

Background Analysis for the GEF CCCD project: Gender and Ethnicity in South Sudan

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Gender

South Sudan's civil wars of 1955-1972 and 1983-2005 and the most recent conflicts (2013 and 2016) devastated the country and caused massive displacements, internally and into the neighbouring countries of Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) with others resettled abroad in USA, Canada, Australia and Europe. The war resulted in poverty and suffering especially among women and children who are more vulnerable members of the society. Women had to step in to fill roles that had traditionally been performed by men. Most women especially widows who lost their husbands during the wars and single mothers still bear the burden of carrying out both roles.

In spite of the demonstrated political will and constitutional guarantees, attitudes to gender equality and the rights of women are still predominantly steeped in a patriarchal social system which entrenches gender-based discrimination and exposes women and vulnerable groups to marginalization, violation of rights and violence. The negative effects of this marginalization of over 50% of the country's population are manifested across all the sectors, particularly the environment and natural resources sectors, which are livelihood dependent.

While enshrining the 25% affirmative action in the Transitional Constitution is commendable and has brought about women's increased political participation and reasonable representation in the National Legislative Assembly, disparities are still evident across the sectors. Among many challenges to equity in access and control over land and other livelihood resources is that most issues that affect women, especially in the rural areas, tend to be relegated to the customary courts, which are dominated by men and are deeply entrenched in patriarchal beliefs and practices.

Both phases of the civil war in South Sudan were characterized by widespread forms of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) including rape as a weapon of war, abduction, forced sexual favours, and new risks and forms of violence against women (VAW). In post-war South Sudan, extremely high rates of GBV remain a serious health and development challenge. Protection and response mechanisms and structures are insufficient and weak. Prevalent forms of SGBV include domestic violence and wife battery, abduction of women and children during cattle raids, rape and sexual assault, wife inheritance, forced and child marriages and girl child compensation. Women and girls' vulnerability to SGBV is reinforced by other harmful traditional practices such as very high bride wealth that is believed to be behind the cattle raids and forced and child marriages.

The health indicators remain poor as a result of the long period of deliberate under-development. Maternal mortality ratio is at 2,054 per 100,000 live births and is considered to be the highest in sub-Saharan Africa. Women, who mainly live in the rural areas, lack information and access to family planning, antenatal and medically-assisted delivery services. Health care facilities are few and inadequately equipped and there is a shortage of specialized mother and child health workers, including nurses and midwives. Lack of information and awareness limit women's access to and use of safe motherhood and child health services, such as antenatal care, medical practitioner-assisted delivery, post-natal care and immunization services.

Although the Transitional Constitution and Child Act (2008) guarantee free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 12, supplementary costs and unfriendly school environment, such as the dearth of female teachers, distance to school and sexual harassment, still limit both enrolment and retention, especially for girls. There is a big gender gap in favour of males in overall enrolment and retention in primary school, at 54.5% for girls compared to 81.4% for boys in 2010. In addition, girls drop out of school because of early marriages and others are kept out of school to supplement household labour or for fear of sexual harassment. In higher education the gap gets even more pronounced, with very limited number of women taking professional disciplines such as medicine, environmental and agricultural sciences. A further result of the imbalances in the education sector is the extremely high rates of illiteracy among women in South Sudan reported to be over 90%.

Currently, most women's involvement in the economy is in the informal sector, which is under-developed and uncoordinated, and in subsistence agriculture. The main limiting factors for women's growth in this sector revolve around the very high levels of illiteracy, lack of access to productive assets including land, finance, credit facilities, agricultural inputs and extension services, and low business skills and management capacity, resulting from historical marginalization. Even the Land Act (2009) did not adequately address issues of land rights for women, in spite of the constitutional provision. However, there are potential opportunities in small and medium agro-businesses, agro-processing and cottage industries. An effort must be made also to increase women and youth's involvement in non-traditional and mainstream economic sectors.

