she grows on her allotment on the farm. She is able to sell the remaining vegetables at the market to provide her with money that she can use to buy medicine and other necessities for her children.

The needs of mothers in post-war South Sudan are numerous and multifaceted. All too often these needs go unmet. Women interviewed for this chapter constantly emphasised that their most immediate, practical needs are access to basic goods and services such as food, water and health care. They repeatedly emphasised the need for education – for themselves and for their children – which they perceive to be the only solution to their current problems.

Their constant struggle for survival overshadows these women’s other needs, especially those pertaining to their social and psychological well being. The impact of armed conflict and forced displacement on the mental health of civilians is significant. Although data about mental health in South Sudan is limited, the majority of the population has experienced some level of trauma over the course of the two civil wars. This trauma goes unacknowledged and untreated. The trauma suffered by mothers can have real effects on their children. However, faced with the daily struggle for survival, there is no time for these women to recover from what they have been through. ‘I have lost two of my sons and my husband in the war, and I have no time to mourn them. I need to find work where I can, to provide for my remaining children’ (Anonymous interview, 3 August). With no time to grieve and care for themselves, many women are operating in survival mode.

**Infrastructure and social services**

South Sudan is one of the least-developed places in the world. As mentioned, services and infrastructure are very limited, and mothers have difficulty accessing everything including clean drinking water, food, medical supplies, clothes and shelter. The lack of basic services makes it extremely difficult to raise children, and complicates their access to the most basic necessities.

UNICEF estimates that at least 40 per cent of the South Sudanese population have no access to safe drinking water. There are not enough water pumps to sustain communities, so each day women and children walk long distances to fetch water, carrying heavy containers of clean drinking water. Water reservoirs, wells and rivers, occasionally get polluted.

Approximately 80 per cent of South Sudan’s population does not have access to adequate sanitation and only 55 per cent has access to improved sources of drinking water (SSCCSE, 2010). Sanitation infrastructure is particularly limited outside of the main urban settings. Waste disposal services are also inadequate, and can be dangerous for children who are often left to play in unhygienic conditions.

Hunger is a familiar sensation for millions of people throughout the country and the struggle to feed their children consumes women’s lives. Milk and other nutritional food items are scarce. Some women try to grow their own vegetable patches, but in a dry country, with water pumps often located far away, it is not easy to keep up cultivation. Buying vegetables in the markets is expensive and fresh produce is often not available when the rains fail. For women in rural areas, access to markets is difficult too, even if they have money to buy food.

In 2010, the United Nations estimated that 4.3 million people across South Sudan would need some sort of food aid in the near future. In the same year, a joint survey by Medair and Save the Children estimated that 46
per cent of children in South Sudan were malnourished (cited in Associated Press, 2010). Malnutrition perpetuates the cycle of poverty – malnourished children are likely to be intellectually impaired, with diminished productive and creative capacities, hence unlikely to flourish economically and thus perpetuating the poverty cycle into the next generation (Bekele, 1998). The economic effects of this are significant on a societal level too.

Health services across South Sudan are inadequate. Hospitals and clinics are, for the most part, available only in the main cities and towns. The shortage of health facilities is compounded by the lack of road infrastructure and public transport. Public transport is scarcely available outside urban areas and there are hardly any tarred roads in South Sudan. The roads that do exist are made from sand and rock and become unusable during the rainy season. This makes travel over long distances extremely challenging and increases the need for health services to be established in the rural areas.

When children get ill, it can take days for mothers to get them to a doctor. Often they arrive too late. In the words of one mother, ‘My child died of malaria because I could not get her to the hospital in time’ (Anonymous interview, 2 August). This kind of statement is all too common, and many South Sudanese children continue to die from malnutrition and preventable diseases. All the mothers interviewed emphasised the need for basic services, without which many of their efforts are in vain. It is hoped that the coming of peace, and the increased development taking place in South Sudan, will improve their desperate situation.

**Education**

Less than 50 per cent of children in South Sudan receive more than five years of primary education, and fewer than 25 000 children complete primary school (Sudan Household Health Survey, 2006–2010). Every woman interviewed for this chapter expressed the desire for her children to be educated. Education was seen as the key means by which they could improve their situations. Martha Lek Makur explained, ‘When children are educated, they learn how to dialogue with each other. This means they will not fight when they are grown men’ (Interview).

Education in South Sudan is expensive, often prohibitively so. School fees are approximately US$60 per child per term. School uniforms need to be paid for too, and most schools do not provide lunches. Many parents cannot afford to educate their children. Even when families have some income, most are not able to send all of their children to school. A mother explains, ‘My salary is only high enough to send my oldest son to school. I hope that education will give him a good job so he can send his brothers and sisters to school’ (Focus group, 3 August, Rumbek).

Simply sending children to school does not automatically ensure that they receive a good education. Many schools are badly under-resourced in terms of buildings, sufficient and well-trained staff and teaching materials, and thus scarcely up to the task of educating a nation. Much teaching capacity was lost during the war. It is estimated that for every thousand students in South Sudan, there is only one teacher (UN Sudan Information Gateway, 2010: 1), and many of these teachers have not completed their own primary education. Exacerbating the problem is the fact that schools have no capacity to absorb the large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons who are returning to the country. Many schools have resorted to holding classes under trees while waiting for the resources to build additional classrooms (Focus group, 30 July, Rumbek East).

Another issue is that curricula originating from Uganda, Kenya and Khartoum are taught in different parts of the country, and progress in developing a unified curriculum has been slow. Although English is the official language of instruction in South Sudan, many students have been taught only in Arabic, as this was the official language of instruction before the signing of the peace agreement in 2005. Children have grappled with the move to English as the language of instruction. In particular, those returning from neighbouring Francophone states know very little English and struggle to learn in this language (Brown, 2009).

A point raised by numerous interviewees was that the education system does not teach marketable, vocational skills suited to the sorts of jobs that are available in South Sudan. Several mothers expressed the desire for schools to become more practical so that children could join the workforce after graduating: ‘It is important for our children to learn about farming and agriculture, because that is the only way we can sustain ourselves’ (Focus group, 31 July, Pacong).

All of the mothers interviewed expressed the desire to become more literate themselves. ‘I need to learn how to read so I can read the prescription of the medicine I give my children’ (Interview, Maria). In order to start or
run businesses, women also need to become more numerate. Lillian, who was educated by her father when she was a refugee, sees the fact that she is educated as the reason she is employed and able to provide for her family and children. However, she too would like to receive further education as, like so many in South Sudan, she sees this as the only hope for the future (Interview).

**Support structures**

The South Sudanese way of life is predominantly communal. Traditionally, large extended families lived in close proximity, supported each other, and played roles in raising one another’s children. Family members who were employed carried the financial load for their unemployed relatives, while the unemployed took care of the children and the household. These communal support structures were greatly affected by the war. Families and communities were displaced and often permanently torn apart, leaving many mothers alone, and raising their children by themselves. Many of the women interviewed reported that they had neither financial nor practical support structures to assist them in raising their children.

Some women interviewed were fortunate enough to have stayed with their families throughout the war and continued to receive their support. Others had been reunited with their families after the war. For them, family support offers crucial relief from the difficult conditions in post-war South Sudan. For example, Lillian is the only one in her family with a job. Her husband is unable to provide for her as he has another wife. She has three children to support, and her sisters and her parents depend on her too. ‘Because my parents are not employed and depend on me for money, they have sent my unmarried sister to take care of my children’ (Interview).

Interviewees reported that it is difficult to expect much from neighbours and other community members – everyone is struggling to survive, and caring for those outside their immediate families is a luxury few can afford. This creates real difficulties for single mothers. Rebekka Alima Atiir explains that she has to leave her children alone while she is working. She has three children to support, and her sisters and her parents depend on her too. ‘Because my parents are not employed and depend on me for money, they have sent my unmarried sister to take care of my children’ (Interview).

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The state provides little support. Interviewees agreed that they expect no financial or material support from the state. Southern Sudan does have a Ministry of Gender, Social Welfare and Religious Affairs, but its social welfare programmes provide support only for the aged, disabled, orphans and street children, and even this is extremely limited. Arrangements for widows, single mothers and families who cannot support themselves financially have not yet been put in place.

**Giving birth and infant care**

Most women living in rural areas in South Sudan give birth at home with little or no medical assistance. Midwives or traditional birth attendants are usually available but most have little training and do not always have the skills or resources to assist if there are birth complications. South Sudan has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, with 1107 mothers dying per 100 000 live births (WHO, 2010: 68). Although the infant mortality rate has decreased in recent years, as noted earlier, in 2010, it still stood at 109 per 1 000 live births (WHO, 2010: 24).

Certain traditional birthing practices in South Sudan place mothers and their children at risk. One such practice is the cutting of the umbilical cord with a grass or maize leaf. This can cause infection at the cut, which endangers the life of the child and, in rare cases, it can endanger the mother too (Focus group, 2 August, Rumbek). Even where scissors are used to cut the umbilical cord, hygiene remains a concern. Scissors must be sterilised before each usage, and midwives have to wear gloves when assisting with a birth, but this does not always happen (Focus group, 2 August, Rumbek). At the time of writing, the Red Cross was training traditional midwives in South Sudan in safer delivery methods, but these practices have yet to take hold.

More women in urban areas are able to deliver their babies in clinics or hospitals. Rosa explains, ‘If my husband has a job and we have been able to save money during my pregnancy, I’ll go to the hospital in Juba to have the baby. I had my twins in the hospital there, but I had my son here in the clinic with a midwife present’ (Interview). In contrast, services at rural health facilities are limited by the capacity of the workforce in terms of staff numbers and training. Emergency obstetric facilities are lacking, and birth complications often result in maternal and child fatalities.

South Sudan has high rates of obstetric fistula, a condition that can be caused by birth complications. A fistula is a tearing of the tissue between...
the rectum and vagina or the bladder and vagina that leads to continuous leakage of urine or faecal waste. As discussed in Chapter 3, although repairing fistulas is a relatively simple procedure, there are few surgeons qualified to carry out this operation and many women simply have to live with this debilitating condition (UNFPA, 2010).

Concerning infant care, there are several issues. The first is around the feeding of infants. During wartime, the terrible conditions, disease and malnutrition often affected mothers’ abilities to breastfeed. With breast milk unavailable, mothers would feed their babies whatever they could find, but often even the water was dirty and contaminated. This led to diarrhoea and other life-threatening diseases and many children died as a result. One interviewee remembers:

*I gave birth when I was hiding in the bush from the soldiers. I fed my baby water and ground nuts, but she did not survive. Now I am pregnant again and the midwife has told me I should feed my baby from my breast. This is better for my baby. I was too tired before, but now I am not.* (Anonymous internally displaced person, 8 November 2010, Khartoum)

In a report published by UNICEF in 2008, Polly Grace Osuo from the Ministry of Health for Central Equatoria is quoted as saying that exhaustion and malnourishment of mothers is still a major problem, ‘South Sudanese mothers from rural areas complain of tiredness and fatigue and of not having enough breast milk to feed their babies.’ Mothers therefore resort to feeding their newborns solids such as porridge using water that is often unclean. ‘Our women do not understand the value of exclusive breastfeeding and how this helps save the lives of our children. Our traditional birth attendants often tell expecting and nursing mothers to throw their first milk away because they believe it is dirty’ (quoted in UNICEF, 2008: 1).

It is vital that mothers in South Sudan be educated about breastfeeding. The Ministry of Health is developing a series of programmes to improve maternal and child health, and organising mothers’ groups to provide peer support to nursing mothers. Osuo explains, ‘We try to get our message across through all possible means and resources – that breastfeeding is one of the easiest ways to save the lives of our children and to prevent childhood diseases’ (quoted in UNICEF, 2008: 2).

### Changing gender roles

A theme that runs through several of the chapters in this book is the fact that during South Sudan’s civil wars, gender roles and the division of labour between men and women shifted significantly. Before the civil wars, South Sudanese women’s abilities to earn an income were constrained by traditional customs, and the fact that women were responsible for food production, household work and childcare (Duany & Duany, 2001). However, during the war there was a 30 per cent increase in female-headed households, and it became increasingly necessary for women to earn an income working outside of the home (Bouta et al., 2005). With men away at war or deceased, women took on the responsibilities that their husbands or other male family members had carried, including becoming financially responsible for their families.

Many women created work for themselves in the informal sector, participating in income-generating activities such as small-scale trading in markets and bazaars. As one woman explains, ‘I sell clothes on the market to have some money to buy food for my children’ (Focus group, 3 August, Juba). Some women brew their own beer, others sell second-hand clothes and some sell vegetables. ‘[Women] must earn a living, work the land, care for livestock, and trade or engage in paid labour outside the home’ (Bouta et al., 2005: 92). Women’s increased participation in income generation seems to have improved their confidence levels, and some of the gender dynamics that altered during the war are beginning to entrench themselves as new societal norms.

On the other hand, however, many of the men who returned home since the end of the war are still unemployed and are unable to provide for their families as they did before the war. This has led to some negative reactions and behaviours from men. Bouta et al. explain, ‘Displacement and post-conflict unemployment undermine men’s sense of identity as provider, which, in turn, often translates into anti-social behaviour and violence directed at women’ (Bouta et al., 2005: 89). In Sudan, years of war, displacement, unemployment and a slow economy have eroded men’s sense of identity as providers. Men report feeling disempowered and robbed of their masculinity. This sometimes leads men to act out in harmful ways, such as domestic violence, sexual violence and alcohol abuse (Silberschmidt, 2001). One interviewee talked about the abuse she received from her husband...
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when he returned home after the war, ‘He did not like that I have a job and he didn’t. He beat me several times’ (Anonymous interview, 2 August). Another interviewee describes the effects of being a working woman:

When I was living in an IDP [internally displaced person] camp in Khartoum, my father married me off to a man who started abusing me. I was working as a translator for an international NGO, I was going to university and I was taking care of my baby. But he did not want me to work and study so he hit me many times. I had to go to the hospital twice. (Anonymous interview, 24 February)

In a follow-up interview she explained, ‘My husband could not find work as a journalist after he came back from the war. He began drinking and was jealous of me’ (Anonymous interview, 30 July 2010).

Conclusion

Even after the past few years of relative peace between North and South Sudan, life for mothers in South Sudan remains extremely challenging. Ongoing insecurity and tribal warfare, a lack of access to basic goods and services, insufficient health care, a shortage of quality educational services and the absence of support structures make the fulfilment of the most basic daily responsibilities a daunting task. South Sudanese mothers have sacrificed everything, and have gone to extraordinary lengths to protect and provide for their children in these difficult times.

However, despite the lengths they have gone to, women respond with frustration to their achievements as mothers. ‘I can often only give my children one meal per day and that is not enough to fill their stomachs. If I can’t even feed them, what else can I do?’ (Anonymous interview, 5 August). Another interviewee cried, ‘I had to resort to brewing alcohol to bring in some money. And now my daughter is helping me. This is not what I wanted for her’ (Anonymous interview, 5 August). Another echoed this saying, ‘I don’t feel as if I have achieved anything for my children yet. I am often not even able to pay for their medicine, let alone for their school fees. Only good education will make a change’ (Focus group, 3 August, Rumbek).

Nevertheless, the stories of Rebekka Alima Attiir, Martha Lek Makur, Margaret Mayeng Deng and so many others show that women do dare to dream of a better future. Regardless of the hurdles, Rebekka is exceptionally proud of her recent achievements, ‘Look at my children, don’t they look healthy? That is because I can give them vegetables to eat that I have grown myself’ (Interview). Martha has big plans for starting her own vegetable shop. She has managed to escape life as a combatant and is bringing up her children in a safer environment. ‘I managed to divorce from my husband and bring my ten children home away from fighting. That is my greatest accomplishment’ (Interview).

These women are not deterred by the challenges they face. They refuse to give up their dreams of a better future for their children, and view their children as potential peacemakers who will keep their country out of war. ‘Our children are the future of South Sudan. When our children will be educated, they will learn that conflict can only be stopped by dialogue, not by violence’ (Focus group, 24 February 2010, Rumbek East).

ENDNOTES

1 The AFEX group runs a camping/accommodation facility in Rumbek that provides catering, transport and other services.
2 Currency conversions reflect values as of August 2010.

