

Fragility Situations and Their Implications on Economic Empowerment of Women in Bor, Jonglei; South Sudan

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ABSTRACT

Globally fragility situations have become a cause and consequence of women disempowerment. In Africa, protracted conflicts, disregard for the rule of law and increased poverty levels have been experienced in countries whose fragility levels are high. In Somali, South Sudan and Sudan efforts at women empowerment have been minimal as governments are more focused on clientelism and or self-aggrandizement. In Bor, South Sudan, where levels of fragility are high, focus has largely been on provision of basic services as opposed to women empowerment. And even where this exists, low literacy levels, patriarchy and cultural inhibitions against inclusion of women and girls remain conspicuous. This paper examines the implications of years of protracted conflicts, bad governance, poverty and patriarchy on efforts at women empowerment. The study is based on data collected by researchers from Kenyatta University, Catholic University of South Sudan and John Garang University under the umbrella of SPARC in the period 2022 to 2024 in Bor; Jonglei. Analysis is done by use of both qualitative and quantitative methods where necessary. It was established that fragility situations affect levels of participation and protection of women, boys and girls in empowerment efforts. To address challenges related to increased levels of fragility governments, development partners and local communities need to synergize their efforts to avoid duplication and neglect of some regions. Urgent cessation of hostilities among warring government factions must be prioritized.

Keywords: Fragility Index, Empowerment, Gender, Legitimacy and Governance

INTRODUCTION

Instability in South Sudan (and the wider Sudan) is historical and can be explained from two main fronts; foreign domination and internal strife. But while domination by foreigners including but not limited to Turks, Egyptians and the Mahdists, continued, civil strife has majorly been occasioned by systemic fragility situations which has bred protracted conflicts, poverty, displacement and the general refugee problem. This is not to mention the thousands of death and destruction of property which bedeviled South Sudan as early as 1899. A UNHCR Report of (2021) indicates that more than five hundred people have lost their lives and thousands are refugees sprawled all around the world. South Sudan thus ranks highly in terms of its fragility index. The African development Bank 2024 Report, for instance, places South Sudan in position three in global fragility index. Somalia and Sudan rank first and second respectively. This means that in terms of the propensity for wars, hunger, humanitarian crisis, corruption levels, legitimacy levels and conflict flare-ups, South Sudan is more likely to erupt than its neighbours including Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. This does not, however, mean that the latter countries are not prone to conflicts or do not experience hunger and/or poverty. Each country is fragile, and every state is prone to humanitarian crises of diverse forms and nature. What matters is the degree of fragility and the capacity, authority and legitimacy that the said state has to cope with the crisis. Fragility therefore, may denote among others, the capacity or otherwise of a state to provide security and peace for its populations as well as stability of the same state to offer opportunities for sustainable development for all the citizens. In addition, fragility is reflected in the levels of acceptance and legitimacy by citizens. The lesser the legitimacy the higher the fragility index. The World Bank notes that such states also fall behind other states in meeting all the sustainable development goals including mortality, literacy, poverty, and malnutrition levels,

which remain higher than in other low-income countries.¹ State fragility also comes with weak and delicate institutions with limited and or restricted ability to offer basic services. Infrastructure, education, health and related services may also be unavailable or limited and even where they exist, they are either inaccessible due to insecurity and related tensions or they are underdeveloped. Technological advancement and communication channels are also weak and generally delivery of government services is weak. Many of such states have dysfunctional laws and where they exist, they are not followed or respected. Freedoms and rights of individuals are also non-existent and abductions, assassinations and or wanton crime is common. Due to the high levels of what scholars call illegitimacy attempts to manage fragility situations may thus take years and requires concerted efforts from diverse actors including organisations, institutions and structural changes. The role of citizens in legitimizing states through among others; periodical free and fair elections is also imperative. This paper employs three concepts to analyse fragility situations in South Sudan thus; Legitimacy, Authority and Capacity. It is argued that while theoretically, the State of South Sudan exists, its capacity to deal with its obligations to the citizen is so weak that it is often challenged by those who feel that the state has no ability to do so. Indeed, many citizens rely on non-state operators for survival while even a larger population feels that the state as it is currently constituted is not only illegitimate but also unacceptable. Constant tensions and attendant conflict flare-ups must thus be seen from this spectrum.

South Sudan is administratively divided into states and each of the states is characterised by certain levels of fragility. And while states like Juba are seen to be relatively 'developed' and therefore less fragile in comparison to other states, fragility levels of Juba are still higher than that of Nairobi. With such an understanding, it is thus, clear that states that have experienced more insecurity, tensions, humanitarian issues, higher poverty levels and limited capacity to handle such challenges remain more fragile. Bor in Jonglei is one such state. For years, Bor has gone through phases of conflicts over resources, governance issues and clan issues. The Murle of Pibor and Dinka have, for instance, historically engaged in protracted conflicts over livestock. The Nuer and the Dinka, have, on their part fought over political power and to-date tensions over power-sharing continue to escalate with President Salva Kiir and First Deputy President Riak Machar constantly positioning their troops for possible war. Among other allegedly insecure states, Bor thus ranks high in terms of insecurity and consequently fragility. An IOM (2023) report on understanding multidimensional fragility in South Sudan reports that Bor stands out as the county with the highest levels of insecurity, environmental, and economic fragility. Thousands of Bor residents are in fact returnees who are struggling to rebuild their lives after years of war. There is only one tarmacked major road from Juba to Bor which still remains insecure with occasional attacks from rebels. Literacy and numeracy levels are also low and healthcare provision remains weak. Severe climate-change shocks have exacerbated levels of fragility and reports of death and destruction of property are common.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized an analytical research design with convenient sampling as the method of choice for collecting data. The choice for convenience sampling was based on the fact that while we collected substantial data from Bor, snowballing also saw us collect data from Nairobi and elsewhere during conferences and workshops with scholars on the same. Bor, one of the regions in Jonglei has consistently been affected by protracted conflicts, periodic tensions and the number of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) circulating amongst men of all ages is immense. Poverty levels are also high and literacy levels remain low. Fragility situations of Bor are consequently high and women empowerment efforts are often hampered by intermittent conflicts in the region. In addition, extreme weather conditions including floods, drought, famine and climate induced poverty have seen an escalation already existing conflict. As research was on-going periodic flash flooding was experienced thereby thwarting efforts at collect data and dissemination. This was however mitigated by use of local enumerators and student researchers who have since become important trainers on women empowerment in the context of fragile situations.

