

# Security, Basic Services and Economic Opportunity in South Sudan:

## Perspectives of Women Post- Independence and Pre-Civil War

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July 2014



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## Abstract

Based on public opinion polling from November 2011 and February 2013, this report describes and analyzes the status and perceptions of women in South Sudan related to security, access to basic services and economic empowerment. Focusing on the critical period between independence and the outbreak of civil war, the paper identifies trends between the two waves of data and highlights the important role public opinion research plays in understanding the well-being of women and communities writ large. The research and analysis presented here is an interdisciplinary effort that combines public opinion primary research with secondary resources on women, peace and security, conflict resolution, and human development. In doing so, this report serves as an evidence-based, practically applicable tool for gender-sensitive conflict prevention, crisis response and post-conflict reconstruction.

## Introduction

In December 2013, the world's youngest independent country – South Sudan – disintegrated into civil war after an alleged coup attempt by then Vice President Riek Machar against incumbent President Salva Kiir. Since then, more than a million people have been displaced, tens of thousands of people are estimated to have been killed<sup>1</sup>, and up to six million<sup>2</sup> are thought to require humanitarian assistance. There has been a complete political breakdown as well as a deepening of social divides, particularly along ethnic lines. The International Crisis Group notes that the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has been hosting “almost 70,000 civilians fleeing ethnic reprisals, but its badly outgunned peacekeepers are no match for the thousands of heavily armed forces and militias.”<sup>3</sup>

One constant, salient aspect of the volatile situation in South Sudan that preceded the most recent outbreak of civil war is the exclusion of women from the conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and statebuilding processes. Women were, and remain, underrepresented in the current government and in the internationally brokered high level peace negotiations hosted in Addis Ababa. Despite comprising more than sixty percent of the population, women have also been politically, economically and socially marginalized in the pre- and post-independence periods of South Sudan's history. Yet, women – as in other scenarios of violent conflict and humanitarian crisis – are especially vulnerable to violent attacks, along with children, the elderly, the disabled, and ethnic or religious minorities. During the continuing civil war, numerous reports of targeted sexual violence against women have emerged, and as millions of families flee their home, women increasingly assume responsibility of dependent family members. Though women do not represent a monolithic group with a singular voice, they are a significant demographic of the population and their well being matters for the health of the country.

This study is based on public opinion data collected by D3 Systems in two waves – first in November 2011 and then again in February 2013. This is an important period in the history of South Sudan because the first wave of data collection occurred soon after the country's independence whereas the second wave of data collection occurred shortly after the outbreak of civil war in December 2013. The report examines three key issue areas: 1) security, 2) access to basic services, and 3) economic opportunity. The data, analysis and findings presented in the study provide a descriptive and analytical overview of: 1) the status of South Sudanese women during this critical time frame; 2) their perception of their country's well-being based on key indicators, and 3) their self-perception of their own well-being. The first wave of the poll surveyed a total sample of 1,050 South Sudanese people from five key cities- Juba, Malkal, Rumbek, Yambio and

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Kulish. "New Estimate Sharply Raises Death Toll in South Sudan." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 09 Jan. 2014. Web. 01 May 2014.

<sup>2</sup> International Crisis Group. *South Sudan: A Civil War By Any Other Name*. Rep. no. 217. International Crisis Group, 10 Apr. 2014. Web. 01 May 2014. 14.

<sup>3</sup> International Crisis Group. *South Sudan*. i.

Wau. The second wave of 1100 individuals includes a rural sample, 550 interviews allocated to urban areas and another 550 to rural areas. This report focuses exclusively on answers provided by women, approximately half of the sample, and does not aim to draw comparisons between men and women but rather assess women as a distinct demographic in a conflict-affected, fragile context.