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The voices of mothers in South Sudan


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Rosa, 30 July 2010, Rumbek

Anonymous interviews
24 February and 30 July 2010, Rumbek
31 July 2010, Pacong
2 and 3 August 2010, Rumbek East
5 August 2010, Juba

Internally displaced person, 8 November 2010, Khartoum

FOCUS GROUPS
23 February, 30 and 31 July, 3 August 2010, Pacong
24 February and 30 July 2010, Rumbek East (the 30 July event was also a peace-building workshop)
2 and 3 August 2010, Rumbek
3 August 2010, Juba
The state of health care, education and other services are among the principal indicators of a nation’s prosperity and potential for economic development. These services are also key factors affecting the quality of life of a population and people’s abilities to improve their socio-economic conditions. War has the potential to devastate the social, economic and political infrastructure of a nation, the capacity of its workforce and the ability of institutions to effectively provide for the well-being of citizens.

South Sudan is a clear example of this. Its two post-independence civil wars (1955–1972 and 1983–2005) devastated an already limited service-delivery infrastructure. By 2010, South Sudan was considered one of the least-developed places in the world. The almost universal shortage of basic services has left generations of South Sudanese people with little formal education, with disturbingly high mortality rates, severe health concerns, unhygienic living conditions, and in need of almost all other basic services.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement, signed in 2005, marked the official ending of the civil war. Southern Sudan’s new leadership promised to restore the health, education and civil services. A flurry of activity, investment and development began in the years that followed, but a shortage of personnel, infrastructure and funding have significantly limited these efforts. At the time of writing, six years later, Southern Sudan continues...
to be ranked near the bottom of the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2010). In the period following the formation of the new independent state, existing service-provision problems have been compounded by the task of providing for the needs of over a million refugees that are returning home. The International Organization for Migration estimates that 1.2 million refugees returned to South Sudan between 2007 and 2009. Approximately 60 per cent of these were female-headed households, and over 30 per cent were youth aged 5 to 17 (IOM, n.d.). Further mass influxes of returnees occurred around the referendum in January 2011. In December 2010, the Southern Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, projected that another 150 000 people would have returned to the South by March 2011 (cited in Richmond, 2010). The rapidly increasing size of the population and the extensive internal movement of the population make the provision of services highly challenging, but these are challenges that the fledgling government and its civil-service structures are expected to transcend.

South Sudan has one of the highest illiteracy rates in the world – 76 per cent of the population are unable to read (IRC, 2011). The new government of Southern Sudan (particularly its Ministry of Education, Science and Technology) has demonstrated a commitment to increasing and improving educational opportunities for its war-ravaged population. In the past three years, there have been great efforts to promote access, particularly to primary education. However, the challenges in the education sector are immense and progress has been limited. In 2009, it was estimated that 96 per cent of primary school teachers in South Sudan have no formal qualifications (Hewison, 2009). A shortage of infrastructure, schools, books and stationery add to the challenges. These are compounded further by the fact that myriad syllabuses are being taught in the country, several of which have been imported from Sudan’s various neighbouring countries, and standardisation has yet to take place.

The situation in South Sudan’s health sector is equally alarming, and the government is ill equipped to tackle it. For example, the newly established Southern Sudan Medical Journal reports that of the estimated 4 600 health workers presently working across South Sudan, less than 20 per cent have received more than nine months of any form of professional training. In addition, the geographical distribution of health workers is severely skewed, with more than two-thirds of the country’s health personnel working in just three of Southern Sudan’s ten states. Clearly the remaining seven states have serious staff shortages.

Women in South Sudan shoulder most of the responsibility for the well being of their families. As a result, women were particularly affected by the decline of service delivery during the war. Left with few alternatives, women played important roles in keeping some of these services going during the years of war, taking over where services were failing – sometimes because the men who were providing them had to go off to war. In the years since the war, women have also been very active in restoring social services. Their contributions have been both formal, and informal; in many instances, women worked as volunteers simply taking on the jobs. Women’s contributions have been significant, albeit undervalued (see Sørensen, 1998), and played a part in significantly altering traditional gender roles. Prior to the wars, women’s work centred on the household. However, during the years of conflict, women began to take on positions as teachers, nurses and volunteers. Women were often left to keep schools, clinics and hospitals operational in the absence of their men who had joined the war.

This chapter describes the contributions made by South Sudanese women in the provision of services during and after the second Sudanese civil war. The chapter focuses mainly on the health and education sectors. These sectors were chosen firstly, because of their immense importance, and secondly, because they illustrate the general state of the service sector in South Sudan.

The chapter profiles the women who are helping to provide these services, assessing the roles they have played in keeping social services alive, and the ways in which their work is helping to remould the social structure within their communities. The chapter highlights some of the major challenges that South Sudanese women face in successfully fulfilling roles as teachers, nurses, doctors and mothers, as well as their hopes for the future.

Looking at the two sectors through the eyes of women working in service delivery provides a different and valuable perspective on the government and civil service in Southern Sudan, and particularly on its efficacy, the challenges it faces, and on the gender dynamics at play within it. Faced with daily challenges, including basic-infrastructure inadequacies, insecurity, understaffing, and delayed or low wages, women are nevertheless continuing to contribute to the rebuilding of their country, balancing this with their
many other responsibilities as wives and mothers. This chapter aims to recognise and acknowledge their efforts.

Informal interviews and structured focus groups were conducted with South Sudanese women in Central, Eastern and Western Equatoria. Discussions were held with a broad spectrum of individuals within the health and educational sectors. At the request of some of these women, some of the names in this chapter have been changed. Details of interviews cited are listed at the end of the chapter.

‘The war for final liberation’

Several chapters in this volume contain accounts of the ways in which South Sudan’s wars, and the transitional periods that followed the wars, have affected gender norms, and the roles that women play both in and outside of the home. As noted, prior to the war, women’s roles were centred on the home, with women being tasked with child rearing and food production. Few women had roles outside of the home, a domain reserved for men; men were responsible for securing income, or in the rural areas for cattle farming. In this context, it was men who were predominantly tasked with ensuring the provision of formal services outside of the domestic arena.

Things began to change with the ending of the first civil war. The Addis Ababa Peace Agreement brought the first of Sudan’s civil wars to an end. The agreement contained a number of provisions that aimed to improve the lives of those in South Sudan. Certain of these provisions stated that all citizens should have equal rights and duties before the law, and that there should be no discrimination based on sex, race, national origin, birth, or economic and social status. Encouraged by these guarantees of equality, South Sudanese women began to break away from their limited roles as wives and mothers, and began to play more active roles outside of the home. The Addis Ababa Peace Agreement thus acted as a catalyst for South Sudanese women to begin entering the formal job market and earning salaries (Beswick, 2001).

The second civil war, ‘the war for final liberation’, pushed women even further into the working world, albeit in a different way. Large numbers of men went off to war or were killed in the fighting. As men became increasingly unavailable, women stepped in as employees, or volunteers, cognisant of the fact that people needed help, and that it fell to them to provide it. Increasingly, women assumed sole responsibility as both primary care givers and breadwinners. Ludiya Guya from Yei County recalls how the war changed her life forever:

My husband and I worked as teachers in different schools in Yei. We would come home and draw our lesson plans and schemes together while I cooked the night’s meal. All was well until the war began. My husband left me with the children and he went to join the SPLA [Sudan People’s Liberation Army]. I assumed the responsibilities of father and mother of our children at the same time. I had to provide school fees for them, buy clothes, find medicine when they fell sick, and also bring food to the table. I knew from that time that war brings more responsibilities. (Interview)

Many women played crucial roles in service delivery during the war, often under devastingly difficult conditions. Lillian Juan is a nurse who worked at Mundari Hospital at the height of the conflict. Having worked in the hospital for over 25 years, she remembers the war as a particularly terrible time. She insists that nothing is more difficult than helplessly watching patients suffer due to inadequate medical services and a shortage of drugs. Lillian recounts:

As nurses we are trained to give care and help to those in pain. But during the war, often, there was not enough medication in the hospital so we would watch patients lose their lives and we could not give any intervention. That was, for me, the most painful experience I have ever had to go through as a nurse. I remember in 1988, the planes [Antonov bombers] used to bomb villages here in Kajokeji. Sometimes we could get about 20 victims of the bomb, and we would pray to God that they do not die in our hands. But it was always only a matter of time before most of the victims would die. We did our best to try and save their lives, but we did not have equipment and regular drug supplies. (Interview)

As the war intensified, international organisations, such as the Red Cross, the UN and Médecins Sans Frontières, began to provide medical and humanitarian aid. Health interventions focused on first-level health services typically provided in emergencies as part of humanitarian action. However, despite these efforts, and those of women volunteering their time and skills
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to local health facilities, demand greatly surpassed the need. Access to health care remained extremely low, with user rates estimated to be 0.2 contacts per person per year (Ministry of Health, 2008: 5).

Violence escalated throughout the war, and bombing campaigns destroyed the infrastructure of several towns, including markets, hospitals and schools. In 2001, for example, the city of Yei and the surrounding area were bombed intensively by Antonov bombers. A nurse working in a hospital, funded by Norwegian People’s Aid, in Yei, Lucy Sitima recalls the aftermath of these fatal attacks – horrific scenes of victims brought into the hospital, most with severed limbs, others already dead:

I had never seen so much blood in all my life. It ran like a river through the corridors of the hospital as victim after victim was brought into the hospital. Even if the hospital had had a well-equipped operating room, I don’t know how many doctors it would have taken to perform surgery on all the people who needed to be operated on. Those patients whose families had some money were given referral letters and they were transferred to Lacor Hospital in Gulu, Northern Uganda [over 400 kilometres] away to get better medical attention. Most of the victims remained in Yei Hospital. A few lucky ones later got better, but went home with one arm, or without legs. The health situation in Yei and the neighbouring areas was alarming. I decided to run to Uganda where I obtained a scholarship to study nursing and midwifery in Nsamba Nursing School. (Interview)

Lucy remained in Uganda until 2002. She was there during the signing of the historic Machakos Protocol Agreement between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM), which laid the path for peace. The Protocol also played a role in determining the position of state and religion, and granted semi-autonomous rule to South Sudan. ‘I kept working hard, with the hope that I would return to work in my country with the return of peace. I wanted to improve my nursing skills, so that I could be of better service when peace is achieved’ (Interview, Lucy Sitima).

Like Lucy, many women with valuable skills fled the country during the war, taking with them much of South Sudan’s human resource capacity. For example, Joyce Abe is a teacher, who graduated from Juba University, and started teaching English in 1979. Joyce lived in Juba, South Sudan’s capital city with her husband, a policeman, and her four children. She taught in a church-managed primary school. She recounts fond memories of family meals at home filled with talk of the day’s events:

All my children were born in Juba, where I grew up. My family and I knew no other place. This was our home and we were happy. My son would be talking to his father and I would be teaching my daughters to cook Sudanese food. We would tell our children stories that had been passed on to us by our parents. I was well respected in my village in the Kator area, and all the people in the area addressed me by the name Ustaza (Arabic for female teacher). I could feel it within my inner self, that people respected me because I was doing something good, passing on knowledge to the next generation. (Interview)

However, this situation was not to last. In the early 1980s news spread that a certain group of former Anyanya 1 soldiers (participants in the first civil war) had started a mutiny in Bor, a town located in what is now Jonglei State. Joyce reflected back on her childhood and the hardship of survival during the first war of the 1960s. She was terrified at the thought of another war. Soon, the ululation of women at full moon was replaced by tension and nervous whispers among the people of Juba. Markets, churches and homes were filled with fear of another war looming on the horizon. ‘Everybody was talking about the war for the final liberation of South Sudan,’ Joyce remembers. The newly launched SPLA launched attacks on various towns in South Sudan. It carried out carefully targeted offensives, and soon distinguished itself as a rebel movement capable of sustaining a full-scale war against the government forces (Arop, 2006). The Northern government, led by President Jaafar Nimeiri, responded by mobilising the Sudanese Armed Forces to quash the rebels. The lethal war that ensued forced many in South Sudan to flee to other countries. Joyce sadly describes the events that led to her departure from Juba:

I thought about my children, and those that I was teaching in the schools. What would happen to all of them when the country goes back to war? I would sit quietly with my children by the fireplace every evening, pondering what our fate would be if war broke out. Then the bombs began to drop from
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different directions. One could never tell where the next bomb would fall. We only counted on prayer to keep ourselves strong. I would get my children to lie down under the beds as bullets flew over our roof like birds. It was in 1987, when my husband decided that I should leave for Khartoum with the children. He would stay on in Juba to watch the situation, and would join us in Khartoum later. That was the last time I saw the father of my children. (Interview, Joyce Abe)

Many women faced similar experiences at the outbreak of the war, leaving their jobs, fleeing with their children and leaving their husbands behind. Many said goodbye to their loved ones for the last time. As millions fled into neighbouring Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and beyond, South Sudan lost a significant part of its already limited professional workforce. This placed an enormous burden on those who stayed behind.

Some women in exile played important roles in supporting the South Sudanese population, and ensuring that they received the services they required. Nama Bullen is one such. When the war escalated in Yambio in 1990, Nama, a teacher, who now works as the Director General of the State Ministry of Education in Western Equatoria State, fled with her family, entering the Central African Republic as a mother, a refugee and a teacher. She remembers that on arrival at the border she could see the condition of the children crossing the border, often unaccompanied. She created a system to account for them. Each day she would register the new arrivals, assessing their state of health and logging their ages and the school grades they had completed before fleeing to the Central African Republic. Despite being ridiculed by some of the other refugees who thought she was wasting her time, she persisted. Her efforts proved valuable. Nama explains:

I wired the list of sick and hungry children to Bangui, the capital of the central African Republic…By this time my list had grown to include infants, school-going children, pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers. In a few weeks we got a response from the United Nations Office in the capital city, Bangui. They sent a truck to pick up the children, pregnant women and mothers caring for sick children. The rest of the adults were instructed to walk up to Obo, the place where we were received and registered as refugees. (Interview)

On arrival at the refugee camp in the Central African Republic, Nama was appointed to register all incoming refugees. She set up a reception committee for new arrivals and an induction process aimed at creating an easier start for new arrivals:

As a teacher my first thought went to the children. I was thinking about the sick children, the children of school-going age and the adults who could teach, but could not find that opportunity. I mobilised for a meeting of elders, and as a community we began to build structures out of locally available materials. Together we built three schools with poles that we got from the nearby bushes, grass thatch and mud for making the walls of the school structures. We enrolled 1,694 children in the three schools. The community unanimously decided that I should be director of the schools in the three camps. I worked with 26 volunteer teachers for two years, only surviving on the assistance that the UN provided us. (Interview)

The years after the war: decentralising government services

South Sudanese people around the world, watched with anticipation as the peace process unfolded. The long-awaited talks took place between 2003 and 2005, focusing on power sharing, wealth distribution, security arrangements and the three disputed territories claimed by both the North and South: Abyei, Southern Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan. In January 2005, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was finally signed between the government of Sudan and the SPLM, marking the end of the war. The CPA provided for the establishment of the government of Southern Sudan, a semi-autonomous government led by Salva Kiir. The government of Southern Sudan was tasked, among other things, with the administration and delivery of services to the people of South Sudan.

An Interim Constitution was created which mandated the division of Southern Sudan into ten states, and a decentralised form of governance was set in place. While national policies are formulated by the national government, they are implemented at the local level, with responsibility for the provision of services decentralised to the various states.

Each state has a governor, who works with a state cabinet to carry out
duties, including the delivery of public services such as education and health. States are subdivided further into counties that are administered by county commissioners. Each county has a varying number of payams, governed by payam administrators. The smallest unit of each administration is the boma.

The government of Southern Sudan has begun to build and oversee the institutions that are providing services, including hospitals, clinics and health-care units, schools and education departments. These are being created at state and county levels. Policies have been created by the national government, funding sourced, and structures put in place to increase the provision of these services. The government of Southern Sudan recognised the need for a sound institutional framework in order to embark on the road to post-conflict recovery and effective service delivery. It also recognised the need for building human capacity, and has embarked on adequately staffing various ministries with the intention of resurrecting service-delivery systems.

However, despite these efforts, service delivery remains limited (Rietveld & Waldman, 2006). Schools and health clinics do not adhere to strict opening times; teachers and health workers are frequently absent from schools and clinics. Many staff are under-trained and the extent to which they are able to effectively carry out their work is limited. Salaries in both the health and education sector are low and payments are sporadic (Ministry of Education, 2009a). The minimal training and capacity of staff in clinics, schools, and at the administrative levels within the government ministries, inevitably impact on the quality of services delivered (World Bank, 2007).

