

Displaced Youth's Role in Sustainable Return: Lessons from South Sudan

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Displaced Youth's Role in Sustainable Return: Lessons from South Sudan

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AVR	–	Assisted Voluntary Return
CPA	–	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
DFID	–	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
GAM	–	Global Acute Malnutrition
GoSS	–	Government of South Sudan
IDP	–	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	–	International Organization for Migration
LRA	–	Lord’s Resistance Army
NGO	–	Non-governmental Organization
NRC	–	Norwegian Refugee Council
NSCSE	–	New Sudan Centre for Statistics and Evaluation
OCHA	–	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
SPLA	–	Sudan People’s Liberation Army
SPLM/A	–	Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army
SSCCSE	–	Southern Sudan Centre for Census, Statistics and Evaluation
SSDDRC	–	South Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission
SSRRC	–	South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission
UNDP	–	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	–	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	–	United Nations Children’s Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a research project on the reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) returning to South Sudan since the signing of the 2005 Peace Agreement, an internationally mediated accord that marked the end of Africa's longest-running civil war in recent history and paved the way for the secession of the South from the Khartoum-based Northern Government. More specifically, the study focuses on the role played by displaced youth as they find themselves differentially situated vis-à-vis the various determinants of sustainable return and reintegration. The research found that intergenerational tensions are resulting from many displaced youths' aspirations to a "modern" – often meaning urban – way of life perceived as incompatible with traditional livelihoods and social relations. In turn, these dynamics are impacting the way in which access to material assets, education, employment opportunities, political participation and other key resources is negotiated among displaced groups and those who stayed behind. Significant gender differences are also evident.

More than 2 million Southerners have returned to South Sudan since 2005, as the end of the North–South Civil War made it possible for a vast array of displaced individuals to return "home" – or, in the case of many from the youngest generations, to contemplate settling in the land of their elders for the first time. In effect, peace and independence have resulted in the coming together of disparate groups with very different needs and expectations depending on their migratory trajectories, among other factors. Crossing the border into Egypt, Kenya, Uganda or Ethiopia, being resettled to a third country, moving to Khartoum and northern Sudan, or staying more locally were common responses to conflict-related violence and insecurity, and resulted in quite dissimilar exilic experiences.

As the pressures of responding to the complex needs of the vast numbers of returning individuals continue mounting, reintegration appears to be a loosely defined concept among government officials and external assistance agencies. The Government of South Sudan (GoSS) has consistently encouraged the return of refugees, initially driven by the political incentive to increase population numbers in time for the census which eventually took place in April 2008. Official and popular discourses convey a strong sense of people "returning home," and highlight returnees' aspirations to rebuild their own futures and contribute to establishing a peaceful and prosperous new country. Whether returnees ultimately settle back in their geographic origins, or establish themselves elsewhere and under which circumstances, remains far from established as returnees struggle to respond to challenging reintegration conditions.

Many returnees are choosing to resettle in urban locations, either because they lack the skills necessary to work as farmers after years of living in northern cities or refugee camps, or because they lack interest in returning to an agro-pastoralist lifestyle – or have never actually done so in the case of children and youth who were born and raised in cities and towns. Most anticipate that economic and educational opportunities will be superior in urban locations. However, employment opportunities in South Sudan’s urban areas are, at present, not sufficient to absorb the large influx of people. Furthermore, international agencies have far more experience restoring displaced households to rural lives than implementing measures to satisfy the needs of rural people – or those who originate from urban areas – seeking to establish themselves in urban settings. Intergenerational differences regarding reintegration needs and aspirations, and even the very desirability of return, are rarely considered. Understandings of what constitutes “sustainable return” also differ markedly among the various stakeholders.

Although progress has been remarkable in some areas, especially considering the extremely low development indicators and the complexity of socioeconomic conditions in the region, research findings reveal that the post-conflict reintegration challenges facing the newly independent country remain considerable. There is evidence that the absorptive capacity of most receiving communities has already been overwhelmed beyond sustainable limits, causing concern and even tensions among local residents. A number of pressing issues require immediate attention including resolving the high levels of insecurity, strengthening the provision of services, supporting human and economic development, finding solutions to the complex land issue, and addressing the high levels of uncontrolled urbanization in Juba and several other larger towns.