The data collection and analysis undertaken to form this report represents an important endeavor because it is crucial for policymakers, on-the-ground practitioners and scholars to better understand how women fared during this critical time in South Sudan's nascent history and how they perceived their own well-being and that of their families, as well as the well-being of their country. While the study does not draw any causal relationships between the answers collected in the public opinion polling sets and the outbreak of civil war shortly thereafter, there are telling pieces of information that can be gleaned about stability and security in South Sudan. The public opinion survey provides a window into daily, lived realities of the population in question. As the international community and the South Sudanese government grapple with the challenges of the on-going violent conflict that has engulfed the world's newest nation, this study is a timely and telling contribution to understanding the status of women.

Women comprise half the world's population; their experiences, needs, talents and perspectives during conflict and in the aftermath of war are fundamental to establishing an accurate historical record, devising solutions to humanitarian, political, and socioeconomic challenges that serve the needs of affected populations, and building a sustainable peace. The UN Security Council, the highest international body responsible for maintaining security and restoring peace, formally acknowledged this truth in 2000 through passage of landmark Resolution 1325. UNSCR 1325 recognized that women not only suffer the worst of fates in war, violent conflicts, political upheavals and humanitarian emergencies but that they are also an indispensable resource to create peace, ensuring rule of law, building democratic societies and promoting stability. By combining public opinion data with political analysis, this report contextualizes the status, safety and viability of women in one of the most insecure, unstable and underdeveloped regions of the world.

## Historical background

South Sudan became independent on July 9, 2011, after some fifty years of violent conflict. The Southern Sudan Autonomous Region was demarcated in 1972 after the First Sudanese Civil War ended but lasted only a decade before the Second Sudanese Civil War commenced, which lasted for more than twenty years. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 brought with it a six-year interim ceasefire period that was followed by official handover of power from The Sudan to the Republic of South Sudan. In addition to The Sudan, the Republic of South Sudan shares borders with Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Suffice to say, the region is a hotbed of violent conflict, which contributes to the instability within South Sudan. The territory that today constitutes South Sudan is comprised of ten states: Northern Babr el Ghazal, Western Babr el Ghazal, Warrap, Lakes, Jonglei, Unity, Upper Nile, Eastern Equatoria, Western Equatoria, and Central Equatoria (where the capital, Juba, is located).

Human development indicators in South Sudan since independence are extremely low. The country's GDP per capita in 2013 was \$1,350, making it 170<sup>th</sup> in the world, according to the International Monetary Fund. South Sudanese people face a significant shortage of food that has been highly exacerbated by the outbreak of civil war. Access to water is also restricted for a majority of the population and the country faces a water crisis. According to the International Crisis Group, almost two-thirds of South Sudan is "inaccessible during the rainy season" and remote areas are "insecure because they are inaccessible, and state structures, including law enforcement have little if any capacity to access or intervene when conflict occurs."<sup>4</sup> In the post-independence cabinet, women held only five out of 29 ministerial positions and ten out of 28 deputy ministerial positions. Women are even less represented in political institutions at local or sub-national levels.<sup>5</sup> The underrepresentation of women in political institutions, especially elected office, undermines democratic, participatory and inclusive governance. At the same time, it is important to remember that issues that affect women are issues that affect entire societies; this includes security.

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<sup>4</sup> Relief Web. *Gender Assessment and Needs Analysis in the Context of the South Sudan Humanitarian Crisis*. Publication. 20 Feb. 2014. Web.

<sup>5</sup> Beny Gideon Mabor. "Women and Political Leadership in Africa: A Demand In South Sudan Transitional Democracy." *Sudan Tribune*. Sudan Tribune, 22 Apr. 2013. Web. 1 May 2014.

## Security

The ongoing civil war broke out on 15 December 2013 after violent skirmishes between rival factions within the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in the capital city of Juba. On 16 December 2013, President Kiir claimed Vice President Machar had orchestrated a coup d'état on national television. Although Machar initially denied these charges, he emerged as leader of the opposition to Kiir and his forces mobilized and gained control over Jonglei, Upper Nile and Unity states. Through regional and international initiative, a ceasefire was negotiated and brokered in January 2014 in Addis Ababa. This, however, was only one step in a long, complex and unfinished peace process. By March 2014, peace talks stalled and the humanitarian situation in South Sudan remained dire, with signs of worsening.