The following sections explore the health and education services, assessing the state of each sector, and describing the experiences of some of the women who have been involved in the provision of these services in the post-war period.

Health services
The state of health in South Sudan is alarming, and is among the poorest in the world. In 2008, the infant-mortality rate was 102 in every 1 000 live births. One in seven children die before their fifth birthday (135 per 1 000 live births). Child malnutrition is endemic: 33 per cent of children under the age of five were underweight in 2008. Of these, 13.5 per cent were severely underweight, while another 22 per cent had moderate and 7 per cent manifested severe body wasting. Only 17 per cent of children under the age of five were fully immunised (Ministry of Health, 2009).

In 2008, only 23 per cent of expectant mothers were receiving antenatal care from skilled health personnel. Just 13 per cent of newborns were delivered in health institutions, with only 10 per cent cared for by skilled health personnel (Ministry of Health, 2008: 10). All these factors contribute to the high maternal mortality ratio, which is of 2 054 in every 100 000 live births (MSF, 2008).

South Sudan’s population is also plagued by other diseases, viruses and conditions: malaria is rife, and the country is host to river blindness, guinea worm disease, African sleeping sickness, nodding syndrome, and a medley of other conditions, many of which are unheard of outside of the area. Many parts of South Sudan have been hit by outbreaks of cholera, meningitis, visceral leishmaniasis (also known as kala azar), pneumonia, and other illnesses in recent years (Interview, Robert Patrick).

The health sector is poorly placed to deal with such major challenges. Health departments and ministries are only just getting established, and are still in the process of creating policies and structures. There is an acute shortage of infrastructure, and no health services are available across large areas of the country. There are serious shortages of medicines, funds and equipment. Government faces major impediments such as poor transport infrastructure, inadequate health-care facilities, as well as limited skilled personnel. There are constant problems with salaries being delayed or unavailable. In short, every aspect of the health service is pushed, overburdened and struggling to deal with its incredible workload.

The severe shortage of well-trained medical staff remains a critical obstacle to improving and extending the provision of health services in South Sudan. There are a number of teaching hospitals across the country but their lack of equipment and resources has rendered them largely ineffective. In 2010, an article in the Southern Sudan Medical Journal estimated that there were approximately 500 South Sudanese doctors who have basic medical degrees, but lack postgraduate training and have been unable to specialise (Achiek & Lado, 2010: 23, 25). The small number of doctors working in South Sudan comes nowhere near the World Health Organization’s recommended figure of 20 doctors per 100 000 inhabitants.
required to sustain a healthy population (Achiek, 2010). Moreover, most of the country’s doctors have left the public health sector and work either in private practice or in administrative posts with NGOs. Robert Patrick explains:

Juba Teaching Hospital used to have over 70 doctors but due to dynamics within the sector, very few of them can stay for a long time. Some have moved on to work for NGOs. Part of this movement of the health personnel to other employers is attributed to low, and sometimes delayed, payment to Ministry personnel. (Interview)

Infrastructure problems prevent many South Sudanese people from accessing medical services, lowering the general state of health, and making need for medical services even greater. Limited health-care facilities are separated not only by vast distances, but by poor gravel roads that are often washed away by seasonal rivers. Public transport is, for the most part, non-existent. In some peri-urban areas, health centres serve up to 75 000 people, while more remote centres provide health care to as many as 160 000 people. In 2006, Southern Sudan was described as ‘a region with almost nothing in terms of basic services’ (IRIN, 2006). Roads, telecommunications and building infrastructure were either destroyed in the war or had simply not yet been established. Although the ending of the war brought hope of improved infrastructure, efforts to improve roads and transportation services have been limited. Reports from international humanitarian aid groups such as Oxfam, indicate that the entire region of Southern Sudan has only an estimated 50 kilometres of tarred roads (Mailer & Poole, 2010: 3).

One mother in Kajo Keji County recalls her nightmare of trying to get her severely ill daughter to hospital. The 12-year-old girl had an extremely high fever and was having convulsions. Her mother had to get her to the nearest hospital in Mundari to receive treatment. She borrowed a bicycle and tied her daughter to her back:

Half way through the journey to the hospital, my poor daughter stopped crying. I could no longer feel her high temperature on my back, but I concentrated on getting to the hospital. I peddled the bicycle as fast as I could, but she became heavier, I felt her weight weigh me down. That is when my heart sunk. Something told me she may not make it. I heard her moan, ‘Ah! Mama’…and those were her last words. She was gone, my daughter was dead. (Unnamed mother, Kajo Keji, Central Equatoria State, 12 August 2010)

As with other services, responsibility for the implementation of health-service delivery has been decentralised to the ten state ministries of health, and the newly formed county health departments (Ministry of Health, 2007). International organisations, such as the World Health Organization, the African Medical Research Foundation, Médecins Sans Frontières, and UNICEF provide health services across South Sudan and play a major role in implementing health programmes at community level.

The various state efforts are overseen and co-ordinated at the national Ministry of Health, and it falls to the Ministry to co-ordinate national health-care priorities, oversee the activities of all health-care organisations, and ensure that all interventions implemented are in line with national health policy. The Ministry’s key role is the formulation of policies to enable the national government to oversee the operation of the health sector.

Robert Patrick, the Director of Planning and Research in the National Ministry of Health, explains that, in addition to policy formulation, the Ministry is involved in mapping health-care facilities, determining facility conditions, examining current delivery practices and assessing the capacity of medical personnel across South Sudan (Interview). The aim of this mapping process is to establish baselines in terms of which efforts can be measured, and several surveys and studies have been conducted so far. Dr Patrick explains that the Ministry is currently processing and evaluating the results of these surveys, and these results will form the basis of future planning and co-ordination:

The first Ministry of Health survey, which was called the Sudan Household Health Survey, focused on water and sanitation conditions, access to health-care and women’s reproductive health. It revealed the highest levels of infant mortality and maternal mortality rates in the world. This survey was to establish a baseline upon which a number of surveys have now been conducted, including the survey on health personnel…We are using a strategy known as the Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response system.
Through this strategy, each health-care facility in the counties, through their county health department, is required to provide weekly reports based on a priority-disease list provided by the Ministry of Health, which includes malaria, diarrhoea and meningitis. Out of the 79 counties in South Sudan, at least 50 are able to provide a report. (Interview)

Using the information contained in these reports, the Ministry of Health has developed a five-year Strategic Health Plan (Ministry of Health, 2010), which deals with, among other things; fostering human-resource development, equipping health-care facilities, improving the financing of health facilities, and enhancing the overall co-ordination of donor and NGO activities.

To account for the various shortcomings currently hampering service delivery, the Ministry has emphasised the gradual rollout of expanded coverage. This emphasis on gradual achievement has had the unwanted consequence of leading to low staff morale and the under-utilisation of health services. However, it seems the government’s efforts are gradually bearing fruit. Dr Margret Itto, a medical doctor who has worked in Sudan’s health-care sector for over 20 years, confirms that:

Health care has come a long way from the time of the war when communicable diseases were at epidemic levels. The Ministry of Health is now working on improving access to life-saving treatment services [to address] the main causes of childhood mortality. The Ministry is addressing the four levels of care: community-based health-care activities; primary health-care units; primary health-care centres; and county health departments. The Ministry would then use these selected areas as a baseline for planning interventions. I understand how much work the Ministry still has to do to put in place the logistical requirements for effective delivery of health care, but there is hope of improved and effective health care. (Interview)

This is not to say that quality health-care services will soon be available to all throughout the country, but indications are that the health-care sector is moving in the right direction. It is in this context, that a legion of brave women is working to make adequate health care accessible to as many people as possible.

The women who guard the health of a nation

In Maridi, present-day Western Equatoria, Mbilla Lotto is a midwife and a nurse in Maridi Civil Hospital. She starts each day by preparing porridge for her five children and her husband. When her duties as mother and wife are done, Mbilla walks to the local hospital to begin her working day. Like those of midwives across the world, her days typically bring a range of experiences; a new life entering the world; a young mother cuddling her newborn; a woman weeping for the loss of a son.

However, in Mbilla’s case, working at the hospital is particularly tough, as there are very few staff and never enough medical supplies. As soon as Mbilla has delivered a child, washed it, wrapped it in linen and handed the baby to its mother, she must hurry to attend to her next patient. Sometimes her days end well, but all too often, she goes home and cries. The exhaustion overwhelms her and the desperate images and sounds of weeping mothers and crying babies are not easily left behind:

I will never forget the day a mother came carrying two twin babies; one on her back and another supported on her shoulder. The doctor ordered the admission of the sick baby and she responded well to the medication administered. At the time the sun was going down, the baby died. The mother was hysterical. I went home that day, with images of that mother, and I could imagine what she was going through. Most of the time, I was immersed in thoughts of weeping mothers and cuddly newborns. (Interview, Mbilla Lotto)

With staff shortages in health facilities compounded by a lack of equipment and supplies, illnesses, wounds, disease and pain often go untreated as the hospitals wait for the delivery of medications and supplies. Raida Jokudu, a senior nurse at Mundari Hospital, explains:

Sometimes the doctor recommends that a patient should undergo a blood transfusion. Since we do not have a blood bank in Mundari Hospital we advise the patients to find a donor, and then we can carry out the necessary tests. Sometimes, by the time we find a donor with a matching blood type, it is too late to save the patient. (Interview)
To make matters worse, storage facilities are inadequate and electricity supply is sporadic. This means that the already limited drug supplies are frequently left unrefrigerated and go to waste.

Women in the health sector work long and hard hours, and are paid extremely low salaries for their efforts. Often, over and above the stresses of work, they have to worry about making ends meet. Grace Adiye, a nurse in Nimule, a town on the Ugandan border, begins her working day with a three-kilometre walk to the local health clinic where she works. There is no reliable public transport system to shorten the journey. Her young children spend their days with her family – in the absence of a formal childcare system, childcare is provided by family and community members. Although she receives only a modest salary, she generously shares her wages with family. Grace explains:

My pay is too little; I cannot afford to buy for myself breakfast for the morning before I go to work. I only wake up, bath and start walking to work. Because I walk a very long distance every day to work, by the time I get to work, I am exhausted. I start administering treatment as prescribed by the doctor until lunchtime. When salary comes at the end of the month, I divide my pay into three. Some of it I have to send back home to pay school fees for my siblings, some of the money I send to my mother who is taking care of my siblings, and I keep a little to take care of myself. Sometimes when there is an emergency that we have to work on at the hospital, I am paid a bonus. Then I can afford two meals. Otherwise, I only have one meal each day, so that I do not use all my money before the end of the month. (Interview)

Frequent delays in the payment of salaries cause immense hardships for health-care workers, who already struggle to survive on low wages. In June 2009, the medical staff of the Mundari Hospital in Kajo Keji, Central Equatoria went on strike after months of delayed pay. Raida Jokudu, senior nurse at Mundari Hospital explains her reasons for joining the strike:

I have six children, they had all been sent home from school because I had not been able to pay their school fees. I had not been paid my salary for the last six months and I have a family to feed. I do not know how I am expected to keep working without even affording a meal for myself. I am the only senior nurse at the hospital and I co-ordinate all the nursing activities, deploy the semi-trained nurses and the traditional birth attendants to attend to patients. I make sure they do their work well. I am not paid a lot of money, and it takes me six months to receive the little pay. I don’t know how the government expects me to take good care of the patients when I am hungry and I have starving children at home. (Interview)

In the years since the war ended, the brain-drain continues to hamper the provision of health services, and it operates at all levels of the health sector. Over a quarter of trained South Sudanese medical specialists currently operate outside of South Sudan (Achiek & Lado, 2010: 3). Poor working conditions have caused many of South Sudan’s health-care workers to leave, depriving the country of their limited skills.

Linda Lemmy, worked in a hospital in Central Equatoria, before deciding to pursue further studies in Nairobi, Kenya. However, her motivation to return to university stemmed from more than just her desire to improve her skills:

I was tired. There were just too many patients and there were only a handful of doctors. I would come to the hospital, and see patient after patient, and would not even remember to take a snack break. I kept working until I realised I was exhausted. That is when I left for Nairobi to study public health. (Interview)

With minimal family obligations and the freedom of youth on her side, Linda was able to leave South Sudan to further her career. However, for most women, regardless of how harsh their circumstances, leaving their families behind, and taking the time to study further, is not an option. In fact, for many women in the health sector, taking a break from the hard grind, no matter what the reason, can have negative results. Beatrice, a nurse from Eastern Equatoria, recounts the challenges she encountered when returning to work after having taken maternity leave:

The work of a nurse involves running around when on duty and sometimes even off duty. When I was active in the hospital, I would run from helping one patient to the next until my shift ends. But I am a mother too, and with
an eight-and-a-half months pregnancy. I couldn’t get everything straight. Sometimes I feared that I might misread the doctor’s prescription due to stress and fatigue. Sometimes, I would get caught sleeping in the nurse’s room. So I decided to take my maternity leave two weeks earlier. That means I had only a month and half to nurse my baby and I would need to go back to work. I still felt I needed to give my baby some more time. So I opted for the allowable one extra month. After the one extra month, I went back to work, and found out that while I was out on maternity leave, my colleagues had participated in a training that had improved their skills. With the training they were promoted to the next grade. As mothers, that’s what we go through every day at work, but we try to compete favourably with our colleagues. (Interview)

In these dire working conditions, the emotional burden of working in health services is not to be underestimated. Frustration and low morale is common, and the quality of services provided is often poor. Despite this, many of the women of South Sudan’s health sector are extremely committed to their work and many of those interviewed expressed the hope that their conditions will soon improve, that there will be more clinics, medicines, personnel and equipment, so that they can experience more joy and success in caring for the health of their war-worn people.

Women in South Sudan’s education sector

Clementina Kiden is a teacher at Buluk A Primary School in Juba. Her class consists of 120 students between the ages of seven and fourteen. The classroom in which she teaches was built for 30 students, but four times that number squeeze into the room, eager to receive an education. It is only due to the resilience, commitment and imagination of teachers like her, that children at this school learn anything at all. During my visit to the school, Clementina was teaching her students an innovative lesson based on a local radio broadcast. Calling on a female student from the back and a male student from the middle of the room to come forward, Clementina demonstrated an activity that enhanced the radio-based lesson, capturing the attention of her students. Given the lack of books and stationery, teachers such as Clementina rely on such creative and improvised teaching techniques.

Decades of civil war denied entire generations of South Sudanese access to even the most basic education. In 2004, the literacy rate in South Sudan was reported at 24 per cent, thus the majority of people in the country are unable to read and write (UNDP, 2004). The challenges that this creates for the population are immense, and it is one of the major factors contributing to the deficit of trained teaching professionals in the country.

Education services are in a worrying state. Around the country, schools lack teachers, infrastructure, equipment and teaching resources. There is a severe shortage of teachers, and, as noted, 96 per cent of primary school teachers have no formal qualifications. Furthermore, 63 per cent have had no teacher training at all (Hewison, 2009).

School infrastructure is another serious problem. Many schools don’t have buildings, and classes are held in the shade of trees. Out of 11,427 ‘classrooms’ in South Sudan, only 5,565 are actual, permanent school structures (Ministry of Education, 2009a: 13). Assunta Gaba teaches Class 2 in Pageri, Eastern Equatoria. Her class of 90 children sits under a large mango tree in the school compound. She explains that it is not possible for her to teach the whole syllabus, as her class cannot continue during the rainy season:

Even if the children come to school, when it starts raining, I cannot teach because the only place to teach them is under the tree. I try as much as possible to cover the syllabus during the dry season, but then I cannot teach everything because I cannot push the children beyond their capacity. The other problem is that school opens in the first week of April and that is almost close to the rainy season. So it is very likely that the children will not learn enough as their classes will always be interrupted by the rains that start between April and May. (Interview)

The Ministry of Education (2009a) has recognised the pressing need for more teachers to deliver quality education. It also recognises the importance of improving the educational infrastructure around the country. Nama Bullen, Director-General of the Ministry of Education in Western Equatoria state, explains, ‘The level of education services provided does not yet respond to the education needs of all Southern Sudanese. In all these small towns and villages, you can see the need to provide quality education as you walk past classrooms under trees. But the situation was much worse during the war’ (Interview).
Efforts are being made to improve the provision of education and to close the literacy gap. The *Education Policy Handbook* (Ministry of Education, 2007) stipulates that, at the national level, the Ministry of Education is charged with the formulation of policies, creating national strategies and guidelines, and with the national co-ordination of all activities. The national Ministry is also responsible for curriculum development, examinations and accreditation and oversight of national institutions such as teacher training colleges and other post-secondary school technical institutions. At state level, state Ministries of Education are charged with the implementation of policy. In other words, they are responsible for ensuring quality, and overseeing county education centres to ensure the effective flow of education services to the population. It is envisaged that these centres will provide in-service training to primary school teachers at county level, conduct inspections and monitor primary education facilities, as well as ensure that all children and adults who require education are able to access these services.

