



Amplifying people's voices to contribute to peace and resilience in Warrap, South Sudan

Warrap state is in the northern part of South Sudan. The state borders Unity state to the north-east, Lakes to the east, Northern Bahr el Ghazal to the north and Western Bahr el Ghazal to the south. The state is home to the Dinka and Bongo ethnic communities.

The main sources of livelihoods for people in Warrap include cattle rearing and small-scale farming, as well as beekeeping and wild honey harvesting among the Bongo community in Tonj South County. Cattle rearing is associated with numerous challenges such as cattle raids, stealing, and the need to migrate to neighbouring communities in search of food and for grazing lands and water for animals. In recent years, Warrap has experienced unprecedented intercommunal conflicts, violent cattle raiding fuelled by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the hands of *Gelweng*¹ youth, and vicious cycles of revenge killings and attacks widely perceived to be incited by local leaders.

In October 2015, Warrap – which was previously one state – was split into three (Gogrial, Tonj and Twic), when the number of states in the country was increased from ten to 28 (and later to 32 in 2017). This created tense relationships between and among communities, as government employees – who had previously worked in the same civil service – were reassigned roles in accordance with their state (Gogrial, Tonj and Twic), and were not allowed to work in the other areas.

Following the decision to return the country to ten states in February 2020, the three states reverted to the previous Warrap state, with its headquarters in Kuajok. With the appointment of Bona Panek Biar as governor in July 2020, hopes for peace and reconciliation among the various

clans in the state were high. The governor toured Tonj North, Tonj South and Gogrial East counties with peace and reconciliation messages and pledged to work closely with peace actors in the state. However, violent conflicts among rival clans in Greater Tonj have intensified, leading to Bona Panek – who was seen as having a 'soft' approach to communal conflict – being replaced by General Aleu Ayieny on 28 January 2021.

Warrap, like many other parts of South Sudan, is experiencing tough economic times. There are multiple factors at play, such as political instability in the state and in the country, poor road connections, persistent intercommunal violence, and hyperinflation compounded by a decline in the purchasing power of the South Sudanese pound. Prices of basic commodities have soared since civil war erupted in the country in 2013, compounded by economic hardship, corruption, impunity and widespread unemployment. These factors are blamed for the increase in crime and the worsening of living conditions for people in the state.

In November 2020, Saferworld and the Organization for Children's Harmony (TOCH) organised a two-day roundtable event in Kuajok, funded by the European Union. This briefing highlights the main safety and security challenges facing Warrap state, as identified by participants in the event. Warrap state government officials, international NGOs, national civil society organisations, women's groups, faith-based groups, youth union members and community representatives from various ethnic groups attended the event. The briefing reflects the views of the participants and does not necessarily reflect the views of Saferworld or TOCH.

Definitions

In this briefing paper, **security** is defined as the protection of people and their assets from violence or theft. It relates to potential harm that may be caused by intentional actions by people, either when their actions are intended to harm others directly or when acts intended to harm others also pose a threat to other people.

Safety is connected to but is broader than security. Safety is defined as the protection of people from harm. Such harm may arise as a consequence of insecurity but also from accidents, fire, flood, disease or other causes including threats posed by the environment or animals.

Key conflict drivers or security challenges

While there was a wide-ranging discussion at the roundtable event on the issues that affect security and peace in Warrap state, participants highlighted the following safety and security concerns as being the most pressing and which require attention from both the government and communities alike.

Safety and security challenges

Land disputes

Participants at the roundtable event said that disputes over land in towns (such as Kuajok and Tonj) are a source of conflict in Warrap state. The state government does not properly regulate land allocation – meaning that a piece of land might be allocated to multiple title holders, and this leads to disputes. Such cases are frequent and citizens are not satisfied that state authorities are working to put a stop to these practices. Officials at the state Ministry of Physical Infrastructure often manipulate the system for illegal gains, as land registration is done manually – due to the lack of official records, the same piece of land may be sold to different people.

