

Gender, violence and survival in Juba, South Sudan

Ellen Martin, Research Officer, Humanitarian Policy Group

Key messages

- Five years after the formal end of the Sudanese civil war, poverty, vulnerability and insecurity remain serious problems in Juba, the Southern capital.
- Incorporating gender analysis within assessment frameworks and conflict analyses can contribute to a more informed understanding amongst aid actors of the underlying dynamics of vulnerability and insecurity in Juba, and the different impacts rapid urbanisation and long-term conflict and displacement are having on men and women.
- Where they exist, current approaches to gender within policy and programming overwhelmingly focus on women. There are many areas where women have unequal positions in society. However, without a broader gender analysis, one that considers the needs of *both* men and women, assistance risks reinforcing negative patterns of need rather than actively helping to address them.

This HPG Policy Brief draws on the findings of field research carried out in May and June 2010 as part of a larger project on the social, economic and political consequences of urbanisation in four cities in Sudan, Juba, Nyala, Port Sudan and Khartoum.

For more information on HPG's work on gender, contact Ellen Martin (e.martin@odi.org.uk).

Overseas Development Institute

111 Westminster Bridge Road
London SE1 7JD
United Kingdom
Tel. +44 (0) 20 7922 0300
Fax. +44 (0) 20 7922 0399

Websites: www.odi.org.uk/hpg
and www.odihpn.org



The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 marked the end of 22 years of civil war in Southern Sudan between the government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). While officially a 'post-conflict' context, violence and displacement persist, and efforts to bring about a visible 'peace dividend' have had only marginal impact. As a referendum on independence for the South approaches in January 2011, the prospect of renewed conflict is a distinct concern.

Uncertainty about the future of the South is compounded by the very serious economic, social and governance problems the region faces. One consequence has been a rapid expansion in the population of the Southern capital, Juba, and a large increase in the numbers of urban poor in the town. Despite government efforts to support rural development and encourage agricultural production, as well as a significant aid presence in rural areas, the population of Juba is estimated to have more than doubled in five

years, from 250,000 in 2005 to over 500,000 in 2010. It is estimated that over 2 million IDPs and 200,000 refugees have returned to South Sudan since 2005, many of whom have chosen to live in Juba, hoping for better livelihoods, security and basic services than they can expect in their home areas.

Expectations of a better life have rarely been realised. Large numbers of Juba's residents live in overcrowded conditions, lack access to services and employment and are vulnerable to repeated displacement due to a lack of secure land tenure. The urban poor are also disproportionately affected by insecurity from crime, high levels of gun ownership and the absence of effective civilian rule of law mechanisms. Levels of violence are higher now than they were during the conflict.

With the 2011 referendum rapidly approaching there are expectations of a second large-scale return of the 1.5 million Southerners still residing in Khartoum or in the diaspora, and it is not unreasonable to expect that the rate

of Juba's population growth will again accelerate. As the possible future capital of a sovereign state the extreme vulnerabilities facing many of Juba's residents and chronic high levels of violence must be addressed. This paper argues that a gender perspective, and one that includes both women and men, is of particular importance in such a process, for two reasons.

First, incorporating gender into assessments of the needs and vulnerabilities of the urban poor will inform a better understanding of the causes of insecurity and violence, both at the household and broader levels. Men, both young and old, are vulnerable to being drawn into violence and frustrated at not being able to find employment and fulfil their role as the main breadwinner. At the household level, the consequences of poverty and daily struggles for survival are manifested through a breakdown in family structures, widespread drinking and domestic violence. At the community level, an emerging gang culture is testament to the social, political and economic marginalisation of young people, and young men in particular. At the institutional level, large numbers of soldiers live in Juba town, many of whom are only irregularly paid, and many civil servants are being laid off.

Second, when gender is considered, the focus tends to be on women's needs, and on promoting women's equality and empowerment, without sufficient consideration as to whether women are in fact always more vulnerable than men. The tendency to approach gender as a cause of violence, rather than as one dynamic of violence, has resulted in programmes that risk exacerbating tensions, for example by prioritising livelihoods support for women over men, whilst failing to address the dynamics of violence against women, for instance within the family. At the broader level, current approaches to gender also fail to recognise the levels of disenfranchisement and exclusion felt by many, not just by women but also by young men in particular. Incorporating a gender perspective into needs and conflict analysis can therefore also help inform more strategic peacebuilding programmes that recognise the diversity of people's needs and vulnerabilities.

