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# Working Paper No.6 - South Sudan: The Economic and Social Impact of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

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## 1 Introduction

South Sudan is a country devastated by war. Since the end of colonial rule, there have been few years when the country has not been affected by conflict. Against this backdrop, the population has largely held to traditional values and close family ties. The world's newest independent country, it is dominated by strong traditions and low levels of Western-style development. South Sudan shares land borders with 6 countries, making its stability a concern across the Horn of Africa (Frontier Economics et al. 2015). Even as war and conflict persist, so too does daily life, although the social and economic life of the country have been profoundly eroded by constant conflicts. The basis of South Sudan's development has been, and will remain, its population. The wellbeing and status of women is a fundamental part of this.

Like many contemporary conflicts, South Sudan has attracted international attention for the brutality of conflict-related violence against women. However, research shows that even given a particularly vicious and misogynistic streak in the current conflict, women are, as generally the case, at greatest risk of violence when in their own homes, at the hands of their own partners and families. Recognising this fact, this paper discusses Violence Against Women (VAW) in South Sudan as a crucial development issue, and explores the impact this has on a nascent economy and society. While there is widespread recognition that VAW is a profound problem in South Sudan, this is generally discussed as a feature or an outcome of conflict, rather than as a driver of many of the root causes of conflict and poor development outcomes. We argue that VAW negatively impacts economic activity, and plays a role in the ongoing conflict-proneness of the state. We further argue that in order to place South Sudan on a path to peace and sustainable development, tackling VAW is essential and urgent.

## 2 Political context: Conflict

The territory that makes up contemporary South Sudan has been largely involved in conflict for at least five decades. The two Sudan civil wars ran from 1955 to 1972, and from 1983 to 2005, with the second war being fought largely in the south (the new state of South Sudan). In the aftermath of the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, a referendum was held, and in July 2011, South Sudan became an independent country. By December 2013, the government of the new state collapsed and the country lapsed into civil war. A peace agreement brokered in April 2016 barely lasted a few months before war broke out again.

The post-independence civil wars have been different to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Sudanese wars. The more recent conflicts are characterised by intense factionalism breaking down along often-shifting lines including ethnic and patrimonial loyalties. Throughout the decades of conflict, local communal violence has also been consistently present, regardless of the overarching political settlement. This is often related to cattle grazing and cattle rustling, cattle playing an enormously important role in the economy and culture of South Sudan (Elmusharaf 2015). Thefts of cattle and reprisal attacks can result in cycles of violence that involve extended families and persist through generations. Elements of the conflicts currently underway intertwine these different dimensions, involving both political differences at the level of national government, and local differences at the level of families and tribes.

The current conflict is consequently especially difficult to resolve, given indistinct structures of leadership and loyalty. It is most likely necessary to broker resolutions at multiple local levels, but there are few resources and little will for such a granular approach. The economic crisis that the country now confronts (see section 5.2 below) is most likely to intensify the conflict: as de Waal (2016) argues, it was not the extraordinary levels of corruption that caused the civil war, but the fact that the kleptocracy became insolvent. Competition for diminishing resources is likely to become more violent as the pool of available resources decreases.

A notable feature of the most recent conflict is its brutality, especially towards civilians, including women and children. Although South Sudan has been in a state of active conflict or post conflict for well over half a century, the experiences and nature of the violence have been markedly different over time. The more recent conflicts, particularly since the Crisis of 2013, have been noteworthy for their extreme brutality, including using mutilation, sexual violence and torture during assaults, targeted against civilians (Ellsberg et al. forthcoming).

Protracted conflict has important impacts on social relations and in particular gender relations. Community cohesion in South Sudan is traditionally rooted in communal ownership of wealth and shared values such as pride, hospitality and generosity (S. Ding et al. 2012, Evans-Pritchard 1951). De Waal argued in the case of the Sudan civil wars (ending in 2005) that the presence of conflict in parts of South Sudan strengthened social capital, causing communities such as that of Abyei on the frontline to rally together in support of the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army and one another. While this is a common feature of societies in conflict, it often occludes intra-community violence and particularly domestic violence. Where individual women are victimised, often by their own intimate partners or family members, it can be even more difficult to name the violence and victimisation in a context of

strong social bonds against an external enemy. Divided loyalties can therefore drive the problem underground and make it invisible (McWilliams and Ní Aoláin 2013).