In rural areas, competition among communities over grazing lands and water for their animals is a major source of conflict in the state. As the number of animals increases, cattle in the state are confined within small areas and this overcrowding – coupled with the effects of climate change, which result in insufficient water – leads to competition over scarce water points. This in turn results in inter-ethnic conflict with neighbouring communities in Unity state. Inevitably, some herders are compelled to drive their cattle into the neighbouring Western Bahr el Ghazal state, where herders clash with farmers.

Participants at the roundtable meeting reported that disputes over the boundaries of administrative units, such as *bomas*² and *payams*,³ were heightened under the 32-state system. The disputes were not resolved with the return to ten states; although previous administrative units became defunct after the return to the original Warrap state, conflicts ignited by contestation over local borders have not been resolved.

Gender-based violence

The elopement of girls, early pregnancies and forced marriages are common among communities in the state and these contribute to violent conflicts. Girls cannot exercise their right to choose who they marry. Instead, parents decide for their daughters. If girls choose to elope with somebody they love, conflicts often ensue – leading to loss of life and destruction of property.

Participants decried the increase in domestic violence at the family level, particularly in towns. This increase is widely perceived to be linked to urban poverty and the economic hardships that people are facing. Cases of domestic violence against women and neglect of children are common in Kuajok and other towns in the state. Participants were also of the opinion that the practice of polygamy is responsible for the high number of children on the streets, because their parents neglect them.

Women and girls are also discriminated against when it comes to ownership and inheritance of property from deceased spouses and parents. In the Dinka culture, women and girls are not entitled to have a share in the assets of their husbands and parents.

There is limited participation by women in community-level affairs, as well as within government institutions, where women's involvement in decision-making processes is extremely limited compared to men. Almost all *payam*, *boma* and county executives are men, depriving women of the right to play an active role in governance and public affairs.

Cattle raiding

Participants highlighted cattle raiding (where a number of people use force to steal cattle) and cattle theft (which is usually committed by one or two individuals, without force) within Warrap and between Warrap and neighbouring Lakes and Unity states as a major contributor of insecurity in all three states. Cultural norms equate ownership of more cows with 'male pride', wealth and strength and notions of being seen as a 'real man' in the community; this is a significant driver of cattle raiding/theft. High bride prices among the Dinka people in the form of cattle is another driver of the unprecedented surge in cattle raiding/theft among Warrap communities. Participants noted that in some cases the bride price is as high as 100 cows, which is forcing young men to steal cows from other communities and this in turn leads to conflict.

Community members and state officials alike condemned the commercialisation of stolen cattle, arguing that the government's inability to curb the exchange of stolen or raided cows by young people in the region has enticed many youth in Warrap to engage in these practices.

Cattle raiding in Warrap is flourishing due to the combination of conflict along the Unity-Warrap borders, and the absence of effective law enforcement agencies at the local level. State and county authorities do not have the capacity to bring cattle raiders to courts of law or to exercise their authority over the civilian population in order to maintain law and order.

Inadequate law enforcement and judicial systems at local levels

Communities and civil society members criticised weaknesses in the county and state court systems. They stressed that delays in finalising cases by the courts and a lack of security services at *boma*, *payam* and county levels have contributed to cycles of revenge killings in the state. Revenge killings have surged, due to the lack of an efficient and trusted administration of justice and the inability of government security forces to ensure criminals are held accountable for their crimes.

Participants also noted that in many cases, conflict stems from the overlapping mandates of the customary/traditional and statutory courts, where chiefs with no competency and authority to handle and/or preside over criminal cases have stepped in to mediate and adjudicate on criminal matters. Statutory courts were also accused of interfering in cases that should be handled by chiefs – a scenario that has created confusion among citizens.

Community representatives at the roundtable event observed that security forces are ill-equipped and insufficiently paid, and this does not incentivise them to carry out their duties effectively. A lack of motivation and limited resourcing of security service providers result in them demanding payment from citizens when people call upon law enforcement agencies to respond to insecurity and threats to people's lives and property.

Proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the hands of civilians

Participants at the roundtable meeting in Kuajok attributed the persistent and vicious cycles of conflict among communities in the state to the easy availability of firearms in the hands of *Gelweng* youth. As guns are readily accessible, almost all young men in Warrap state are armed – at times better than the state and county police personnel. In 2020, the national government's attempts to disarm civilians in the state turned violent and lives were lost both among the army and armed youth. This has worsened the safety and security situation in Tonj East and Tonj South counties. Many conflicts in the state are fuelled by the presence of guns in the hands of the civilian population – and the acquisition of firearms by civilians has inflicted more damage on people than the perceived enemies for whom the guns were initially bought for.

In order to restore peace, participants stressed the need for effective coordination at all levels to disarm civilians in all of the state's counties. The use of firearms by young people for revenge killings, violence and criminal activity – such as cattle raiding and targeted killings based on past grievances – is a manifestation of deeper societal tensions. The government needs to promptly conduct uniform and comprehensive disarmament across the state and the neighbouring Unity and Lakes states. Government coordination is necessary to avoid incidences such as in 2020, where over 100 lives were lost.

Recommendations

As a starting point for resolving the safety and security issues discussed in this briefing, participants made the following recommendations for state and national government, international NGOs, civil society and communities in Warrap state.

To state and national government:

- Introduce biometric land registration to minimise corruption by surveyors, town planners and town clerks at the state Ministry of Physical Infrastructure.
- Deploy security forces in border areas to protect communities' property.
- Enforce and implement the 2008 Child Act to protect and uphold the rights of children.
- Establish an independent committee to handle land disputes relating to the pre-February 2020 administrative jurisdictions under the 32 states.
- Improve the capacity of security and justice officials by providing them with comprehensive on-the-job training and incentives, and revise their salaries. Pay their salaries on time.
- Legislate and enforce state-specific laws to deter and punish perpetrators of cattle raiding and theft.
- Conduct uniform, comprehensive and peaceful disarmament in the state and in Lakes and Unity states.

To civil society:

- Conduct awareness raising on existing land policies and by-laws.
- Advocate for the inclusion of women within customary and statutory court structures and decision-making processes at local and state levels.
- Provide communities with information on relevant procedures for acquiring land.
- Organise communal dialogues between communities to resolve land disputes peacefully.
- Conduct awareness raising on gender-based violence and its impact on women, girls, families and society.

To communities:

- Discourage young people from cattle raiding and theft by imposing penalties on cattle raiders in their areas of jurisdiction.
- Chiefs and traditional leaders should discuss a reduction in the number of cows paid as the bride price in the state.
- Foster greater cooperation with government and security agents to identify and apprehend cattle raiders.
- Include more women in customary courts and in decision-making processes and structures.

About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe in a world where everyone can lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from fear and insecurity. We are a not-for-profit organisation working in 12 countries and territories across Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Saferworld has been working in South Sudan since 2002. We work on community safety and security, peacebuilding, small arms and light weapons control, and conflict-sensitive development. Since 2012, we have implemented community security programmes with ten civil society partners in 16 locations across eight of the ten states: Central, Western, and Eastern Equatoria; Northern and Western Bahr el Ghazal; Warrap; Lakes; and Jonglei. We extended our programming to Unity and Upper Nile states in 2019.

Since the outbreak of conflict in December 2013 and expansion of conflict in July 2016 to previously peaceful parts of the country, Saferworld has included peacebuilding and reconciliation programming in our work. At present, with funds from the European Union and UK AID Direct, we are implementing peacebuilding activities in 14 counties to address intra- and inter-community conflict and gender-based violence.

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- 1 *Gelweng* is a term used to describe young people who act as cattle guards/protectors.
- 2 *Boma* is the third tier of local government administration.
- 3 *Payam* is the second tier of local government administration.

Cover photo: General views of life in Kuajok, Warrap state. February 2013. Thomas Martin/Saferworld