Gender concepts within humanitarian and development programming

Most aid actors feature the empowerment of women and gender equality in their mission statements, and efforts to strengthen humanitarian coordination have also included attempts to adopt a more cohesive or 'mainstreamed' approach to

¹ Much of this section draws on E. O'Gorman and I. Clifton-Everest, *Review of Gender Issues and Strategies against Gender-based Violence in Humanitarian Interventions* (Brussels: ECHO, 2009).

gender issues.¹ Gender is usually defined as 'the socially constructed differences, as opposed to the biological ones, between women and men; this means differences that have been learned, are changeable over time, have wide variations both within and between cultures'.

Within humanitarian action, it is argued that introducing the concept of gender into assistance can help agencies avoid reinforcing negative patterns of power and vulnerability. A gender-oriented analysis can therefore help strengthen needs assessments by taking into account different gender identities, roles and responsibilities, and how they shape social power relations. It can also help to understand and address protection risks and threats, and understand the impact of aid interventions. For many agencies, approaches to empowerment and gender equality within humanitarian programmes remain grounded within a development policy framework. There is a strong emphasis on the rights and empowerment of women, on equal access to resources and on the need to draw on everyone's capacities in the cause of development.

While many gender policy statements say that they include both men and women, most focus more on women on the grounds that gender inequalities affect women more than men. UNICEF for instance emphasises protection of children and mothers in emergency activities because caring for children might be more difficult in a crisis context and because protecting mothers ensures protection for children as well. In development work, the focus is on girls' education, maternal and child health and promoting the decision-making role of women within households. UNHCR's framework is also grounded in human rights approaches, in that it sees equality of rights and empowerment as necessary for the protection of female refugees and IDPs. UNHCR carries out community sensitisation around inequality, and supports self-help initiatives. At the state level, it advocates for the provision of legal support for women.

Women are seen to be particularly vulnerable in urban areas. The Beijing Platform for Action, for example, states that women are more vulnerable to wage discrimination and segregation in labour markets,² while UNESCO notes that women are vulnerable to the environmental hazards of urbanisation as they spend more time than men do at home in overcrowded informal settlements.³ Women-headed households are becoming more common in urban areas. According to a UN Habitat

² BPFA, *Beijing Platform For Action – Declaration on Women*, 1995.

³ UNESCO, *Women and Urban Crises: Gender Sensitive Strategies for Managing Critical Urban Environments in the South and in Eastern Europe*, 2003.

survey, on average 20% of urban households in developing countries are headed by women, and suffer disproportionately from poor housing and services and insecure tenure.⁴ Organisations promoting women's rights, for instance to housing or economic opportunities, argue that doing so will help them reduce their own vulnerability and ensure that urban areas develop into vibrant and equitable environments.⁵ However, the findings from recent research on urbanisation in Juba challenge some of these assumptions.

Juba in times of 'war' and 'peace'

Juba's experiences during the conflict and the post-CPA period are in some ways a mirror image of those of South Sudan more broadly. An isolated garrison centre during the conflict, Juba was the most secure town in the region, and a magnet for a large number of IDPs as well as refugees. After the signing of the CPA, the town has been transformed. The economy has boomed, driven by the influx of businesses, government officials and aid actors. In parallel, however, insecurity and crime have risen markedly, mainly affecting the urban poor, whose numbers have increased dramatically over the past five years. The reality of day-to-day life for the urban poor and the chronic levels of insecurity they suffer remain largely invisible to international agencies, who often believe that urban residents are better off than their counterparts in rural areas.

Juba is increasingly taking on the characteristics of a developing-country town. Neighbourhoods tend to reflect the socio-economic status of their inhabitants according to the pattern laid out by the old colonial land classification system, with the better-off concentrated in large, demarcated plots around the centre of town, and poorer residents in the more densely populated areas on the outskirts. For this group at the periphery, access to livelihoods and services is difficult. As the outskirts of the city are not classified for town planning purposes, there are no roads, basic services or facilities. There are serious health and sanitation risks in these areas, including cholera outbreaks.

The following section shows how extreme levels of poverty in combination with changing gender roles and the monopolisation of power and resources by a select few has contributed to new levels of violence at both the household and community levels.