¹ World Bank, "Fragility Violence and Conflict," Available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/overview#1> (Accessed on 2/03/2016). We acknowledge the contribution of SPARC through the IDRC, ILRI and Kenyatta university for managing the fund.

To collect data questionnaires were administered by trained research assistants in Bor. Outside of Bor, additional information was sought through purposive discussions with key informants who had in-depth knowledge on the topic of study. Primary data was collected through Household Surveys, KIIs, FGDs, and observations while secondary data was obtained from journal articles, books, and internet sources.

Causes and Manifestations of Fragility Situations in Bor

Protracted conflicts

The enduring nature of conflicts in South Sudan dates back to the fight for independence. The conflicts majorly revolve around political power, resource contestation, ethnic animosity and most and climate change. The table 1 below provides a summary of the types of conflict experienced in South Sudan;

Table 1: Type of conflict experienced

	Anyidi	Baidit	Jalle	Kolnyang	Makuach	Total
Inter-clan	58	57	53	88	85	341
cattle rustling	56	11	23	120	93	303
Political	63	63	39	30	93	288
land based conflict	50	62	14	25	92	243
pasture conflict	47	6	30	19	76	178
Water related	13	32	16	8	86	155
Revenge back	44	38	10	11	44	147
Over salt licks	1	3	1	0	10	15

As shown, the frequency of inter-clan conflicts was the highest with a total of 341 mentions. In this regard, cattle were identified as a major cause of the conflict and fighting (pasture related, cattle rustling and revenge back) clashes. Studies however show that there are several layers of conflict in Jonglei. For instance, a report by International Crisis Group (2014) underlines that there are several armed groups in the region. They argue that most of these groups are not fighting for control of the government in Juba and the conflicts could be resolved at the state or local level but due to the weak governance structures, these are hardly addressed.

Cattle rustling and attendant tensions also contribute greatly to escalating tensions especially among and between pastoralists. Only a small number of those interviewed reported farmer-herder conflicts as a major issue. The said conflicts have had far-reaching implications with death, displacement, destruction of property and infrastructure and a general humanitarian crisis reported by 89% of those interviewed in Bor. Efforts at peace-building have been immense and a major peace agreement in 2005 which ushered in a new constitution, outlines rules for power-sharing, ways of redistributing resources and instituting security saw relative calm. This agreement was followed by many others, including but not limited to the 2011 one which brought about independence, the September 2018 which sought to end the bloody civil war, the 2020 Juba Agreement for peace and which was signed by Sudan's transitional government and many of the rebel groups. The extension of the 2018 peace agreement in 2022 called for the unification of army, creation of a more comprehensive constitution and the completion of preparations for general elections.

The signing of a peace agreement was heralded as a new dawn for the fragile nation. After decades of war, tensions and communal violence, it was expected that the country would stabilize economically, socially and politically. It was also thought that those that had sought refuge and asylum would return to grow their economy and develop sustainable institutions for overall betterment of lives. For a short period upto 2018, there was relative calm. A negotiated democracy was instituted with a government comprising of people from diverse clans and ethnic groups holding various positions. Majority of these came from either the Dinka or the Nuer, the two largest ethnic groups in the country. The economy grew, albeit slowly and the social fabric appeared to be tightening. Security wise, locals in Bor report that criminality and related vices reduced between 2015-2017 as communities began to return to their homes. Majority refocused into their economic activities and a steady influx of foreigners from neighboring countries was experienced. Events in 2018, however, reverted all these gains as local Murle, Dinka and Nuer among others began accusing each other of

politically undermining the other at a national level. Territorial conflicts are also common among Bor, Lakes and Jonglei states. These are based on claims of indigeneity, 'autochthony' and identity. In a country where land ownership is based on communal ties such conflicts are not uncommon even among clan members.

Coupled with this, resource scarcity played a major role in the ensuing conflicts as communities fought for pasture, water and other natural resources. The study noted that Bor has an abundance of natural resources with River Nile and the Sudd acting as the major sources of water for consumption, fishing and animal use. The waters are also important transport sites and contestation over who, how and when these waters are to be used and for what has also become a source of tensions among locals. Charcoal burners report that they often fight in the thick forests over best trees to use for their trade. Wood cutters in Bor on their part lament that rebels from Congo entered and cut down indigenous trees for sale to rich merchants who in turn resell to foreigners. Pastoralists in Jonglei generally note that a complex web of cattle trade emerged where traders from Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia exchanged weapons for livestock. Such commercialization saw a swift proliferation of firearms which began to circulate to payams. The more animal one had, the higher the chances one had to acquire arms. Interethnic conflicts, for instance between equatorial people and locals from Jonglei resulted in several tens killed, maimed and property destroyed. In Jalle and Baidit payams, rape, child abductions and forced marriages were reported during this period. The attacks are majorly attributed to armed groups, rebels and criminal elements who reside in forests. Some of these rebels live among community members but they operate as vigilante gangs at night. This is as evidence from a young man from Kolnyang payam who had this to say about rebels;

'I have this scar from a bullet wound which I got many years ago while chasing attackers/rebels. I was operated in Juba where skin from my left leg was used for grafting the wound in my right leg'.

