WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON SECURITY IN SOUTH SUDAN

RESULTS FROM THE WPS BAROMETER

Cordaid

Acknowledgments

Involved partners:

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CRSV	Conflict-Related Sexual Violence
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EPON	Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PoC	Protection of Civilians
RBF	Results-Based Financing
(S)GBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

Local partners reviewing the preliminary results

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Combat stigma and the normalization of (S)GBV

Throughout the Barometer process, it has become clear that stigma and local gender norms are strong drivers of (S)GBV and obstacles for the meaningful empowerment of women and girls. We urge the international community to mainstream the problem of stigma across the whole peacebuilding architecture and make the analysis of gender dynamics, power-relations and local norms hard criteria for need assessments, monitoring mechanisms, and evaluations. South Sudan is a complex country where ethnic and geographical differences go hand in hand with different forms of stigma. This is why we argue strongly in favor of locally owned interventions that foster the owner- and leadership of local women's organizations.

Protect civic space and strengthen the social contract

Civic space is a vital precondition for good governance. In South Sudan, however, civic engagement is under increasing pressure as democratic rights and freedom of speech are often curtailed. We urge the international community to thoroughly monitor their investments into the security sector to ensure that aid is not misused to curtail political participation. Moreover, we advocate for increased efforts to decentralize decision-making in South Sudan. With power concentrated in Juba, remote areas are not benefiting from the wealth and are excluded from meaningful participation. By transferring resources to local authorities and enhance their accountability towards citizens, ownership and effectiveness of development and security processes can be improved.

Link livelihood support to awareness-raising as part of peacebuilding efforts

The Barometer shows clearly that there is a strong linkage between prevailing traditions, a lack of economic opportunities and different forms of (S)GBV. The specific way in which harmful traditions are translated into daily practices is not simply determined by local gender norms. Instead, they are partly a reflection of prevailing poverty and closely linked to a lack of stable livelihoods. Forced marriage, for example, is a harmful coping strategy that cannot simply be overcome through awareness-raising alone but requires initiatives that tackle underlying root causes as well. We strongly advocate for an integrated approach that combines livelihood support with awareness-raising about harmful practices. Only if cultural practices and economic needs are linked, can the risk of (S)GBV be mitigated effectively.

Enhance the UNMISS mandate

UNMISS has provided physical protection and ensured humanitarian access to thousands of beneficiaries. UNMISS is considered vital for the peacebuilding process and we advocate for continued financial support in combination with critical monitoring by the UNSC. We are especially concerned about the relocation of IDPs from PoC sites since uninformed procedures can put women and girls at increased risk. We strongly advocate for voluntary relocation which is complemented by livelihood support and other relevant services to ensure the sustainability of this undertaking.

Continued commitment to end conflict-related sexual violence

In spite of a new peace agreement and the establishment of a transitional government, the conflict in South Sudan is ongoing on multiple levels. This has resulted in a climate of increased indifference by certain UN member states. We urge the international community to continue their engagement despite the difficult obstacles in the peacebuilding process. The complexity of conflict resolution is not an excuse to turn our back on the people of South Sudan but rather a signal to find new and innovative ways to attain meaningful and sustainable development. We remain committed to peace and stability in South Sudan and urge the whole international community to continue and reinforce their efforts too.

THE BAROMETER

Since the outbreak of civil war in South Sudan in 2013, sexual and gender-based violence has been widespread and has been widely used as a weapon of war. While the precise number of incidents remains unknown, it is clear that sexual violence has increasingly become normalized on both the local level and in higher political forums. In addition, harmful gender norms and traditions limit the meaningful participation of women which further compromises the effectiveness of peacebuilding processes. With the Barometer on Women, Peace and Security, we aim to adopt a bottom-up approach to security and peace that is in line with the priorities of women who are most exposed to the realities of (S)GBV and conflict-related violence.

Why the Barometer?

South Sudanese women are powerful agents in coping with insecurity and contributing to peace. But their situation shows insufficient improvement as many security initiatives are based on incomplete analyses. Macro indicators focusing on state security, for example, do not measure the daily situation and quality of life at the community level. Involving women and basing our work on their priorities leads to more effective programmes. Therefore, the Barometer aims to:

■ Bridge the information gap between (inter)national policymakers and local women and men
■ Produce a robust way of measuring and documenting the security needs and concerns of local women
■ Provide contextualised information and contacts for local women, organisations, and policymakers
■ Equip women to share their perspectives on daily peace and security issues in their community

Sustainable peace in South Sudan can only be achieved if local women are meaningfully involved in peacebuilding, security and conflict prevention. But because of unequal power relations, most women have limited access to political participation, resources, and information. We believe that women's perspectives need to be taken up in all stages of decision-making and represented in all spheres of power.

