



Working to prevent violent conflict

## BRIEFING

October 2011

# People's Perspectives on Peacemaking in South Sudan

## An initial assessment of insecurity and peacebuilding responses in Unity State

Complex layers of insecurity plague Unity State. As one of the states bordering Sudan, the people of Unity experience first-hand the impact of Khartoum's policies in Abyei and Southern Kordofan. The campaign currently being pursued in those areas follows a familiar pattern to the military campaigns launched against communities living around the crucial oil infrastructure located in Unity. The insecurity in Southern Kordofan and Abyei has further restricted crucial trade between residents of Unity and Sudan causing prices to escalate throughout the state. This comes atop an already fragile economic situation in which food security has always been tenuous at best.

Throughout the civil war, Unity was the site of severe fighting as various inter-ethnic tensions flared within North-South and South-South conflict dynamics. Competing Nuer factions fought against each other as well as against the South Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) for influence and control over the oil field areas. Shifting allegiances within Unity have always influenced and been influenced by political arrangements in Khartoum and Juba and perceived links between the capitals, armed groups and political leadership remain. Tensions on the national stage play out at state level with perceptions of marginalisation and ethnic rivalry magnified as political competition is polarised between competing ethnic groups with long-standing grievances. Additionally, in 2011 armed rebel groups found fertile ground in Unity to mobilise against perceived marginalisation and bias within the South Sudanese government, using violence and the disruption of activities through landmines as a tool to further identity-driven political and economic agendas.

With the majority of the existing oil installations operating in Unity, the expectations for increased security and development in an independent country run high. However, serious concerns about the ability of the state government to translate oil revenue into service delivery continue to shadow the administration. The seeming injustice of not having visible economic and development dividends from the oil exploration plays into the lack of reconciliation and redress for the scale of abuses incurred by the populations living close to oil installations during the civil war. This further motivates a sense of marginalisation and victimisation and lends towards increased frustration with the government at state and national level and increases the potential for further violence.

### Unity State Profile

- Predominantly Nuer with Dinka communities in the northern counties of Abiemnom and Pariang
- 9 counties – Mayom, Rubkhona, Abiemnom, Pariang, Guit, Koch, Mayendit, Leer and Panyijar
- Population 585 801 with 311 477 of these under the age of 16
- 160 000 returnees settled in Unity State (SSRRC/IOM 2011)

Statistical Yearbook 2009, [http://www.qoss-online.org/magnoliaPublic/en/Independant-Commissions-and-Chambers/Center-for-Census--Statistics-and-Evaluation/mainColumnParagraphs/0/content\\_files/file1/Statistical%20Yearbook%20Final.pdf](http://www.qoss-online.org/magnoliaPublic/en/Independant-Commissions-and-Chambers/Center-for-Census--Statistics-and-Evaluation/mainColumnParagraphs/0/content_files/file1/Statistical%20Yearbook%20Final.pdf)