The impacts of the escalating conflicts and communal tension are also best captured by an elderly man from Baidit payam who asserts that women and children are more likely to experience violence and criminality than are men. He notes;

People around here are starving. During conflicts women, children and the elderly are negatively affected. To begin with girls are abducted and taken away either as brides or as has been recently happening to be ransomed by the abductors. It is reported that in early 2023 ninety-nine hostages were taken by the Murle in Jonglei and the government paid the attackers to release the abductees most of whom were women and children. Also, unlike in the past, children and women have become targets for killing. It was reported that in the past, women, children, elderly and even unarmed people were not targeted but this is continuously being disregarded whereby the killing is indiscriminate and the women and children have increasingly become victims and as it was put "shootings anyhowly is the norm(sic)"

Such cases of gender-based violence particularly through inter communal attacks affects all people negatively. Among the Dinka GBV is common and it is predominantly men beating up women as a way of "disciplining". A key informant interviewee lamented that

'GBV has been normalized. If a man does not beat the wife, if they are peaceful then the woman is accused of having silenced the man. Some women are beaten so badly e.g there was one whose eyes were gouged out and others even miscarry their babies.

Yet, despite increased cases of GBV, Dinka women insist that marriage is a sacred and important phase in their lives as it accords them a higher social status. A Dinka proverb aptly captures this thus; 'a bad marriage is better death for both men and women'. Consequently, a woman would rather be married as a way of fitting in to the social fabric of her society. An unmarried woman is, after all, a disgrace to society.

Natural Calamities and Disasters

In addition to conflicts associated with resources use and scarcity, climate-related shocks have escalated fragility levels. For instance, since the year 2020 flooding in Bor has left hundreds displaced, livestock and property washed away, and farmers continue to complain of failed harvest. In all the Payams, study

participants identified flooding as the main natural calamity they had experienced in the recent past as presented on figure 1 below;

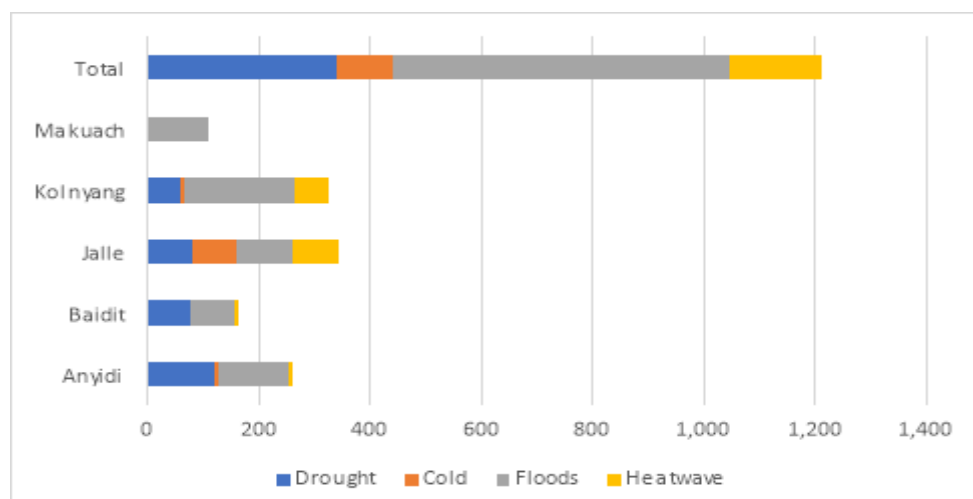


Figure 1: Extreme weather changes experienced in the recent past

In this regard, the youth in Bor lamented that, Continued flooding both from the White Nile and flood water from along the floodplain has made it difficult for people to exist. This is often followed by drought and famine. These droughts are so common, and people have been known to die from the prolonged hunger (FGD, Bor, 23-11-2023).

As expressed in the FGD, when flooding occurs, people have to move to safer places. Often. This leads to competition over the higher grounds to people escape floods. The research noted that this has also caused tensions as people position themselves to acquire what they consider as safer grounds for their safety and that of their animals.

An FGD with middle- aged men aptly captured this;

Currently, flooding has been (worse) there since 2020, not before. This is caused by heavy rains around the lake region causing flooding along the Nile. The Swamp is in low areas that hence the water flows backwards,

As noted in the study, due to the heavy flooding in Bor county in 2020, majority of the pastoralists moved as far as Equatorial states. Pastoralists complained that higher grounds, though, safer from flooding and other climate-related calamities are, however, not spacious enough for their animals often leading to conflicts with local pastoralists and crop farmers. A participant aptly captured this during a community workshop thus;

‘The most challenging thing (during movement to safer places) is insecurity/conflict especially because animals can destroy crops in the destination...then it becomes a crisis because people take guns to fight to solve the problem instead of going to the government’. So, cattle keepers are kept moving constantly’. “If a Dinka man moves his animals to Equatoria, he is asked by the hosts, ‘why do you move from your place to our place?’ They then inform the government and the Dinka are removed. ... another problem is the rebels who kill the pastoralists in order to take their animals (Community workshop, November 24th, 2023).

The excerpt clearly shows how flooding which is a natural calamity triggers movement and ultimately conflict in South Sudan. Available literature shows that various ethnic communities have played a major role in exacerbating the enduring conflicts between crop farmers and herders. According to Human Rights Watch (2017), the Dinka and Nuer herding communities have been at the forefront of this conflict, historically clashing over access to land and resources. In addition, have also been associated with these conflicts particularly in the Pibor Administrative Area and Jonglei State. This has meant that over the years, these groups have engaged in violent cattle raiding, revenge attacks and counter attacks thereby contributing to the region's ongoing instability (United Nations Mission in South Sudan, 2020). Hence these groups have to keep moving to regions considered rebel-prone areas and this has engendered further tensions and simmering

conflicts. For instance, some herders who moved from Bor to Equatorial and other neighbouring states complain that they often face hostile rebels and communities who feel that they are encroaching on their grazing lands. The study therefore underlines that conflicts, floods, and other factors have disrupted traditional livestock movement, increasing tensions between the crop farmers and herders.