When women are empowered and enabled to communicate their collective concerns, they are in a stronger position to find new ways to address conflict and insecurity. Coalitions of local women can forge connections with other actors such as the peace movement, the development sector, and the (in)formal governance and security sector, as well as the military and the police. The Barometer helps women to become acknowledged as stakeholders in peace and security processes.

Story collection and survey interview

" Countries with more gender equality have better economic growth; peace agreements that include women are more durable; and parliaments with more women enact more legislation on key social issues such as health, education, anti-discrimination and child support. The evidence is clear: equality for women means progress for all"

Ban Ki-moon, Former UN Secretary-General
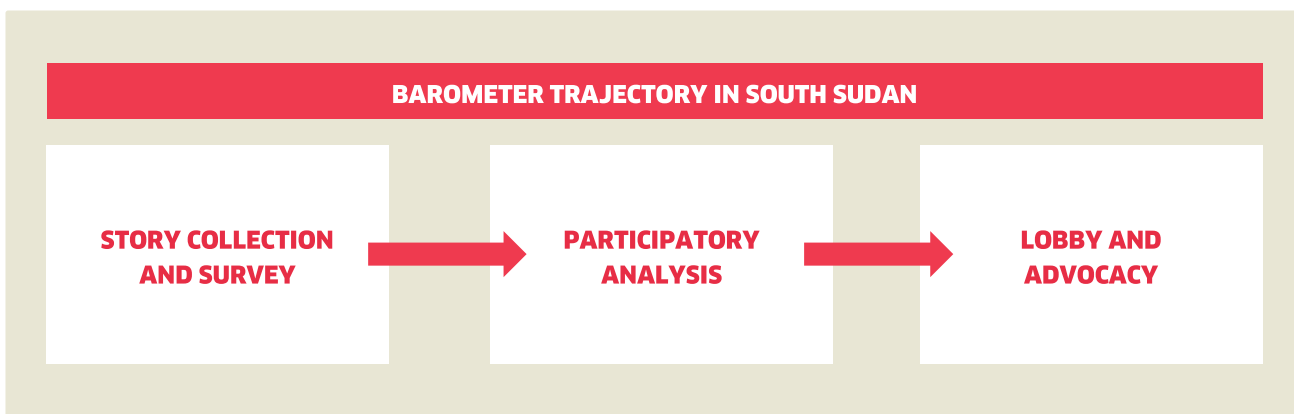
APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The Barometer approach is based on a standardized process yet remains flexible enough to consider the particular realities in South Sudan. Every step is informed by the core idea of giving women the power to define what security means for them and what their priorities are. Throughout the Barometer trajectory, local women are involved to ensure that the data are meaningfully interpreted and appropriately translated into an evidence-based lobby and advocacy strategy. By doing so, the Barometer complements existing statistics with nuanced information from the ground.

The steps of the Barometer process

STORY COLLECTION. With the Barometer, women express their unique concerns by sharing a story about a security incident within the last six months. The story is accompanied by a survey that allows diving deeper into the circumstances of the shared story. While some sections of the survey are standardized allowing us to compare results across countries and time, we added a number of unique questions to better grasp the complex situation in South Sudan and to align our efforts to the mandate of our local partner organizations. The data are digitally collected using tablets and secured by the cloud services of CommCare. Our local partners, trained in gender-sensitive interviewing techniques, have interviewed 237 participants in more than 13 locations.

PARTICIPATORY ANALYSIS. After a preliminary analysis, the results are brought back to the communities to discuss the outcomes and make sense of the results. By combining women's individual perspectives and translating them into a collective view, the data become a meaningful instrument to advocate for women's empowerment and rights. Consultations take place in all communities and are based on mixed dialogues between men and women as well as on women-only discussions where sensitive issues can be shared in a safe space. We ensure that important stakeholders, such as community leaders or local police representatives, are included in these activities to foster accountability and meaningful participation.

LOBBY AND ADVOCACY. The collective security concerns and priorities are consolidated into a multi-level advocacy strategy aiming to advance women's rights, their meaningful participation in peace processes and their security on the community level. By bringing local perceptions into national and global forums, women are gaining a voice that can shape the policy discourse and security-related development cooperation. This helps to close the gap between (inter)national policymakers and women affected by fragility and conflict. We act as a facilitator to ensure access to relevant decision-making bodies, in close cooperation with our local partner organizations.

BAROMETER TRAJECTORY IN SOUTH SUDAN

| STORY COLLECTION AND SURVEY | → | PARTICIPATORY ANALYSIS | → | LOBBY AND ADVOCACY |

DATA QUALITY

Collecting reliable data in fragile contexts is difficult. With restricted access to remote communities and stigma on sexual violence, retrieving and understanding the daily realities of insecurity is a challenge. By working together with our local partners, we are able to collect in-depth narratives and include communities at all stages of the research process to ensure that the right conclusions are drawn. Through an intersectional approach, the research ensures that the different needs and challenges across societal groups are taken into account.