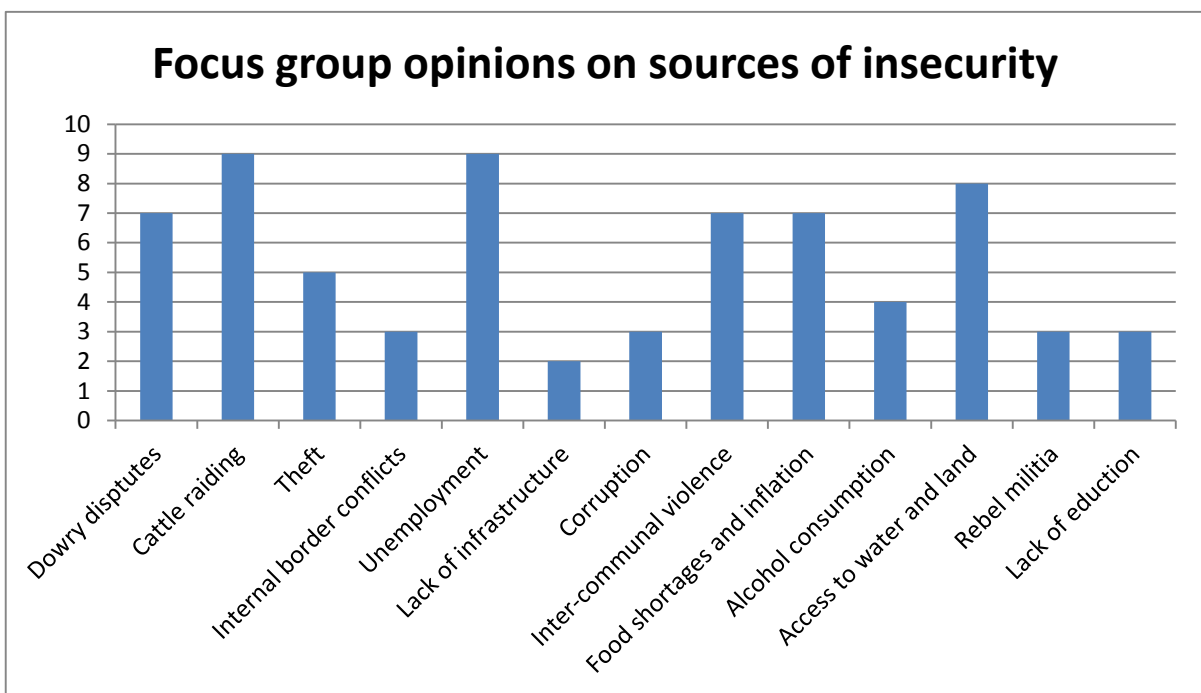
It is into this complex environment that the government of the new state with the support of international partners are implementing peacebuilding measures. The purposes of this paper are to:

- Outline some of the key sources of insecurity in Unity State
- Present public perceptions on security and development responses
- Propose implications for future programming

This paper is based on field research conducted in Unity State in September and October 2011. Primary data was collected through focus group discussions and key informant interviews in Bentiu, Rubkhona and Guit. Fourteen focus group discussions were conducted with elders, women, men and youth<sup>1</sup>. The data gathered from the focus groups was complemented by fourteen key informant interviews with political leaders, state representatives, traditional authorities, security service providers, civil society representatives and international actors. The focus groups and key stakeholder interviews sought to establish perceptions on insecurity and peacebuilding.

### Key sources of insecurity in Warrap State

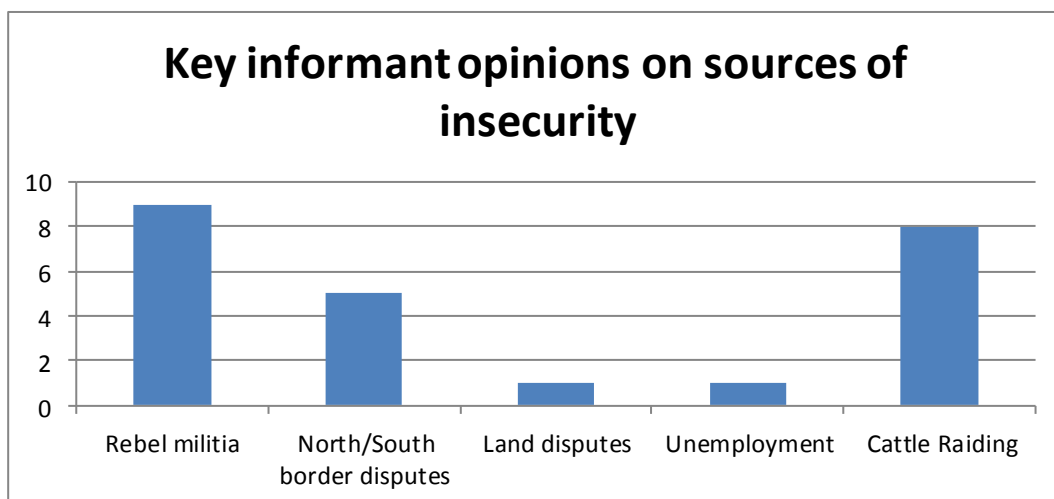
From the focus group discussions, the following key issues were identified as sources of insecurity:



The above chart captures the number of groups that mentioned the specific issue as a source of insecurity. In all of the fourteen groups, participants mentioned more than one source of insecurity and all these responses are captured above.

The chart on the following page captures the number of key informants that mentioned the specific issue as a source of insecurity. Most of the fourteen people interviewed mentioned more than one source of insecurity and all these responses are captured below.