Poor and Weak governance Systems

Poor governance in South Sudan is historical. It dates back to the colonial period, progresses to the 1980s civil war, moves to the 2013 bloody conflict which saw thousands killed and the most recent 2018/2020 governance and climate-related conflicts. Weak governance systems in themselves are reflected in the many years of state failure to among other things monopoly of violence, respect for the rule of law, provision of basic services and importantly honour myriads of peace agreements. Of the total number of people interviewed in Bor, for instance, 89% reported lack of national government willingness, commitment and capacity to deliver on their political promises as well as respect the rule of law.

In Bor, majority of respondents above 30 years old added that it appears that ‘there is no government’. In their words; ‘government only exists in Juba’. As such, in the rural areas, the Dinka people have learnt to survive. The only time we experience government is when we see the army and even in such cases, the army is as brutal as are the rebels.’ This aptly captures the mood of people in all the payams. In Kolnyang, a woman reports that ‘hospitals have no medicine, doctors and toilets are dirty’. The government, according to 92% of respondents does not provide basic services. And even where such services are available like in Bor town, there is a lot of corruption such that for one to access any government services one needs to pay a small amount of money yet no receipts are offered. In the shopping centres around Bor town, traders complained of people who collect illegal tax yet that tax is not used to develop infrastructure. Issues of non-existent transparency and accountability of government officials were thus largely mentioned with 84% blaming the national government for perpetuating this. Elections in South Sudan have also been conducted in such an opaque and shambolic manner that locals in all the five payams in Bor, see no need of organizing new elections. The most anticipated 2024 general elections, is, for instance, yet to take place. Asked why this is the case, locals in Bor argue that there are already people who plan to rig so as to sustain themselves into power. The two main factions; Salva Kiir and Riak Machar are yet to agree on the structures and modalities of conducting the elections. The Ministry of Finance, itself, appears to have little if any money to conduct a fair and free elections, after all, government workers themselves have received no salaries for at least five months.

Increased Poverty levels

A World Bank (2024) report on poverty levels from South Sudan indicates that the country remains the poorest in the world with more than 80% of the population having no income from either employment or livelihood activities. It is envisaged that extreme poverty levels will indeed continue to increase if the current oil prices, weak governance systems and severe food insecurity. At present only a small population boast of abundance. Majority of these are either former/current warlords and oil merchants. Those who deal in timber and mineral resources are also considered resource rich as they have been able to build permanent and/or semi-permanent houses in rural or urban areas.

In Bor, poverty levels are manifested in the daily mortality rates for both adults and children due to malnutrition, disease, natural disasters among others. Lack of food, water, shelter, clothing and access to social amenities is also an indicator of wealth and/or poverty levels, with majority at 85% of the population complaining of considerable levels of poverty. In terms of gender, women complain of food insecurity, inadequate health and education access as well as low or no income. Employment opportunities are also limited while wages remain negligible. In Bor, government employees complained that they haven’t received their salaries in the last eight months, yet they continue to go to work. Local traders in Bor, on their part lament lack of capital circulation in the rural areas making life almost unbearable.

Historically, the legacy of conflicts, overreliance on oil revenue and decades of climate related shocks have also left the region so fragile that no one seems safe from the pangs of poverty. Due to war both farmers and herders have relocated to urban areas neglecting and the number of internal and external population continues

to increase tremendously. These are compounded by the effects of climate change as underlined by SIDA report of (2024). The authors state that;

South Sudan is extremely vulnerable to climate change, with no long-term coping mechanisms for people in poverty. Climate change exacerbates extreme weather variability, causing severe flooding in recent years which has affected millions (SIDA 2024: 15).

With such poverty levels, criminality and increased insecurity continue to be experienced and in February 2024, a student from a local university in Bor noted that cases of petty crimes have increased in almost all the five payams. Asked on the impact of poverty on livelihoods, 86% of respondents noted that they are not able to access healthcare, education, food and other basic services. Majority of these at 91% lament that no day ends without a case of petty theft in Bor town. Of these 89% reported that they have no formal education because their parents could not afford to pay school fees. Women in particular complained that although the situation is changing access to reproductive and maternal healthcare is still low and deaths associated with child-birth are still high. This is however the case, not only Bor but South Sudan in general as reported by SIDA (2024:19) who emphasize that the maternal death rate in South Sudan is one of the highest in the world with 1,223 maternal deaths per 100,000 births. Bor has few health facilities with limited staff and drugs.

Humanitarian Crisis

South Sudan, generally, has faced years of humanitarian crisis occasioned by among others conflict, governance issues and most recently climate and environment-related risks. The crisis is manifested in the number of refugees hosted in neighboring countries, number and impacts of displacement, healthcare crisis as well as literacy levels in the country. Generally, the USAID (2024) and UNHCR (2024) estimates that there are more than 3million refugees spread all over the world from South Sudan. In Bor, most refugees who were hosted in Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia have begun returning but majority remain food insecure and they continue to die of malnutrition and other nutrient-related maladies. The WFP (2024) reports that women, children and the elderly are the most vulnerable and are in dire need of humanitarian assistance. Flooding has left thousands displaced, property destroyed or washed away, and water-borne diseases appear to be on the increase. An informal conversation with one of the locals revealed that every year children die of water-borne diseases, sanitation issues while others die from flooding while women who are largely the family pillars die of reproductive health related diseases and general climate related shocks. As flooding escalates, cases of displacement are also increasingly leaving women and children more vulnerable. The next section examines the impacts of fragility situations in Bor on women economic empowerment in the last decade.