Beyond gender

A diverse data set is necessary to challenge simplified representations of women's daily security situations. All too often, women are seen as a homogenous group leading to inefficient interventions or culturally insensitive initiatives that can put specific groups at higher risk. By gathering stories and quantitative data from different age groups, from rural as well as urban locations, from people with different ethnic and migratory backgrounds and from women with disabilities, the Barometer is able to grasp the complexity and diversity of women's realities in South Sudan. This allows us to go beyond simplified images of women as victims and to indicate how the gendered impact of conflict plays out on the local level.

> *"When I conceived, I was sent to the boy's family. The boy comes from Bor and they have a plot, they built a house but it has no windows. I stayed with him until I delivered. Then they took me back to my parent's home. Even there, nobody cared about me and my baby. My husband [the boy] has no money. I started doing business and I go in the morning and return in the evening. There is no money for treatment if the child gets sick so I decided to go back to the father of the child. Then I became pregnant again in 2013, now I am 19 years old."*
>
> *Participant from Juba*

Our local partner organizations were trained to conduct gender-sensitive qualitative interviews and visited numerous communities to collect stories and surveys of 237 participants. While the focus lies on story collection, the survey data complements the results with semi-quantitative and quantitative data. Moreover, the quality of the results stems from the participatory analysis on the community level where our local partner re-visit the communities to discuss the preliminary results and discuss with women effective entry points for improving the daily security situation. Throughout the process, the power to define security lies in the hands of those women who are affected by conflict and fragility on a daily basis.

» INTERVIEWEES BY AGE AND LOCATION
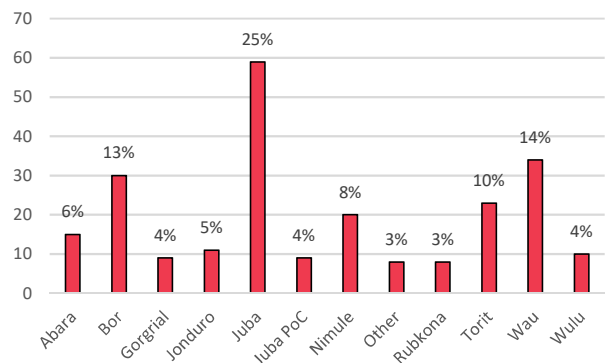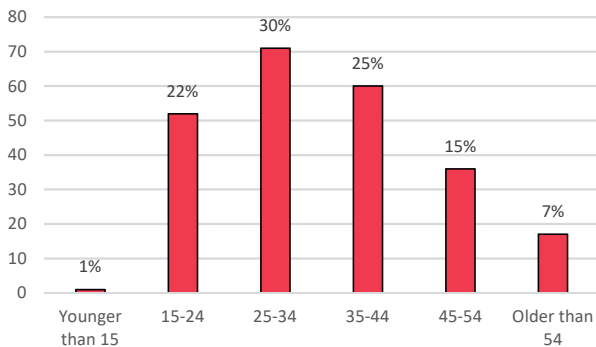
Comment: -

Problem and solutions at a glance

The following table summarizes those issues that have become evident throughout the Barometer process and remain relevant to all communities. The indicated solutions are mainly based on the participatory analysis at the community level. While it is important to gain an overview of the most prevailing grievances, any solution needs to be grounded in the local context.

» IDENTIFIED PROBLEMS AND SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS BY INTERVIEWEES		
Topic	**Problem**	**Suggested solutions**
Awareness	Limited access to education for girls; this compromises their self-esteem and their ability to speak out	In strong collaboration with community leaders, raising awareness about the positive impact of education for the whole community. Provision of quality education.
	A lack of awareness about rights, resulting in the normalization of domestic and gender-based violence	
Livelihoods	Limited economic opportunities for men; this undermines their role as provider and is conducive to violence or the joining of armed groups	Livelihood programmes which explicitly aim to overcome the drivers of domestic violence by supporting men and women in contributing to their household.
	Limited economic opportunities for women; it decreases their decision-making power in the household and their control over resources	
Rights	Unequal land rights increase uneven power relations	In strong collaboration with community leaders, raising awareness about the importance of equal rights and the benefits this can have for the whole community.
	A lack of equality between men and women regarding informal justice mechanisms	
Stigma	Stigma leads to impunity of perpetrators, self-blame of victims, social isolation and an increase of risk for further (S)GBV	Awareness-raising for women and men likewise.
Marriage	Early and forced marriage, negatively impacting education	Combination of awareness-raising and livelihood programming which decreases the incentives of economically informed marriages
	Polygamy, negatively impacting the living standard of the whole family	
	Poverty enhances the commercialization of marriage due to dowry whereby this leads to an increase in cattle raiding.	
Political participation	A lack of meaningful participation of women on the local level due to traditional norms and harmful attitudes	In strong collaboration with community leaders, raising awareness about the importance of political participation and the benefits it can bear for the whole community.
Security actors	Misbehaviour and (S)GBV by various security actors, including armed groups, police and south Sudanese military	Training of security actors through results-based financing and other mechanisms
Health	No access to health services in regard to SRHR and beyond	Provision of quality health services independently of gender, race or social class
Forced migration	Displacement detaches women and girls from community-based safety nets and increases reliance on the external protection	Well-informed and voluntary resettlement in combination with livelihood and education support to allow communities to rebuild and overcome gender inequality
Comment: These issues were mentioned frequently across the whole sample and omit crucial differences among the different communities		

CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Different armed groups continue to violate international law and use sexual violence as a strategic weapon of war. In 2018, UNMISS communicated an "alarming increase in the number of incidents and victims of conflict-related sexual violence" [i]. In 2019, the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan reinforced this message by making clear that "despite the signing of the peace agreement, violations including rape and sexual violence continue to occur which may amount to international crimes, including war crimes and crimes against humanity." [ii] The Barometer data confirms these messages well. We urge, therefore, the international community to reinforce efforts at all levels to prevent conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), to foster justice mechanisms that effectively fight impunity and to support reconciliation in order to strengthen peaceful co-existence and social coherence.

CRSV and impunity

The violations of the peace agreement have strongly contributed to an increase of insecurity, as indicated by the Barometer data. The analysis reveals that the shared stories of women are mostly about incidents that happen on a regular basis. 61% of them happen *often* or *very often*. In accordance with the high prevalence, most of the interviewees consider their daily living situation as dangerous. Only 12% of the participants believe to be *generally safe* or *really safe*. As the story in the textbox indicates, security incidents are often linked to conflict-related actors whereby it becomes clear that CRSV plays a strategic role in the conflict. But even in situations where sexual violence is not used strategically, it is an implicit element of warfare in South Sudan. It is effective because it allows community structures and families to be destroyed at minimal costs for the perpetrators. In some cases, it ensures control over relevant resources and can serve as an incentive for soldiers.

> *"They brought soldiers to guide the area but some of them do bad things. Like to me, they came and beat me at home at 2 pm at night. [...] Someone was stabbed by a knife and they say it was my child, a small child, until somebody came and took the child and one person took my elder daughter behind the house and they wanted to rape her. If my daughter was not strong enough, they would have raped her. Then they opened the sword, they wanted to kill my son who is a priest. So I said, if you want to kill my son, you kill me first then you can kill him after. So they took me to a place of cement and beat me. They took bamboo and beat me on the kidney, on my head and my legs. And all the children at home were also beaten. [...] Security in our place is very bad and since that time I cannot work.*
>
> *Participant from Juba*

» FREQUENCY OF SHARED INCIDENT (LEFT) AND OVERALL SECURITY PERCEPTION (RIGHT)
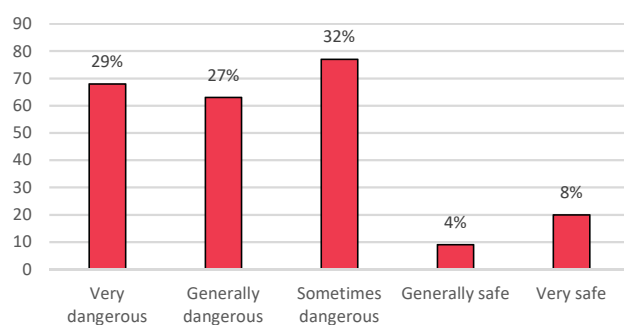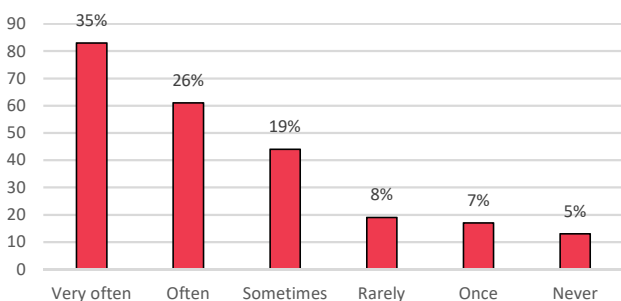
Comment: The left chart depicts frequency of the security incident shared in the story

Supporting providers of security

Not all women are equally affected by the conflict. In Wau, for example, women indicated 20 times that *armed groups* are the main threat to their security while mentioning *husband* only three times. In other places, such as Gorgrial, *armed groups* were only considered one time as a threat while *husband* was mentioned 76 times. Moreover, the same security actor, such as the police, is often perceived as both a provider of security and as a threat to security, depending on the situation and context. The ambiguity of different roles can compromise interventions that aim to increase security on the local level. The Barometer makes clear that there are no simple solutions to security and that the capacity strengthening of security providers needs to be well informed by local conflict and power dynamics. Before any intervention, it is critical to adequately consult the local population about the roles of different security actors and understand the uneven exposure of different people and communities towards different forms of violence. For example, while the quantitative Barometer data shows that community leaders and community organizations can be effective providers of security, the participatory analysis made also clear that they are not always responsive towards the priorities and concerns of women. The support of local security providers, therefore, needs to put special emphasis on increasing awareness about the gendered impact of conflict and the particular issue of CRSV.