Urban livelihoods and gender roles

Whilst agrarian livelihoods, including pastoralism and subsistence farming, used to be dominant

⁴ UN-HABITAT, *Global Report on Human Settlements 2009: Planning Sustainable Cities (Abridged Edition)*, 2009.

⁵ UN-HABITAT, *State of the World's Cities 2008/2009: Harmonious Cities*, 2008.

activities for many, traditional ways of life have now firmly changed. The long conflict and resulting forced displacement have meant that many families have lost their cattle wealth. As Juba expands it is absorbing land traditionally used for agriculture, and empty spaces in and around the city that were previously used for cultivation are rapidly becoming residential plots. Some areas on the outskirts have become too insecure for cultivation.

The growing numbers of urban poor are locked in a cycle of falling incomes, unemployment and rising living costs. As during the war, the urban economy is dominated by small-scale activities including firewood collection, charcoal making, petty trade and alcohol brewing.⁶ While goods are in plentiful supply, and economic sectors including construction, vehicles and electronics are expanding, the majority of Juba's residents are still involved in semi- and unskilled work, and are facing growing competition as the town's population grows.

The particular characteristics of urbanisation and conflict and their implications for livelihoods-related vulnerabilities are important to gender analysis as they have had a significant impact on gender roles. These effects were already apparent almost a decade ago, when a 2001 study carried out by ACORD found that the move to an urban cash economy resulted in greater dependence on petty trade by women. Men were increasingly unable to fulfil the roles expected of them as providers and protectors of their families, and women were replacing them as the main breadwinners. Young people were being prevented from accessing education, vocational training and jobs, and, in the case of young men, turning to the army as a source of employment.⁷

Since 2005, these trends have become firmly entrenched. Increasing numbers of women are engaged in informal livelihood activities, and many run small businesses in the market. Some women also report using micro-finance loans to set up in business, whilst a small number have found employment with one of the many restaurants and bars that have sprung up in the past few years. As more women are earning an income, so more are providing for their families as their husbands are no longer able to do so. Access to public sector jobs, previously an important source of employment for men, has become difficult as the Central Equatoria State government can no longer afford to pay salaries to all its staff, and the Governor of Juba has issued an order to reduce the state government workforce from 19,000 to 10,000.

⁶ J. El-Bushra and I. Sahl, *Cycles of Violence: Gender Relations and Armed Conflict* (Nairobi: ACORD, 2001).

⁷ *Ibid.*

Large numbers of young men are also unemployed, and competition for jobs has become increasingly fierce, with higher qualifications being demanded. Most male youth, if employed, are engaged in casual labour, where wage rates are extremely low. Formal private sector employment opportunities have been scarce. Even though more private companies are making a conscious effort to employ local Sudanese, workers from East Africa are often cheaper and have better skills.

Gender identities

The coming together in Juba of diverse population groups with different life experiences has meant, in the words of one woman, that there is now greater 'social freedom' and acceptance of differences in traditions and cultural norms, and greater opportunities for learning from each other. Women's greater economic role was pointed out by both men and women as a positive development, and an example of the attitudinal change in Sudanese society as a result of urbanisation and people's experiences during displacement. Since Juba became the capital of South Sudan, women are playing a much more visible role in politics, and international actors have actively promoted the participation of women in government. Some women who previously were very active within the SPLM/A or civil society groups hold ministerial posts, and campaign and work within the town.

For the majority of women, however, these trends do not mean that attitudes towards gender roles and behaviours have made a clear break with tradition, or led to a better quality of life. Rates of divorce and family separation are on the rise, and the traditional family unit is fragmenting. Men without an occupation and skills find it difficult to cope with the demands of town life, particularly as they cannot fulfil the responsibilities associated with being the head of the family. One man described the extent of this change when he said that 'men are even doing domestic work while women collect firewood'. For some the idea of taking on work traditionally associated with women, such as plaiting hair and carrying water, was very difficult to accept. One respondent noted that he would only do such work if he was sure he would not be recognised. Another said that it was 'shameful' for men to carry goods on their heads, as women do. As another respondent explained, the impact has been that men feel they are losing their right to make decisions because they do not earn an income, and in turn therefore have no value.

As the next section shows, the changing gender roles brought about by urbanisation and conflict, high and chronic levels of poverty and prevailing

attitudes and expectations are all feeding into a cycle of violence and risky coping strategies.

