



Community Security Assessment

Gok- Machar, Aweil North (May 2020)

Gok-Machar

1. Introduction:

In November 2018, Saferworld, in collaboration with Community Initiative for Partnership and Development (CIPAD), conducted a Community Security Assessment (CSA) in Gok-Machar. Gok Machar is the County Head Quarters of Aweil North County which is located in North-West of Northern Bahr el Ghazal State. The assessment used Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) targeting authorities, youth, women, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), traders, teachers, people with disabilities, INGOs and UN agencies operating in Aweil North County.

This report summarises key findings from a further community security assessment carried out by Saferworld and partner Community Initiative for Partnership and Development (CIPAD) in May 2020. The assessment used Focus Group Discussions (FGD) observing social distancing in line with health guidelines on COVID-19. The number of participants per FGD was limited to five or six individuals targeting, youth, women, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), traders, teachers, and people with disabilities. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were also carried out which targeted INGOs, UN agencies, authorities, women leaders, and youth leaders in Gok-Machar County. Respondents were asked about what has changed, what issues have remained, as well as which new issues have emerged since the last CSA conducted in 2018.

The following describes the key findings affecting livelihoods, peace and stability in the area as identified by the CSA respondents.

2. Major conflict and security issues identified in Gok-Machar

2.1. Main security issues identified by respondents that have not changed since 2018

- Early marriages. Due to widespread poverty, girls as young as 16-17 years are forced to marry in exchange for dowries. This is a common practice in the area. In such situations, the girls are not allowed to continue with their education.
- Inadequate health facilities and services. With a lack of health facilities, treatable diseases like malaria are killing children and pregnant mothers.
- Poor road network. Internal roads in Gok-Machar are impassable during the rainy season, which restricts traders from bringing goods to the area.
- Youth unemployment. With high rate of joblessness, young people are left idle and young men in particular are vulnerable to recruitment into militias and other armed groups.
- Cross border trade issues. Tensions between Dinka Malual and Reigate Arabs has instilled fear among the community in the area, restricting cross-border trade between Sudan and South Sudan.
- Conflict between farmers and cattle keepers related to the destruction of farm crops by cattle is a serious peace and security issue in the area.
- Lack of quality education. Without access to quality education, children in the area are left with fewer options as they grow. Many children drop out of school early rendering them vulnerable to recruitment by criminal gangs and armed groups.
- There is widespread proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons among civil population in the area.
- Conflict over water points. This issue was identified as causing conflict among women and girls when boreholes are overcrowded with long queues throughout the day.
- Poor maternal health care. The maternal mortality rate is very high in the area due to a lack of adequate health care.
- Border closure between South Sudan and Sudan. With the continued closure of borders between Sudan and South Sudan, the flow of goods and services to Gok-Machar has been hampered, which increases prices in the market resulting in heightened economic hardships on the population.

2.2. Issues that have improved or changed since 2018

- Local border conflicts have significantly reduced following continued engagement by Saferworld and partner, CIPDA with local communities in peacebuilding activities.
- Chieftainship disputes arising from the political appointment of chiefs who clashed with those elected by the community has improved.
- Land disputes between farmers have reduced due to activities that promote peaceful co-existence among residents in Gok-Machar, allowing them to resolve disputes peacefully.
- Forced marriages. There are fewer cases of forced marriages reported in the area due to engagement with chiefs and authorities on gender-based violence.
- Fewer case of domestic violence have been reported compared to 2018.

2.3. New issues that have emerged since 2018

- High rates of alcohol consumption.
- Inadequate water points resulting in competition and conflicts over existing and few water resources.
- Increased rate of crimes such as theft and robbery.
- The COVID-19 pandemic and related lockdown measures have impacted on free movements and other business activities that generate incomes for families. This has resulted in food insecurity and hunger in the area.
- Migration of youth to Sudan searching for livelihood opportunities. This is a risky endeavour; young men risk being rounded up by militias, or being detained or even killed while illegally crossing the border to Sudan.
- A lack of job opportunities resulting in idleness among the youth. Young people are mostly seen playing of cards and dominoes when they are supposed to be engaging in productive work. This is in part due to lack employment opportunities. Young people generally lack opportunities, example, vocational training, to develop skills that they can use to earn a living
- School dropout rates are high. Due to peer pressure, young boys abandon school and join groups of gangs. Young girls are forced to drop out due to forced marriage, early pregnancy and lack of sanitary materials.