> *"When my mother went to the bush, thieves came. The thieves came to the bush and some of them were soldiers. When the news reached us in Juba, it took two days to reach her because the place is far. We managed to bring our mother to the hospital but my mother is still not okay because we did not find the proper treatment for her. Everything needs money. We don't have the resources to help."*
>
> *Participant from Juba*

» PERCEPTION OF SECURITY ACTORS

PROVIDER OF SECURITY

THREAT TO SECURITY

CONFLICTING PERCEPTION OF SECURITY ACTORS

□ Provider of security   ■ Threat to security

Comment: The first two charts depict only actors mentioned more than 5 times while actors mentioned 5 or fewer times are categorized as "other".

UNMISS

The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has provided immediate physical protection to more than 200,000 people, opened access for humanitarian aid actors to at least 100,000 persons in need of immediate assistance and fostered accountability by monitoring and reporting human rights abuses. The importance of UNMISS was well reflected in the collected Barometer stories. While UNMISS is vital for conflict resolution, we remain concerned about the limited prioritization of (S)GBV, the relocation of IDPs, and the lack of financial and processual flexibility.

(S)GBV as a clear priority

A report of EPON on the effectiveness of the UNMISS concluded that there are "widely differing views within the mission on the priority given to sexual violence"[iii]. For the mission, (S)GBV should not be seen as an issue that needs to be tackled once peace is established but as a prerequisite for overcoming conflict and fragility. In other words, fighting (S)GBV is not only a matter of justice but an issue of overall security which requires adequate attention in order to establish and maintain sustainable peace at all levels. It is well acknowledged that UNMISS worked together with UNDP to establish a court in Juba for prosecuting cases of sexual violence. But with an increased normalization of (S)GBV and the use of rape as a weapon of war, UNMISS needs to make the prevention of (S)GBV and the fight against impunity a clear priority.

Well-informed relocation of IDPs

The intention to scale-up efforts beyond the PoC sites is well recognized. As one of our participants explains: *"If there is help coming, it does not reach us because the place is very far. But those who are in the town get help [...]. Nobody knows where we are. People who are in the city are being helped but not here."* While we agree that services need to be delivered beyond the PoC sites, we are concerned that the discontinuation of protected camps puts vulnerable people, especially women, even at greater risk. Moreover, the relocation of people to ethnically homogenous areas may ensure that tensions are mitigated in the short run but do not promote peaceful co-existence in the longer run. The urban centers, such as Malakal, Wau, Bor and Juba used to be ethnically diverse places and the voluntary return of IDPs in combination with intensified livelihood support in these urban areas could contribute to peaceful co-existence of different communities. We urge, therefore, the UNMISS and the UNSC member states monitoring its work to ensure that the relocation of people is at all times well-informed and voluntary. As the relocation remains a dilemma, consultation with women's organizations is crucial to ensure that this process does not further increase the risk of (S)GBV.[iv]

> *"My husband was killed in Malakal. When we came here [Jonduru], there are no schools, there's no food. When a child is sick, nobody helps with treatment. Even children don't have clothes. I have been sick and I've lost weight. This is suffering but what kind of suffering is this? If people can help us, please help us with resources so that I can do something to earn some money. This is what I can tell you, I don't have any power. [...] My message to UNMISS is: I want to do business."*
>
> *Participant from Jonduro*

Increased flexibility and evidence-based interventions

We advocate for a continued decentralization in favor of the field missions. UNSC Resolution 2406, for example, encompasses over 200 mandated tasks which decrease the flexibility of the mission to respond to the ever-changing circumstances on the ground. Broadening the scope of the mission while strengthening the financial commitment would allow UNMISS to better respond to the needs and priorities of the people as they emerge along the conflict dynamics. Moreover, the allocation of the given resources needs to be well-informed and backed up by thorough gender-sensitive data collection. We advocate for increased engagement on the community level to ensure that interventions correspond with the priorities of women affected by conflict.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND GENDER NORMS