Given the short period of time since the ending of the war, South Sudan's education sector is still in a formative state. For the most part, and at all levels, processes are in the planning stages and at the time of writing, implementation was limited. The Ministries are all in the early stages of organisational development, and their personnel are often unsure of their roles as administrators and managers. Furthermore, Ministry employees, at both state and local levels, tend to have little direct involvement with schools, because they don't have transport to visit the schools that they serve.

Similarly, steps are being taken to extend teacher development. Literacy and numeracy training is being provided to government officials, including those in the state Ministries of Education. Some county education centres are already functional, and running in-service training for teachers during school holidays. The Ministry of Education plans to have a functioning teacher-training institute in each of the ten states of Southern Sudan. Unfortunately, implementation of this plan is being delayed by the fact that some of the existing institutes are in a very dilapidated state and require complete reconstruction before they can be used effectively.

At the time of writing, the Ministry of Education had opened teacher-training institutes in three states, and the Maridi Teacher Training Institute had over 200 students from the three states of Central, Western and Eastern Equatoria (the National Curriculum Development Centre is also located at this institute). Malakal's Teacher Training Institute had students from the states of Upper Nile, Western Bahr el Ghazal and Unity, while the Aramweer Teacher Training Institute had students from Lakes State, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Warrap and Jonglei states. Students at these institutions were undergoing a rigorous training programme, with facilitators from the University of Juba and Nairobi University.

Furthermore, to try to ensure that more people can access education, the Ministry of Education has established both a formal and an alternative education system. The *formal* system relies on an 8-4-4 system – that is, eight years of formal primary education, four years of secondary education and four years of higher (post-secondary and tertiary) education. Within the formal system however, there is a need to unify the curriculum. In areas close to the borders, curricula from neighbouring countries are taught in some schools. This complicates matters in various ways: apart from different content and methods of assessment, there are variations in the number of years of schooling: Uganda (7–6–4), Kenya (8–4–4) and Ethiopia (8–2–2 plus two additional years of higher education).

Progress in achieving a unified curriculum has been slow. Between 2002 and 2007, the National Curriculum Development Centre in Maridi, Western Equatoria, developed the teacher-training curriculum and part of the curriculum for primary education. The new primary-education curriculum has been launched in most schools in South Sudan, but launching the curriculum is only the first step. A key problem is that the new curriculum is in English. Most of South Sudan's teachers received their training in Arabic. They have struggled with the switch in language (Hewison, 2009), and there is a shortage of textbooks to support their teaching. However, with the intensive English courses conducted by the Ministry of Education's Directorate of Alternative Education Systems, some teachers are gradually beginning to adopt the new system.

The *alternative system* compresses eight years of primary education into four years, and offers flexible entry and exit points for children, youth and adults (Ministry of Education, 2007). Within this system, different streams of education have been created to deal with the differing needs in the population. The Director-General for Alternative Education Systems, Mr Kuol Atem Bol explains:
About 60 per cent of the population of South Sudan are youth. A large majority of them dropped out of school at an early age and have no skills. That is why we have introduced alternative education in different forms. We have the accelerated learning programme, community girls’ schools, intensive English courses, literacy for pastoralist communities and radio-based education. We use these different formats to reach out to different target groups with literacy, numeracy, life skills, health and civic-education messages. We also provide intensive English courses to education personnel at the state, county and payam levels to equip them with knowledge of the official language of South Sudan, English. (Interview)

International organisations and NGOs play a key role in assisting schools, and in providing education in South Sudan. Organisations such as UNICEF, Save the Children, Windle Trust International, Education Development Center, Academy for Education Development, and many others, have worked with the Ministry to initiate and implement education programmes. These organisations have also provided technical assistance to strengthen systems and improve the Ministry’s planning and teacher-development processes. Committed donors such as the US Agency for International Development and the Multi-Donor Trust Fund, a consortium of over ten countries, have provided financial backing to enable the Ministry of Education and their implementation partners to realise their sectoral plans.

One crucial part of improving the educational system is monitoring the delivery of services. Information needs to be collected about what services are being provided in different areas, and where shortages in infrastructure, equipment and teaching capacity exist. Perhaps the most important achievement of the Ministry of Education has been the creation and maintenance of the education management information system, which provides up-to-date data on teachers, schools and the education sector as a whole. This data then informs the education sectors’ planning processes.

Those tasked with monitoring the education system face a daunting task, however. Leticia Gbafi is a county supervisor for basic education in Nzara County in Western Equatoria. A former teacher, Leticia brings years of experience and has an amiable rapport with her colleagues. Her job involves a significant amount of travel to monitor and evaluate the school system across the region, and includes recording the challenges facing teachers, documenting best practices and reporting her findings to the county education director. Leticia has an enormous workload. She explains that insufficient support and inadequate public transport hinder her ability to do her job well:

My load of work is just too much for me to handle on my own. The schools in the county are far apart and I do not have any means of transportation to visit all of them. Most of the time, I have to wait for my colleagues who have motorbikes, so that I can ride with them to visit the schools. Some schools have never been visited because there are only very few staff and we cannot go to all the schools.

My day usually starts at 5 in the morning. I have to prepare my children for school and get myself ready for work as well. I wake up early to make breakfast, clean the compound, go to the borehole to fetch water and send off my children to school. Because of all this work, I always show up at work over an hour late, and I am always the subject of mockery due to my constant ‘habit’ of coming to work late. You see, I am a single mother, and I am the one who has to do everything at home. After work I go to buy groceries, get back home and prepare food for supper. By the time I am going to bed, I have my back aching. Yes, I still have to keep going because I want to work, and get money to take care of my children. The biggest challenge is that when I come to the office too late, I find my colleagues have left without me to inspect the schools. (Interview)

South Sudan’s teachers work hard, in overcrowded classes, often struggling to juggle their personal and professional responsibilities. For teachers who are also mothers, as most of the female teachers are, the challenges can be daunting. Hellen Saida teaches in Yei, Central Equatoria. She has twins, who were nine months old at the time of our interview. Hellen’s day starts with preparing and packing a meal. Since she has no one to help her care for her children, she takes her babies with her to school:

I rely on the goodwill of other teachers and children at the school to take care of my babies as I teach. Sometimes I would be teaching, and a pupil would just walk into the class with my child, crying. I would leave everything I am doing, stop the lesson for a while and come to feed my child, before
Hope, Pain and Patience

Like other public-sector employees, teachers throughout South Sudan have experienced delayed salary payments. Disbursement of salaries is a slow and complicated process. Money is disbursed from the Ministry of Finance to the Ministry of Education, which must then pass this money on to the Ministries of Education in each state so that they can facilitate payments to teachers in co-operation with the local counties. Unfortunately, with South Sudan’s banking system still in its infancy, it often takes longer than expected for the teachers’ salaries to reach them. The situation has slowly begun to improve with the establishment of a payroll system for teachers. Nura Matayo works as both a primary-school teacher and an instructor in the accelerated-learning programme for adults. She explains:

I go through a painful experience waiting for my salary, because that is all I have to cater for my needs and those of my children. In addition to school fees for my children, I need to buy them clothes, take them to hospital when they are sick, and I have to do all these things using the meagre salary that I earn. Although it is not enough, it helps to have it on a regular basis, but when it takes three months to get paid, sometimes my children and I have to go hungry. I have encouraged my children to learn to survive on one meal a day, so that we can be able to save some money to cover the time when salaries are delayed. That is how we survive here. It is not easy, but as a teacher, I know that there are many children and even adults who demand my services, and I must sacrifice to help them. (Interview)

Education is among the most important factors that enables or prevents a population from developing. If the socio-economic situation in South Sudan is to improve, skilled people are urgently required. And skills development is entirely contingent on the creation of a population with a good basic education; so much depends on this crucial sector becoming effective.

Female participation mandated, yet gaps remain

There is a significant shortage of staff in the South Sudanese civil service. However, in the women of South Sudan, the country has a great, untapped resource, which if adequately trained, could contribute to reducing the drastic shortfall in human resources. Article 20(4) of the Interim National Constitution of Southern Sudan deals with the rights of women. It stipulates that all levels of government in Southern Sudan shall:

a. promote women participation in public life and their representation in the legislative and executive organs by at least twenty-five per cent as an affirmative action to redress imbalances created by history, customs and traditions;

b. enact laws to combat harmful customs and traditions which undermine the dignity and status of women; and

c. provide maternity and child care and medical care for pregnant and lactating women.

The Interim Constitution thus mandates affirmative action for women. Increasing the number of women employed in service delivery and public administration could form a crucial aspect of this. In 2008, the government of Southern Sudan created a gender policy, which among other things, mandated a quota of 25 per cent as the target for the participation of women in government (Gatdet Dak, 2008). In this way, attention has been focused on the need for increased female participation in the civil service, and steps have been taken to set in place the policies required to ensure this.

Having said this, indications are that opportunities for women have not yet been fully developed. Statistics from 2009 illustrate that the large majority of educators are still male, with females making up only 10 per cent of teachers across South Sudan. Even within government where the 25 per cent quota for the employment of women is in place, women have filled an average of just 18 per cent of government positions (Gatdek Dak, 2008).

‘Gender equality cannot be achieved without women[‘s] empowerment,’
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South Sudanese women in service delivery

argues the former Gender Affairs Minister Mary Kiden. Building women’s rights is an important component of bringing women into the workplace. Kiden has also emphasised the need for special programming focused on equipping females with the skills required to participate in all levels of governance, and in the civil service (quoted in Gatdet Dak, 2008).

The first step required for creating more female teachers and health professionals is educating more females. Prioritising girl-child enrolment at primary school level is as important as ensuring that training centres are in place. The ‘Go to School Initiative’ implemented in South Sudan, which began in 2004, increased primary-school enrolment from 300 000 to 1.1 million. However, the classrooms are still strongly male dominated, and this tends to perpetuate a continued lack of female participation. If young women are not encouraged to obtain an academic foundation, the limited number of females involved in the workforce will persist, and efforts to build the future educational and health workforce are likely to falter (Hewison, 2009).

However, there are some promising signs. The first (ever) College for Nursing and Midwifery has been established in the capital, Juba, and has enrolled its first students in an intensive, accredited three-year diploma course. Of the first student intake, two thirds are female. A student commented, ‘Some of us have been working as nurses in various state hospitals. We are very happy to be here. The courses will help us upgrade our knowledge and skills’ (quoted in Bucyabahiga, 2010: 57). It is expected that by 2015 the college will have trained over 100 nurses and midwives from all states of South Sudan (Bucyabahiga, 2010).

In addition, the Ministry of Education’s Directorate of Gender and Social Change is providing scholarships to over 8 000 female students to enable them to complete their secondary education and join the teaching profession. After finishing their secondary education, these students are recruited directly into teacher-training institutes. Arapi Teacher Training Institute in Eastern Equatoria has even made provision for students who are mothers. The institute has constructed dormitories with an extra wing for mothers who have babies, and provides caregivers for the children, allowing mothers to participate fully in the training programme. It is hoped that such efforts will increase the number of female teachers, and that they will, in turn, act as role models in attracting more girls to go to school.

Conclusion

The women interviewed for this chapter, and the many thousands of women in South Sudan are ready to work towards building the new state of South Sudan. For years they have played a part in educating children, and keeping them healthy, while war devastated the country’s infrastructure and prevented the state from offering them any support. As traditional gender roles shifted during and after the war, women began filling human-resource gaps in schools, clinics and hospitals, often with little or no training. The women of South Sudan played an invaluable role in the provision of services during the long, hard years of conflict.

So too, in the post-war period, many women continue to contribute in any way that they can towards providing health care and education. The role played by women in reviving the country’s social services, either formally or informally, is not to be underestimated. By helping to address the shortages of services, and the needs shared by all members of the community, women contribute to the long-term process of overcoming past tensions and reviving a sense of community (Sørensen, 1998).

Women interviewed for this chapter expressed their longing for education and skills training, so that they can be more effective in their chosen professions. They also long for better-resourced facilities so that they can more efficiently play their part. By ensuring that quality schools, healthcare facilities and training centres are developed, the government of South Sudan will better be able to utilise women to help them to overcome the many challenges facing the country in the rebuilding of the civil service.

Despite the tremendous challenge of balancing the needs of their families with the demands of their careers, often for very little remuneration, all the women interviewed take pride in their work, and take their responsibilities seriously. They have waited a long time for peace. Now that it has come, and a new country is to be formed, women stand at the forefront of the reconstruction efforts. Without the full and effective participation of women, it is unlikely that South Sudan will fully achieve its goals of peace and sustainable economic and social development. With their efforts, the future promises to be a better place than the past.
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In 1990, a coalition of women from around the world began lobbying the UN Security Council on the need to recognise the effects of armed conflict on women, and to involve them in peace processes and peacebuilding efforts. Ten years later, in October 2000, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325, which requires countries emerging from conflict to respect women’s rights, and to enable their participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction. Since then, women across the world have begun to be included in post-conflict negotiations, and in arrangements for rebuilding their war-torn countries. The subsequent introduction of quotas relating to women’s participation in political structures in many countries has meant an increase in the number of women taking on positions of political power.

In South Sudan, the second Sudanese civil war was brought to an end on 9 January 2005 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). This represented a key opportunity to lay the foundations for...
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Apart from putting in place a set of agreements aimed at resolving various contentious issues, the CPA also provided for a minimum of 25 per cent of political seats across all levels of government to be reserved for women. Although this quota has not yet been met, its presence has begun to pave the way for greater participation by women in politics.

An issue discussed throughout this book is how South Sudan's two civil wars (1955–1972 and 1983–2005) affected traditional gender roles in the country. Since a large number of men were killed, or absent for long periods while taking part in the fighting, women stepped in to fill roles that had traditionally been held by men. Women became the backbone of their communities, taking care of their homes and families, the sick and the wounded, as well as managing agricultural production (Arabi, 2008). In addition, many women played key roles in the armed forces, at times in direct combat, but more frequently in providing the soldiers with vital logistical support. As women’s responsibilities increased, gender differences, which had been so entrenched before the war, began to shift. In spite of this, however, patriarchy and sexism persist; cultural norms that subordinate women to men in almost all social interactions remain pervasive.

This chapter provides an overview of women’s involvement in politics and leadership in South Sudan, and explores the experiences of a number of women in political and other leadership positions. The history of women’s involvement in South Sudanese politics is briefly outlined, and the impact of the quota system on increasing women’s political involvement is assessed. Factors that hinder women’s participation in political and other structures are discussed, and the chapter concludes with a synopsis of what the women interviewed see as priorities for women’s empowerment, and strategies for increasing women’s participation in a more free and equal future for all in South Sudan.

In terms of methodology, the views and information in this chapter were obtained through a series of face-to-face interviews and focus groups held with women who, at the time of writing, were involved in politics, held leadership positions or worked for various NGOs in South Sudan. Semi-structured, open-ended interview questions were used to allow for the inclusion of unforeseen comments, concerns and ideas. A total of 25 women were interviewed in seven of Southern Sudan’s ten states. Details of interviews cited are listed at the end of the chapter.

An outline of women’s involvement in politics and leadership in South Sudan

According to Beswick (2000), small numbers of South Sudanese women traditionally held positions of religious, political and clan leadership in their country. Long before the colonial era, women from the Shilluk and Nuer kingdoms held positions as religious leaders. Similarly, Azande and Bari women held positions as clan leaders. During the Turco-Egyptian and Mahdist colonial period (1821–1898), in an attempt to resist the colonialists’ barbaric policy of executing tax-defaulting chiefs, Dinka communities appointed women to replace male chiefs, believing that colonial administrators would be less likely to execute women.