<sup>1</sup> A total of 116 people participated in focus groups of which 41 were female and 75 were male.



Before further discussing the content of these findings, there are some interesting observations about the data sets. Firstly, with the focus group discussions, more so than in the other states in which we have conducted this research<sup>2</sup>, it is evident that there are complex, inter-related and layered sources of insecurity being faced by the resident population with varied sources of insecurity highlighted. Secondly, it is interesting to observe the different perceptions emerging from the focus group discussions and from the key informant interviews. The key informant interviews targeted senior leaders from government at state and county level as well as representatives from the security services, international community and civil society. What emerged is a significant difference between the perception of the level of threat presented by **rebel militia** groups with more senior leaders more concerned about the impact of these actors and local populations having less fear of the impact of rebel militia activities.

During the civil war, the CPA period and into independence, Unity State has in many ways borne the brunt of **rebel militia** activity. During the war, at certain points Khartoum-backed forces under Paulino Matiep Nhial, Peter Gadet Yak and Riek Machar Teny fought against the SPLA and each other for control of key strategic points around the oil producing areas. Even with the integration of key Nuer leaders into the government<sup>3</sup>, severe inter-Nuer violence and aggravated tensions between Nuer and Dinka elements of the SPLM/A continue to provide impetus for violence. In March 2011, forces loyal to Peter Gadet Yak announced the formation of the South Sudan Liberation Army (SSLA) which has become an umbrella for a group of loosely associated armed groups operating mostly in Unity State. In August 2011, Gadet signed an agreement with the Government of South Sudan to re-integrate into the SPLA and for mechanisms to be set up to deal with the grievances about the defence reform process that spurred the defection earlier in the year. The case of Gadet has clearly illustrated that there are significant concerns with integration arrangements within the SPLA including on rank negotiation, discipline and professionalism (with allegations of corruption, bias and nepotism) and inter-ethnic tensions<sup>4</sup>.

Across the participants consulted in Unity State, **cattle raiding** was seen to be the most prevalent source of insecurity. Also related to raiding is competition for **access to land and water** and **inter-communal violence**. Cattle raiding and competition for land and water resources are common facets of agro-pastoralist livelihoods where cattle form a central part of social and economic hierarchies. Although raiding between the Nuer and Dinka in parts of Unity State is a frequent seasonal occurrence, the primary areas of concern expressed by participants came from cross-border raiding between Unity, Lakes and Warrap states.

<sup>2</sup> The EC-PPP project has used the same methodology and questions in Warrap, Jonglei and Unity. To see the reports from Warrap and Jonglei go to: <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/search-resources.php?pubType=Briefing%2Fsubmission>

<sup>3</sup> Paulino Matiep and his forces integrated into the SPLA and he currently serves as Deputy Chief of Staff of the SPLA. Riek Machar serves as Vice President. Peter Gadet integrated into the SPLA before defecting again in March 2011.

<sup>4</sup> See for more information: Saferworld South Sudan Monitor May 2011 available online at <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/> and International Crisis Group, *South Sudan: Compounding instability in Unity State*, 17 October 2011

Such tensions are further frustrated by **disputes over borders** both between communities as well as between Sudan and South Sudan. Unity State occupies a precarious geostrategic location: sharing a sizeable and un-demarcated border with Sudan, sharing borders with four other South Sudanese states and rested atop significant oil reserves. Land is central to the conflict dynamics for the cattle rearing populations, the Misseriya that seasonally migrate across the border and for control of oil, water and other essential resources.

Associated in many ways with socio-cultural practices of cattle rearing communities, the phenomenon of **dowry disputes** was highlighted as a serious concern. Respondents particularly highlighted 'girl stealing' or the practice of abducting young women as wives without paying bride price. The non-payment of bride price, which is a significant source of income for families with girl children, is taken to be a serious infringement and can be met with violent response. Additionally, in three of the focus groups the 'girl issue' was also related to young women becoming pregnant before bride price had been paid which can negate efforts by her family to secure a good dowry.

