

South Sudan

- Total population: 11.2 million (49.9% F, 50.1% M)¹
- Population Age Disaggregation: 0-14 yrs 41%, 10-24 yrs 33%, 24 -64 yrs 23%, 65 and above 3%²
- Average household size: 7
- Polygamy: 40% of all unions³
- Female headed households: 48.6%⁴
- Literacy Rates 15 yrs & older: 19% females, 35% males⁵
- Infant Mortality rates: 97.9 per 1000 live births⁶
- Maternal Mortality rate: 1150 per 100,000 live births⁷
- Rate of Intimate Partner Violence: 51%⁸
- Proportion of the population with a disability: 15%⁹

Gender in Brief

Introduction

Gaining independence in 2011, South Sudan experienced renewed conflicts in 2013 and 2016 which have significantly undermined the development gains achieved since the independence and worsened the humanitarian situation¹⁰. There are more than 60 ethnic groups and 80 local languages in South Sudan, and 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 ethnic group. Principle ethnic groups include the Dinka, Nuer, Bari, Murle and Shilluk. Around 60% of the population in South Sudan is Christian, while 33% follows indigenous religions, and another 6% identify as Muslim¹¹. Pastoralism 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 and remains the main catalyst of inter-communal violence. In many parts of South Sudan, cattle are also used for the bride price required to marry. Northern South Sudan has oilfields, and some areas remain in contention with Sudan.

Gender Roles and Responsibilities

Gender relations in South Sudan are shaped by the social and economic realities of being one of the world's poorest countries and by decades of conflict. Traditional gender norms which guide everyday life for most South Sudanese put responsibility of household chores, as well as collecting firewood, fetching water, care work for children, elderly and the sick on women, while girls help them¹². These gender roles are even maintained in camps hosting IDP's or refugees where pregnant women are seen queuing to fetch water while their husbands rest. While expected to financially provide for their families, making the decisions for the family and the community, the men and boys are also responsible for cattle (boys tend to be cattle-herders), hunting, fishing and charcoal making. The lack of transportation means within and among communities also limit the mobility of the community members, particularly those of women and girls due to insecurity. Although there are legal provisions ensuring the equal rights of women to land, the limited social recognition and lack of enforcement create barriers to women's access and control over land¹³. In fulfilling the expected roles from them, women do have control over household items and small animals.

Education and Economic Empowerment

An estimated 2.4 million children were out of school in 2020; whereby floods, conflict and school closures also impacted the availability of school facilities¹⁴. Children with disabilities particularly have challenges accessing schools, due to lack of assistive devices. Girls also face additional challenges, since early and forced marriages as well as likely early pregnancy lead to them dropping out of school. Other contributors to early and forced marriage are cultural perceptions within the communities that educated girls engage in criminal activities, or becoming pregnant leading to lower dowries. Only 25% of girls in South Sudan receive a secondary level education¹⁵. Similarly, the access of the boys to education is also constrained by revenge killings at schools. Less than half of the schools in South Sudan have clean water and soap available, while lack of menstrual hygiene management also affects female learner retention¹⁶. The majority of the population depends on agriculture as their main livelihood. In South Sudan agriculture production is heavily affected by flooding and drought. Women do an estimated 80% of the agricultural work in South Sudan¹⁷. Food security and livelihoods were identified as the most needed assistance for men (55%) and women (52%) in 2022¹⁸. Data also show that female-headed households are more food insecure in comparison to male headed households across South Sudan¹⁹.

Participation and Policy

Prevailing cultural norms and gender roles, especially in rural areas, marginalize women from participation in any level of political activity or decision-making. However, the Transitional Constitution and Bill of Rights (2011) provides guarantees for the equality of men and women, while setting out a 25% Affirmative Action quota for women in legislative and executive bodies. Women currently comprise 32.14% of the Council of States and 32.36% of the National Legislative Assembly²⁰. Women in South Sudan have had an historic engagement in peace negotiating teams and a significant number of women participated in drafting the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005²¹. Lack of access to resources and funds, and harmful gender norms and practices prevent women and girls' participation in public sphere²². South Sudan had its first National Action Plan (NAP) on UN Security Council Resolution 1325, covering the period between 2015 – 2020. Efforts to develop a second NAP have been ongoing.