Drivers of exclusion and violence

Insecurity in Juba affects people of all ages, male and female. However, different forms of violence affect women and men in different ways. For men and women, the challenges of urban life and changing gender roles have contributed to an increase in domestic violence, compounded by alcohol. In one group discussion, respondents attributed domestic violence to the fact that women were supporting the family, with 'the husbands idle, drinking from the morning'. At the community level, the disintegration of family units and social exclusion have manifested themselves in a new form of social structure, namely a gang culture, particular amongst young urban men. Many respondents reported that young males were dropping out of school because they could not afford the fees and transport costs involved. Drinking is widespread.

The easy availability of small arms compounds these problems. Residents report regularly hearing gunshots at night, and people being killed in gun fights. In some areas people report being ambushed and attacked at night, and self-imposed curfews are in place. Soldiers were cited as greatly contributing to insecurity, spending afternoons in drinking lodges, refusing to pay for goods, harassing women and stealing. In some parts of Juba's outskirts communities mentioned cattle rustling as a contributing factor in insecurity. While conflict over water and grazing land is often believed to lie behind cattle rustling, it is in fact a symptom of the inability of young men to acquire bride wealth in the form of cattle. Following the CPA, cattle ownership has become concentrated in the hands of high-ranking SPLM and government officials, whose rush to invest in livestock drove up prices to levels unaffordable to many. One of the few ways to gain cattle wealth is therefore to steal it. As one young man in Gumbo put it: 'life becomes difficult at every step – you are expected to work, to get married and to have a family, these are too many expectations'. Men are also vulnerable to manipulation by powerful political and economic actors. Soldiers and young men are acting as 'middlemen' for commanders, politicians and businessmen seeking to acquire land, either through evicting residents or owners by force, scouting out areas in attractive locations and identifying who might more easily be chased off, buying land illegally or acting as guards for land plots.

Violence at both the household and broader levels can therefore be seen as a symptom of the frustrations men feel at not being able to fulfil their expected roles as family providers. It also serves

an economic function, and a means through which to secure an income.

Gender within international aid policies and programmes

Overall, the impact of conflict and urbanisation on gender roles, and how these two phenomena feed into dynamics of vulnerability and insecurity in Juba, remains poorly understood. Where they exist, policies and programmes incorporating gender overwhelmingly focus on women and addressing women's inequality in society. This is not to say that there are not many areas where women have unequal positions in society. However, when the majority of policy and programming approaches incorporate gender components related to promoting women's rights and empowerment only, without including a broader gender analysis, they fail to adequately recognise the diversity of vulnerabilities and needs, and in some instances risk exacerbating inequalities and compounding tensions. While women are of course vulnerable in many ways that men are not, it would be wrong to assume that men are less vulnerable *just because they are men*.

Micro-finance has been identified as a key means of supporting the livelihoods of poor people within the GoSS Private Sector Development Strategy (PSDP), and is supported by the Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) and USAID. One of the explicit aims of micro-finance programming is to promote the economic empowerment of women.⁸ In relation to this objective, the project has made a significant proportion of micro-loans available to women only. Three micro-finance institutions provide loans in Juba: the Bangladesh Rural Cooperative (BRAC), Finance Sudan Ltd and the Sudan Microfinance Institution (SUMI). BRAC is the largest, with 17 branches within Central Equatoria State and over 14,000 members across South Sudan. Its loans are made available exclusively to women. Finance Sudan Ltd reserves three-quarters of its loans for women. Likewise, SUMI makes 'special efforts' to provide loans for women.⁹

Closer attention to gender issues would highlight the risks inherent in this women-centred approach, and the tensions it can cause between men and women. While some women reach agreement with their husbands on the loan and share the money, others choose to 'go on their own'. More generally, while men supported the idea of loans being provided for women, they could not understand why they were not allowed to access them as well. Being excluded from access to cash, vital in the urban economy, is leading to ever-greater feelings of frustration. As one husband put it: 'if I get angry about this, is it wrong

that I beat my wife?'. In addition, men felt that these loans were not helping the family. For many women, paying back micro-loans is a real struggle, and eventually increases the burden on the household budget, making less money available for other family expenditures, such as food and school fees. As such, while micro-finance may indeed be a useful and important component of supporting livelihoods recovery, programmes need to be designed on the basis of careful assessments of their economic viability, as well as the vulnerabilities of all the urban poor, including men.