Family connections and marital relations play a crucial role in the nature and progress of conflict in South Sudan. SPLA commanders have been shown to literally construct their social networks by marrying many wives and having large families to staff their battles (Pinaud 2016). The military elite consolidates its position through the provision of gifts, often cattle to serve as marriage gifts (Pinaud 2016). Marriage to soldiers can offer women protection from targeted victimisation by other combatants (de Waal 2016), and there is evidence in recent years that families are increasingly marrying their daughters at a young age as a means of economic survival, since it brings a dowry (Frontier Economics et al. 2015). Marriage plays a fundamental role in structuring social, political and economic relations in South Sudan, and as such it is a core feature of the conflicts there.

Recognising that women play a unique role and have unique and gendered experiences of conflict, the UN Security Council has since 2000 issued a number of Special Resolutions on the topic of Women, Peace and Security.<sup>1</sup> These resolutions provide for the prevention of violent conflict and violence against women in conflict; the protection of women in conflict; and women's participation in conflict resolution. Long experience of war and displacement has resulted in women from South Sudan developing leadership and organising skills, and playing public roles (Erickson and Faria 2011). Women have organised to push for their inclusion in peacemaking and peace building, invoking South Sudan's National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security 2015-2020.

### 3 Status of women in South Sudan

As with all issues relevant to South Sudan, comprehensive quantitative data on the status of women is absent. For example, South Sudan is not included in the UNDP's Gender Inequality Index, since there is little gender-specific data to analyse. However, certain indicators of human development are stark. The maternal mortality ratio of 2,037 per 100,000 live births is among the highest in the world (Elmusharaf et al. 2017). As of 2006, young women between the ages of 15 and 19 were likelier to die in childbirth than finish primary school. Only 16 percent of the female population over 15 is literate, compared to 40 percent for men (World Bank 2013). On the other hand, South Sudan sees a high level of representation of women in politics: the 2011 constitution mandates a 25% quota for women in parliamentary seats (Ali 2011), and since independence women's representation has exceeded this figure. Estimates of labour force participation suggest that women are part of the labour force at up to 75% of the rate of men (data.un.org), a far greater level of equality than in neighbouring countries. While neighbouring countries demonstrate high levels of religious extremism, making regressive gender norms a matter of orthodoxy, South Sudan is more normatively egalitarian (Ali 2011).

South Sudan has devastatingly low human development indicators across the board, and women suffer especially badly. Nonetheless, women are active and visible in the public

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<sup>1</sup> UNSCR 1325 (2000); 1820 (2008); 1888 (2009); 1889 (2009); 1960 (2010); 2106 (2013); 2122 (2013).

sphere. The society is one in which the respective roles of women and men are clearly demarcated and maintained. The foundation of society and economy is the institution of marriage, secured and maintained by the exchange of cattle.

As a result of this, men are recognised as natural heads of households, and have absolute authority over their households. This arrangement is secured by the bride price of cattle, paid by the man's family. A wife's position is thus subservient not only to her husband, but to his wider family. Wife inheritance is practiced in many communities, whereby if a man dies, his wife passes automatically to a member of his household (typically his brother or the eldest son of his first wife) (Ellsberg et al. forthcoming).

Owing to the lack of state presence in most of the country, conflict has led to a retrenchment of customary law in South Sudan. Customary law brings benefits in that it is often a source of cohesion and order in families and communities; however, it is also patriarchal and reinforces the subservience of women (Frontier Economics et al. 2015). Traditional norms thus interact with conflict to limit the scope for new, more gender equal laws or policies to make a change in women's lives. Within the household, men are viewed as rightfully dominant, with the authority to discipline and control women's lives. Women often do not have control over money, and cannot freely choose to work outside the home (Ellsberg et al. forthcoming).