Essential to the overall recovery of the country after decades of civil war and neglect, these challenges are differentially prioritized by the various actors involved in the reintegration processes. Young people are experiencing the greatest difficulties as they struggle to (re)integrate into resource-poor rural lifestyles to which they are often unaccustomed. Limited educational and vocational training opportunities, lack of sports and entertainment facilities, and the isolation created by language barriers and inadequate infrastructure and transportation have combined to create a sense of alienation among some returning youngsters. Younger children are struggling with a much more restricted diet and more limited access to health care than was the case while their families were based in internationally managed camps and settlements abroad or in Khartoum. Older girls and women also lament the loss of the greater opportunities available to them in exile, in contrast to what they perceive as the more constraining traditional social mores of conservative South Sudan. In other cases,

however, young returnees educated abroad have introduced new skills and progressive attitudes to a country where both economic and social development were effectively halted for decades. In spite of adverse circumstances and multiple challenges, young returnees often demonstrate remarkable determination in their efforts to overcome a turbulent climate of social instability, deprivation and conflict.

Surmounting these obstacles is essential to providing an environment conducive to the sustainable return of the dissimilar groups of displaced South Sudanese, and requires a thorough understanding of an extremely complex and changing situation. This report seeks to contribute to this effort by sharing findings that may inform return and reintegration programming so that it better responds to the age- and gender-differentiated needs and aspirations of diverse migrant groups, hence paving the road for a more sustainable return. Given the very high proportion of children and youth among the population of most sub-Saharan countries, and the high prevalence of migratory flows in the region, the experiences of this age group must be better understood and factored into projects for migrants in South Sudan and, by qualified extension, other comparable States.

1. INTRODUCTION

The newly independent Republic of South Sudan entered the international stage on 9 July 2011 amid jubilant celebration, but also as one of the least developed countries in the world. Supporting the sustainable return and reintegration of vast numbers of returning refugees and IDPs is one of the most pressing challenges facing the new African country. More than 2 million displaced Southerners have returned to South Sudan since the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), an internationally mediated accord that paved the way for the secession of what is now South Sudan from the Khartoum-based Northern Government. The end of the North–South war, Africa’s longest running civil war is recent history, also made possible the return of a vast array of displaced individuals. For many among the youngest generations, the terms “return” and “reintegration” would both be misnomers, as the move to the new county for them involves settling in the land of their elders for the first time, and adopting unaccustomed lifestyles which do not often meet their expectations.

In spite of outstanding security concerns, high levels of poverty and limited basic services, infrastructure and livelihood opportunities in the new country, the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) has persistently encouraged the return of refugees. The political incentive to increase population numbers in time for the 2008 census – a key landmark in the transition process leading up to elections and part of the CPA – is regarded as one of the primary drivers of this emphasis on repatriation, as is the validation of the post-independence regime represented by high profile return programmes. Less attention to the sustainability of return seems apparent in the GoSS’s policy and practice, as measures are put in place to integrate returnees in a context of very limited absorption capacities.

The South Sudanese context presents considerable additional challenges for international agencies that have far more experience restoring displaced households to rural lives than implementing measures to satisfy the needs of rural refugees and IDPs – or those who originate from urban areas – seeking to establish themselves in urban settings. Intergenerational differences regarding reintegration needs and aspirations, and even the very desirability of return, are rarely factored in repatriation programmes and still largely unexamined and insufficiently understood. Addressing this knowledge gap by assessing the situation of displaced South Sudanese youth at the dawn of independence is thus an essential prerequisite if the return and reintegration processes are to be successful and the post-conflict recovery of the country is to gain momentum.

1.1 Background

The country of Sudan, of which South Sudan was part until its recent independence, had been in a state of civil war for all but 12 years since 1956 when it became independent from the United Kingdom. Sudan's First Civil War officially began in 1956¹ and continued through 1972, when the North agreed to declare the South to be a self-governing region. Peace lasted for 10 years until 1983 when the announcement that Shari'a law would apply to all Sudanese, compounded by the impact of a severe famine, precipitated a new conflict between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) and the Khartoum-based Government. The Second Sudanese Civil War also triggered one of the worst humanitarian disasters of the twentieth century. It lasted more than two decades, resulted in the world's highest death toll since World War II with as many as 2 million casualties (USDS, 2006), including women and children (HRW, 2009:8), and forced more than 4 million people from South Sudan to become internally displaced or seek refuge in neighbouring countries (UNHCR, 2006).