Shortly after the second wave of data for this project was collected, South Sudan descended into a brutal civil war, as described previously. The humanitarian toll of this ongoing conflict has been vast. The heightened insecurity affects men and women in certain ways that are similar and others that are different. One particular security threat that has disproportionately affected women during both violent conflict and cessation of hostilities is sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). In the most recent outbreak of conflict, widespread instances of gender-based violence have been reported and patterns of violence suggest that combatants have used rape as a tool of warfare. Considering all of this, it is useful to better understand how women viewed security and experienced insecurity between 2011 and 2013, in the period during which the public opinion polling was conducted.

The data shows a steep and pronounced decline in women's perceptions of security at national and community levels. The data also shows a decrease in trust amongst respondents in the ability of national defense institutions – including civilian and military – to protect them. Trends from a number of different metrics all point to increasing anxiety surrounding security issues. For example, although 72% percent of women responded “strongly agree” when asked in 2011 if they thought the South Sudanese government could protect its citizens, by 2013 they were less sure; fewer than 60% responded “strongly agree.” When asked what area the government should be spending most money on, the percentage of women who felt improving security was the highest priority doubled from 5% in 2011 to 10% in 2013.

When asked to identify sources of insecurity, in both 2011 and 2013, women overwhelmingly identified Northern Sudan as the greatest threat to their country's security. More precisely, 84% of respondents identified Northern Sudan as the greatest threat to security in 2011 and this rose to 89% in 2013. This seems to indicate that tensions in the post-independence period have been and remain high between The Sudan and South Sudan. One of the main points of contention is how to divide revenues generated from oil and the mining of natural minerals. Border disputes also pose a type of persistent governance challenge and security risk for populations that live in border regions of both countries. The current wave of violence South Sudan is experiencing was however not triggered by any one single cause or instigated by one particular external

actor. Rather, the civil war is being fought at a communal level with multiple forces contributing to conflict and manifesting in a way that specifically targets civilians, and increasingly, women.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to concurrently analyze how women perceived security within their own communities at a sub-national level. Women, across the board, rated the security of their neighborhoods lower in 2013 compared to 2011. In 2011, some 28% of women rated neighborhood security “Somewhat Bad” or “Very Bad” but this rose to 39% in 2013. In answering a separate but related question, only 26% of women in 2013 said the level of security in their neighborhood had improved in the last 6 months, compared to 44% who said the same in 2011. Conversely, the percent of respondents who said the level had gotten worse in the past six months jumped from 16% in 2011 to 32% in 2013. Approaching this perceived decline in security from a human security angle can be particularly useful for early warning monitoring of impending conflicts.

Human security is a broader conceptualization of what it means to be safe and secure that shifts focus away from exclusively being on the state-level to the community or even individual level. The notion of human security is based on “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want” by taking into account social and economic factors alongside physical, legal and political factors.<sup>7</sup> Measuring security from a more traditional standpoint by focusing on military strength, territorial integrity or geopolitical rivalries – while important – tends to marginalize women’s lived experiences and the various types of insecurities that can affect their daily lives. For women in particular, perceptions of neighborhood security are an important metric to measure and analyze. Public opinion research can be a useful vehicle for measuring human security to in turn serve as a predictor of impending violence and, therefore, it is important to survey both men and women. This does not necessitate asking men and women the exact same questions about their personal well being or their perceived well being of their society or country. Men and women experience security differently, during war and in peacetime. Integrating gender sensitivity into early warning monitoring systems can enhance the ability of researchers, policymakers and humanitarian professionals to devise timely, appropriate and proportional responses that are attuned to the needs of both men and women.<sup>8</sup>

According to focus group research conducted by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in 2011, community security shifted following independence. As one participant stated “There was only one enemy before the CPA, but now there is insecurity everywhere. Even neighbors are becoming enemies.”<sup>9</sup> NDI’s focus group data reinforces the public opinion polling conducted for this report with regard to respondents’ trust in local police. In the D3 surveys, 60% of respondents identified police as primarily

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<sup>6</sup>Jason Straziuso. "Apr. 22, 2014 5:29 PM ET "Piles and Piles' of Bodies in S. Sudan Slaughter." *Associated Press*. Associated Press, 22 Apr. 2014. Web. 1 May 2014.