The Barometer clearly indicates that insecurity does not come from war-related actors alone. 71% of the violent incidences in the shared stories take place at home. This shows how security is embedded in the domestic context and reproduced on the community level through stigma and harmful gender norms. Solutions to daily insecurity need to be comprehensive and include all community members. Many of the stories tell us that insecurity is not an external force that penetrates community life from the outside. Instead, it is shaped by locally specific gender relations. We and our partners urge the international community to mainstream the problem of stigma and the identification of local gender norms across all peacebuilding efforts to ensure that interventions are effective and meaningful.
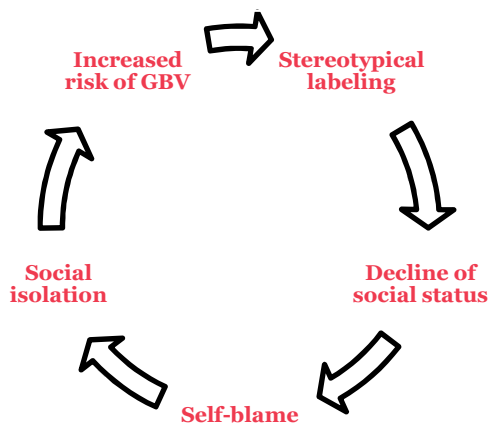
Stigma and harmful gender norms

As one interviewee from Juba puts it: *"normally, certain things cannot be said or told"*. Throughout the Barometer process, it became clear that stigma is a paramount threat to the security of women. In many cases, perpetrators are not held accountable while victims are blamed. A culture of silence is dangerous as it decreases the risk for offenders while reinforcing the social exclusion of victims. Once social support networks are lost or weakened, survivors are even more exposed to further violence. Because stereotypes are often internalized, self-blame adds further complexity to the issue of stigma. For example, 82% of the women in South Sudan believe that they "should tolerate violence in order to keep her family together". [v] But even if women speak out and seek assistance, as illustrated in the textbox, the effectiveness of formal court orders is limited by stigma and harmful gender norms on the local level.

"I will tell this story and this story happened in Bor with a relative of mine. She has a small girl. The mother left her at home and went away to the market to buy food and the girl was in the house with a man. And this man is an uncle of the mother and he raped the girl. When she returned, she found the girl in the bed and she screamed. The man ran away. She took the girl to the hospital. [...] She is 9 years old. It was a police case and then when they went to court, the girl was unable to walk because the legs were loose. The man who raped the girl is 36 years old. The court charged him to pay 15 cows. The relatives from the father's side came and demanded the cows to be paid but the woman said the girl is still in the hospital and nobody knows what will happen to her. These people became angry and beat her. [...] but when it comes to dowry, these people don't care whether the girl will be okay or not and they didn't follow court orders."

Participant from Bor

Together with our South Sudanese partners, we consider stigma one of the biggest issues in South Sudan as it compromises any type of development initiative. We cannot understand the impact of (S)GBV if we do not understand the stigma that goes along with it. Justice mechanisms are not effective when stigma makes incidents go unreported or when the enforcement is compromised by harmful attitudes and gender norms. Fighting stigma, therefore, is crucial for providing effective aid in South Sudan. We urge the international community to mainstream the issue of stigma across the whole development architecture in order to break the vicious cycle of stigma. To do so, it is necessary to identify the daily norms that enable stigma to evolve in the first place. Only if the context is well understood, it is possible to define effective entry points to combat stigma without risking backlashes for women and girls. Stigmas are persistent because they are not limited to the attitudes of individuals but institutionalized across society as a whole. We, therefore, urge the international community to strengthen institutions that challenge dominant stereotypes and exclusion by providing non-discriminatory assistance to survivors and support gender-sensitive justice mechanisms.

Increased risk of GBV → Stereotypical labeling → Decline of social status → Self-blame → Social isolation → Increased risk of GBV

Transforming gender norms through livelihood support

The specific way in which gender relations are translated into daily practices is not simply determined by local gender norms. Instead, their daily reproduction on the community level is partly a reflection of prevailing poverty and closely linked to a lack of economic opportunities. As the story in the text box illustrates, forced and early marriage, for example, is partly a response to the lack of access to relevant services. Such harmful coping strategies cannot simply be overcome through awareness-raising alone but require initiatives that tackle underlying root causes as well, for example livelihood programs.

"South Sudan remains a deeply patriarchal society in which custom and tradition entrench the subservience of women and girls to men."[vi] At the same time, however, gender relations in South Sudan remain highly complex and programs should not aim to impose values that do not correspond with the everyday life of different communities. Even within one ethnic group, the role of women and girls can play out very differently depending on whether people live in urban or rural areas, for example.

Hence, we urge the international community to localize efforts to transform gender relations on the local level in combination with comprehensive livelihood support. While we strongly believe in the importance of strengthening the national peace architecture, the formalization of gender-sensitive laws and the meaningful participation of women in national decision-making bodies, the Barometer shows that the daily manifestations of different forms of (S)GBV are strongly informed by the local economic realities. With local and community-based organizations being at the forefront of this engagement, financial support to relevant associations could improve the lives of women in remote areas.

