

THE IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT ON SOUTH SUDANESE WOMEN

An overwhelming majority of South Sudanese women voted in a January 2011 referendum to separate and become Africa's number 54th country. Women of South Sudan had a high expectation for a better life in the new country such as peace and security, equal opportunity in health care, education and greater participation in decision making, promotion and protection of women's life.

With the onset of the 15th December 2013 conflict, the situation of South Sudanese women deteriorated dangerously, Women are being raped to inflict pain and humiliation. The consequences of the conflict for the civilian population have been devastating. There have been attacks on hospitals, churches, mosques, and United Nations'he consequences of the conflinconflict have committed acts of rape and other forms of sexual violence against women from different ethnic groups. More than 10,000 people were estimated to have been killed and around 1.9 million displaced throughout the country and 500,000 outside the country. Most of them are women.

Women are not only targets of sexual violence and abuse; the conflict has also disrupted their gender roles. As the violence erupted, women suddenly became the heads of household. For example, many women were forced to flee their towns and seek protection for their children and themselves at the UNMISS compounds in Malakal, Rubkona, Bor and Juba, while their husbands and sons were killed or recruited. Young girls who lost their parents also became the main breadwinners for their siblings. The conflict has also had an adverse effect on the socio-economic status and health of women. The complete destruction of livelihoods has led to extreme poverty, reversal of the limited socio-economic developments, and continuous psychosocial trauma for women. Gender-based violence (GBV), including rape, sexual harassment, intimate partner violence and early marriage, has already been widespread in South Sudan before the crisis. This number is likely to increase due to high insecurity, and the loss of community protection mechanisms as a result of the conflict

UNMISS provided protection of Civilian (PoC) within its premises; but outside the PoC , women and girls faced additional risks from mostly armed actors and host community tribes, also women and girls experience high risks of violence, particularly sexual violence inside the PoC and it made them feel unsafe.

Women have the right to life, free movement, safety and access to food; all the basic rights are denied to women during the conflict. Women who were agriculturalists or doing small businesses had lost it all. The same case is in the capital Juba women face the consequences of the conflict day by day the prices of everything is sky rocketing and the country's economic is fast deteriorating, there is an increased alcohol and drug abuse, robbery and high levels of criminality contributing to insecurity of women.

Women activists are not exceptional, they also face threat and challenges of freedom of expression, movement no access to information especially women at the grassroots are not aware about what is going on in the country as far as the political situation is concerned.

Much as South Sudan women and girls are mostly victims of violence, they also take on multiple roles during the current conflict. Apart from taking care of the family, nursing the wounded soldiers and cooking for them, some women are actual combatants along their male counterparts, while other women took the role of advocating for peace both within the country and at the peace table.

While a final peace agreement is yet to be reached, the South Sudanese women present at the negotiations table have been vocal in raising issues concerning the impact of conflict on women, especially the issues around transitional justice, reconciliation and healing, reparation for war survivors, and transitional security arrangements. They are also lobbying for 40 percent women's representation in all institutions of the Transitional Government of National Unity (TGONU), including in ministerial positions. Women have also called for an adequate representation in the monitoring of the implementation of the peace agreement. Women's groups and coalitions such as the South Sudan Women Platform for Peace (SSWPP) have been actively lobbying within the country, as well as in Addis Ababa, to ensure that women's positions and interests are guaranteed in the peace agreement and in its implementation. Recently women's call for the appointment of a senior Gender Advisor had been heard and recruitment is underway.

In conclusion the conflict has destroyed the social fabric of the South Sudanese communities and severely damaged livelihoods of women. It is continuously produce traumatized and psychologically affected children women, widows and orphans, who need rehabilitation, medical and psychosocial support, in order to be able to peacefully work and live in their communities.