<sup>7</sup>*Human Security Now*. Publication. New York: Commission on Human Security, 2003. Web. 1 May 2014.

<sup>8</sup>Susan Schmeidl, and Eugenia Piza-Lopez. *Gender and Conflict Early Warning: A Framework for Action*. N.p.: International Alert and The Swiss Peace Foundation, 2002. Web. 1 May 2014.

<sup>9</sup>Traci D Cook. *Building a Nation: South Sudanese Share Their Thoughts on the Creation of a Successful State*. Publication. Washington, DC: National Democratic Institute, 2011. Web. 1 May 2014.

responsible for providing security in their neighborhood. While 50% of respondents thought the police “very trustworthy” in 2011, the figure dropped to 40% in 2013 as the group who thought police “not very” or “not at all” trustworthy grew from 16% to 24%. Likewise, those who thought the military “very trustworthy” dropped from 52.7% to 37% between 2011 and 2013 as those who thought the military untrustworthy rose from 14% to 27%. By 2013 women were also far less likely to endorse violent acts. In 2011, 34% responded that violent action was “sometimes necessary to protect the interests of someone like me,” but in 2013 that number had dropped to 15% and respondents who “strongly disagree” with the statement jumped from 17% to 47%.

Today, international aid groups working in the region identify violence against women as an escalating crisis, though most admit exact numbers are difficult to verify. Recent reports from the UN indicate that radio broadcasts have urged violence, and specifically “vengeful sexual violence against women from [other communities].”<sup>10</sup> In other words, people are being mobilized to use sexual violence as a means to a political end. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) reports anecdotally that violence against women is endemic in the refugee camps in which they have conducted assessments, but with few or no avenues through which women can report these crimes, it is almost impossible to gauge the true scale of the problem. 11

Public opinion polling has the potential to play an important role in understanding and combatting widespread violence against women. More often than not, data collection on traditional security misses the factors that impact women’s lives most intimately. Surveying women on the sensitive topic of sexual assault comes with its own set of well-documented methodological considerations, as it is a topic that many women are unwilling to discuss, or that can ostracize respondents because of social taboos surrounding rape.<sup>12</sup> However, even without directly asking difficult questions of victims, there are a number of metrics concerning human security that can greatly enhance existing data on traditional security, and can most effectively be collected through public opinion research. Perceptions of community security, accessibility to justice mechanisms, availability of adequate maternal healthcare, anxiety about tasks such as gathering firewood or attending school (both of which are sometimes correlated with high instances of sexual assault), and intimate-partner violence can serve as proxies to measure women’s security which can serve as a precursor to, or predictor of communal violence.

Physical and socioeconomic security is closely linked to the ability of people to access basic needs and services. Public opinion research can be a useful tool to understand the availability and accessibility of services as well as the way in which people perceive the government’s ability to provide such services.

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<sup>10</sup> James Copnall. "South Sudan's Massacre among Many." *Al Jazeera*. Al Jazeera, 23 Apr. 2014. Web. 01 May 2014.

<sup>11</sup> International Rescue Committee. *Violence against Women and Girls in South Sudan*. Publication. London: International Rescue Committee, 2012. Web. 1 May 2014. From Harm to Home.

<sup>12</sup> World Health Organization. *WHO Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Researching, Documenting and Monitoring Sexual Violence in Emergencies*. Rep. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2007. Web. 1 May 2014.