Attitudes towards gender based violence mirror this culture of male dominance. A study conducted with 680 individuals male and female in seven sites within South Sudan in 2009–2011 revealed an overwhelming acceptance from both women and men toward violence against women. There is a considerable level of agreement that 'a woman should tolerate violence in order to keep her family together', 'there are times when a woman deserves to be beaten', and 'it is okay for a man to hit his wife if she won't have sex with him' (Scott et al. 2013)

## 4 Violence Against Women and Girls in South Sudan

Violence Against Women and Girls is widely regarded as a serious problem in South Sudan, with INGOs such as Care International and Amnesty International drawing equal attention to its barbarity as well as its pervasiveness. Nonetheless, and unsurprisingly given the fragile context over many decades, there is very limited comprehensive data on the prevalence of violence against women. The following section discusses the types of VAWG that occur in South Sudan, to the extent that data allows us to know this. The two subsequent sections explore two types of violence in more detail: intimate partner violence, and conflict-related violence, and go on to discuss the inter-relations between different types of VAWG and conflict.

In spite of data limitations, there is a certain amount of information available about types and prevalence of VAWG in South Sudan. In a 2009 study, 41% of respondents reported that they had experienced GBV in the past year and 29% reported knowing someone who had experienced GBV in the past year. The most commonly reported forms of GBV included physical violence (47%), psychological violence (44%), economic violence (30%), and sexual violence (13%). Evidence collected from interviews in a 2011 report revealed that 59% of

surveyed women reported GBV in the home and 19% reported GBV in the community (Scott et al. 2013).

Formative research conducted for DfID's What Works programme in South Sudan indicates that, in spite of the high profile given to conflict-driven sexual violence, the most common form of violence perpetrated against adult women is physical and sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner, known as intimate partner violence or IPV (Ellsberg et al. forthcoming). This finding is complicated by the taboo surrounding non-partner sexual violence, and the very low likelihood that women will report or even discuss the act. In the absence of prevalence data, the best that can be said is that both IPV and non partner sexual violence (NPSV) are likely to occur at a higher rate than the global average – which is one in three women experiencing either IPV or NPSV.

Other forms of intimate partner violence are likely to also be common although they are rarely reported, including psychological and economic violence. Women also experience violence at the hands of their own families and those of their husbands, for example if they reject a marriage partner or if they are perceived by their in-laws to have “misbehaved” (Elmusharaf 2015). Polygamy is commonly practiced in South Sudan, and can result in competition and tensions between wives and between a wife and her husband: it is often associated with heightened levels of family violence (Ellsberg et al. forthcoming).

Outside of the sphere of family violence, conflict-related violence is the type that receives high levels of attention, although instances of non-partner sexual violence are utterly taboo and so rarely discussed. Section 4.2 expands in some detail on the nature of conflict-related violence against women. In addition to this, sexual harassment may be a rising problem in South Sudanese communities, although it was not considered prevalent previously. Qualitative interviews carried out by Ellsberg et al suggest that harassment may have increased following the 2005 signing of the CPA and return of refugees from other countries. Similarly, with growing poverty and instability there has been a rise of petty criminal activity particularly in Juba City and Protection of Civilian Camps (PoCs). This activity can be accompanied by sexual assault perpetrated by armed men or gangs (Ellsberg et al). All forms of gender based violence (GBV) tend to go unreported: for example, in a survey conducted by Care International, just 7% of all women who had experienced GBV had reported it to any authority, either because of fear, shame, or because they felt there was no point in reporting (Care International 2014).

#### 4.1 Intimate Partner Violence

While it is difficult to estimate the exact prevalence of IPV, it is reasonable to assume that it is extremely high, as is common in conflict zones with strong patriarchal norms. As we have seen, attitudinal data demonstrates the problem to be normalised and probably widespread. For example, a 2011 investigation into protection concerns revealed that 59% of surveyed women reported GBV in the home and 19% reported GBV in the community (Scott et al. 2013). A culture of female subservience and male ownership of their wives and women in the extended family endorses the use of violence to control women, while an intensely stressful context increases violence triggers in households. The 2010 Demographic Health Survey

found that 79% of respondents considered it justifiable for men to beat their wives for any reason suggested (Ministry of Health and National Bureau of Statistics 2010).

According to qualitative research carried out for this report and another What Works project, physical violence is most widespread form of domestic violence, commonly exercised as a form of discipline by husbands over their wives (Ellsberg et al. forthcoming, Elmusharaf 2015). Economic violence is also widespread, especially instances of preventing a woman from working outside the home, and denying her access to adequate money for her needs, or controlling her salary if she does work outside the home (Ellsberg et al). Sexual violence in marriage is complicated by the fact that marital rape is not recognised by law, and culturally is viewed as non-existent. Thus, it is extremely hard to understand the true extent of the problem, but qualitative research suggests that it is common (Ellsberg et al. forthcoming, Elmusharaf 2015). In addition to physical, economic and sexual violence, psychological violence is also likely to be widespread (Ellsberg et al. forthcoming).