In January 2005, following more than 12 years of peace talks facilitated by the United Kingdom, the United States and Norway, the Government of Sudan and the SPLM/A signed a CPA. The Republic of South Sudan became an independent nation on 9 July 2011, following a largely peaceful referendum that took place on 9 January of the same year, in which the people of South Sudan voted overwhelmingly – 98.3 per cent – to separate from the North (Southern Sudan Referendum Commission, 2011; GoSS, 2011a). South Sudan has made significant progress since the CPA marked the official end of a brutal war that often affected children and youth worst. The situation of the youngest generations of South Sudanese warrants focused attention. Few groups experienced more missed opportunities and greater risks during the conflict than the country's girls and boys. Girls were even more adversely affected, owing to gender-based inequalities that confer females lower status in society, differentially assign domestic responsibilities, and undervalue schooling for girls. Age and gender dynamics are also playing a crucial role in the post-conflict period, and constitute powerful factors shaping the challenges and opportunities facing returnees in their efforts to rebuild their livelihoods and futures in their new country.

Since the signing of the CPA, South Sudanese refugees and IDPs have been returning home in steady numbers, with upwards of 1.8 million people heading back between the end of the war and 2008, according to the Statistical Yearbook of Southern Sudan 2010. Return was initially only possible during the dry season, from November–December to May, until IOM started organizing returns using air transport in 2007. Before October 2006, the joint government–United Nations strategy was to support spontaneous return – one of the three main modalities of repatriation which, unlike

organized return and assisted voluntary self-repatriation, involves people timing and organizing their return themselves without external assistance.² Subsequently, a joint plan of the Government of National Unity, the GoSS, and the United Nations was developed for an organized return process, marking “a fundamental shift in approach to planning for returns” (UNMIS, 2007:1) to South Sudan. Organized returns began in February 2007, after delays in setting up way stations – temporary settlements or stopping places for returnees on the way to their final destination – and other necessary infrastructure. These early efforts notwithstanding, the organized return process has been responsible for only a small percentage of returnees, as the large majority are returning spontaneously (Pantuliano et al., 2008:9).

Their return was encouraged by the GoSS, driven by the political incentive to increase population numbers in time for the population census, which eventually took place in April 2008. Although the majority of returnees report being aware that they would likely face significant hardships in South Sudan, many also expressed a desire to be counted in the 2008 census, and to cast their vote in the 2011 referendum. A pronounced increase in return migration rates – termed “first wave of return” – took place between October 2010 and June 2011. This period witnessed the repatriation of over 306,000 South Sudanese who returned in preparation for the Referendum of Self-Determination on 9 January 2011, and the anticipated celebration of Independence Day (IOM, 2012). For many, return was thus a deeply political undertaking, as well as a social process with profound implications for the viability of the new and fragile country.

A “second wave of return” is currently under way, described by IOM as “more rushed and less prepared than the first wave,” due to post-independence circumstances (2012:212). The number of returnees is also higher than originally anticipated. Overall, more than 2 million Southerners have returned to South Sudan since 2005 as the end of the North–South Civil War made it possible for a vast array of displaced individuals to return “home” – or, in the case of many from the youngest generations, to contemplate settling in the land of their elders for the first time. In effect, peace and independence have resulted in the coming together of disparate groups with very different needs and expectations depending on their migratory trajectories, among other factors. Crossing the border into Egypt, Kenya, Uganda or Ethiopia, being resettled to a third country, moving to Khartoum and other areas of northern Sudan, and staying more locally were common responses to conflict-related violence and insecurity, and resulted in quite dissimilar exilic experiences. In most instances, these diverse displaced groups have returned to areas where the conditions for integrating returnees are adverse due to the exceptionally high levels of poverty, limited infrastructure, basic services or livelihood opportunities, following decades of civil war and neglect.

Many returnees report a preference for resettling in urban locations either because they lack the skills necessary to work as farmers after years of living in northern cities or refugee camps, or because they lack interest in returning to an agro-pastoralist lifestyle – or have never actually done so in the case of children and youth who were born and raised in cities and towns. Most anticipate that economic and educational opportunities will be superior in urban locations, an expectation generally supported by local realities. Indeed, colonial legacies have combined with the country’s economic struggles to perpetuate the tendency to favour the development of education and other services in urban centres at the expense of the rural (Usman, 2005:193). However, employment opportunities in South Sudan’s urban areas are, at present, not sufficient to absorb the increasing influx of people. Given the country’s agrarian history, absorbing large numbers of individuals into urban contexts will require a significant economic and social shift.