However, despite these historical precedents, traditional South Sudanese culture does not, on the whole, encourage women to assume leadership positions in society, and tends to discourage women from involving themselves in anything that might undermine their abilities to care for their male relatives or their children. However, during Sudan’s two civil wars (1955–1972 and 1983–2005), with men constantly away on the frontlines or killed in battle, women had little option but to assume many of the responsibilities that men had previously held. In this way, the wars were a catalyst for many South Sudanese women to begin to break with their customary gender roles.

Interestingly, the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement, which ushered in a nine-year lull between the wars (from 1972 to 1983), provided for equal citizenship rights for men and women and included women’s political rights. This relatively peaceful time saw the emergence of modern political leadership among South Sudanese women, who entered politics in considerable numbers (Beswick, 2000: 101).

When the conflict escalated again and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) was formed in 1983, women were incorporated into the military for the first time; many more women joined the SPLA than had joined the rebel movements of the 1960s and 1970s. By 1985, a women’s battalion had even been formed and a significant number of female military
officers were trained as combatants (see also Chapter 2, this volume).

Opportunities to acquire an education and work experience (both unavailable in their villages) were an added incentive for many of the women who joined the SPLA. Female combatants were trained to take on roles such as managing radio communications, assisting in the medical corps, gathering intelligence and lecturing in political education (Beswick, 2000). Through their involvement in the war effort, women gained the kinds of skills that would help them step into leadership positions after the war.

Another small avenue for empowerment and skills development opened up during the second civil war when several humanitarian organisations working in South Sudan began to employ local women. These employees acquired skills in emergency-relief management, resettlement of refugees, rehabilitation and development, protection, human rights, administration and management, training and monitoring specific issues regarding the well being of women and children (Interview, Norah Edward Doro).

For most women, however, the radical changes brought about by the second war forced them to once again take on multiple new roles as their husbands, brothers and fathers left to join the fighting. As de facto heads of households, assuming sole responsibility for sustaining their families with extremely meagre resources, women were under immense pressure just to survive. Few had time for political or any other voluntary work (Focus group, Margaret Nako).

The CPA, signed in 2005, signalled the dawn of a new era in Sudanese politics, however. The CPA put in place a series of stipulations aimed at resolving key disputes around border demarcation, governance systems and the sharing of profits from South Sudan’s oil reserves. More importantly, for the purposes of this chapter, the CPA enshrined equal rights for men and women, providing for an Interim Constitution that would do the same.

Article 20 of the Interim Constitution of Southern Sudan, 2005, recognises the rights of women, and stipulates that:

1. Women shall be accorded full and equal dignity of the person with men.
2. Women shall have the right to equal pay for equal work and other related benefits with men.
3. Women shall have the right to participate equally with men in public life.

4. All levels of government in Southern Sudan shall:
   a. promote women’s participation in public life and their representation in the legislative and executive organs by at least 25 per cent as an affirmative action to redress imbalances created by history, customs and traditions;
   b. enact laws to combat harmful customs and traditions which undermine the dignity and status of women; and
   c. provide maternity and child care and medical care for pregnant and lactating women.

5. Women shall have the right to own property and share in the estate of their deceased husbands together with any surviving legal heirs of the deceased.

To help make Article 20 of the Interim Constitution a reality, the government of Southern Sudan established a Ministry of Gender, Social Welfare and Religious Affairs. According to Regina Lullo, the ministry’s Director for Gender, the ministry’s mandate is to mainstream gender throughout government institutions, and to establish women’s empowerment initiatives, and also focus on creating national policies for implementation by local ministries in the ten states that make up Southern Sudan (Interview). At a conference on women in politics held in 2007, the president of South Sudan, Salva Kiir, reiterated the need to empower women. He indicated his support for efforts aimed at enhancing the capacity of women, and enabling them to make a more meaningful contribution to national development (quoted in UNDP, 2007).

The quota system

The introduction of the 25 per cent quota for women in government was another major intervention by the government of Southern Sudan aimed at improving the lives of women. In 2007, President Kiir noted that the quota has almost been achieved in Southern Sudan’s national ministries (where, by 2010, seven of the 32 ministers were women). He noted that much remains to be done to achieve this target at the state level, however (by 2010, only one of Southern Sudan’s ten states was governed by a woman). The president warned male legislators ‘who are occupying posts meant for women’ to vacate such offices if they cannot live up to the challenge of ensuring that
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the quota is fully implemented (quoted in UNDP, 2007).

It has been argued that quota systems are the most effective means of increasing women’s participation in political parties and in elective office (see, for example, Ballington, 2004). However, quota systems do not guarantee substantive changes in the division of labour, or in the allocation of responsibilities within institutions of government. Adding complexity to the picture, although the introduction of quotas might provide a means of addressing the gender imbalance in decision-making, the practice often lacks support from political actors and may well meet opposition from communities that have strong patriarchal traditions. In other words, quota systems cannot guarantee a shift in popular perceptions of women's skills and abilities.

Several of the women interviewed expressed some doubts about how the system is working in South Sudan. For example, Kyampaire Verince, a businesswoman and a member of the South Sudan Women’s Union, stated, ‘It is true that there are woman leaders in most states, but most of them have been placed in those positions to add cosmetic value.’ She adds, ‘We are still not aware of what criteria were used to make these women leaders’ (quoted in Chimbi, 2009).

Furthermore, even though 25 per cent of positions in Southern Sudan’s national and state legislative assemblies are allocated to women, women elected into political office are not necessarily immediately empowered to effect the kinds of changes they envision. Besides the fact that there is a severe shortage of state resources, few women have the political experience or the formal education that could enable them to quickly get to grips with how the systems work and what is required of them to effectively carry out their mandates.

Eliana Nadi Albino emphasises that introducing a quota without addressing related challenges, such as the long-term effects of war, traditional beliefs and practices that undermine women, improving women’s access to education, etc. will leave many issues unresolved, and may simply reinforce underlying discriminatory norms and practices:

The 25 per cent affirmative action is very good, and the only way of bringing women on board has been done through the affirmative action. However, few women in Southern Sudan are educated, while others had limited resources for election fees…in a country where more than half of the population lives below the poverty line. As a result, there is the need to identify women with the right skills [and] knowledge in order to fill the positions. (Interview, Eliana Nadi Albino)

Deborah Tito, an active member of the Women’s Union in South Sudan, describes herself as a housewife and a typical grassroots woman. Her main concern is around quality rather than quantity:

It’s very unfortunate that the debate about women and leadership has degenerated into the number of seats we can or should have…We know there is under-representation of women in leadership; what we need to do is learn how to better strategise by marshalling strength in support of the most promising candidates…How about women as equal stakeholders of society? Are we not also entitled to participate in making decisions that determine our future as a nation?…Wouldn’t it be better to have fewer women leaders who can deliver, rather than more who are there to make the leadership class look good in terms of being more gender representative? (quoted in Gathigah, 2010)

Thus, while the 25 per cent quota may be helpful in including women at a decision-making level, enhancing women’s participation in other spheres of influence will be just as important. The Interim Constitution expresses a commitment to equitable development and the eradication of poverty. Clearly, the fullest possible participation of women in every sphere of society is essential if this is ever to be achieved. Yet many institutions in South Sudan remain dominated by males, and women are still, for the most part, absent from decision making and real political power. For example, women comprise just 11.8 per cent of the justices and judges in Southern Sudan’s judiciary (Interview, Regina Lullo). Thus, in terms of ensuring increased participation of women in decision making that affects them and their communities, the quota system is simply a starting point.

Getting involved: how and why

In the post-conflict period, women have become involved in politics for a number of reasons. In this section we explore some of the routes that South
Sudanese women leaders have taken to reach their current positions in the political, NGO or economic spheres.

Adelina Tito is Paramount Chief of Eastern Equatoria State – the only woman in South Sudan to hold this position – and she presides over 397 male chiefs. The granddaughter of a rainmaker and a chief, Adelina describes her greatest asset as her leadership skills. When her husband was assassinated on suspicion of being an SPLA member, she was left to care for her two sons. She decided to take charge of her situation. ‘It is at this point that I had to fend for myself and my children. I joined the police force, and became a powerful police woman.’ Adelina used her position in the police to contribute to the war effort. While working in the prison services, she organised for the release from prison of hundreds of young South Sudanese soldiers, who later escaped to Uganda. ‘It is this type of work that propelled me into the position of leadership,’ she says (quoted in Omukhango, 2009).

After the CPA was signed in 2005, Adelina returned to Torit Country. There, she was soon promoted to the position of paramount head chief in recognition of her selfless commitment to her community. Adelina is trying to ensure that more women follow her footsteps. Although she appreciates that the CPA has expanded the democratic space for women, she says that a lot still needs to be done. Sudanese women, she notes, face a number of obstacles such as access to information, lack of education and cultural barriers (Quoted in Omukhango, 2009).

Like Adelina, many South Sudanese women became active in politics as a result of the responsibilities they took on during the war. At the time, many women were called upon to transport ammunition and food to the frontlines. Women cooked for the soldiers and became their wives. Many took care of the wounded soldiers, and others served as translators for rebel groups or government forces. All these women were an integral part of the struggle. When the peace agreement was signed in 2005, most of these women aspired to remain involved, to join in the new decision-making processes, and to bring change and lasting peace to South Sudan (Arabi, 2008).

On the whole, women wish to construct a family-friendly environment throughout South Sudan, where children are protected and able to enjoy their childhood while growing into healthy, responsible adults who know their rights and are able to stand up for them (Arabi, 2008). A number of the women also emphasised that their involvement in politics, and in leadership roles in various other spheres, is related to their desire to improve the provision of health care and education, and to help in the fight against poverty. The desperate state of public health and education services directly affects women on a daily basis (see Chapters 5 and 7 in this volume), and the problems around these have played a significant role in propelling women first into activist, and later into leadership roles.

So it was for Sarah Nyanath Elijah. After being sent for training in Cuba, Sarah served in the SPLA as a nurse from 1988 to 1991. She then worked in the humanitarian sector in Ethiopia, Kenya and South Sudan for over a decade before the formation of the government of Southern Sudan in 2005, when she was appointed as an MP in Upper Nile State’s legislative assembly and later as Minister of Social Development in Upper Nile. During the April 2010 elections, Sarah stood for the position of Governor of Upper Nile State.

Sarah explains that for some Sudanese women, entry into politics provides a platform from which they can realise their childhood dreams of achieving gender equality, empowerment and a free and just society for all. She adds that during her own childhood, she was aware of many women who were discriminated against and forced to endure gender-based violence. Subsequently these women began to question why they were not being treated respectfully and as equal to men (Interview, Sarah Nyanath Elijah).

Patriarchy remains prominent in South Sudan, and it has been argued that it is one of the major causes of poverty among women (Abwunza, 1997). Men dominate the economic, social and political sphere, benefitting from advantageous treatment at almost every level to the disadvantage of their female counterparts. This system has greatly impeded women’s development, resulting in their exposure to all kinds of discrimination and violence (Interview, Sarah Nyanath Elijah). A desire to oppose these destructive patriarchal practices has led many women across the region, including in neighbouring countries, to become advocates for the rights of girls and women (Interview, Miria Matembe). They want to fight the systems they see as undermining women, such as wife inheritance, property ownership and violence against women.

Sabina Dario Lokolong is one of these women. Lokolong was the first-ever female Speaker in a parliament in South Sudan – she holds this position...
in Eastern Equatoria’s legislative assembly, after having been nominated for the position by her late father’s clan. She explains ‘I am a very ambitious person and I always knew I could rise to great heights in whatever career I chose, but to be the Speaker in a country where women almost don’t count in political discourse? That surprised me’ (quoted in Chimbi, 2009).

As an unmarried woman with no children of her own (she adopted seven children orphaned by the war), Lokolong is a graduate in psychology and education from Ahfat University in Khartoum. She explains how the tradition of demanding that ‘all rise’ when the Speaker enters the Assembly caused a huge stir, ‘This caused so much hostility towards me, an unwed, female, young Speaker, they simply couldn’t take it.’ But Lokolong fought back, ‘I speak my mind even when it might elicit antagonism, as long as by doing so I am serving my people’ (quoted in Chimbi, 2009). Following a number of corruption allegations, a motion to impeach her was eventually tabled in her absence, a move that was out of order and therefore dismissed. At the time of writing, she still held the position of Speaker.

**Community activism: ‘today we are succeeding’**

Outside of government, women are making important contributions to the rebuilding of their nation via their participation in various women’s organisations. Women have played important roles in forums aimed at resolving inter-ethnic conflicts and clashes between groups over their rights to land, water and other resources. In just one example, journalist, Anne Itto (2006) notes that when Dinka elders decided to send a peace delegation to Nuer territory, no one was willing to lead the delegation. Eventually it was the wife of a Dinka chief who demanded that her husband lead his people into Nuer territory, even though she was aware of the high risks involved. Through this kind of commitment to dialogue, women’s organisations, such as the Women’s Association of Tonj County, have participated in formulating several grassroots peace accords, such as the one drawn up at the 1999 Wunlit Peace Conference and the 2000 Lilir Covenant. Sadia Mangok, a representative of the ‘Tonj County Women’s Association, addressed the Wunlit Peace conference as follows:

I will not ask you why we are killing one another with our fighting. What we women want to ask you is why our children should suffer and die as they are? In any conflict, men do not reconcile with one another, but it is the women who feel the pain and call for reconciliation between our peoples. For three years I have run the Workshop in Adoor. When we began the peace process we were given the mandates written down. People mocked us and laughed saying you will be killed by the enemy. But today we are succeeding, and you men must follow us as we open the way for peace. (SSFI, 1999)

The Sudanese Women’s Voice for Peace (SWVP) has provided a forum in which women could be involved in the peaceful resolution of conflict. Established in 1994 by Sudanese women exiled in Nairobi, SWVP promotes dialogue among all sectors of Sudanese society, with a particular focus on women. The organisation’s main objectives are to empower women through training and participation in conflict resolution and to promote a culture of peace. SWVP has played a role in advocating the use of traditional methods for resolving conflict and restoring peaceful relations between local communities and community members. For example, they have encouraged embattled communities to reflect on questions such as: will revenge bring my loved ones back? (Arabi, 2008: 57).

A further example of women mobilising women is the Women’s Union. Founded in the early 1950s to bring Sudanese women into politics through educational, cultural and social activities, the Women’s Union is still strong, and has branches across the southern states. The movement gathers women together to discuss political and societal issues. At meetings, members are encouraged to articulate and collate their grievances and issues. These are then passed on to women who occupy elected and appointed positions in government (IRBC, 2002).

Women’s involvement in such organisations provides them with an opportunity to explore new levels of responsibility in a public space. In this way, a number of women have found the confidence to negotiate and compete with men for political office. According to Regina Lullo, this has resulted in a number of women being elected to parliament and being appointed ministers in South Sudan’s new government (Interview).
**Challenges experienced by women leaders in South Sudan**

Women who consider standing for political leadership face considerable opposition and have to overcome several practical obstacles. Some of these are outlined below.

**Access to financial resources and poverty**

Very few women have access to the resources required to pay nomination fees and run election campaigns (Focus group, Sarah James Kun). Sarah Nyanath Elijah, a former Minister of Upper Nile State elaborates, ‘Financial challenge is also breaking our efforts since politics is a very expensive game, and you need money for it’ (Interview).

Women seldom own property, and their spouses or other male relatives usually control their finances. Akello Cham Ajok, an MP from Pochalla County, explained that, ‘women’s financial resources are a derivative of their lack of control or ownership of property. Men have more money to invest into competing for leadership positions. Men tend to control more of the family financial resources and to receive more financial support from the community’ (Focus group). Rebecca Arop Chuang, an MP from Pigi County in Jonglei State echoed this and added that the situation is often exacerbated by a lack of party financial support for women candidates. She believes that this has discouraged many women from entering politics altogether (Focus group).

Those women who can muster the resources to fund and win election campaigns, then face the challenge of meeting the expectations of voters with almost no state resources at their disposal. Rebecca Arop Chuang noted that with limited funding to achieve the promises that they make to their constituencies, women candidates find it hard to face their communities. She argues that this has already negatively affected perceptions of female leadership in South Sudan (Focus group).