## Access to basic needs and services

Access to basic needs, such as food, clean water, healthcare and education, is a significant challenge in South Sudan, where the majority of the country's population lives in poverty. Yet, the public opinion research conducted for this report suggests there is a gap between perceptions and reality in terms of access to services and the role of government in providing access to them. In the first wave of data collected, 42% of women reported that their households could not afford the basic amenities they needed. This figure rose to 45% in the second wave. More specifically, 36% of respondents reported having enough money to afford food, but still struggled to buy other goods in 2013. And yet, the vast majority of women polled thought the South Sudanese government was successful in providing basic services (79% in 2011, 77% in 2013). Within this overwhelming majority the proportion of those who thought the government was "very successful" decreased between 2011 and 2013 from 41% to 28% whereas the proportion of respondents who thought the government was "somewhat successful" increased from 38% to 49%. It is difficult to account with certainty for these changes between the first and second waves of data collection. However, one possible explanation is that in 2011, soon after independence, there was a general sense of optimism about the country's future and respondents had a higher regard for the government. A closer examination of specific categories of services – shelter, water, nutrition and health, education, and employment – provides a more detailed picture of reality on the ground.

### *Shelter*

Women were shown to be increasingly dissatisfied with their ability to access adequate shelter, with the number of dissatisfied women growing from 43% to 51%. Their ability to access electricity for their homes also decreased significantly, with dissatisfaction regarding access to electricity rising from 64% to 80% of women polled. Access to adequate cooking fuel remained difficult, but steady, with around 63% of women polled in both waves declaring they were dissatisfied with their ability to procure cooking fuel. Finally, answering a question only asked in 2013, 31% of women declared they had access to a telephone at home, whether through a landline or a cellular telephone.

### *Water, nutrition and, access to healthcare*

With regards to access to clean water, food and healthcare, notable progress appears to have been made in access to water, but very little appears to have changed in other areas. For example, in 2011, 56% of respondents were satisfied with their ability to access clean and safe drinking water. In 2013, this number rose to 70% of respondents. It is unclear from the survey to what factor(s) respondents attribute this improvement. In answer to a question asked exclusively in 2013, 14% of women polled said they had access to clean water at home and 12% were able to access clean water within 5 minutes of their homes. 57% of women could access water in under an hour, and 15% needed

to travel over an hour to find clean water supplies. It is clear from this polling, therefore, that the majority of respondents have limited or very limited access to water on a daily basis.

Satisfaction with access to food decreased slightly between 2011 and 2013, from 75% to 69%. Here, as was mentioned earlier, it is worthwhile to note that while overall satisfaction varies only slightly, the number of women reporting they were “very satisfied” decreased by 12 points from 31% to 19%, while the number of those who reported being “somewhat satisfied” rose from 44% to 50%. In 2013, respondents were asked about the distance required to travel to access food. 43% percent of women reported having to travel less than 30 minutes to acquire food for their households, 19% travelled up to an hour, and 35% travelled over an hour to access food. The survey did not discern, however, whether food was obtained from markets, humanitarian donors or other sources and, moreover, the questions asked do not clarify whether time traveled was on foot or via other means of transportation.

A small and steady majority of 53 % of women polled was satisfied with its ability to access health care. The government of South Sudan was perceived by respondents to be successful in providing healthcare in both waves of data collection. In this field, too, there was a decrease in the number of women who consider the government “very successful” at providing healthcare from 42% to 28%, and an increase in the number of respondents who perceived the government to be only “somewhat successful” from 36% to 49%. In 2013, the survey showed that healthcare facilities remain far out of reach of many of the respondents’ homes and require lengthy travel time. When, respondents were asked how long they had to travel to access healthcare facilities for women, 26% said healthcare facilities were reachable within 30 minutes of their home. For 26% of women, travel time to access healthcare facilities was between 30 minutes and an hour. 40% of women declared they had to travel for over an hour to access healthcare. It is worth noting that the distance traveled to access healthcare facilities for men and children were not significantly different from the ones given above. This can also explain why “building hospitals” was consistently the second highest ranked answer when respondents were asked what the South Sudanese government should spend the most money on. This is unsurprising because of the lack of medical care facilities available to citizens of South Sudan, especially in rural areas. Moreover, South Sudan ranks the highest in the world for maternal mortality<sup>13</sup> and only 6% of children in South Sudan are fully immunized.<sup>14</sup>