Effects of fragility situations on Women Economic Empowerment in Bor

Fragility and resultant conflicts disproportionately affect women and men. While some studies see women as victims of conflicts associated with fragility, others underline that women have acted as instigators or contributors to conflicts. Tindall (2022) notes that women representing various groups have been instrumental in peace negotiations at varying levels; that is, while they were very active in some in others they were excluded or had minimal representation. This is due to the fact that South Sudan is a highly patriarchal society, and as is common in such societies, women and youth have very few opportunities for participation in high-level decision-making (Aymerich et al., 2023)

Conceptualizing Women Economic Empowerment

Women economic empowerment entails affording women power to, power with and power over access, control and ownership of economic resources individually or in groups. This power also allows them opportunities to participate in decision-making at the family and community level.

In the context of Bor, fragility has negatively affected various facets of women's lives. The study employed the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/ World Bank (2023) Measurement Guide for assessing women and girls' empowerment. The authors identify three pillars of empowerment including Resources, Agency and Context each with specific indicators. These were then domesticated to reflect the Bor situation. The pillars and measurements adapted for the study are shown on table 2 below;

Table 2: Measuring women empowerment

Pillar	Measurement	Tool
Resources: Financial, Control over assets, decision to sell household assets	- occupation - livestock ownership - education and training	Household questionnaire
Agency - Capacity to make decisions about one's life and act on them -Freedom from violence and fear	- Household decision- making. -attitudes towards wife beating -Girls usefulness as marriage in exchange of cows	- Household questionnaire FGD KII
Context- Social arrangements e.g norms and institutions	-Sharing of household chores	FGD KII

Source: Adapted from World Bank (2023)

In regard to the first pillar; that is resources, the study endeavoured to determine whether Dinka Bor women were empowered. Data from Bor reveals levels of women empowerment differ greatly with urban women, educated women showing higher levels of ownership, access and control of 'resources. These resources include but are not limited to livestock, small animals, wood, land, agricultural produce and business ware. Majority, who live in rural areas displayed low levels of empowerment as shown in figures 1, 2 and 3 below;