## 4.2 Conflict-related violence

Ellsberg et al. (forthcoming) remark that the most recent conflicts to affect South Sudan, particularly the 2013 Crisis, are unique for their extreme brutality and in targeting civilians, in particular for acts of extreme gender based violence. They suggest that while a degree of control over the rank and file was exercised by SPLA leadership during the Sudan wars including a prohibition on rape, the current crop of armed insurgents act with impunity. Reports from human rights and humanitarian actors substantiate this claim: since the outbreak of conflict at the end of 2013 there have been widespread reports of sexual violence against women and children by security forces, particularly in the States of Central Equatoria, Jonglei, Upper Nile, and Unity (Care International 2014, International Rescue Committee 2012). Forms of such violence include rape, including gang rape and rape with objects, sexual slavery and abduction, taking of 'war wives', forced abortion and mutilation of women's bodies. Women, young girls and young boys have all been targeted by perpetrators and there is evidence of the perpetration of such acts by combatants on all sides of the conflict (UNMISS, 2014: 49). Given that reporting is extremely rare, it is likely that such cases represent the most extreme instances, and a tip of the iceberg. Many of the rape cases that have been reported are girls in their childhood mainly less than 13 years old. Most of these cases occur at home, at schools, or at night and in the transportation (ibid).

In qualitative interviews, individuals in PoCs have said that at times women are selected by their own families to run errands outside of the camp, because while they run the risk of rape and sexual assault, men will be killed (Ellsberg et al. forthcoming). In a militarised atmosphere, inter-communal violence also persists, driven by competition for cattle ownership and acts of cattle rustling: women are directly targeted as a part of this violence also, and rape used as a tactic of revenge (ibid).

### 4.3 Relationship between Conflict and VAWG

Ellsberg et al describe how the conflict informs, drives and triggers a wide range of types of violence against women, and all VAW in South Sudan can be described as in some way conflict-related. Directly conflict-related violence is that in which civilians are targeted by combatants, often in such a way that it includes sexual and gender-based abuse, targeting women specifically for their reproductive role. But conflict pervades relationships in South Sudan, and it informs almost all types of VAW.

Much violence against women is indirectly conflict-related: for example intimate partner violence, family violence, forced and early marriage, and sexual harassment. These episodes, which we have seen are likely even more common than those directly conflict-related, are rooted in societal attitudes and values. However, they are exacerbated and often triggered by the conflict context. The economic context is dire, with the country experiencing famine since August 2016, and formal employment opportunities almost absent. Poverty, hunger and illness all increase the stress and tensions at household and community level, and can result in violent acts. These tensions emerge in a hyper-masculine, militarised context, where physical violence is normal, weapons easily available, and men are often practiced in attacking and defending others. One of the impacts of the conflict is the absence of the rule of law in many locations, so that most acts of violence or criminality are carried out with impunity; while customary law does exist, it is deeply patriarchal and invariably favours the man in a relationship dispute. Thus, while specific episodes of violence in themselves may be local and not part of a wider political conflict, they are embedded in a context which increases both their prevalence and brutality.

The relationship also works the other way, with violence against women in turn informing the context of normalised competition and violence as a means of resolving disputes. Norms of gender intolerance and inequality which are supported by an 'environment of structural violence [against women and girls]' result in violence 'as a way of life and a valid tool for settling disputes' (Caprioli 2005). In the case of South Sudan, gender inequality is clearly pervasive, and this is likely to be a factor in intensifying violent reactions to conflict. The corollary of this is that communities and societies possessing more gender equitable attitudes are the ones most likely to reject violent conflict as a means of resolving disputes (Melander 2005). Finally, violence frequently works to remove women from the public sphere, and to limit their ability to play an equitable role in the task of peacemaking, peacebuilding and governance, resulting in less comprehensive and robust post-conflict settlements. Addressing gender inequality, and particularly gender based violence, could prove essential to laying the foundations for lasting peace in South Sudan.