## Education

The level of education of the general population of South Sudan, and of South Sudanese women in particular, decreased between the two waves of data, most likely as a result of the greater rural sampling in wave 2. In 2011, 49% of women declared they were able to write a letter in their native language, and 56% could read a book in their native

<sup>13</sup> "South Sudan: The Biggest Threat to a Woman's Life." *IRIN*. IRIN, 20 July 2012. Web. 1 May 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Relief Web. *Gender Assessment and Needs Analysis*.

language, compared to 72% and 77% of men respectively. This wide gap in literacy between men and women is noteworthy. In 2013, these figures decreased for both men and women: 39 % of women declared they knew how to write and 43% that they knew how to read. The figure for men also decreased to 59% and 62% respectively. It is worth noting that the question referred specifically to a respondent's ability to read and write in their native language, and that respondents to the survey declared 37 individual native languages, some of which may not have been taught in schools. The number of women who responded that they had never received a formal education rose from 27% to 46% between the first and second waves of data collection. The percentage of women who had received an education, regardless of the level, decreased by an average of 5 percentage points. This highlights a discrepancy in access to education between urban and rural populations and the additional barriers to schooling for women in rural areas.

Respondents identified building schools as what ought to be the government's top financial priority. 15% of respondents also identified educating children as what should be the country's number one priority. In other words, the women surveyed indicated a strong desire to see greater investment in education. Women's satisfaction in the government's ability to provide education and schools rose between 2011 and 2013, from 53% to 60% satisfied. Schools were for the most part accessible, for both boys and girls alike, in under an hour. On average 44% women reported traveling under 30 minutes to reach a primary education facility, around 25% travelled between 30 minutes and an hour and approximately 25% travelled over an hour to reach a school. The difference between access to schools for boys versus girls was within the margin of error. However, for those who lacked access to education altogether, girls were at a greater disadvantage than boys. More specifically, 4% of respondents claimed that boys had no access to primary education in their community whereas this figure was 8% for girls. This metric was not included in the first wave of data collection and, therefore, it is impossible to draw a comparison over time.

The ability of the South Sudanese government to provide basic services – including access to health, education, electricity, etc. – has been very low since independence and this capacity is further undermined by the outbreak of violent conflict. Until July 2013, the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management was the government agency responsible for providing relief to citizens when this department was consolidated into the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare.<sup>15</sup> International organizations maintained an extensive presence in South Sudan until the outbreak of civil war in December 2013 and played a crucial role in providing basic services to South Sudanese people, in concert with more than a hundred local non-governmental organizations. The humanitarian landscape shifted dramatically in early 2014 when most international aid agencies – governmental and non-governmental alike – were forced to evacuate due to intense security concerns triggered by the civil war. During the ongoing civil war, humanitarian relief is provided through a cluster system that includes NGOs and the UN agencies. There are different lead organizations that take the helm of service

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<sup>15</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. *South Sudan Crisis Response Plan 2014*. June 2014. OCHA South Sudan. Web.

delivery for key needs including coordination within camps, response to refugee influxes, food security, health, emergency shelter, civilian protection, gender-based violence, water, sanitation and hygiene. Unfortunately, the public opinion research conducted for this report precedes the civil war and therefore does not reflect an up-to-date representation of women's perceptions and experiences of access to basic services.

## Economy

Access to basic services and the ability of people to meet their basic needs is part and parcel of the economic vibrancy of any society. Furthermore, economic opportunity and participation are critical to the security of individuals and states, alike. Without an economic livelihood, it is significantly more difficult – if not virtually impossible except for in welfare states – to acquire basic services. Public opinion research on the economy is therefore important for understanding the well being of women, especially in conflict affected settings.

The economy of South Sudan is fragile, underdeveloped and understudied. The security situation in the country, combined with a complete lack of basic infrastructure, makes data collection about the country's economic life difficult. Data on standard indicators such as GDP are inconsistent and unreliable and different agencies – such as the World Bank, IMF and CIA – have notable discrepancies in reports. For example, where as the CIA cites the GDP per capita for 2012 as \$11.79 billion, the World Bank cites \$10.22 billion. Moreover, South Sudan does not feature in the annual *Human Development Report* or other prominent indices that rank macroeconomic well being of countries around the world. Nevertheless, it is clear that South Sudan's economic progress has been significantly hampered by decades of violence and conflict.