One of the serious concerns raised by participants in the focus group discussions was **food security and inflation**. Like most parts of South Sudan, food security is a serious issue for most communities. For Unity State, this situation has been further pressurised in recent months with the restriction of access to Sudan. Unity State is somewhat economically isolated from the rest of South Sudan and depends on access to markets in Sudan for buying and selling goods. Since May 2011 there have been restrictions imposed on the transport of goods and fuel from the north which has been further aggravated by the conflicts in Abyei and South Kordofan in recent months. Communities are facing extreme shortages and massive increases in prices for goods and fuel. Adding further pressure is the influx of refugees and internally displaced persons as insecurity continues to plague the northern and eastern counties of Pariang and Abiemnom (that share border areas with Sudan) and Mayom (the geographic centre of much militia activity). With indications that the border will remain closed and the risk of insecurity remains high, the food insecurity situation in many parts of Unity State is unfortunately set to continue and probably worsen into 2012<sup>5</sup>. Additionally, in response to the restrictions placed on trade into South Sudan by Khartoum, there are indications that South Sudan will close the border in December 2011 to prevent northern nomadic groups from entering southern territory during annual grazing migrations<sup>6</sup>. This could cause further volatility between communities living along the border; especially if military deployment is used to ensure the closure of migration routes.

**Unemployment** was highlighted by both sets of respondents as an area of concern and is related to both increasing costs of food and goods and **lack of education**. Outside of agro-pastoral livelihoods, the oil sector is a key source of employment in Unity State. However, there have long existed perceptions that more people from Sudan are employed in the oil fields than drawn from local communities<sup>7</sup> which fuels grievances and perceptions of marginalisation that already exist in some areas. However, lack of access to education and the continued impact of poverty and insecurity on sustained access to education, result in a young workforce unable to compete for jobs with competency, skills and experience.

As with other parts of South Sudan, Unity State suffers from a **lack of infrastructure** and some areas are largely inaccessible during the rainy season. Concerns around lack of infrastructure are slightly different in Unity than in other states due to the presence of oil companies and the influx of oil revenue. Other research conducted by Saferworld has noted the perception that oil companies should contribute more to the development of roads, schools and hospitals for local communities. Additionally, the state government is expected to show more visible improvement in infrastructure development because of access to increased state income derived from the oil revenue. In the focus group discussions, participants expressed frustration at perceived **corruption** in the state government that is preventing the translation of oil income into public goods, development and improved livelihoods.

Other social ills, often associated with the pressures of unemployment, food insecurity and lack of

<sup>5</sup> FAO estimates an increase in the number of severely food-insecure people in South Sudan 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Sudan Tribune, 'South Sudan to shut borders with north: official', 25 September 2011 Available online <http://www.sudantribune.com/South-Sudan-to-shut-borders-with,40237> Accessed 18 October 2011

<sup>7</sup> See for example, International Crisis Group, *South Sudan: Compounding instability in Unity State*, 17 October 2011

development opportunities, such as **alcohol abuse** and **theft** were also highlighted by participants as sources of insecurity. One of the cross-cutting issues that was raised in various ways was around the youth: violence, banditry and theft was often related to youth unemployment and the lack of opportunities for a population that is predominantly under the age of 30.

## **Security and development responses**

### **Government**

From the focus group discussions, the primary government actor that people felt should provide for their security is the South Sudanese Police Service (SSPS) and there were high expectations that increased police presence, training and equipment would yield increased security dividends. However, some very serious concerns about the police were raised including:

- Lack of police capacity with deployment concentrated at county level and limited presence at *payam* level (noted by all focus groups)
- Lack of training and experience (noted by all focus groups)
- Lack of vehicles and mobility (noted by 11 of 14 focus groups)
- Abuse and corruption, including drunkenness, beatings and bribery (noted by 10 of 14 groups)
- Infrequent pay (noted by 9 of 14 groups)
- Too old (noted by 5 of 14 groups)

Two of the groups also referred to a lack of laws to enable policing and the prosecution of criminal behaviour. There are two facets worth noting here: firstly, there are some significant gaps in the legal framework in South Sudan due largely to changes being undertaken in the legal system with the shift to independence. Secondly, there are potential gaps in training for the police on the laws that are in place and on the criminal procedures required for the implementation thereof.