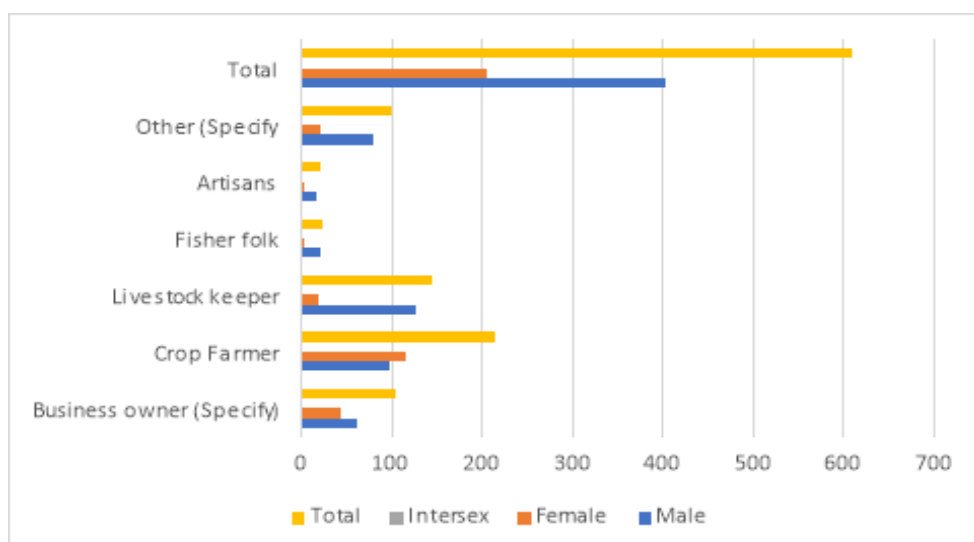


Figure 1: Occupation of respondents

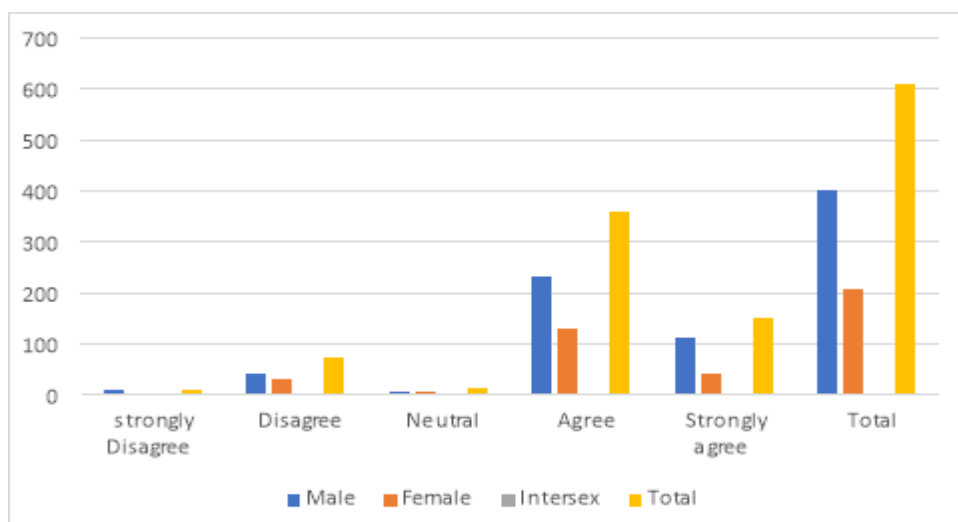


Figure 2: Women cannot own livestock

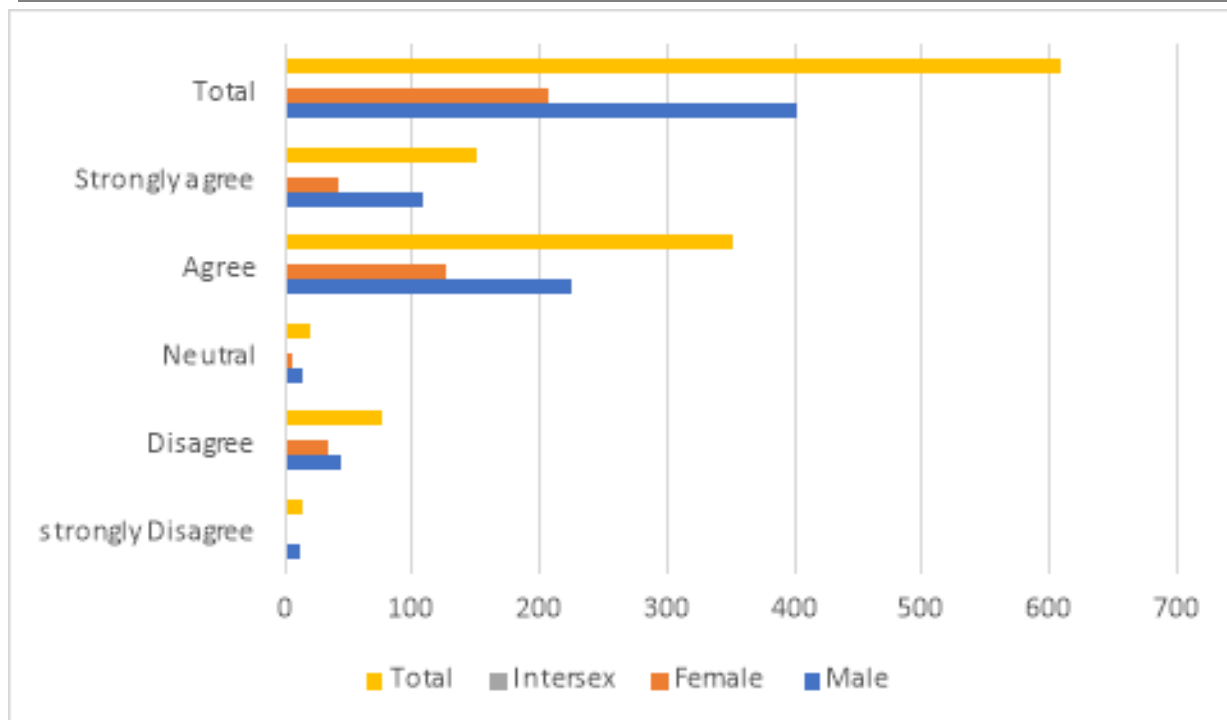


Figure: Women have no right to sell the household livestock

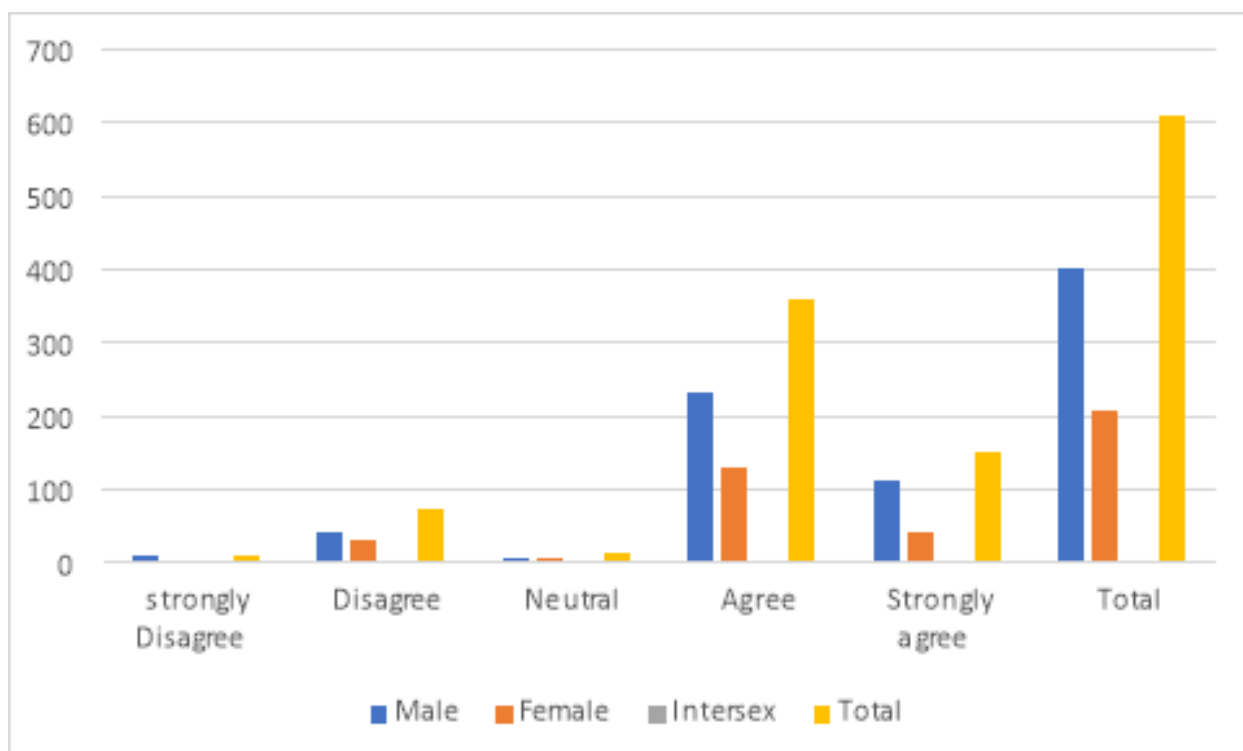


Figure 3: Girls do not need education because they will get married

This was assessed by checking for ability of women to access, control and own resources such as land and cattle as well as levels of formal literacy, numeracy and training. The participants felt that being educated is being empowered arguing that only those who have gone to school have power to influence policy at the higher level. Ability to read and write is thus at the core of empowering local communities in Bor, yet only a small percentage of the population is educated.