The public opinion data collected as part of the research for this report indicates that as security concerns increased in the years between independence and the civil war, confidence in economic stability and prosperity dropped. In 2011, soon after the country's long-awaited and hard-fought independence, women's perceptions of South Sudan's economic situation were relatively equally distributed across the spectrum, with approximately a third responding that the situation was "fair" and the remaining two thirds relatively equally divided between "excellent," 10%, "very good," 19%, or 29% total, and "poor," 21% or "very poor," 11%, 32% total. In the second wave of data, women's perceptions of the economy remained mixed, but shifted to an overall more negative view. Only 16% of respondents felt the economic situation was "excellent" or "very good," and the percentage of those answering "poor" or "very poor" rose to 45% total.

In both waves of data, economic concerns remained a top priority for South Sudanese women. When asked to identify the greatest problem facing citizens of the young country, the two highest-rated challenges were unemployment and inflation. In 2011, 27% of women identified unemployment as the number one problem, and this figure rose to 34% in 2013. Inflation and rising prices of basic goods were the top concern for 20% of women in 2011, dropping to 10% in 2013. Similarly, when asked if unemployment was a big problem, a minor problem, or not a problem at all, women overwhelmingly identified it as a big problem: 80% in 2011 increasing to 88% in 2013. South Sudanese women also lost confidence in their government's ability to deal with these problems. While in 2011 47% of women thought the government had been "very

successful” in creating more jobs, and 45% thought it had been “very successful” in controlling inflation, those numbers dropped to 21% and 25% respectively by 2013.

The high priority South Sudanese women place on unemployment in the country reflects the essential role of economic empowerment to post-conflict reconstruction and to stability and security. Without employment, securing one’s own financial independence is challenging, let alone those of any dependents such as children, parents or other family members, and this applies to men and women. For women, in particular, periods of violent conflict can result in their becoming, contrary to more traditional societal models, heads of households or primary income earners because men are often engaged in combat away from home.<sup>16</sup> They bear, therefore, a dual burden of caring for families as well as raising income. At the same time, unemployment – especially in fragile contexts – can exacerbate other sources of instability and insecurity. When a large percentage of the population is unemployed or underemployed, especially when this group includes young men, there is much more fertile recruiting ground for extremist groups and militias. A USAID *Toolkit on Youth and Conflict* notes, “when young people are jobless... with few opportunities for positive engagement, they represent a ready pool of recruits for groups seeking to mobilize violence.”<sup>17</sup> This trend has been traced in many different cases during times of political upheaval or transition. For example, studies in the Balkans show that opportunity to earn an income was often greater motivation for young men to join militia groups than was ideological or ethnic solidarity.<sup>18</sup>

Women’s responses concerning their personal financial status mirrored their declining faith in the national economic situation. The number of women who responded that the financial status of their household had improved in the past year dropped considerably between 2011 and 2013, as did the number who remained hopeful that it would improve the following year. In 2011, 63% of women said their household’s financial status had become “somewhat” or “much” better, compared to 50% in 2013. Those who said their situation was “somewhat” or “much” worse rose from 11% to 26%. It is likely that the advent of war will push financial improvement even further down, though no data on household status has been collected since the violence began.

Economic empowerment is necessary to securing lasting stability, and women’s economic empowerment in particular plays a crucial role in post-conflict reconstruction. Both anecdotal and quantitative evidence show a clear link between women’s economic integration and overall economic growth. For example, the World Economic Forum has consistently found a strong correlation between gender equality and per capita GDP.<sup>19</sup> Women tend to reinvest their earnings in their families and communities, making overall human development increase and the likelihood of war less imminent. Moreover,

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<sup>16</sup> Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay, and Meredith Turshen. *The Aftermath: Women in Post-conflict Transformation*. London: Zed, 2001. Print.