Men and women play different roles in contributing to livelihoods. While women play a key role in food production and preparation, they and the children are among the first victims in times of food shortage and hunger and often suffer from malnutrition. Women also do most of subsistence crop production using rudimentary tools and animal rearing to feed the family, meanwhile men are mainly involved in cash crop production for selling, and livestock for prestige and marriage. Lack of improved technologies, poor postharvest management techniques, lack of markets and lack of control over land are some of the factor limiting expansion of agriculture production, and productivity. Diversifying and extending women's role beyond the subsistence production to other sectors, including agro-business, food preservation, value addition, storage and marketing can help address some of the imbalances.

South Sudan is among countries in the region that are susceptible to environmental disasters including prolonged droughts and floods. Women play a critical role in providing food, water, fuel wood and subsistence farming among other vital services and are the most affected by environmental degradation and hazards. Women provide the bulk of agricultural labour in South Sudan. Men have responsibilities as decision makers for the communities and their families, while women are responsible for farming, and collecting water and fuelwood. Consequently, the livelihoods of women and the members of their households are vulnerable to the effects of ecosystems degradation and climate change on resources like water and natural forests and agricultural lands. In times of resource scarcity, often the women travel over long distances in such of water, fuelwood, wild foods and other important livelihood resources.

The National Gender Policy of the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare includes formulated Strategies to enhance environment and natural resource management in South Sudan, such as providing women with education opportunities and information on environmental and natural resources management in order to take up leadership roles.

➤ **Recommendations with regard to gender**

The proposed activities of this project are aligned with the strategies of the National Gender Policy, which is based on the principles of: i) the Transitional Constitution; ii) the Bill of Rights; iii) the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); iv) the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA); and v) the Protocol to the African charter on Human and People's Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol).

Although activities on the ground are limited under this project, there is a significant opportunity to mainstream gender considerations into the national policy framework, the awareness and capacity building activities, and the environmental information network. In particular, it is recommended that the project:

- Ensure adequate representation of women in the project implementation.
- Ensure that the interests of local communities (including women, vulnerable groups and youth) are taken into account.
- Include women, vulnerable groups and youth in the target audiences for awareness and capacity building activities.
- Raise awareness on the importance of gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the Rio Conventions, and on the important role played by women with regard to natural resources management.

The available women structures (women's associations and women's groups) will be used to reach women at the local levels (County, Payam and Boma levels).

Ethnic Groups

South Sudan is ethnically and culturally diverse, with 64 major ethnic groups. These are: Acholi, Adio (Makaraka), Aja, Anyuak (Anyuaa), Atuot (Reel), Avukaya, Azande, Bai, Baka, Balanda-Boor, Balanda-Bviri, Banda, Bari, Binga, Bongo, Didinga, Dinka (Jieng), Dongotona, Feroqhe, Gollo, Ifoto, Imatong, Indri, Jiye, Jur (Beli & Modo), Jurchol (Luo), Kakwa, Kara, Keliko, Kuku, Lango, Larim (Boya), Logir, Lokoya, Lopit, Lotuka (Otuho), Lugbara, Lulubo, Maban, Madi, Mananger, Mangayat, Moro, Moro Kodo, Mundari, Mundu, Murle, Ndogo, Ngulngule, Nuer (Naath), Nyangatom, Nyangwara, Pari, Pojulu, Sere, Shatt, Shilluk (Chollo), Suri (kachipo), Tenet, Tid, Toposa, Uduk, Woro and Yulu.

Each group has different social and livelihoods systems, cultural traditions and a sense of identity which vary from each other, while some have similar systems depending on the level of interaction. The diversity can present both a unique opportunity for the country to enjoy the colourful richness of these traditions and also a threat to national unity and a collective sense of national identity.

With numerous ethnic groups, South Sudan does not have one unifying national language; instead the country uses English as the national language, Arabic as a means of communication among those who studied in Arabic and local Arabic commonly known as Juba Arabic in major Equatorial towns.