**The lack of education**

UNICEF’s Chief of Education, Eliana Nadi Elijah says that women’s lack of formal education (as well as the technical knowledge, and relevant experience that tends to go with it) is another major hurdle for women in the political sphere, especially given the highly complex nature of South Sudanese politics.
Many women interviewed cited language as another practical barrier in limiting them in the effective execution of their duties. English is the official language of South Sudan. Some of the women politicians interviewed explained that, because they speak neither English nor Arabic, their work is made more difficult, and this prevents them from performing their duties as expected.

In focus groups, a number of women agreed with Martha Kok, an MP for Ulang County, who stated that women with the right skills sets and competencies will change the situation of women in South Sudan for the better (Focus group). Regina Lullo noted that women should be supported and given the necessary technical skills and tools so that they can perform the duties that are expected of them in political office and elsewhere (Interview).

Patriarchy and gender stereotypes
As mentioned, patriarchal practices that endorse a view of women as subject to men's authority continue to hinder women's progress in politics. Women in leadership positions often face negative attitudes, stereotyping and even intimidation. Sarah Nyanath Elijah explains:

Political life is organised for male norms and values, and in many cases even for male lifestyles. In politics, you are looked at as an intruder because they think that politics is not in the space of women, and you feel lonely because of being few in numbers...Women in the parliament for the first time, when trying to make an important point, can be ordered to sit down or to stop talking. Some women find this embarrassing and might not try to talk next time. Women can only overcome this if they have a clear vision and do not care whether they get it right or wrong. Politics is a thankless task and, being a woman, you are expected by the society to achieve a lot compared to the male counterparts. People do not appreciate the little that women in politics are doing. As a result, women need to have high level of identity in order to perform their work effectively at the parliament. (Interview)

The belief that public life and leadership positions should be reserved for men remains widespread, and women vying for leadership positions have difficulty winning the trust of voters (Abwunza, 1997). Margaret Nako noted that women discussing politics in public are automatically referred to as prostitutes (Focus group). In this context, women tend to avoid seeking leadership positions through the electoral process because, as Sarah Nyanath Elijah put it, ‘politics is perceived by many people as a dirty game’ and women are supposed to be too refined and ‘principled’ to play (Interview). Eliana Nadi Albino concurred, noting that men are seen to be better placed to play the game than women (Interview). A number of the women interviewed stated that they often face discriminatory attitudes from the public. They explained that women politicians are often talked about negatively, while male politicians are respected despite failing to fulfil their mandates.

In addition, the rules for participation in political life are seen to differ for men and women. Sarah Nyanath Elijah elaborates, ‘Some women cannot represent the states where they were born if they are married to someone from another state, while the men can marry from anywhere and still represent the community.’ She adds that ‘Young women [who stand for political office] are told that it is not their time yet and that they are going too fast, and this is being said in a negative way: “She is coming to represent us and yet she is not married!”’ But the community will never question single men in the community [who do the same thing].’

Martha Chol Luak, an MP from Akobo County, adds that, ‘Women leaders also have to work extra hard to gain recognition and respect. They are often suspected to be acting on behalf of a man, or with the backing of one. This perception can delay promotion, as people continue to believe the stereotypes. Women have to compete with men in South Sudan.’

Eliana Nadi Albino put forward the view that those men who are not educated still hold conservative views of women who are involved in politics. The men who have obtained an education, and have travelled abroad, are more accepting of changing gender dynamics. Yet, she notes that, even if educated, some male colleagues are disrespectful of female leaders, make jokes about them, and refuse to take them or their work seriously. Some comment constantly on a woman’s ‘sexiness’, and will support or sabotage her work based purely on her looks and perceptions of her ‘availability’ (Interview, Eliana Nadi Albino).

Not surprisingly, many women internalise these stereotypes and come to believe they do not have the qualities, training or experience required...
for politics. As a result, they lack political ambition and fail to seek party
nominations (Interview, Miria Matembe). Even when it comes to supporting
candidates in elections, men try to proscribe women’s choices. Tereza John,
an aspiring politician from Wau County in Bar El Ghazel State, has argued
that men put pressure on women to try to prevent them from supporting
women candidates. She explains, ‘Most women will not be able to attend
campaigns because they will not be allowed by their husbands – they are
advised to attend to other home chores which are considered important to
the family’ (quoted in Omukhango, 2009).

Those women who manage to put aside society’s stereotypes, and stand
for political office often face opposition from their own families and a series
of further practical obstacles. Sarah Nyanath Elijah elaborates, ‘There is
usually the negative attitude from the family of the husband, and this gives a
lot of challenges for us.’ Eliana Nadi Albino adds that being away from home
for long periods to attend training programmes or to meet the requirements
of a full time job is a challenge in itself, especially when family members are
not available to assist with child minding (Interview).

The media’s biased lens
In South Sudan, the media could play a leading role in challenging gender-
based stereotypes. Instead, media coverage is heavily biased in favour of
men. Alice Michael, Executive Director of Voice for Change and a member
of the Women’s Union, has noted that local media coverage of the 2010
elections for instance was ‘usually supported by pictures of men seemingly
caucusing, perhaps to create the impression that they are deep in serious
political discussions.’ Women, on the other hand, hardly featured at all.
This, argues Michael, makes politics appear very masculine – and when it
becomes a general public perception, males find it difficult to view women
as equal counterparts (Quoted in Gathigah, 2009).

These remarks were echoed by Mary Sadia, another member of the
Women’s Union, ‘The manner in which the media represent us [women] is
key in deconstructing the perception that our roles are in our homes, to bear
and rear children.’ She added that the power of the media to perpetuate
and solidify gender stereotypes cannot be overemphasised. ‘It is even more
critical to bear in mind that the most powerful and memorable social changes
are instigated by the media, usually in subtle ways. Ways that nonetheless

paint very powerful pictures in people’s minds’ (quoted in Gathigah, 2009).

Pochalla County MP Akello Ajok takes this further, saying: The media
highlights only the negative aspects of women leaders, forcing them to avoid
publicity entirely. Yet sometimes the visibility gained through publicity is
considered to be an indicator of effectiveness, and women lose out on gains
as a result…You need finances to advance yourself in the media, and this
creates more obstacles. (Focus group)

Hopes and plans for the future
All the women interviewed for this chapter voiced a vision for the future
of their country as peaceful and secure, with clean water and adequate
educational and medical services – a place where both men and women will
work together for the common good. To make this vision a reality, women
see several tasks ahead for themselves. For example, Teresa Gwang, Minster
of Cabinet Affairs in Upper Nile State, notes:

We have the vision of educating ourselves on why we are in politics so as to be
knowledgeable of what we are doing. We also want to build strong networks
in order to go as a cohesive group so as to influence the governance agenda.
It is good to be there in numbers in order to make an impact. (Interview)

Women parliamentarians put forward the need for enhanced solidarity – for
women to unite among themselves to more effectively voice their concerns
and opinions on issues pertaining to development and peace building in
Sudan. The Minister for Gender, Social Welfare and Religious Affairs,
Agnes Kwaje Lasuba, echoed this view when addressing a conference
for South Sudanese women in political parties, which aimed to develop a
common women’s agenda ahead of the 2010 elections. She said, ‘To fight
discrimination and labelling of women as inferior, women in South Sudan
must unite and lobby seriously to pressurise the government of the Republic
of the Sudan to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of
Discrimination Against Women’ (quoted in Godia, 2009).

The importance of contributing to reconciliation and anti-corruption
efforts, and of engaging in inter-clan, inter-tribal community peace dialogues
were pointed to by numerous women.
Though sometimes we might be in power without power, and end up serving power without making an impact on governance, women should be able to translate the numbers into laws, policies, programmes and plans for the improvement of the lives of women and children of South Sudan. In order to free women and unleash their potential, there is need for mobilisation, training and education. There is also the need to support the ministry of gender to run training programmes in order to mainstream gender in policies, programmes and in budgeting. (Interview, Regina Lullo)

Finally, many of the women interviewed for this chapter emphasised the need to put pressure on local and national government to support women’s self-help groups and make funding available for microfinance projects. Miria Matembe, for example, argued that such projects would contribute significantly to improving peaceful coexistence within society and to the empowerment of women as they enable sustainable poverty reduction and promote gender equality (Interview). Several women echoed Sarah Nyanath Elijah, who argued that illiteracy among women has to be addressed through programmes that provide adult education, life skills and other forms of training (Interview).

**Conclusion**

Steady progress has been made since 2005 in enhancing women’s representation in government, and a layer of women leaders has emerged. However, women are not yet sufficiently represented in the leadership structures. As shown, women’s participation in leadership is still hampered by a number of factors, including deeply entrenched patriarchal structures both at the state and the community level, which effectively cast women as second-class citizens, and continue to prevent women from real and meaningful participation in most aspects of community life. This is exacerbated by the fact that the majority of women in South Sudan do not have the education or skills necessary to participate effectively at leadership levels.

Although changes in gender roles began to take place during the conflict, and had an empowering effect on women, the social foundations for gender relations remain largely unchanged, and the prevailing cultural norms that force women into subservience are still deeply entrenched. Certainly, the CPA and the Interim Constitution have paved the way for a new democratic dispensation, but much remains to be done to demonstrate the government’s ongoing commitment to the rule of law, justice, equality and respect for human rights, and in particular, the rights of women. The introduction of a quota for women’s participation in governance structures is a significant step in the right direction. However, the small number of female leaders at both national and state level suggests that government will have to focus on growing new layers of leadership, and training and empowering women to step into these positions.

Addressing gender inequity is challenging anywhere in the world. To change attitudes that are as deeply entrenched as they are in South Sudan, is daunting. But programmes that systematically create opportunities for women, combined with governance systems that safeguard their rights can be highly effective in initiating changes in social relationships. As emphasised by the women interviewed, there is a tremendous need to prioritise capacity building for women – at school level, in adult education, and within political parties and women’s organisations. In addition, it is crucial that the media increases coverage of women leaders who are helping to bring about positive change, thus ensuring that the public are better informed.

These interventions could go a long way towards increasing women’s participation in politics and enhancing the effectiveness of women in positions of political leadership. There is no doubt that the women of South Sudan have both the potential and the determination to bring about meaningful and sustainable change.

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One of the tragic consequences of South Sudan’s wars was the displacement of the population. Fleeing violence, about four million people left their homes (WFP, n.d.). Most were displaced internally, rendered homeless in their own country. Hundreds of thousands crossed the borders, escaping to neighbouring countries. Thousands more relocated further afield, to states around the globe. In their new homes, refugees began to re-establish their lives, attempting to create a sense of stability while their country was being ravaged by war.

This chapter tells the story of South Sudan’s dispersed population, focusing on some of the women who fled Sudan. It documents their journeys; often on foot, walking hundreds of miles, without food or shelter, fleeing from enemy fire. It describes what awaited them across the borders: massive refugee camps, inhospitable and teeming with people. The chapter describes the resettlement programmes that a small number of women benefited from, which relocated refugees to countries around the world. It goes on to explore women’s experiences in the diaspora, documenting the struggles they faced and the successes they achieved. Finally, the chapter explores women’s feelings about returning to South Sudan now that the war is over, as well as their views, hopes and concerns for the future of their country.
The experiences of women displaced by South Sudan’s wars were different from those of men. Yet, while much has been written about South Sudanese men in the diaspora, women’s stories have largely remained untold. This chapter focuses on a few women in particular, relating their stories, their opinions and views. In terms of methodology, a review of the existing literature was conducted, and interviews were held with several young South Sudanese women living around the world. Interviews were conducted in person, by telephone, or using Skype. While not ideal for interviews, these technologies made it possible for women in different parts of the world to be included, giving the chapter a more international perspective. Some of the interviewees asked to remain anonymous, and for them, pseudonyms have been used.

In 2010, an estimated 370,000 Sudanese people were still scattered around the world (UNHCR, 2010). Since the ending of the war in 2005, returning to South Sudan has become a real possibility. Thousands returned in the period immediately preceding and following the landmark 2011 referendum. However, many refugees are now settled in new countries, with new jobs and new lives, and have no plans to return. Many of these men and women are among the best-educated South Sudanese people in the world and have gained hard skills that the fledgling South Sudanese state, desperately short on human capacity, is sorely in need of. Sadly it appears that these citizens and their skills may be lost to the new country forever, an enduring legacy of decades of conflict.

War in South Sudan

Prior to the wars (which took place from 1955 to 1972, and from 1983 to 2005), much of the population of South Sudan lived in rural homesteads, largely untouched by electricity and other modern technologies. For the most part, the population lived off the land, growing crops and farming cattle. Cattle were a key measure of wealth, and held a central place in economic and social life (Burton, 1978). The South Sudanese lifestyle was deeply traditional, and people adhered strictly to tribal and cultural practices. It was a communal way of living: family and neighbours were intrinsically involved in one another’s lives; adults had a duty to care for the young; and the young a duty of care for the elderly. There was little concept of individual ownership and interest, rather ideals of family and community acquisition prevailed. Disputes were resolved by community members, or by traditional leaders applying locally developed mechanisms.

Those in South Sudan claimed that the South was being marginalised by the North, where the nation’s seat of power was held, and demanded more autonomy for the South. These demands led to war breaking out in 1955, and continuing until the signing of the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement in 1972. In less than a decade the resolutions contained in the peace accord had broken down, and war resumed in 1983. At that time, a soldier named John Garang broke away from the government’s armed forces and founded the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA). The SPLA grew rapidly and soon became the dominant rebel group opposing the Northern government. The war was fought over a range of issues, including self-determination for the South, control over state resources including oil, and the role of religion in the state. Various other armed groups were involved in the war, which spanned a massive geographic area and was fought in various parts of the country.

During the war years, over two million people died and, as mentioned, a further four million were displaced. Civilians bore the brunt of the harm – caught in the crossfire and frequently also the direct targets of attack. At times Northern government armed forces launched attacks themselves, but they also operated through the Qout Sha’biya, a government-backed militia. Armed groups attacked villages and towns, abducting women and children as slaves and combatants, raping, torturing or killing others and setting fire to villages and surrounding lands, so that those fleeing would have nowhere to return to.

In the scramble to escape, parents lost their children, and children wandered the countryside alone. Possessions and homes were abandoned. People left their cattle – a significant loss, given the value that cattle held in society – and fled to what was known as ‘the bush’, where they hid for long periods in clearings in the vegetation. Conditions in the bush were terrible. People slept on the ground with no shelter, even during the long rainy seasons. Many had fled their homes with nothing and were forced to survive on shrubs, berries and any other edibles they could find. Thousands died of starvation or malaria and other diseases. The threat of attack was always imminent, and land or air strikes would have everyone scattering
once again. In time, people began to head for the borders, desperate to flee what had become one of the most dangerous countries in the world.

The journey to escape
While a privileged few escaped by air or were able to secure transportation on trucks and vehicles, most South Sudanese refugees made the long journeys on foot, covering hundreds or thousands of kilometres on their way to the border. People walked in groups, carrying what they could, but forced to leave most of their possessions behind. The soaring temperatures of South Sudan, which rise above 50°C, and the desert landscape that characterises large parts of the country, meant that, for much of the journey, little food or water was available. People chewed on plants or leaves, and even swallowed mud, to eke out some sustenance. Thousands died of thirst or starvation. Survivors recount that the weak and vulnerable sometimes fell prey to lions and other wild animals.

Trains of people walked in silence, wary of attack. They had to repeatedly run for cover, hiding from the troops moving overland and fleeing at the sound of helicopters or fighter planes approaching overhead. Those caught by government or rebel groups would sometimes be rounded up and forcibly conscripted or taken as slaves.

Viola Aluel and her family lived in Abyei, a town in the centre of Sudan, considered to be the bridge between the North and South. Located in an area rich in oil reserves, Abyei was one of the most disputed towns in the war, and was vigorously claimed by both the North and the South. Viola lived in Abyei until she was 12 years old, during which time the town was controlled by the North. She recalls that it was not a peaceful place to live. Viola described how government soldiers used to pass through Abyei on route to the North, with abducted children and cattle in tow – a terrible sight to witness. She recalls the frequent sounds of gunfire. They could often hear the fighting nearby, and when the sounds of fighting got too close, they would run to the church to hide. People in the town were beaten randomly by government soldiers who arbitrarily accused people of colluding with the SPLA, doling out punishments for this. She recounts that at one point her cousins were abducted – and one of them was extremely sick at the time. There was little peace of mind in Abyei and Viola recalls that every day her mother cried and prayed. Eventually her mother made the decision that the family would cross the border to the SPLA-controlled territory in the South (Interview).