Despite seven years of recovery and reconstruction, the humanitarian situation in South Sudan has actually worsened since 2008, with more people displaced in the South than in Darfur (IDMC, 2010; Macdonald, 2010:4). Reintegration efforts are being implemented in a context of fragile peace between Sudan and South Sudan, rampant insecurity, lawlessness and disorder in some areas of the country, the weak national economy, and the inadequate capabilities of national, state and local government institutions to fulfil their mandates. These factors have resulted in the limited capacities of both urban and rural communities to absorb the massive influx of returnees. At the time of writing, serious security threats understandably remain a government preoccupation. Whether returnees ultimately settle back in their geographic origins, or establish themselves elsewhere and under which circumstances, remains far from established, as returnees struggle to respond to challenging reintegration conditions.

1.2 Rationale

The repatriation of refugees has been traditionally regarded as both constitutive and indicative of peace processes and indispensable to national and regional stability and prosperity. International organizations and national authorities have often operated on the assumption that creating a future for returnees would be best satisfied by restoring them to their places of origin and former livelihoods. The inadequacy of this approach is evident in cases of protracted displacement when physical and political landscapes have significantly changed, or when local security and economic conditions remain unstable. Furthermore, returnees often actively seek settings other than those they left behind, either because their goals and aspirations changed while they were away or, in the case of the younger generations who were born or grew up abroad, because their elders’ home towns and way of life do not actually constitute “home.”

While “return to the past” approaches are no longer perceived as unproblematic, the aspirations and long-term prospects of returning migrants, especially those of the youth, remain underexamined and insufficiently understood. Some noteworthy exceptions notwithstanding (Black and Koser, 1999; Hammond, 1999; Long and Oxfeld, 2004; Newhouse, 2012; Warner, 1994), the consequences of repatriation after protracted displacement on returnees and receiving communities have received relatively little interest among scholars. The dearth of knowledge on the differential challenges and opportunities facing youth, one of the largest demographic groups of returnees both in South Sudan and elsewhere, is problematic and unjustifiable, considering that repatriation has been the preferred of the three “durable solutions” for refugees for more than a decade, as is further discussed in the next chapter.

Recent research has indicated that repatriation is frequently accomplished as a longitudinal and often multistaged process involving multiple relocations between different sites across and within borders, rather than as a one-time move from place of asylum to permanent “home” (Hovil, 2010; Long, 2010). Other studies conclude that urban centres are particularly attractive to young returnees, especially those whose years abroad have been lived in towns or densely populated refugee camps (Ensor, 2012; Long, 2010; Newhouse, 2012; Omata, 2010; Sommers and Schwartz, 2011). Having been effectively urbanized during their exile, many refugees and IDPs are no longer interested in, or adequately prepared for, the rural lives that often await them upon return to the country they fled years back. Returnees are thus compelled to seek more suitable alternatives elsewhere, often in already crowded cities where tensions and conflict are common as they compete with the local urban poor for the limited resources and services available (Weiss Fagen, 2011:3). This pattern of secondary displacement currently characterizes a number of larger towns in South Sudan, including Juba, where the estimated population doubled since the signing of the 2005 CPA and currently stands at over half a million (Martin and Mosel, 2011).

Uninterested in pursuing subsistence livelihoods in rural areas, many displaced youth attempt to secure other opportunities in urban centres. Juba attracts the highest number of young returnees (Newhouse, 2012:3) who hope to capitalize on their education levels, which are often higher than the local population, by seeking employment with the GoSS or one of the many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and UN agencies located in the capital of the newly independent South Sudan. Other rapidly urbanizing regional towns such as Wau, Bor, Malakal and Torit have similarly attracted displaced youngsters. The particular reintegration needs of this young and urbanized segment of the returnee population are not always recognized nor addressed, leaving them vulnerable to re-victimization and further disenfranchisement. The majority of the international agencies facilitating the repatriation programmes, however, have far more experience restoring displaced households to rural lives than

implementing measures to satisfy the needs of rural people – or those who originate from urban areas – seeking to establish themselves in urban settings. Understandings of what constitutes “sustainable return” may thus differ markedly among the various groups of returnees, as well as between displaced groups and those organizations seeking to facilitate their reintegration. Intergenerational differences regarding reintegration needs and aspirations, and even the very desirability of return, are rarely considered as the “tyranny of the urgent” prevails in a context of multiple pressing concerns, and immediate survival needs are prioritized over targeted solutions more conducive to long-term sustainability.