The two dominant ethnic groups in South Sudan, the Dinka and the Nuer are predominantly agro-pastoralists. The Mundari and Murle are all agro-pastoralists who derive their livelihoods from farming and cattle rearing. Cattle are typically a central part of their livelihoods and society. They primarily rely upon livestock, but are also engaged in planting (cultivation) and fishing during the dry season. In addition, Toposa, Lotuka and Didinga ethnic groups depend on cattle rearing and crop farming for their livelihoods.

These communities keep on moving with their cattle during the dry season (usually January to May) to the wet areas (swamps in the rainy season which turn into pasture in the dry season), where they set up temporary cattle camps. Here the cattle are able to access water and graze for part of the year. Fishing is usually best in the dry season as the rivers and pools get low and fish are easier to catch. At the beginning of the rainy season (May/June), the people return to their homesteads and fields are planted.

Most communities in South Sudan value animals which are kept as a sign of wealth, prestige and for marriage. Cattle are kept by households and the more cattle one has, the more powerful and wealthy he is. Cattle are used for payment of bride price, rituals and rarely for ploughing land. With the high value attached to animals, any impact on the livestock population as result of climate change will hit South Sudanese households hard. In addition, by having large heads of animals, their contribution to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions will be high.

The large herds of cattle are the major root cause of resource-based conflict in forms of cattle raiding, competition over water and pasture during dry season and destruction of crops (sources of livelihoods of agrarians). These conflict are widespread in the country and often lead to loss of hundreds and thousands of human lives on yearly basis. These conflict intensify during dry season in predominantly pastoral communities when large herds of cattle gather in water points. In agrarian communities, conflict intensify during rainy season when pastoralists have moved away with their livestock from water points and wetlands to access pasture in highlands. During these period, agrarians would have planted their crops and therefore result in conflict with the pastoralist who are armed in most cases. Unless these conflicts such conflicts are addressed through enactment and enforcement of policy and laws, they are likely to aggravate and impede development in rural areas.

Other ethnic groups in South Sudan, such as Chollo, Anuak, Maban, Azande, Kakwa, Bari, Lokoya and Pojulu are more agrarian and tend to keep goats, poultry and a few cattle compared to the major pastoral groups. The agrarian communities derive their livelihood primarily from fishing and crop production. Subsistence farming where crops are produced mainly by women for family consumption and surplus are sold for purchase of basic commodities such as salt and sugar. Shifting cultivation, which involves periodic movement from one area to another after a farmland has lost its fertility, is used by most farmers who have limited access to better farming technologies and access to extension services. These communities value livestock, although they are not dependent upon cattle for food relative to other agro-pastoralists groups. In the dry season, the livestock do not need to migrate for long distances.

All the 64 ethnic groups typically have stronger ties to their local tribal and religious organisations than to the national government. Competing tribal interests continue to make strong parochial demands on public appointments and resources. The government's ability to meet these demands has been constrained by the worsening economic situation. This has deepened existing perceptions of marginalisation amongst less powerful ethnic groups, thereby placing further strain on the fragile network of political accommodations that bind South Sudan's society together. This in turn impacts on the environment in which they are living and utilisation of natural resources.

➤ **Recommendations with regard to ethnic groups**

While the project has limited activities on the ground, it is important that considerations with regard to ethnicity in South Sudan are taken into account in the project implementation. In particular, it is recommended that the project:

- Ensure adequate representation of state and local level stakeholders in the formulation of policies, as well as in awareness raising and capacity building activities.
- Ensure that the interests of local communities, vulnerable groups and youth are taken into account.
- Raise awareness on the importance of traditional knowledge and practices in the implementation of the Rio Conventions.
- Incorporate lessons learned and best practices related to natural resources management and its linkages with conflict reduction and peace-building in South Sudan.

References

- The Republic of South Sudan (2013). National Gender Policy. Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare.
- The Republic of South Sudan (2017). Initial National Communication (INC) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- BRACED (Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disaster) in South Sudan research report.

Annex 1: Livelihood zones of South Sudan (Source: FEWS NET, 2013)