They left Abyei in 1996. Leaving everything that they owned behind, they left one evening, carrying only food and water. Like thousands of others who made this journey, they walked quietly, in a group of about 30 people, led by men from the South who had volunteered to help guide people to safety. People struggled to keep pace, particularly those with small children. They rested only in designated areas before quietly setting off again. Viola recalls that people were very scared during the walk – being caught by government soldiers could be disastrous.

It took them four days to walk the 80 kilometres to Mayen Abun in the South. By the time they arrived, Viola’s small feet were severely swollen. In Mayen Abun, Viola’s family were met by an uncle who was working for an organisation that provided food to conflict-affected areas. Through him, Viola’s mother was referred to the World Food Programme, which was providing humanitarian relief in the area. They soon offered her a job in Nairobi. Within two weeks, Viola’s family left for Kenya, travelling in an aircraft belonging to the World Food Programme. Viola remained in Nairobi until 2006 when she finally returned to South Sudan (Interview).

Probably the best known of those who fled South Sudan were the so-called Lost Boys, whose journeys were made famous by a number of documentary films and by books, such as God Grew Tired of Us and What is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak. The Lost Boys were about 20 000 orphans and children who had been separated from their parents who walked in groups on foot towards the borders. The children, mostly boys, aged between 5 and 15 years, walked hundreds or even thousands of kilometres from different parts of South Sudan to neighbouring Ethiopia in the east, where they were eventually housed in refugee camps. The long lines of children had no food, water or supplies. They often did not even have clothes, losing pieces along the way, or trading items of clothing for food. Those who witnessed them describe rows of emaciated children, often walking completely naked. When Ethiopia’s president was overthrown by rebels who were hostile to the South Sudanese refugees, the children had to leave Ethiopia, crossing back through South Sudan and then into Northern Kenya to Kakuma Refugee Camp. A large number died along the way – of
the 20 000 who began the journey, fewer than 11 000 made it to Kakuma. There were girls who made this journey too, although there were fewer of them, and their stories garnered less attention.

In addition to these children, hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese refugees flocked across the borders, settling in camps in Ethiopia, Central African Republic, Uganda, Rwanda and Kenya. It was from Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya that the major refugee-resettlement drives took place.

**Kakuma Refugee Camp**

Kakuma Refugee Camp is located in the Turkana District in the northwest of Kenya. It was established in 1992, to provide shelter for those fleeing South Sudan, and for a long time, South Sudanese refugees were the largest refugee group there, but the camp has since been expanded to house refugees from Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi. The camp is located near to Kakuma town, which has a population of 97 000. At times the refugee camp has been home to as many as 120 000 refugees, although it was built to house a maximum of 20 000 people.

Life in Kakuma is difficult. Located on a large piece of land, in a semi-arid desert environment, the camp suffers severe dust storms and searing temperatures, with an average daytime temperature of 40°C. The camp is host to a range of poisonous spiders, snakes and scorpions. Kakuma is divided into several sections, each housing refugees from different countries and conflict zones. The *Kakuma News Reflector* (n.d.) describes the camp as follows: 'The camp is a “small city” of thatched-roof huts, tents and mud abodes. Living inside the camp is equally prison and exile. Once admitted, refugees do not have freedom to move about the country but are required to obtain Movement Passes from the UNHCR and Kenyan Government.' For many, Kakuma became a home for years and even for decades – a 'limbo' where refugees waited for circumstances to change or for a better future to present itself.

The office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the agency mandated to assist refugees, was responsible for administering the camp. It struggled to cater for the many thousands of refugees stranded in Kakuma. The number of refugees was far greater than had been planned for, and the overcrowded conditions exacerbated the camp’s many other problems. Although UNHCR provided food, there was never enough and hunger was a constant concern. Refugees also complained about the monotony of the food – residents lived for years on a diet which consisted mainly of beans, maize meal and vegetable oil (Muhindi & Nyakato, 2002).

A significant number of children, including the Lost Boys, arrived in Kakuma without their families. Where possible, unaccompanied minors were settled into foster families, a preferred solution that allowed them to learn the South Sudanese way of life and culture (Muhindi & Nyakato, 2002). For the most part however, boys were placed in large groups or homesteads. Girls were given preference when it came to being allocated to foster families, as it was felt that girls were more vulnerable to attack and that foster families could offer them some protection. Some girls were lucky enough to receive support and protection from their foster families, but this was often not the case. Foster families frequently used girls as unpaid servants before marrying them off to benefit from the bride price the girls could fetch (Harris, 2009). Girls were sexually vulnerable in the camps and in their family placements, and there were frequent occurrences of rape or of girls being exploited in exchange for food and other basic commodities.

Local Kenyan communities tended to be hostile to the refugees and some would come to the camp at night and steal food or even kill people. Arbitrary shootings took place and residents of Kakuma reported that they felt extremely insecure there (Muhindi & Nyakato, 2002). The SPLA also frequently raided the camp to enlist new recruits for their ranks. Unaccompanied children made easy targets and many children, including girls, were enlisted while living in Kakuma.

However, life in the camp was not all bad. Despite the challenges, conditions in Kakuma were far safer than in war-torn Sudan, and at least some food, building materials and medical facilities were provided. Refugees in the camp received free education, something that UNHCR and other aid organisations prioritised. There were other positive aspects to life there too. A communal way of life developed in the camp, and refugees helped and supported each other. Close friendships and bonds were formed that many people reported missing when they were finally resettled in other countries (Muhindi & Nyakato, 2002).
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The Kenyan authorities preferred South Sudanese refugees to remain in the camps, rather than settle in their country. Viola Aluel, whose family moved to Nairobi, recalls that police often harassed refugees in Nairobi because they wanted to limit their numbers in the city. South Sudanese living in the cities and towns were often arrested and constantly had to pay bribes to the police. Viola explained that at least in Kakuma refugees had some respite from police harassment (Interview).

By January 2011, six years after the end of the war in South Sudan, there were still between 7,000 and 8,000 South Sudanese living in the camp. Many refugees travelled to South Sudan after the ending of the war, but returned to Kakuma, when they discovered that conditions in Sudan were not as stable as they had hoped. Those who still remain in Kakuma fear renewed violence and are choosing to see how things unfold, before returning to South Sudan. Others have chosen to remain in the camp because services such as education, and health care are more accessible and of a better quality than those that would be available to them in South Sudan (Enough Project, 2011).

Resettlement

The 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees set in place the international system for the protection of refugees. States signing the Convention bound themselves to providing refuge to asylum-seekers arriving in their countries, provided they met the narrow definition of a ‘refugee’ provided in the Convention. Article 1(A)2 of the Convention:

A refugee is anyone who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.

In order to spread the responsibility for refugee protection, and alleviate the burden on countries neighbouring on conflict zones, a system of third-party resettlement was developed. Third-party resettlement occurs when refugees who have fled from their homes to a second or neighbouring country are subsequently resettled to a third country. Resettlement countries accept refugees where there is no alternative way to guarantee their security in their country of origin or in their country of original asylum. Admission criteria for resettlement differ from country to country. Where there are large groups of refugees, those who are considered particularly vulnerable are selected for resettlement.

Large resettlement programmes took place out of Kakuma into the US, Canada, Australia and a few other countries. Given the enormous number of refugees in Kakuma, and that these countries agreed to accept limited numbers of refugees, resettlement was highly selective. UNHCR and government representatives visited the camps to select those who would be moved. The resettlement of youth, and particularly of unaccompanied minors, was prioritised.

The US’s resettlement programme was the largest. Sympathetic to the plight of the Lost Boys, the US agreed to resettle a few thousand children from Kakuma. From 2000, a total of 3,276 South Sudanese boys and 89 girls were accepted into the US for resettlement (Harris, 2009: 2). A number of reasons have been suggested to explain why so few girls were resettled.

The Lost Boys’ journey had become very well publicised, and many say that resettling the girls, whose plight was less well known, was an afterthought. Another view is that as the boys remained in large groups, they were more visible than girls, who had often been integrated into families (Harris, 2009). On a practical level, it is certainly true that candidates for resettlement were chosen mainly from lists of unaccompanied children living in the camp, and girls’ names did not appear on these lists to the same extent that boys’ names did. Girls living with foster families in Kakuma quickly became daughters and housekeepers and were soon ‘lost’ to the official register of unaccompanied minors. There is also evidence that girls were intentionally hidden from the UNHCR in order to keep their names off the lists. As noted earlier, some families benefitted from having girls remain in Kakuma – for some, girls were seen as valuable sources of unpaid labour and potential income (from bride price) – so they did what they could to avoid losing them to resettlement programmes. A final reason given for the small number of girls resettled is that the UNHCR consulted with Sudanese elders in Kakuma about which youth should be resettled. The elders proposed the resettlement of higher numbers of boys, arguing that males would be more likely to receive formal
education than girls, and were therefore more likely to be of value in helping to rebuild South Sudan after the war (DeLuca, 2009).

The selection and interviewing process took around two years. Lists were prepared of those who would be considered for resettlement, and those whose names appeared on the lists were interviewed before a second selection was made. During a second round of interviews, names and ration cards were verified. This was a stressful process for those involved. Interview dates were frequently postponed and there were long waits between them, often spanning many months. The interviews were reportedly daunting, particularly for those who could not speak English (Muhindi & Nyakato, 2002). When the selection process was complete, successful candidates were offered limited preparation for their move. Some were given English lessons as well as briefings and reading materials on their adoptive countries. Finally, the selected few were flown across the world to begin their new lives.

**Life in the diaspora**

It was not only those resettled from Kakuma that made it abroad. South Sudanese refugees moved around the world through a variety of means, often travelling as immigrants or students, and seeking refugee status on arrival. Whole families also relocated and many young girls were taken across the world by their parents, spending most of their lives away from South Sudan.

Hundreds of thousands remained in Sudan’s neighbouring countries, or sought refuge further afield on the African continent. They settled in refugee camps and cities, often forming large South Sudanese communities. Many were forced to move numerous times over the years, unable to find a permanent place in which to settle.

Agyedho Adwok’s family left South Sudan when she was just one month old. Since leaving Sudan, she has lived in Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya, residing in refugee camps and cities along the way. In 1985, two years after the war began, conditions were worsening in Juba, the city of her birth. Her father, who had been a professor at the University of Juba, became involved with the SPLA, soon rising to the rank of captain. At that time, the SPLA was operating partially out of Ethiopia, where it was strategically planning its moves in South Sudan. Agyedho’s father moved to Ethiopia to take part in this process, taking his family with him. They settled initially in a refugee camp in Ethiopia, but in 1991, the president of Ethiopia, Mengistu Haile Mariam, was overthrown by rebels who were hostile to the South Sudanese refugees, and Agyedho’s family had to flee. In the years that followed, the family relocated a number of times, along with many thousands of South Sudanese refugees in similar positions. At the time of writing, Agyedho had returned to South Sudan and settled in Juba once more (Interview).

The experiences of South Sudanese women in the diaspora differ greatly. In some places, South Sudanese women remained poor, while in others they prospered. The section that follows focuses mainly on those who settled in the West, and provides a more in-depth analysis of refugee experiences in that part of the world.

**Integration: adjusting to the new context**

Life in the West was dramatically different to that in South Sudan and to the refugee camps that many had come from. Most of those resettled had never been in a city before, had never seen electricity and had never been in a motor vehicle. The food in the West looked different, the languages spoken were unfamiliar, and the customs and societal expectations completely foreign. Like other refugee groups, South Sudanese refugees faced myriads of challenges in resettling, including navigating new cultures, learning the languages and dealing with discrimination. Resettling was a significant adjustment and one that was, at times, overwhelming and difficult.

Research with immigrant and refugee populations has shown that the earlier in life a person moves, the easier the adjustment tends to be (Elhag, 2010). Children tend to acculturate more quickly than their parents, and, it has been argued by some that South Sudanese youth have been more successful in resettling than many other refugee groups (Muhindi & Nyakato, 2002).

Research has also found that the effects of immigration are particularly intense for women, in part because of the ‘gender renegotiation’ that women have to face (Elhag, 2010: 1). For example, one of the challenges faced by South Sudanese women in the diaspora, common to many refugee and immigrant groups, are conflicting feelings about where to draw the line between fitting in to their new cultures, and maintaining their...
traditional ways of life. Immigrants risk losing their culture, including its many positive and valuable aspects, and immigration involves a constant process of negotiating and renegotiating these identities. Anne Harris, who worked with South Sudanese women in Australia, explains that, ‘the costs and benefits of acculturation compete: the stripping away of the difference demanded by assimilation/integration…[versus] the currency afforded by difference’ (Harris, 2009: 4–5). Harris continues:

While these changed conditions in new countries partially represent increased opportunities for Sudanese young women, they do not come without a price. Many of my participants have gone to great lengths to counter perceptions of Sudanese women as disempowered and subjugated in male–female relationships even within Australia. And while they defend the cultural practice of ‘bride price’ (paid for young women by the men’s families) to non-Sudanese, they simultaneously defend their new freedoms to concerned Sudanese family members who fear they are becoming too westernized and free. The double bind is clear: integrate and flourish, but not too quickly. For some young Sudanese women, these role tensions are constant and crippling. (Harris, 2009: 4–5)

Certain key variables seem to play a role in assisting South Sudanese refugees to adjust to new environments. For example religious groups have been key in aiding integration for some. Their Christian identities connected South Sudanese immigrants to a wider community of Christians in their new countries, providing them with both a community and a sense of belonging. Particularly in the US, the churches provided refugees with social support and assistance with integrating: volunteers from churches hosted refugees in their homes, invited them into their communities, helped them to find housing, cars and jobs, and donated clothes and furniture to them. This certainly alleviated some of the difficulties of integration (Elhag, 2010).

Another variable is the number of South Sudanese people who resettle in an area. Where there are many South Sudanese, they tend to stick together quite closely and integrate less, a pattern that is common in many immigrant communities. One interviewee, Keji Majok left Kejikejo, a South Sudanese town close to the Ugandan border when she was eight years old. Her family first moved to Nairobi where there was an extremely large South Sudanese community. Keji recalls that in Nairobi, her family associated mainly with other South Sudanese people, and seldom mixed with Kenyans, taking no steps to adopt the Kenyan way of life. In 1991, her family moved to Mutare in Zimbabwe, where there were very few South Sudanese people. She recalls that in her school, there were only six South Sudanese children from two families. Keji explains that things changed greatly as her family could no longer only associate with South Sudanese people, and so they began to integrate more with the local population, finally adjusting to the Zimbabwean way of life (Interview).

Receiving an education

From the moment of their arrival at the refugee camps, the message was repeatedly instilled in South Sudanese refugees that education was the key to self-improvement and to creating a better life for themselves. The UN and other aid organisations made education a key priority in the camps, employing teachers to teach refugees, often holding classes under the trees (Muhindi & Nyakato, 2002).

For many, the promise of education was one of their main reasons for wanting to relocate. South Sudanese refugees arrived abroad with high expectations about the education they would receive, many believing that they would start their schooling immediately upon arrival, and that this would lead them into employment as qualified professionals. Unfortunately, this was rarely the case, and many had to put off going to school in order to work in low-paying jobs so that they could pay the bills or save up to pay for school or college. When they were able to study, many had to work concurrently, or had to care for their families, leaving them little time to focus fully on their studies. Disappointment around education seemed to be a common experience among South Sudanese refugees (Muhindi & Nyakato, 2002).

When they did attend school or college, many South Sudanese refugees struggled academically. Most had received little education in South Sudan or had had their education interrupted by the war. This was particularly the case for women, who had seldom received any real education before leaving South Sudan unless they came from particularly wealthy or liberal families. Even the education they received in the refugee camps was not of a quality that adequately prepared them for schooling in the diaspora. Harris writes that despite having high levels of determination, South Sudanese women
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often did not have the ‘foundational aptitude or conceptual knowledge’ to achieve as much as they wished to in their studies (Harris, 2009: 7).

Harris explains that the hardest part of resettlement often happens in the second or third year, when refugees begin to realise the barriers to achieving their goals. She explains that at some point they begin to recognise what a daunting challenge attaining a tertiary education may be, and they begin to understand that their dreams of becoming lawyers or doctors may actually be beyond reach (Harris, 2009).