In the key informant interviews, the responses to questions about government responses to security and development concerns raised above were significantly different from the emphasis on policing expressed during the focus group discussions. Only one key informant highlighted the SSPS and the need for increased policing capacity. Other respondents referred to:

- Peace dialogues and conferences
- Negotiations with rebel militia groups
- Integration of militia forces into the SPLA
- Civilian disarmament programmes

The divergent opinions expressed between focus group discussants and key informants on government responses are congruent with opinions expressed during the previous section on sources of insecurity. There have been some significant successes with negotiating the integration of rebel militias into the SPLA since independence (for example of Peter Gadet Yak and his forces and Gatluak Gai's forces). The strategy of political engagement remains essential to bringing the remaining rebel militia groups into the fold.

In August 2011, a presidential decree was issued, calling for the national army to begin a civilian disarmament campaign in Lakes, Unity and Warrap states. Civilian disarmament is currently a key area of focus from the government with active weapons collection campaigns being conducted by the SPLA and civilian authorities across the three states. Initial indications in September and October are of success with voluntary and peaceful collection efforts.

### **International actors<sup>8</sup>**

In general, most respondents had positive opinions about the role that international actors had been playing in Unity State. Particular mention was made of healthcare, education and food provision programmes. These essential services and emergency assistance responses are crucial for survival and form the basis for future development programming. In the key informant interviews, the

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<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this discussion, 'international actors' includes the range of bilateral and multilateral agencies as well as internationally based civil society groups and non-governmental organisations.

activities of international actors in the realm of peacebuilding were noted with particular reference made to peace dialogues that had been hosted.

On the positive side, the primary perception was that international actors can be depended upon to deliver emergency assistance and to bridge gaps in government service delivery with specific emphasis on healthcare and education. On the negative side, participants expressed concerns that international actors employed mostly foreign staff who failed to understand the importance of local cultural and traditional practices and cannot speak local languages. Additionally, some international actors conduct assessments and data gathering in communities that sometimes do not get translated into concrete programming. There was a sense of frustration at the perceived lack of response to the needs and issues identified by local populations during consultations and assessments. Several respondents were also concerned about the seemingly weighty bureaucratic processes of international actors and the delays in the delivery of goods; an example was given of an agricultural programme in which tools and seeds arrived two months after planting season.

From the key informant interviews, the opinion was expressed by several participants (42 per cent) that international actors need to be more transparent and accountable with their funding and programming and co-ordinate better with the government. There was a call from the focus groups for increased employment and capacity-building for local community members for access to employment in international organisations as well as more support for community initiatives and improved community consultation.

From the focus group discussions, people have positive perceptions of projects carried out by international actors that have promoted health and hygiene, education, agriculture and access to water. An area of concern was that some of the water projects have been less successful because of a lack of sustainability – when water tanks and boreholes have broken, there was no locally empowered capacity to do repairs and maintenance. Additionally, there were perceptions that food was selectively distributed to some communities and not to others for reasons that people could not understand. Particularly when food is distributed to returnees and internally displaced people and not to host communities, access to food aid could become an additional source of tension within communities surviving on very meagre resources.

### **Traditional authorities**

From the focus group discussions emerged the opinion that traditional leaders should be empowered to play a more central role in dispute resolution and be given more powers to preside and judge cases in the community because of deficits in the formal criminal justice sector. In a focus group discussion at a chief's court, opinions were expressed that the traditional authorities bear a larger burden for administration and dispute resolution than the government, yet they do not get as many resources as the state administration. Additionally, the traditional authorities called for more court police to be able to enforce warrants for people to appear before the courts. It was accepted by various respondents that the traditional courts adjudicate on family and domestic matters, theft and assault but not on matters of murder, cattle raiding and theft of goods over the value of SSP 20,000<sup>9</sup>. However, in the focus group discussions it was also accepted that because the police are not always located close by, people report incidents to the chief. Additionally, reporting cases to the police was viewed as a time-consuming process that does not enable timely resolution of the dispute. As expressed in one of the discussions, people only report cases to the police that the chief of the area cannot resolve.