<sup>17</sup> USAID. *Youth & Conflict: A Toolkit for Intervention*. Washington, DC: US Agency for International Development, 2004. Web. 1 May 2014.

<sup>18</sup> James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin. "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity." *International Organization* 54.4 (2000): 845-77. Web. 1 May 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Ricardo Hausmann, Laura D. Tyson, and Saadia Zahidi, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2010* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2010), 29–31.

countries where gender inequality is lower – overwhelmingly – are more stable, secure and prosperous. A USIP report on gender and nation-building in South Sudan reported that focus group interviewees identified women’s economic empowerment as key to reducing poverty, and that the government had taken small steps towards this end, such as launching the first women’s vocational training institute.<sup>20</sup> The Millennium Development Goals, established in 2000, as well as the post-2015 development agenda spearheaded by the United Nations are also built on the notion that poverty alleviation must incorporate women’s economic participation and be attuned to the needs and aspirations of women alongside men.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Nada Mustafa Ali *Gender and Statebuilding in South Sudan*. Rep. no. 298. Washington, DC: United Institute of Peace, 2011. Web. 1 May 2014.

<sup>21</sup> United Nations. *The Millenium Development Goals Report 2013*. Rep. New York: United Nations, 2013. Web. 1 May 2014.

## Conclusion

This report provides an insightful snapshot of the status of South Sudanese women in the window between independence and civil war, and highlights the important role public opinion research can play in contributing to the understanding of women's lives and of communities more broadly. Particularly in conflict-affected or underdeveloped countries, women's experiences and perceptions can highlight day-to-day difficulties that may otherwise be left unnoticed. Women are an understudied and underrepresented demographic in South Sudan but, despite their marginalization, they comprise 65% of the population and, therefore, are key to understanding security and stability in the country.

Much more research – including but not limited to public opinion-based data collection – is required to better understand the well-being and perceived well-being of women, and men, in South Sudan in the past but also – and perhaps more importantly – in the future. While it is practically very challenging to conduct public opinion research during the outbreak of prolonged violent conflict, it will be extremely important to ensure that surveys such as the one conducted for this report are carried out after a cessation of hostility. Periods of post-conflict transition are critical to the sustainability of peace agreements, economic viability of societies and fostering good governance. In South Sudan, public opinion research can be used to learn more about how men and women adapt and how they believe their lives could be better served by their government. It is important, however, to not just ask men and women the same questions (and therefore employ a gender neutral methodology to questionnaires) but to also ask gender sensitive questions that can provide a glimpse how men and women perceive and experience conflict and post-conflict transitions differently.

One of the areas that this study does not touch upon extensively but that warrant further research is the political participation of women. Public opinion research could be used to give women political voice and also to encourage greater integration of women and their perspectives in decision-making on issues of state-building. In the ongoing high-level peace negotiations that are taking place in Addis Ababa, there were only three women at the table as of February 2014. All of them were part of opposition and no women were part of the government delegation. The government's lead negotiator, Michael Makuei was reported in January 2014 as saying, "what is important is *not* the gender representation of the delegation" but rather the "achievement of the objective", which he perceived as "irrespective" of whether or not women were represented. However, others – including certain other negotiators, women in South Sudanese civil society groups, as well as international observers – assert the participation of women is indeed important and makes a difference to the process as well as the outcome of the process. Sarah Nyanath, former minister of social development and SPLM deputy chairperson, pointed to women having "different priorities than men, such as protecting women and children during conflicts." At the same time, Sophia Pak Gai, one of the female negotiators on the opposition's delegation, explained, "we are here pushing for

peace as women because the majority of the population in South Sudan are women.”<sup>22</sup> Though women in South Sudan are voiceless in the peace negotiations, their experiences, needs, aspirations, talents and contributions to peacemaking, governance and economic reconstruction are essential to sustainable peace.

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<sup>22</sup> Marthe Van Der Wolf. "Women Take Role in South Sudan Peace Talks." *Voice of America*. Voice of America, 16 Jan. 2014. Web. 1 May 2014.