The young women interviewed for this chapter made the point that the pressure to be educated came largely from their families. Aguil Deng, who moved to the US with her parents, said that in the summer breaks she was made to read or to go to the library, and was never allowed a vacation. If she protested that she did not want to study, her parents would scold, ‘You can switch places with your cousins in the war’. Aguil explained that there was an expectation from her family that she would study for a ‘hard’ career. Her parents would ask questions like, ‘Why would you study social sciences? How is that going to help Africa?’ (Interview).

Despite the challenges and disappointments, South Sudanese women have attained far higher levels of education in the diaspora than they would have had if they had not left South Sudan. Many have received professional qualifications or tertiary educations, making them among the best-educated South Sudanese people in the world. Given post-conflict South Sudan’s crippling lack of skills and human capacity, the women educated in the diaspora represent a tremendous potential resource for their country.

One of the steps that the government of South Sudan is taking to address the country’s shortage of skills is to send people abroad to be educated, with the hope that they will return to South Sudan with hard skills. In 2008, Viola Aluel was sent by South Sudan’s Ministry of Education to South Africa to study Social Development at the University of Cape ‘Town. She completed her studies and returned to South Sudan in late 2010. Viola was sent as part of a programme created between the Government of South Africa and the Government of South Sudan, which planned to send about 200 students to study in South Africa. Unfortunately, due to bad management, nepotism, and a failure to market the scheme, fewer than five people actually benefited from the programme. Similar schemes in China, Egypt and India have been more successful (Interview).

Finding employment

On arrival in their new countries, South Sudanese refugees had to find work. At least in the initial years, most had to accept unskilled, low-paid jobs as maids, babysitters, nannies, pre-school attendants, nurses, care workers or in catering facilities (DeLuca, 2009; Muhindi & Nyakato, 2002). Even those who had qualifications when they arrived often had to take jobs at lower levels than they were equipped for (Abusabib, 2006).

The US has a policy of ‘economic self-sufficiency’, which guides the lives of all new immigrants and refugees. According to the policy, refugees must find a job as soon as they can on arrival, so that they can pay their own bills. In the United States, resettlement agencies assist refugees with job placements, rather than providing much financial or material support. Finding employment is therefore a major focus of US refugee policy. This differs in countries such as Canada, where there is more state support and less emphasis on self-sufficiency (DeLuca, 2009).

In South Sudan, women’s roles had centred on the home and women seldom held formal jobs. Men worked outside, while women were responsible for caring for children, food preparation and taking care of living quarters. Finding work outside of the home was therefore a great adjustment for South Sudanese women in the diaspora. In finding jobs, they had to navigate new relationships, new behaviours and new expectations. Gaining employment had significant effects on gender relations too. It was in finding employment that some of the greatest steps towards integration took place.

Changing gender norms

South Sudanese society is deeply patriarchal. Societal rules encompass clear-gendered divisions and, from an early age, children learn the ways in which both men and women are expected to act. Men are the heads of households and women are expected to be subservient to them. These perceptions of gender and the role and place of women were significantly affected by life in the diaspora. On arrival in the West, South Sudanese women found themselves in an environment that promoted their independence rather than deference, and exposed them to new ideas about the ways in which men and women could relate (Elhag, 2010). This made women begin to question the values they had been raised with, and in time, it began to affect...
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However, it was not only exposure to new ideas that affected gender relations; necessity also played a part in changing roles. Increasing employment of women outside of the home, led to the household division of labour becoming more equitable – when women accepted job offers, men had to perform more of the household tasks purely out of necessity, particularly if they were not working themselves. Couples in the diaspora also found themselves dependent on one another in ways that affected the traditional gendered division of labour. For example, women often had to rely on their husbands to assist with tasks that they would have done alone in South Sudan, such as grocery shopping (particularly if the women did not speak English), or child care (if the women had appointments or had to go to work). This forced a merging of male and female roles (Benesova, 2005). In terms of physical space, too, South Sudan had provided distinct male and female spaces in spacious homesteads, and men and women spent much of their time in separate areas. In the diaspora, couples were forced together physically, living in small apartments where there was not enough space for separate male and female areas (Benesova, 2005).

Thus gender roles gradually began to shift, altering the ways in which women perceived their roles as mothers, daughters and wives. Women often welcomed these changes more than their husbands and male relatives did, which at times caused friction in marriages and other family relationships. The shifts also caused stress for parents and children, with parents more entrenched in traditional ideas, struggling with the ideas, values and lifestyles that their children were exposed to at school.

Mary Luak, who was raised in Washington by South Sudanese parents, described the difference between being at home with her family and time outside of her home, saying, ‘it felt like a schizophrenic life’. Mary attended an American school and took part in American activities, but then came home to a South Sudanese home, where traditional rules applied; men ate before women, and were served their meals by the women and girls (Interview). Keji Majok who was raised in Zimbabwe echoed this, saying that at school she was exposed to the ideas that boys and girls should mix and were equal, while at home she was taught the opposite. Keji explained that her father was very strict with her, making her stay in the house, because he believed that girls should not go out (Interview). Aguil Deng, a South Sudanese woman who was raised in the United States, said that her parents had different rules to those of other American families. Her parents were under the impression that American children were out of control and had no respect, and therefore felt that she should not spend time with them. Her parents would say things like, ‘Why do you need friends? You have sisters.’ Aguil was not allowed to spend the night at friends’ homes until her parents had met the other parents. She was not allowed to date boys until college (Interview).

It can be argued that issues related to ‘gender renegotiation’ tended to make integration more complicated for women than it was for men. Some found it difficult to become the assertive women the West expected them to be, having been raised to be more deferent (Harris, 2009). In general though, exposure to different gender norms has been positive for South Sudanese women, in that they have opened up a range of possibilities that these women never had before.

For those who have returned to South Sudan, changes in gender norms have created a different set of issues. Keji Majok recalls that when she went back to South Sudan, she had trouble accepting the way in which women in her family were treated. When voicing her concerns, Keji got into trouble, and was told that she was badly behaved and disrespectful (Interview).

Discrimination

Many foreigners and most refugees around the world face discrimination. This can be a barrier to finding and keeping jobs; it can also stand in the way of successfully attaining an education, and make it harder to assimilate into the new culture.

Research has documented the fact that in the US, African immigrants are often stereotyped in the same way as African Americans, resulting in them being harassed, intimidated or unlawfully arrested by the police (Elhag, 2010). Interestingly, Aguil Deng disagrees with this finding, averring that in her experience, African immigrants are treated differently to African Americans. She feels that in America, it is more important how one sounds, so if one has spent most of one’s life in the USA and sounds American, then in her experience, one is not discriminated against. Aguil added, however, that in the area where she grew up, everyone had originally come from somewhere else and so xenophobia was never really an issue (Interview).
Discrimination against foreigners is worse in some countries than in others. South Africa, for example, has an unfortunate history of xenophobia, with violent attacks against certain foreigners sporadically taking place, and resulting in death and further displacement. Keji Majok, a young South Sudanese woman currently living in South Africa, notes that xenophobia is palpable, and can be felt on a daily basis. Interestingly, she notes that these are not based on the fact that she is South Sudanese as much as on the mere fact that she is and looks foreign. Reactions to the fact that she is from South Sudan are mixed. Many South Africans actually find it intriguing as she is often the first Sudanese person they have met. She does, however, recall that when growing up in Zimbabwe, children used to tease her about being South Sudanese, mocking her about the fact that Sudan was not a good country and that people were going hungry there (Interview, Keji Majok).

Mary Luak who grew up in Washington remarked that no one there had heard of South Sudan, and if they had, they had heard only bad things, or they confused it with Somalia (Interview).

Contact with those in South Sudan
During the war, those living in the diaspora followed the news from home from a distance, trying to keep track of what was going on, and attempting to check on the well being of those who remained in South Sudan. Direct communication with those at home was difficult but possible.

Mary Luak recalls that during the war her family had sporadic telephone contact with certain people in South Sudan. Aside from this they received news from people who were arriving at the refugee camps on the borders, or in Khartoum. Mary’s family followed what was going on in South Sudan closely. She describes one occasion when, following a massacre in a certain town, her family managed to get hold of video footage taken by people who had arrived in the town soon after the massacre, so that they could see for themselves what had happened there (Interview). Keji Majok’s family kept contact with South Sudan through her father’s eldest brother who remained behind. However, Keji recalls that they did not hear all of the news, and did not know about many of the deaths that occurred there (Interview).

Communication with South Sudan has become far easier since the ending of the war. A host of cell-phone service providers now cover most of the South Sudanese territory, connecting even remote rural areas. Many small towns have internet cafés, or public places such as libraries or community centres where people can access the internet. This has made it easier for those in the diaspora to stay in touch with family and friends within South Sudan.

Remittances form an important part of the relationship between refugees and those remaining in their home countries. Around the world, refugees feel a strong sense of obligation to send remittances back to those they have left behind, in the form of money or goods, and thus find themselves taking on the role of ‘global breadwinner’ (Johnson & Stoll, 2008). These remittances often form an integral source of income for households and communities in conflict zones. On a global scale, remittances reportedly form the second largest source of external funding for developing nations (Rath, 2003).

Many South Sudanese who settled in the diaspora sent remittances back to South Sudan and to refugee camps such as Kakuma. Mary Luak recalls that her family was always sending clothes, books and money to South Sudan. Her father also paid for relatives in South Sudan to attend school (Interview). Several interviewees living in the diaspora reported strong pressure to send money home. When people hear that they are living abroad, they phone them to ask for money, as there is a perception that those in the West have access to large sources of income. This puts refugees in extremely difficult positions – particularly as many are struggling financially themselves. Many refugees report both feeling extremely guilty and being looked at negatively if they do not provide for those remaining in Africa (Muhindi & Nyakato, 2002), and many have continued to send remittances to South Sudan in the post-war period.

Returning to South Sudan
Since the end of the war in 2005, the situation in South Sudan has stabilised to a certain extent, making it possible for many refugees to return home. The International Organization for Migration estimates that between 2007 and 2009, 1.2 million refugees returned to South Sudan; of these, 60 per cent were part of female-headed households (IOM, 2009).

Most of the women interviewed for this chapter were still living in the diaspora at the time of the research, which was conducted in 2010 and 2011.
When questioned about whether they would consider returning to live in South Sudan, their responses were mixed, and they raised several factors that stood in the way of their returning. For one, the situation in South Sudan remains unstable, with frequent armed clashes and persistent security concerns. Those interviewed displayed a mixture of optimism and caution about whether independence would really be granted to South Sudan or whether renewed conflict might recur. They explained that they would not consider permanently moving back to South Sudan, until there was more certainty about the country’s future.

Another factor preventing the interviewees from returning was the difficulty of living in South Sudan, given the lack of infrastructure and services. Although it might be ‘home’, it is not an easy country to return to. A few of the interviewees said that they had always thought they would return to South Sudan after the war, but after visiting the country, they had changed their minds. Aguil Deng, for example, returned to South Sudan soon after the war. She described the frustrating process of trying to register a construction and development company; travelling from government ministry to government ministry, foiled by how disorderly the system was, and the way in which everything relied on having personal connections. Aguil soon returned to live in the United States. Reflecting on her experience, she says that the system in South Sudan seems to be a difficult one in which to work and achieve anything (Interview).

Another point mentioned repeatedly by the women interviewed was that it would be difficult to adjust to the strict traditional gender roles in South Sudan, after having lived with the more liberal gender roles of the West. Interviewees expressed concerns at how rigid the societal rules are in South Sudan. Keji Majok complained that in South Sudan they are all about ‘rules, rules, rules’ and offered this as a key reason why she did not think she could live there (Interview).

Finally, a number of women commented that they feel foreign when they are in South Sudan. Keji explained that although she feels strongly Sudanese when she is in the diaspora, when visiting South Sudan she felt different and foreign (Interview). Mary Luak recounted that people in South Sudan repeatedly told her that she was not Sudanese enough (Interview). Aguil Deng, now working as a public health practitioner, explained that it is far easier for her to work in other African countries; there they see her as a ‘fellow African’, while in South Sudan, they see her as a foreigner because she has spent so much of her life outside of the country (Interview).

However, despite these factors, a number of women have returned to South Sudan, and feel that it is the right thing to do. In 2005, Agyedho Adwok visited Juba, the capital of South Sudan, for the first time since her departure as a child. After that first visit, she returned abroad to study further, but has since returned to live in Juba. When asked about whether she plans to remain there, she replies, ‘Maybe not forever, but for now.’ Agyedho explains that in Juba, she has a sense of being home. ‘In Nairobi life was difficult, because I was living as a refugee. There was always something that reminds you that you are not at home.’ On living in South Sudan she says, ‘Even with the heat and the lack of services and life being uncomfortable there, it is worth it.’ She concludes, ‘I was once lost, and now I am back’ (Interview).

Views about the peace process in South Sudan
All around the globe, South Sudanese people voted in the January 2011 referendum to determine whether the South of Sudan should secede from the North. A total of 58,203 votes were cast from voting stations in countries such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Canada, Australia, the UK and the US. The diaspora referendum results reflected an overwhelming vote in favour of secession.

Women in the diaspora have watched the peace process unfold. Despite the distance, they are well informed and have opinions, hopes and concerns about the situation in South Sudan. They are joyful that the war is over, pleased at the progress that has been made to date, and hopeful that peace will persist.

However, these women also have concerns about the situation in South Sudan, some of which they raised during the interviews. For example, interviewees commented that, for years, the people of South Sudan have had one common goal – the fight against the North. They expressed concern that now that this common goal has been removed, the people of South Sudan will begin to turn on each other for power. Tribal tensions are a significant source of concern. Keji Majok recalled that when she visited South Sudan, she was struck by how pronounced the tribal hostilities were, saying that she
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could feel the hatred and the palpable awareness of tribal differences. Keji raised the point that while the Dinka, the largest and most well-off of the tribes, are now leading the new government, those from other tribes are still suffering and will soon begin to get angry (Interview). Mary Luak took this one step further, saying that among Southerners there are some who believe that South Sudan might follow in the footsteps of Rwanda as a result of the ethnic friction.

Mary Luak’s views were different from those of the other women interviewed. She confessed that she was not entirely pro-separation. Mary explained that when she started studying Sudan more closely, she began to see that it made more sense for Sudan to be one unified county, albeit one where everyone is treated equally and where the South is not marginalised. Mary made the point that separation is an emotional decision, but not a smart one, and that those supporting separation have overlooked the crippling lack of development, capacity and infrastructure, as well as the pressing ethnic tensions. Her years in the diaspora have allowed her the distance to form this view, but Mary acknowledges that her pro-unity opinion is an unpopular one (Interview).

All of the women interviewed expressed the hope that the situation for women in South Sudan will improve. Mary Luak commented that in the short time since they have been in power, the new South Sudanese government has already pushed through a number of conservative rules that discriminate against women. She feels that the men in South Sudan have absorbed misogynistic attitudes from the North, and that these developments do not bode well for the future of South Sudanese women. She hopes that steps are taken to tackle this, and to elevate the status of women living in South Sudan (Interview).

Conclusion

During the devastation of the war, hundreds of thousands fled South Sudan. Moving on foot, pursued by enemy troops and weakened by famine and disease, South Sudan’s people fled across borders, many falling along the way. The refugee camps along South Sudan’s borders became among the biggest in the world, and despite the overcrowded and unpleasant conditions, became home to many thousands of refugees, for years. A fortunate few were given the opportunity to move further afield, where their new journeys began.

Adjusting to a life in the West was filled with challenges. For South Sudanese refugees, coming from a deeply traditional and largely undeveloped country, the pace, culture and ideas were a significant adjustment. New skills had to be mastered, new challenges overcome and the difficult process of navigating a foreign homeland begun. Over time the women in the diaspora acquired skills, education and jobs, and became among the best educated of all the South Sudanese people.

The war in South Sudan has come to an end, but many of its people remain dispersed, grappling with the difficult decision of whether to continue their lives in the far reaches of the world, or to return to an uncertain and undeveloped homeland. South Sudan ‘feels like home’, yet at the same time, it is foreign, and so different to the new lives they have become accustomed to. For a country desperately short of skilled and educated people, the educated women of the Sudanese diaspora are a precious resource. However, the question remains as to whether they will return or be lost to the country forever. Interviewing a number of remarkable South Sudanese women living in the diaspora suggested the sad reality that many may not return. Perhaps this will change when the new state is formed and the situation becomes more stable. If not, their absence will be one of the great and enduring losses of the wars in South Sudan.

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