### **Obstacles to security and development**

The scope of the challenge of statebuilding and peacebuilding in Unity State is informed by the complex interplay of sources of insecurity and underdevelopment. People consulted during the collection of data for this report highlighted some key obstacles that are preventing further stability and development dividends in the post-independence era, including (in order of frequency mentioned):

- Lack of roads (this was related both to inaccessibility and to immobility due to landmines)

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<sup>9</sup> Approximately USD 6900 (at bank exchange rate of 2.9SSP to 1USD – 19 October 2011)

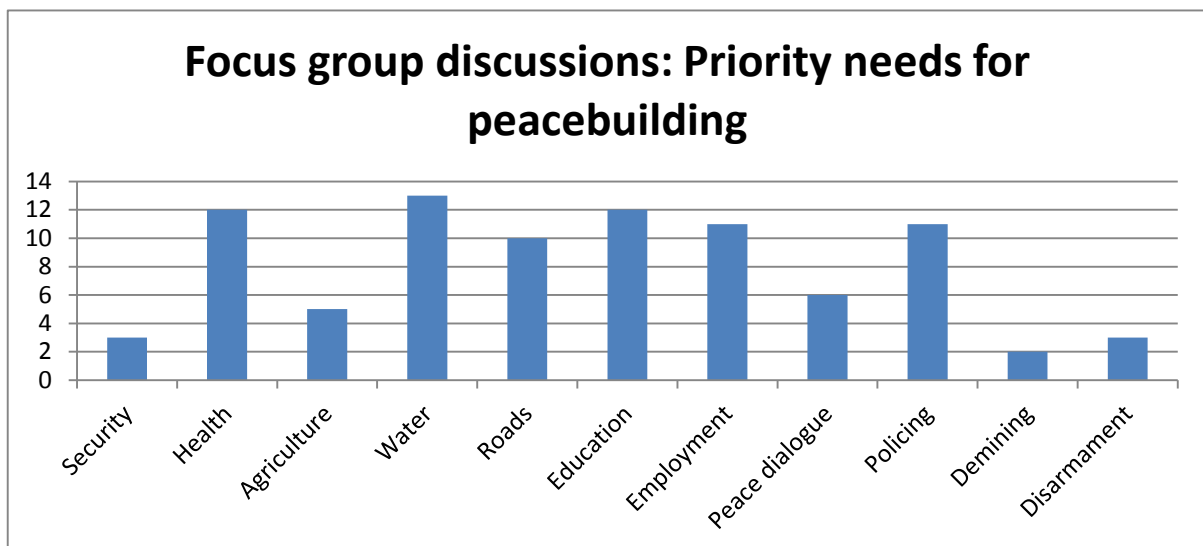
- Lack of training for police
- Lack of equipment for police and military
- Continued insecurity (from rebel militia, cattle raiding and along the border with Sudan)
- Lack of rule of law and weaknesses in the criminal justice sector
- The proliferation of small arms and light weapons
- Lack of financial resources for the state government
- Lack of coordination between actors in the security sector

With trade restrictions on goods transported from Sudan, respondents raised concerns about the lack of availability of goods and materials as a key obstacle to security and development. This includes basic food supplies, fuel and construction materials. Related to this, the issue of high taxes on goods and the collection of customs duty at several points along the road coming from Sudan and from surrounding southern states were raised as an obstacle to development. As food insecurity increases and people do not have access to markets in Sudan to sell cattle, the increase in prices and scarcity of goods in markets in Unity State, will severely impact livelihoods and poverty levels in the lean season.

In a focus group with women in Mankwai, Rubkhona, rape was discussed as an obstacle to development as women were unable to tend to their agricultural plots and to collect fresh water because they frequently get attacked by gunmen. The rape of women during cattle raiding was highlighted by some of the other focus groups as a problem that contributes to the continuation of cycles of violence and revenge attacks. Rape was also spoken about as an issue in relation to dowry disputes and girl impregnation to influence bride price arrangements. In the discussions when raised as an issue, rape was perceived as a problem in relation to having a negative impact on other issues (i.e. agriculture and food cultivation) but not as a problem in and of itself. This indicates that there is a significant problem in how gender-based violence is perceived in communities and the importance of advocating for respect for the rights of women in particular.