3. Safety and security threats facing women and girls, or their roles in fuelling existing conflict in Gok-Machar

3.1. Issues that have remained the same since 2018

- Early/forced marriages for young girls in Gok-Machar is rampant and affect girls' education. This is due to abject poverty which pushes families to marry off daughter to offset poverty. Majority of the girls are married before completing primary and secondary education in Gok-Machar has increased number of school dropouts among girls.
- Poor maternal health care for women increases the mortality rate of the women and children during delivery in the localities of Gok-Machar. There are no good health care centres for pregnant months which is perceived as security threats to women and children.
- Lack of quality education frustrates most of the students and the parents loosing hope in the future of their children thus resulted into early marriages and school dropped out.
- The practice of polygamy resulted into many cases of divorces, increased of the children in the streets and as well as domestic violence because economically the cost of living becomes hard and unaffordable by poor families.
- Unwanted pregnancies.
- Unemployment of youth increases number of youth gangs and robberies thus causing insecurity to the community and business people.
- SGBV prevalence increases due to exploitation over the earning of living by children and vulnerable people.

3.2. Issues that have improved or changed since 2018

- Domestic violence has reduced linked to continued awareness campaigns in the area.
- Force marriages have reduced. Although some cases of forced marriage continue to be reported, the scale has slightly reduced.
- Women fuelling conflicts. The women's sub-cluster has empowered women to stop fuelling conflict in the community.

- Girls' enrolment in schools have improved in the area. However there are fear of impact of the Covid-19 lockdown on girls. There have been reported increases of pregnancies of girls due to the Covid-19 lockdown in other parts of Aweil. Although not reported in Aweil North, the risks of continued lockdown to girls' education are very high.

3.3. New issues that have emerged since 2018

- Hunger/ food insecurity keeps increasing due to flood and dry spelt as well as border trade closure thus making life of the vast community hard to secure routine meals as expected.
- The COVID 19 pandemic. Small business operated by women have been closed due to lockdown which has negative impact on their livelihoods.
- High rate of unwanted pregnancies among girls. Due to poverty in the area, majority of young girls are manipulated by wealthy people, thus pushing girls to limit of sexual exploitation.
- Inadequate water points.
- Increase in divorce cases. Due to the economic crisis, men do not have enough resources to sustain polygamous families, which has resulted in women either being abandoned or choosing to divorce.
- Consumption of alcohol among youth and adult both women and men leads to the fighting among the youth and many rape attempts as well as increase robberies and many domestic violent cases in the area.
- Shisha smoking by many youth leads to idleness in the market just smoking and practising prostitution which leads to more cases of adulteries in the areas. Women abundant their children throughout the day and night and in their homes and crowd in the market at shisha place.

4. Safety threats facing young people in Gok-Machar

- Lack of job opportunities for youth is affecting their livelihoods.
- Increased bride price. With widespread poverty in the area, coupled with a lack of job opportunities for young people, young men are unable to afford to get married. A failure to pay dowries because of poverty can trigger fighting between families.
- Consumption of drugs by young people.
- Absence of skills training opportunities that prepare youth for jobs.
- Lack of youth involvement in decision-making by authorities.
- Lack of quality education for young people.
- Poor health services.

5. Potential solutions suggested by respondents

Proposed solutions to the above conflict issues

- Advocate for proper regulation of alcohol selling by the government
- Conduct awareness-raising on COVID-19 preventive measures.
- Establishment of girls' schools.
- Establishment of a vocational training centre for youth to help them avoid robberies create job opportunities to them to earn living.
- Strengthening the local health care system by providing enough health facilities for general medication and in particular for maternity resources for women.
- Strengthening the rule of law making people accountable for their act like apprehend youth gangs and take them to the court for justice, that is to empower police to deal with cases of such
- Creation of jobs and livelihood opportunities through micro-business and loan and saving programs in the areas for women.