The second pillar considered was agency. Women's agency was measured using two variables, that is their role in household decision making and whether they can make decisions to sell family property. Figure 4 shows the findings.

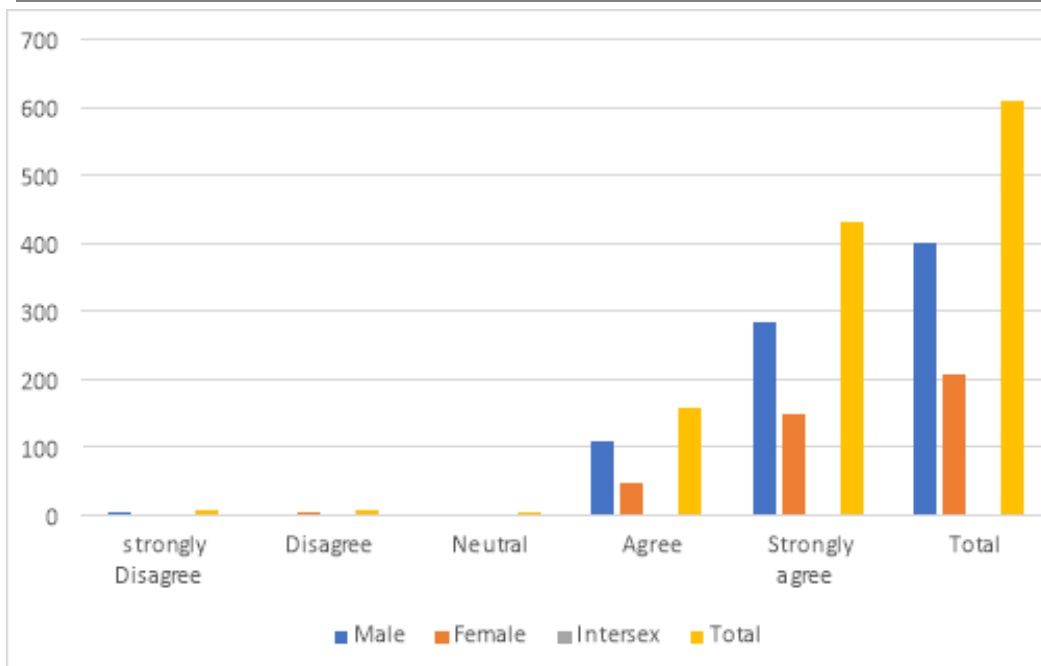


Figure 4: The man as the automatic head of the household

In line with the second pillar, women's empowerment is manifested in their ability to make decisions at both private and public spaces for their benefit and that of their families and communities. Decision-making is largely determined by their levels and extent of understanding of issues, their willingness to engage and importantly their participation/inclusion in influencing policy. Our definition of empowerment thus, also interrogated women's agency, skills and competencies that would in turn propel them to engage in decision-making.

Women do not own any property nor are they in a position to make decisions over family property. There are instances women can even be given cows or even land by name, but technically; they do not own these cows or land. Because they have no authority (control) over these. The only property women may sell are chicken (and they use the earned income to feed the family (Young women FGD, Bor November 2023)

The excerpt demonstrates that Dinka women in Bor lack agency. Therefore, at household level, it was noted that they do not contribute to or influence decisions regarding property due to their secondary position. Thus, even when gifted with cows or other property, this is all superficial as men have the final say on such properties.

On a positive note, it was noted that some women have agency to voice their concerns especially in market places and many more are ably paying school fees for their children. These included, the women fish traders as well as those that are in paid employment in sectors such as hotels and Non- Governmental Organizations. Of those interviewed in Bor, however, only a mere 5% feel empowered economically. The rest lamented lack of agency to engage in decision making, they own no land and related resources and they can not question decisions made by men. In total 93% of women interviewed noted that they have no formal education and they rely on their male relatives to make important decisions. Majority of the women therefore do not see the need to attend development meetings organized by either government or development partners because such meetings are conducted using the English language.

The third pillar that was used to measure empowerment was context. In any social setting, social arrangements including norms and social institutions shape and influence women's access, control over resources as well as their agency (World Bank, 2023). The study therefore, endeavoured to find out how domestic chores are shared at household level as well as the influencing factors. To achieve this, the study used some attitude questions focusing on the usefulness of women and girls as perceived by the community and attitudes towards the division of labour among the Dinka of Bor. The findings are presented below;