### Priority areas for peacebuilding

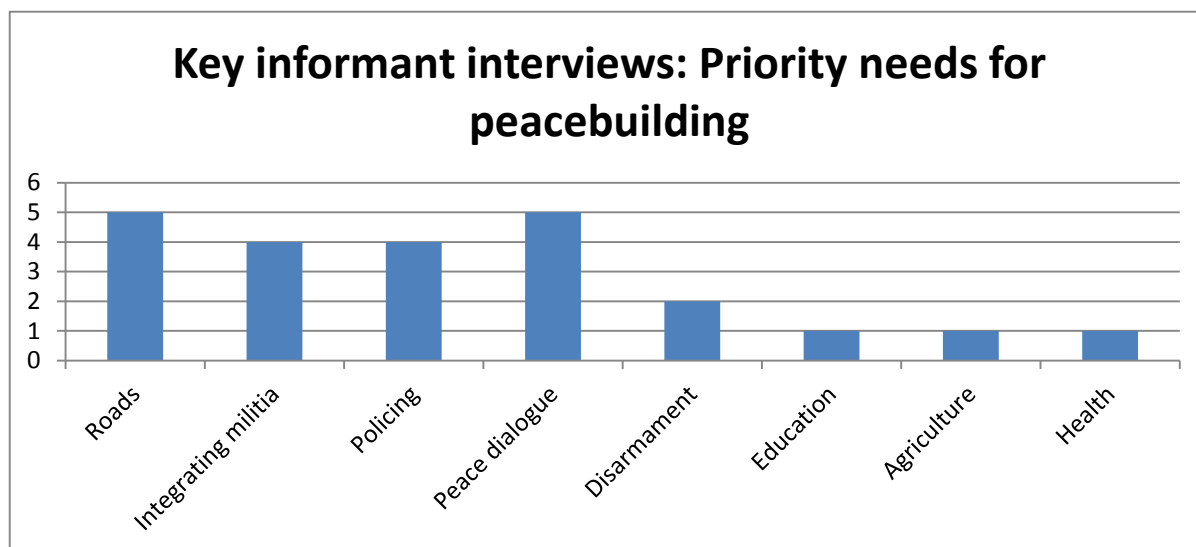
As with other areas in South Sudan, the list of needs and priorities to improve the livelihoods and security of people in Unity State is long. The following graph captures the number of times each issue was mentioned as a priority need during focus group discussions.



There was a clear prioritisation of increased access to water, education, healthcare and employment as the foundation for development. Access to water emerged as a clear priority area in order to reduce the potential for conflict during dry season and as a basis from which to improve living conditions. Access to health care was also a key priority area in terms of access to medical facilities (more clinics, hospitals and doctors) and also just having more access to medicines. In terms of traditional security priorities, a focus on improved policing capacity emerged as a priority area, followed by disarmament and demining as part of a need for improved security. Peace dialogues and

initiatives to encourage reconciliation were also mentioned as important to improving stability. Investment in agricultural production was seen as central to overcoming food insecurity. The focus on increased employment opportunities included references to the need for more micro-financing schemes and for vocational training centres particularly for women and youth.

In contrast, the following table presents the priority needs for peacebuilding identified during the key informant interviews.



The need for improved roads and more peace and reconciliation activities were the highest priorities emerging from key informant interviews. Issues of education, agriculture and health care were mentioned to a far lesser degree. Employment opportunities viewed as critical to improving standards of living during focus groups did not feature as a priority from the key informant interviews. This reinforces the differing perceptions of the range of people interviewed during this research and highlights that there is a distinct gap between the priorities of senior representatives and those of the communities. There is a different lens through which the different actors view their circumstances and the priorities of politics and security (and the legacy of a government being formed by and from a liberation army) provide a particularly 'hard' security focus to opinions. From community perceptions, the 'hard' security issues are more secondary to the requirements for survival and the basic building blocks for an experience of life with less suffering.

The findings from the research in Unity State also encourage increased questioning of the links between security and development and how programming can increase security and development simultaneously. Because of the differing perceptions that have emerged the research also reinforces the need for increased consultation and participation in order to ensure that government initiatives fulfil the needs of the citizens. However, given the particular historical legacy of the government, the continued insecurity and the political and economic competition occurring at all levels of authority, it can be expected that this 'hard' security lens remains the dominant framework to inform government action in Unity State.

### **Implications for programming**

The primary purpose of this analysis is to provide recommendations for the programming of international actors based on the perceptions of some of the recipient populations. A range of interesting findings have emerged; some of which are specific to Unity State and others that bear significance across geographic boundaries and for consideration in national and international level programming.