Assessments need to be better linked with conflict analyses incorporating a balanced gender perspective. The UN Population Fund (UNFPA), for example, has supported the training of special police units in four locations in Juba to deal with cases of gender-based violence. Health workers have also been trained to deal with sexual abuse.¹⁰ The programme recognises that few women can access courts or hospitals, but it does not give detailed consideration to the dynamics of violence against women specifically, or to the vulnerability of other people to insecurity more broadly. Sexual and gender-based violence does not exist in isolation; rather, it is one manifestation of a complex pattern of violence affecting both men and women.

Moves are also under way to promote equal citizenship rights. A new constitutional provision stipulates that women must occupy at least 30% of decision-making positions at all levels of government and in government commissions. Clearly, women have traditionally not been able to exercise their full citizenship rights, and very few have held official positions or had the freedom to exercise the right of political participation. However, during more than two decades of war the majority of Southern Sudanese, both men and women, were prevented from exercising these rights. In a context like Southern Sudan, it is not gender alone that dictates participation in politics and governance. For the Catholic Church, which is actively engaged in promoting equality and women's rights in Juba, the 30% quota does not really address inequality as it does not actively support opportunities for *all* citizens to compete at the same level for government jobs.

Women's unequal status within customary law has also attracted a great deal of attention, in particular their exclusion from land ownership. In the urban context of Juba, however, unequal rights to land is a problem facing all urban poor, and many lack secure tenure. Land being claimed by the expanding town, and owned communally under customary law, is vulnerable to land-grabbing due to the loopholes created by overlapping legal systems, and only

⁸ GoSS Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Supply, *Private Sector Development Strategy for South Sudan*, 2007.

⁹ SUMI, *Sudan Microfinance Institute Profile*, 2007.

those with resources and powerful connections are able to acquire plots. Access to justice for the urban poor is compromised due to corruption in the legal system.

Conclusions

Clearly, the social, political and economic position of women in Southern Sudan is changing. Women are playing a more prominent role in development and peace-building activities, and are demanding more equal treatment, in terms of education opportunities for example. Conversely, traditional male roles are coming under increasing pressure. More aid actors are now aware of the detrimental impacts of emphasising the needs of women over those of men without an adequate assessment of needs and causes of vulnerability, and more are incorporating gender issues into conflict analysis. SIDA, for example, has made a point of better incorporating the needs of men and young people into its gender work. However, there is still a long way to go, not least in relation to peacebuilding efforts.

To mark the tenth anniversary of UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security on 8 October 2010, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon noted that: 'Ensuring women's participation in peacebuilding is not only a matter of women's and girls' rights. Women are crucial partners in shoring up three pillars of lasting peace: economic recovery, social cohesion and political legitimacy'. Moreover, 'peacebuilding strategies cannot be fully "owned" if half the nation is not actively involved in their design and implementation'.¹¹ Renewed attention on the importance of civic participation and inclusion in

peacebuilding processes is welcome. However, there has been a tendency to emphasise women's empowerment during peacebuilding efforts. Unless men are also supported in rebuilding or securing new livelihoods which enable them to exercise the roles expected of them as men, such approaches risk achieving little in terms of longer-term recovery.

Supporting livelihoods is a core component of both humanitarian and development strategies in South Sudan. As such, it is particularly important to ensure that a gender approach looks at the needs of males and females equally, rather than making assumptions about women's vulnerabilities. This would ensure that international interventions are better able to harness the opportunities and identify the obstacles that urbanisation and conflict present to women and men, and their role in fuelling insecurity. Gender analysis must be part of conflict assessments, needs assessments and other vulnerability frameworks; participatory approaches must be developed, and international actors should stress the importance of male and female equality to ensure that both men and women have a say in decision-making processes. Livelihoods support in particular should include consideration of the needs of the growing number of urban poor, particularly young males, who at present rely on the informal economy or are unemployed. How males and females can best be supported in gaining skills and access to employment in all sectors of the economy is therefore key.

¹¹ Report of the Secretary-General, *Women's Participation in Peacebuilding*, General Assembly Security Council, Sixty-fifth session, A/65/354-S/2010/466 (New York: United Nations, 2010).