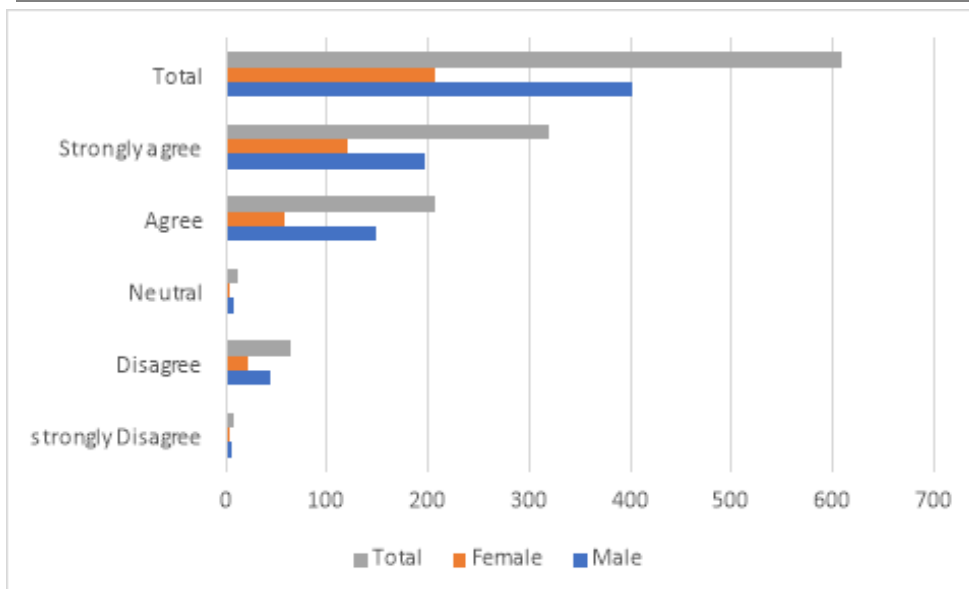


Figure: Women are the property of men,

95% of those interviewed used **education parameters**. **Many** felt that being educated is being empowered arguing that only those who have gone to school have power to influence policy at the higher level. Education is thus at the core of empowering local communities in Bor, yet only a small percentage of the population is educated.

Existing Efforts at Women Empowerment in Bor

Despite years of protracted conflict and climate related shocks, government and development partners are engaged in diverse women empowerment efforts in Bor. In the area of education, respondents from the Ministry of Education noted that despite the myriad of challenges bedeviling the education sector, plans are underway to ensure that all children enroll and remain in school at all times. Development partners on their part reported that they have consistently worked with locals to ensure that children access basic amenities such as water, electricity, food and stationary. In Bor, several NGOs were on the ground to provide sanitary kits to girls. Others have established counselling centres to teenage mothers willing to return to school. In the area of healthcare government health facilities though present are, however, few and far apart. Majority lack basic drugs, health workers are few and ill-equipped to deal with major illnesses. In particular, health workers needed to work on women reproductive health issues are absent in many health facilities resulting in increased mother and child mortality. In Bor, female respondents complained of having to deliver at home and on the streets due to inadequacy of health workers and related facilities.

In the area of infrastructure development, government together with development partners have been engaged in the construction and maintenance of the Juba-Bor road which had for years remained a mirage. And while the road remains unsafe owing to the myriad rebel groups hiding in the forests along the way, traders, government workers and humanitarian groups applauded the government for such development efforts. Donor agencies particularly observed that today, they can deliver humanitarian aid with fast and with ease. Prior to this, transport had hampered delivery of even the most essential of goods and services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cognizant that majority of efforts have been cash-based, the following more sustainable recommendations are suggested for addressing women empowerment efforts in the context of fragility situations in Bor;

Strengthening Governance and Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

The South Sudanese government should conduct credible elections. This should be done in collaboration with international organizations working in the country as these are in a position to enhance governance structures

such as effective law enforcement and security, health and education sectors among others as these would be instrumental in addressing conflict drivers, such as ethnic tensions, land disputes, and resource, competition. There is also a need to implementing community-based conflict resolution mechanisms including but not limited to raising peoples' consciousness on the negative effects of protracted conflict and the need for establishment of accountable and transparent processes land systems to prevent disputes.

Enhancing Climate Resilience and Sustainable Resource Management

Given the impact of climate change and resource scarcity on conflict, investment in climate-resilient infrastructure such as flood mitigation measures, water management systems, and sustainable agricultural practices such as irrigation are essential. Development partners should therefore invest resettling the people of Bor on higher grounds as well as building dyke and drenching sections of the Nile depending on what is considered scientifically viable. The study also underlines the need for programs aimed at promoting livestock related enterprises. This may require configuration of livestock keeping from being a socio-cultural activity to profit driven herd management practices as this will be instrumental to reducing conflicts driven by resource competition.

Women through Economic and Social Inclusion

The study also recommends targeted interventions to increase most at-risk populations including women's access to formal literacy and numeracy education as well as vocational training. Additionally, microfinance and cash support targeting women to support them set up enterprises can enhance their economic independence. Additionally, advocacy and legal reforms should focus on strengthening women's rights in decision-making and property ownership while putting in place mechanisms to shift harmful social norms that perpetuate gender inequality.

CONCLUSION

This study established that state fragility in Bor, South Sudan, stems from prolonged conflicts driven by political struggles, ethnic tensions, and resource competition. Inter-clan violence, cattle rustling, and land disputes are key contributors, exacerbated by weak governance structures that fail to address conflicts effectively. Resource scarcity, particularly water and pasture, fuels ongoing tensions, while armed groups and criminal elements perpetuate violence, including GBV and child abductions. Though peace agreements have provided temporary stability, underlying tensions persist. Women and children remain especially vulnerable, with GBV normalized in some communities. The proliferation of arms and territorial disputes continues to challenge peace efforts in Bor, Jonglei State.

It is also observed that climate shocks, particularly flooding worsened by climate change, have intensified fragility. Thus, displacement due to floods have triggered competition for higher ground, leading to further conflict. Weak governance, corruption, and inadequate basic services exacerbate instability, while widespread poverty, high unemployment, and food insecurity especially among women and children add to the crisis. Armed conflicts between herders and farmers, driven by resource scarcity, persist. The study concludes that South Sudan faces a deepening humanitarian crisis, with rising malnutrition, disease, and displacement. Poor governance and ongoing conflict continue to hinder economic stability and social development.

Women's economic empowerment measured in terms of access, control, and ownership of resources, participation in decision-making at family and community levels. The study established that in Bor, fragility has severely impacted women's empowerment, particularly in rural areas where access to resources is minimal. Using the World Bank's measurement framework, the study notes that women's empowerment based on resources, agency, and social context is low. Consequently, women in Bor face significant barriers to economic empowerment due to lack of property ownership, decision-making power, and education. While some employed women demonstrate agency, 93% remain dependent on male relatives. Social norms reinforce gender inequality, limiting women's autonomy. However, government and NGO initiatives aim to improve education, healthcare, and support systems to enhance women's empowerment.

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