1. ***Building on defence transformation processes*** – there are several international efforts focusing on reform of the SPLA including disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) initiatives. The continued activities of rebel militia forces in Unity State have highlighted the importance of programmes that integrate non-state armed groups into the SPLA and the importance of overcoming perceptions of marginalisation in the military. The potential for spoilers to defect from the SPLA and use violence to express grievances remains high. This risk will probably increase as DDR programming is implemented if some demobilised soldiers continue to perceive bias in selection procedures. There is need for increased dialogue on and oversight of the defence reform process and of the implementation of DDR within civil society, parliament and at local levels to mitigate potential mobilisation around perceived grievances.
  
1. ***Engaging in border management*** – managing the flow of goods and people between Sudan and South Sudan is a critical concern for future development and security in Unity State. The trade restrictions and insecurity in the border areas causes increased community insecurity and undermines livelihoods. Negotiation and agreement on migration routes and grazing arrangements should be prioritised as well as increased access to markets across the border. Border delineation and demarcation programmes need to work closely with the communities living along the border areas with communication and the sharing of information being a central pillar of programming. Sustainable improvements in security and development in Unity will rely on focusing on both the local cross-border dynamics and the higher level political and security environment. Concerted political engagement on conflict resolution in Southern Kordofan is vital for improved security and development in Unity.
  
2. ***Improving internal trade*** – Unity State is not well integrated into internal economic flows in South Sudan and suffers from economic isolation worsened by legal and illegal internal tax and customs regimes. In addition to poor road networks and vast distances to travel, illegal check points and the imposition of severe duties make it costly for traders to transport food supplies and food products into Unity State. Easing bottlenecks in internal trade routes, improving security on trade routes and making more use of riverine trade routes are some areas of engagement that need to be strengthened to increase the supply of basic products into Unity State. With volatile border conditions and a potential economic crisis brewing in Sudan, integrating border states into the South Sudanese formal and informal economies will be crucial to offset critical food insecurity and crippling inflation. The use of government subsidies to quell the rising cost of basic food products in Unity should be investigated; especially given the increased oil revenue available to the state authorities.
  
3. ***Strengthening the capacity and professionalism of the police*** – the need for improved policing presence was widely recognised by community members as a priority investment area for Unity State. Additionally, programming should focus on strengthening accountability of the police through internal and external monitoring mechanisms. There should be stricter vetting processes for recruits and improved training programmes. Abuses of civilians by police should be treated seriously with publicly communicated penalties.
  
4. ***Improving public financial management and accountability*** – there are perceptions of corruption and lack of accountability of state authorities for the translation of oil revenue into improved service delivery. There is scope for strengthening anti-corruption and transparency mechanisms as well as implementing more participatory and open budgeting and monitoring activities involving the state legislature and civil society organisations. Strict measures should be put in place to discourage corruption with stiff penalties enforced for civil servants who infringe thereon. Furthermore, there should be a focus on the regular remuneration of the police and military personnel and improved internal financial and human resource management systems for the security services.
  
5. ***Channelling funds to create opportunities for people*** – priority areas for action identified during the consultations called for increased funding for initiatives that open avenues for development for people including through education, vocational skills programmes and micro-financing, especially for women and youth.

6. **Prioritising conflict-sensitive development** – competition for access to water and land are central to the conflict dynamics in Unity State. Increased access to water is an important foundation for development and tool for conflict mitigation. In addition, many people feel that certain groups or individuals are receiving more assistance from the development and humanitarian community than others and do not understand the reasons for this. Such perceptions of prejudice or bias could fuel existing inter-group conflict dynamics and undermine inter-group peace dialogue and relationship-building work.
7. **Highlighting the security of women** – ensuring the security of women on roads and during agricultural activities should be a priority area of engagement for the police and other security service providers. There is a need to highlight that gender-based violence constitutes criminal behaviour and carries with it criminal penalties. This requires adequate and accessible structures and mechanisms within the criminal justice system to report, investigate and bring to trial cases involving gender-based violence. There is also a need for trauma counselling services for the men and women who have faced sexual abuse during the war and in recent times including places of safety where these issues can be discussed and where physical and psychological recovery assistance is available.

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