"I was forced to marry when I was seventeen years old, now I am 18 years old. I had a reason because the man I was going to marry was going to help my mother because she was sick. [...] They told me if I did not marry this man, my mother was going to die. And then everyone told me that if my mother dies it will be all on my neck and then I will not have a life. So I accepted to marry this man and now, my mother did not make it, she died. And now, the cows that were given to my parents [dowry] were eventually taken by my uncles and by cattle people [thieves]. And now, we don't have the cows, we don't have the money, we don't have the food. I'm staying with this man and his other wife. His first wife treats me like a kid in the house, mistreating me when I say anything. He just beats me and then he tells me that I am useless, he abuses me and I have no choice. I have nothing to do so I cannot leave. And then back home, they say that this man was going to support my parents but he does not give anything, he does not give any support to my parents, so my mum died. That's my story."

Participant from Bor

» MOST RELEVANT ACTORS IN THE BAROMETER STORIES
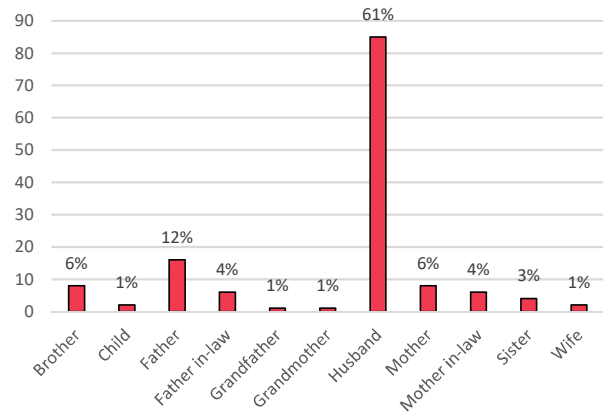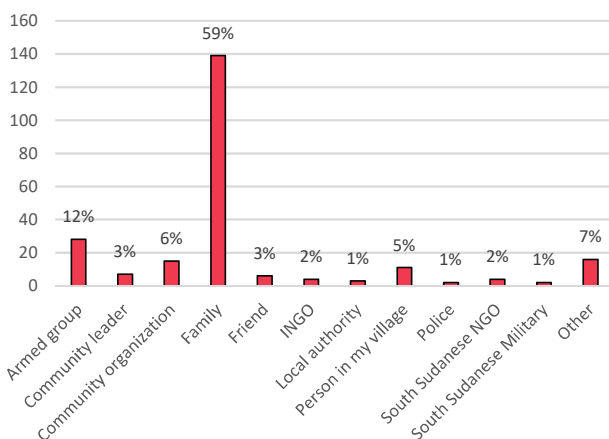
Comment: The left chart depicts all actors while the right chart depicts the Family (59%) along with different family members

CIVIC SPACE AND PARTICIPATION

The role of the United Nations is of critical importance for the peacebuilding process. And while, for example, the shift of the UNMISS mandate in 2014 indicates a recognition of the member states that the government of South Sudan itself is a threat to security, the impact of UN missions is limited by the principle of sovereignty and the conviction that the state holds primary responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. This is why we strongly advocate for an intensified commitment by the international community to protect civic space in South Sudan. in order to foster democratic rights, freedom of speech and governmental accountability.

Protect civic space

The report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan from February 2019 raised serious concerns about the "increasing securitization of the state with the intelligence arms of the security sector playing a pivotal role in the increasing repression resulting in individuals being deprived of their fundamental freedoms and civic space shrinking."[vii] The impact of securitization is deeply gendered. While men are more likely to be associated with hostile affiliations and suffer especially from arbitrary arrest and torture, women who engage in dissent are often subject to sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence. We urge the international community to monitor thoroughly so that investments in the security sector are not misused to curtail democratic and human rights. Moreover, we advocate for strong support of local women's organizations and their meaningful participation in the implementation of the new peace agreement. While 29% of the national parliament being women is a step in the right direction, this does not necessarily mean that the different priorities of women are taken into account.

Protester against (S)GBV

Engendered decentralization

The issue of decentralization is complex. On the one hand, it is clear that power remains concentrated in the hands of a few politicians seeking to maintain control over South Sudan's wealth and obstruct equal allocation of relevant state services and resources. On the other hand, decentralization could spark new power struggles and reinforce ethnic tensions. There is no simple model to peaceful co-existence in South Sudan and avoiding ethnic fragmentation should remain a priority. However, we advocate for well-informed local level investments rather than large-scale national investments. The peace deal remains fragile and the transitional government continues to fall short on central responsibilities.[viii] The Barometer makes clear that people have little confidence in the new peace agreement. With roughly half of the population still in need of humanitarian services, structural investments on the national level are risky and will likely not trickle down to levels where the needs are most urgent. Therefore, we urge the international community to link an overarching decentralization agenda to a focus on resilience programming that aims to bridge humanitarian aid to long-term development on the community level.

"We want the government to help us with the security but they are not helping us here. We don't have power."