## 5 Economic context

South Sudan became independent as an oil state, but in the short years since independence in 2011, it has suffered total economic collapse. In 2016, inflation ran to 300% while the currency slumped by 90% (Africa Research Bulletin, 2016). A global fall in oil prices coincided with a 35% drop in oil production owing to the conflict, a devastating blow in a country where

90% of government revenue at independence came from oil (de Waal 2016). External debt rose from an estimated 3.2% to 38.7% of GDP in 2016. Consequently, international aid was suspended pending economic reform and implementation of the August 2015 peace agreement (African Research Bulletin, 2016). Against this backdrop, food prices soared and in February 2017, famine was declared in South Sudan. The famine is widely recognised as a result of catastrophic political failures.

At independence, it was apparent that South Sudan was oil dependent, and therefore vulnerable to risks typified by the concept of the resource curse, including corruption, a lack of long-term planning, and strong political grievances from numerous constituencies (de Waal 2016). Even in peace time, there were few linkages between the oil sector and the wider economy. Instead, most new economic activity centred around the cities of Juba and Wau, servicing the needs of international oil and development aid professionals with hotels, private transport and construction services, largely staffed by business people from other East African countries (S. Ding et al. 2012).

Outside of the oil and aid sectors, just 12% of the population is engaged in formal economic activity (CIA.gov), and 80% work in agriculture. In spite of its labour intensive agriculture sector, South Sudan is in fact import-dependent, including for foodstuffs. Imports are costly owing to an almost non-existent transport infrastructure: the country has just 200km of paved roads. Local economic activity mainly consists of informal, micro and small enterprises, largely headed by women (World Bank 2013), and this local activity is the most likely basis for any future sustainable economic growth.

The poor levels of education and population health in South Sudan, discussed in section 6 below, mean that the country has extremely low levels of human capital. As a result, what economic opportunities exist are largely exploited instead by enterprising people and businesses from outside of the country (S Ding et al. 2012). Infrastructure is similarly poor: South Sudan has among the lowest road densities in all of Africa, while only around 1% of the population have access to electricity, mainly privately provided by off-grid diesel plants (Attipoe et al. 2014). For those few urban dwellers with access to central electricity supplies, the tariff is among the highest in Africa (ibid). Since the 2013 Crisis, essential infrastructure has been destroyed, including schools and hospitals. The country ranks 186<sup>th</sup> in the world in the 2016 World Bank Doing Business index.

South Sudan is economically primitive, with a large amount of activity occurring at the micro scale, very limited sectoral linkages, poor human capital, and significant barriers to doing business of all kinds. The task faced by government and administrators is enormous. On the other hand, reserves of oil, extensive agricultural land and access to markets throughout East and Horn of Africa are suggestive of economic promise. What is not visible in any macro economic analysis is the immense drag on the economy that violence against women currently places. Across all sectors and locations of the economy, the epidemic levels of unreported violence are impacting on the productivity of workers, both women and men, and on the wellbeing of families and children.



## 6 Human development, poverty and inequality

South Sudan has extremely low indicators of human development. Ranking among the ten lowest countries in the 2016 Human Development Index, the average life expectancy at birth is 56.1 years, while the adult literacy rate is just 31.9%. The combination of dire maternal health and mortality with a patriarchal system that places immense importance on women's childbearing role make the context especially bad for women: we have already seen (in Section 3, above) that women's rates of education and literacy are far lower than those for men.

Human development has been profoundly affected by years of conflict, but especially by the most recent conflict. According to Ellsberg et al, in the aftermath of the Crisis of 2013, formal employment opportunities dropped owing to a drop in foreign investment and especially a reduction in oil production. What's more, fears for personal safety have resulted in a reduction in smaller scale livelihoods activities such as petty trading. A 2014 report by Frontier Economics on the cost of war in South Sudan outlines the many ways in which the conflict could impact on human development and ultimately on indirectly conflict-related deaths. The report highlighted that in the case of a protracted and serious conflict, human health would be impacted through disease and food insecurity: this has clearly now occurred. Frontier Economics estimated that after 3 years, for every one direct death from conflict, there was likely to be 5 indirect deaths (Frontier Economics et al. 2015).

South Sudan came to independence with some of the worst development indicators in the world. While the country has been independent for a very short time, and has been in conditions of civil war for much of that time, it is still fair to say that there has been no serious effort to address poverty, poor services and profound lack of opportunity. A UNDP analysis of budgets in the country shows that budgetary allocations dedicated to infrastructure and the social sector (including health and education) were pegged at less than 20% of the overall budget by 2014. For example, the 2013/2014 budget shows 3.8% dedicated to education, 2.4% to health, in contrast to a massive 17.8% spend on security (Attipoe et al. 2014).