Protection and Gender-based Violence

GBV and protection issues in South Sudan are driven by a culture of silence and stigma, masculine identity tied to cattle-raiding, bride-price, a lack of access to legal recourse, and customary practices that favor compensation for crimes like rape. Decades of human rights violations and abuses, and international humanitarian law violations, besides the climate of impunity and lack of accountability have also created a climate of conflict and insecurity in South Sudan²³. Compound vulnerabilities in South Sudan are affected by ethnic and/or political marginalization, conflict related displacement, localized insecurity and armed conflict, and flood-related displacement. Despite the protection risks being high and common, there is little access to justice and rule of law by survivors and victims. Men and boys face risks of recruitment by armed forces, while there is also heightened distress in the county due to targeted and indiscriminate killings, mines and explosive remnants of war²⁴.

GBV and harmful traditional practices are present across the country. Women and girls are exposed to GBV risks when carrying out their routine activities, besides being subjected to domestic violence, early forced marriages, physical assault, and rape²⁵. Survival sex has been of a particular concern in South Sudan, whereby the girls with disabilities seem to be at a higher risk²⁶. Similarly, early marriages are highly common in South Sudan adding to the GBV risks faced by the girls. An estimated half of South Sudanese girls get married before the age of 18, while the reports of early marriage cases remain low²⁷. Intimate partner violence regularly comprises at least half of all reported GBV incidents²⁸. Weaknesses in family law both within the statutory and customary systems, as well as lack of overall trust to service providers, hinder women's enjoyment of their rights and their ability to access justice²⁹. 38% of households report that women and girls avoid more than one area in their communities (including water points, latrines, distribution areas, markets, and firewood collection sites), as they feel unsafe³⁰.

Emergencies

There are various factors such as climate change, access constraints and operational interference, economic instability, public health challenges such and endemic violence which create a complex emergency in South Sudan, leading to increased protection risks, including negative coping mechanisms, GBV, child labor, child marriage and human trafficking³¹. Therefore, the gender relations in South Sudan are rendered even more complex due to the protracted state of this emergency. The roles and responsibilities of women, men, boys and girls though clearly delineated are altered in times of crisis. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the care giving responsibilities of women and girls have increased, which required humanitarian actors to conduct outreach activities to ensure reaching out to them for service delivery. Similarly, activities that promote leadership of women and girls are deemed crucial to ensure they are not left behind and that they take leadership roles in their communities in order to create more equitable societies.

¹ World Bank, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=SS>

² Ibid

³ The Economist, 2017, [The Link Between Polygamy and War](#)

⁴ UN Volunteers, 2019, [Supporting the livelihoods of women in South Sudan with UNDP](#)

⁵ HNO, South Sudan, 2022

⁶ UNICEF Data, <https://data.unicef.org/country/ssd/>

⁷ UNFPA, World Population Dashboard, South Sudan, 2022 <https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population/SS>

⁸ UNICEF South Sudan, 2019, [GBV Briefing Note](#)

⁹ Rohwerder, B. (2018). Disability in South Sudan. K4D Helpdesk Report. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies

¹⁰ World Bank, South Sudan Country Profile, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/southsudan/overview#1>

¹¹ US Department of State, Office of International Religious Freedom, [2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: South Sudan](#)

¹² Government of South Sudan, UN Women, 2020, [Rapid Gender Analysis on COVID-19 in South Sudan](#)

¹³ HNO, South Sudan, 2022

¹⁴ HNO, South Sudan, 2022

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Feed II, Gender Analysis Report, <https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/south-sudan/feed-ii-gender-analysis-report>

¹⁸ HNO, South Sudan, 2022

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ IPU Parline, Global Data on National Parliaments, South Sudan, https://data.ipu.org/node/160/data-on-women?chamber_id=13580

²¹ Women Count: SC1325: Civil Society Monitoring South Sudan. 2012

²² OXFAM, 2020, [Born to Lead](#), Recommendations on increasing women's participation in South Sudan's peace process

²³ HNO, South Sudan, 2022

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ UNFPA, South Sudan GBVIMS Report 2021

²⁶ HNO, South Sudan, 2022

²⁷ UNFPA, South Sudan GBVIMS Report 2021

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ HNO, South Sudan, 2022

³⁰ UNFPA, South Sudan GBVIMS Report 2021

³¹ Ibid