Barometer participant
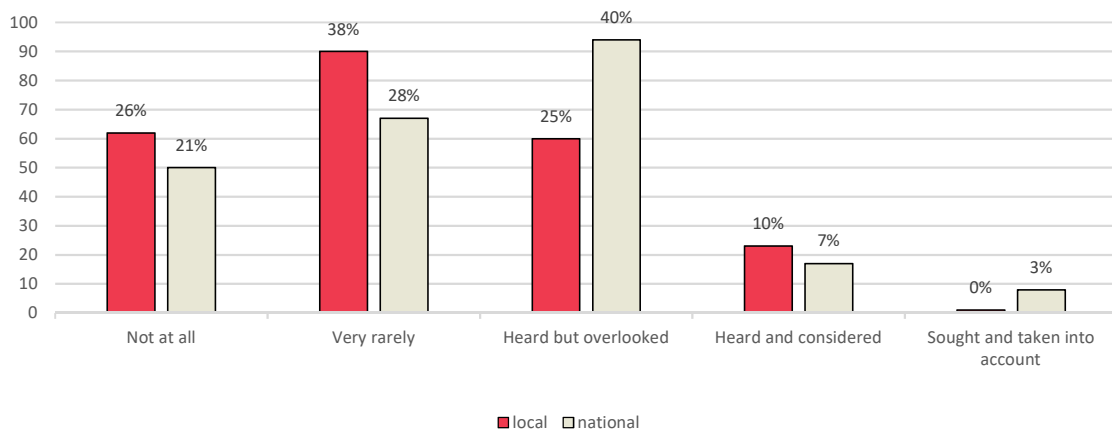
Power and participation

The success of engendered decentralization depends on the ability to translate centralized power to the communities while empowering women in the process. South Sudan remains a highly patriarchal society and decentralization carries the risk of reinforcing harmful institutions on the local level. Together with our partner organizations in South Sudan, we advocate for comprehensive consultations about locally specific gender dynamics before allocating resources and responsibilities to local authorities. RBF approaches can be useful to translate investments into meaningful improvements. Local women's organizations need to be involved in all stages while it needs to be ensured that their

Participants before the story collection

constituencies reflect the diversity between and within different communities. Women need to be involved. They know the problems yet often lack the ability to effectively challenge, resist and change them. Decentralization should aim to increase the power of women to shape their daily living conditions and find locally owned solutions. The Barometer can be a helpful tool as it allows us to consolidate shared concerns of women and to translate them into clear priorities and action points.

While the meaningful participation of women is critical for sustainable security solutions, the Barometer equally shows that women's empowerment needs to be recognized and owned by men as well. As Barometer data reveal, *denial of resources* and *forced marriage* are the most mentioned security issues (15%) after *physical assault* (33%). These practices are based on uneven power relations between men and women. That is to say, to improve the security situation, the inclusion of men and boys is vital. While gender equality will not be achieved without shifting the attitudes of men and boys, this does not take away the importance of maintaining women's only spaces. Programs need to continue to aim at empowering women and strengthening their political participation or equal access to resources and opportunities. Programming that engages men and boys should always be done in conjunction with programmes that focus on empowering women.

» EXTEND TO WHICH WOMEN'S OPINIONS ARE CONSIDERED

	Not at all	Very rarely	Heard but overlooked	Heard and considered	Sought and taken into account
local	26%	38%	25%	10%	0%
national	21%	28%	40%	7%	3%

Comment: -

ENDNOTES

i)   United Nations (2019): Conflict-related sexual violence. Report of the UN Secretary General.

ii)   Human Rights Council (2019): Report of the commission on human rights in South Sudan. Page 1.

iii)   EPON (2019): Assessing the effectiveness of the UNMISS. Page, 84.

iv)   Oxfam International, Nile Hope, Titi Foundation, Danish Refugee Council, Norwegian Refugee Council and CARE (2019): No simple solutions. Women, displacement and durable solutions in South Sudan.

v)   Care (?): South Sudan. Gender in brief.

vi)   Human Rights Council (2019): Report of the commission on human rights in South Sudan. Page 6.

vii)   Human Rights Council (2019): Report of the commission on human rights in South Sudan. Page 4.

viii)   UN Press Releases (2019): South Sudan Peace Process 'Precarious' but Advancing after Leaders Recommit to Transitional Government, Top Official Tells Security Council.

ABOUT CORDAID

Cordaid strives to end poverty and exclusion. We do this in the world's most fragile and conflict-affected areas as well as in the Netherlands. We engage local communities to rebuild trust and resilience and increase people's self-reliance. Our professionals provide humanitarian assistance and create opportunities to improve security, healthcare and education and stimulate inclusive economic growth. We are supported by 288.000 private donors in the Netherlands and by a worldwide partner network. This gives us leverage and implementing power to solve problems and create structural change in the most challenging settings.

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