## 7 Political and legal context of VAWG

In order to understand the context of violence against women in different countries, it is essential to assess legal and policy provisions prohibiting and preventing different types of gender based violence. These indicate the protections that are available from the state, and the measures that states are taking, including through norm-setting, to prevent violence. In the case of South Sudan, it is important to note that there is a general breakdown in the rule of law, and few people can access formal justice for any situation. The framework of the law thus tells us more about intention and norms than it does about the actual provisions available to women at present. In the event that the rule of law is established, much work remains to be done to put in place a comprehensive system of protections from gender based violence.

South Sudan ratified the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2014; this is the principle international instrument for promoting gender equality, and it includes an optional protocol related to Gender Based Violence. In 2015, the Ministry

of Gender, Child and Social Welfare launched a five-year National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. In principle, this is a high level commitment to preventing conflict and its disproportionate impact on women and girls, protecting women and ensuring their participation. However, the impact of such plans is often mediated by the power of the government department that manages them.

Rape is prohibited under the Penal Code, and is punishable by up to a 14 year prison sentence; sexual harassment is also against the law, with a punishment of up to three years detention (US Department of State 2014). However, intimate partner violence is not prohibited, and the act of forced sex within marriage is not recognised as a crime. Prosecutions and convictions for violence against women are almost unheard of.

In the absence of access to formal justice or indeed services, most incidents of violence are neither reported nor addressed. Indeed, the stigma that adheres to sexual violence makes it almost entirely undisclosed. In response to the December 2013 Crisis, humanitarian actors have set up GBV services and coordination mechanisms in five Protection Of Civilians sites. Outside of these, women are reliant on police services for protection, although information from key informants suggests that there is a lack of faith in the formal justice system (Ellsberg et al. forthcoming). Special Protection Units have been developed to address the problem of police insensitivity, staffed by specially trained police and offering legal aid, protection, medical care and psychosocial support. The development of these units has been slowed by a lack of trained personnel, however, and they remain largely unavailable outside of major urban centres (Elmusharaf 2015).

The traditional means of resolving cases of family violence, primarily violence against women, is through customary practices known as Boma Courts, led by local chiefs. These courts tend to seek to maintain families rather than enabling a woman to leave an abusive situation. In cases of rape, many survivors are forced to marry their attacker, since the woman is spoiled for any other marriage match, and this will allow the family to receive bride-price, and the woman to have the opportunity of marriage and parenthood (Ibreck et al. 2017).

## 8 Conclusion: Impacts of VAWG on South Sudan's economy and society

No studies have been carried out on the impact of violence against women on South Sudan. Indeed, VAW tends to be viewed as an outcome of the conflict, rather than a root cause, contributing both to conflict and to a drag on economic development. The current study aims to outline the ways in which failure to address VAW will continue to place an unsustainable burden on the economy and society.

Although we do not have accurate prevalence statistics, it is widely estimated that prevalence of IPV and conflict-related non-partner physical and sexual violence is extremely high. There is going recognition that VAW is a crucial development issue. The phenomenon has a significant impact on a nascent society and economy. Through its impact on formal and informal workplaces, VAW places a drag on economic growth which is unacknowledged. Since economic disaster is a major factor in the spiralling conflict, this economic impact cannot be separated from the political impact of VAW on the conflict-proneness of the state. There is a significant burden of ill health following on from VAW, which is currently borne at a local level

by women themselves and by their families. In the absence of effective healthcare services to address this burden, women undergo the physical and mental trauma of family abuse largely without ever seeking professional help to address it: this results in reduced capacity for work, childcare and social and community engagement. The health and human burden of violence against women may be even greater than that of conflict, since rates of IPV are likely to be far higher than those of conflict-related violence among civilians (Ellsberg et al. forthcoming). Thus, at individual level, VAW diminishes human capital and individual capabilities; while at the level of society as a whole, it plays a destabilising role, reinforcing conflict dynamics.

VAW is an under-examined, but crucial component of the overall crisis in South Sudan. In order to put the country on a stable path to peace and development, addressing VAW will be crucial.

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