



# South Sudan

## GENDER IN BRIEF

South Sudan is the world's newest country with more than 60 ethnic groups and 80 local languages. Distinctions of ethnicity, language, religion, social class and rural or urban way of life cut across the society resulting in different gender relations even within the same overall ethnic group. Principle ethnic groups include the Dinka, Nuer, Bari, Murle and Shilluk. Most South Sudanese are Christian, there are also Muslims, and many South Sudanese practice traditional animist beliefs. Most South Sudanese (83%) live in rural areas although there are significant differences between states. Cattle culture is very important for most South Sudanese ethnic groups. The size of one's herd is a key marker of wealth, and cattle-raiding was the main catalyst of inter-communal violence before the current political conflict erupted. In many parts of South Sudan, cattle are also used for the bride price required to marry. Northern South Sudan has oil-fields and some areas remain in contention with Sudan.

Gender relations in South Sudan are shaped by the social and economic realities of being one of the world's Least Developed Countries and by decades of conflict. There are more men than women in South Sudan: 52% male to 48% female compared to the global average of 51% female to 49% male. The population is very young: 72% are under 30 years. South Sudan has the highest rates of maternal mortality in the world: one in seven women will die from childbirth or pregnancy (2054 per 100,000). Infant mortality rates are also extremely high with 75 children per 1000 dying before their first birthday of whom more baby boys than girls are affected. Education rates are low with 27% of the adult population literate: 40% of men over 15 years compared to 16% of women over 15 years. UNICEF estimates that 70% of children aged 6-17 years have never set foot in school.

Prevailing cultural norms, especially in the countryside, marginalize women from participation in any level of political activity or decision-making. However, since independence, there have been real changes in national policy and laws on gender equality. The Transitional Constitution and Bill of Rights (2011) provides guarantees for the equality of men and women. It recognises the historic inequalities between women and men in South Sudan and sets out a 25% Affirmative Action quota for women in legislative and executive bodies. Women currently comprise 26.5% of the National Legislative Assembly. Women in South Sudan have a historic engagement in peace negotiating teams and a significant number of women participated in drafting the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005). The 1983-2005 conflict temporarily transformed some gender roles; *"Women managed to keep a semblance of community life as they went about taking care of their children and doing most of the work done by men, most of whom had gone off to war."*

Gender and Protection issues are closely interlinked. CARE's GBV baseline survey conducted in October and November 2013 found that rape, beatings, psychological abuse, denial of education and economic opportunity were both commonplace and seldom reported. Gender-based-violence is common with 41% of respondents (women and men) in a 2009 UNIFEM survey reporting having experienced gender-based-violence within the last year. During the 1983-2005 conflict, documented gender-based violence included sexual violence, rape of women and men, trading women for food or security, traditional practices including 'girl compensation', and

women and men, trading women for food or security, traditional practices including gift compensation, and forced prostitution/sexual slavery. Domestic violence is also widely accepted by both women and men in South Sudan: 82% of women and 81% of men agreed that “*women should tolerate violence in order to keep her family together*”. There is no specific domestic violence law in South Sudan. Early marriage is very common: 45% of girls married before they were 18 years old and 7% of girls were married when they were younger than 15 years old. Bride price paid by the husband to the girl’s family is the norm. To obtain cattle for the bride price, cattle-raiding has increasingly targeted women and children in the attacks. Polygamy is also very common with 41% of unions involving more than one wife. Divorce is extremely difficult for women to obtain: traditionally only men can ask for one and the wife’s family have to pay back the bride price. Gender-based violence and protection violations in South Sudan are driven by a culture of silence and stigma, masculine identity tied to cattle-raiding, bride-price, a lack access to legal recourse, and customary practices that favour compensation for crimes like rape.

Gender relations in South Sudan are complex: the roles and responsibilities of women, men, boys and girls are clearly delineated but can and do alter. Women and girls have responsibilities for farming, collecting water and firewood, cooking, cleaning, childcare, and brewing beer. Men and boys have responsibilities as decision-makers for the communities and their families, cattle (boys in particular tend to be cattle-herders), hunting, fishing and charcoal making. In times of crisis, gender roles and responsibilities change to take account of the context, the needs and the different coping strategies families and individuals can put into action. Gender and protection concerns for women, men, boys and girls are a crucial issue in South Sudan. Steps need to be taken to mitigate the harm they cause. Gender relations do affect the needs, coping strategies, participation and access of women, men, boys and girls to humanitarian assistance.

### CARE Impact Groups:

- **Rural women and girls** of reproductive age (13-49 years) who have few or no assets and who survive of less than <\$1.25 per day.
- **Rural male youth** (14-35 years) who are marginalised and economically vulnerable
- **Adolescent girls**

### CARE Programming:

- Economic empowerment through Village Savings and Loans
- Gender-Based Violence Programming
- Peace and Reconciliation
- Sexual and reproductive health programming