Reintegration, however, is of necessity a long and gradual process. The GoSS’s capacity and the international community’s support are both lagging far behind the pressures created or exacerbated by the return of vast numbers of migrants. As national and state-level formal structures – in terms of services, infrastructure and governance – are grossly inadequate to receive a major influx of peoples with diverging needs and expectations, the burden to accommodate the needs of the returnee population continues to fall on host families. As the absorptive capacity of local communities is increasingly overstretched, additional stress is accumulating on what is already a deeply fragile transitional period. Focusing more effectively on understanding and supporting the conditions for the successful return and reintegration of the diverse groups of returnees is thus of paramount importance to the stability and prosperity of South Sudan.

1.3 Scope, Methods and Structure of the Report

This report constitutes a segment of a broader study whose overall aim is to contribute to South Sudan’s process of nation-building in the post-independence period through an improved understanding of how ordinary South Sudanese, as well as institutional stakeholders, engage in, perceive, and respond to efforts to promote peace and development. Focusing on repatriation as a critical dimension of the larger process of post-conflict reconstruction, this report presents findings on challenges and opportunities that characterize the reintegration of refugees and IDPs returning to South Sudan since the signing of the 2005 Peace Agreement. More specifically, the study focuses on the role played by displaced youth as they find themselves differentially situated vis-à-vis the various determinants of sustainable return and reintegration.

The research was initiated with an extensive review of secondary sources, a process that continued throughout the study. The bulk of the data was collected in the summers of 2009, 2011 and 2012 through ongoing ethnographically informed

qualitative research in Juba and several other locations in South Sudan (such as Rumbek, Yei, Kajo Keji, Magwe and Nimule) as well as in Cairo, Egypt, and in Adjumani, northern Uganda. Participatory methods (such as trend lines, conflict analysis matrix, conflict and resource mapping) were combined with focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Formal and informal interviews were conducted with representatives from UN agencies, international and national NGOs, community-based organizations, national, state and local government officials, donors, teachers and headmasters, and students, and refugee and IDP returnees, both youth and older adults. Project sites visited included primary and secondary schools, local markets, vocational training programmes, and livelihood projects.

Approximately 25 open-ended interviews were conducted at each location – and 50 in Juba – with some participants being interviewed more than once. Views expressed by local individuals during unplanned spontaneous conversations have also been incorporated into the discussion as relevant. Additionally, ten structured focus groups were conducted as follows: three in Juba (one with returning refugee youth, one with local university students of mixed ages, and the other one with adult civil servants who often gathered after work at a popular local restaurant, all three including females and males); another three in Nimule (one with returnee females of mixed ages, one with local male youth, and one with returnee male youth); two in Yei (one with female and male secondary school teachers, and another with local leaders all of whom were male); and two in Cairo (one with female and male refugee youth, and one with members of a refugee women’s group). Both data collection and analysis sought to shed light on the relationships between returnee and resident households, paying attention to potential sources of further conflict such as competition over resources.

Age- and gender-segregated discussions generally encouraged more open conversations. Given that the terms *child* and *youth* are not defined within fixed chronological parameters in either South Sudan or northern Uganda – although perhaps more so in Egypt – the researcher relied on self-identification to determine the participants’ age group. Data were disaggregated by gender, age (youth/older adult) and displacement status (returnee/resident). The analysis of the differentiated experiences of return to post-war South Sudan focused on ascertaining the determinants for successful reintegration, revealing differing understanding of what constitutes “sustainable return” as perceived by the various stakeholders involved, and identifying the existing and potential livelihood opportunities in areas of return. These issues were explored within the broader environmental, social, political and economic context, to take account of the institutions, policies and processes that have impacted on the return and reintegration processes.

The report is divided into five chapters. The first chapter summarizes the context in which the return and reintegration of displaced youth and their families are taking place, from historical events to current conditions. It also discusses the study's rationale, as well as the scope and methods of the research that forms the basis of this report. Chapter 2 presents an overview of some of the theoretical frameworks most frequently utilized in the study of return and reintegration processes, highlighting their main strengths and limitations. In particular, legal-normative perspectives and sociocultural approaches are examined in terms of their contribution to a clearer understanding of what "sustainable return" means, and the role played by returnee youth. The third chapter centres more directly on displaced youth, situated in the broader context of young people in South Sudan. The age and gender dynamics that shape the experiences of South Sudanese youngsters are emphasized. Particular attention is paid to the challenges and opportunities facing young returnees in their efforts to adapt to a way of life which is often markedly different from that which they experienced in exile. The fourth chapter focuses on the determinants of sustainable return. The livelihood strategies in which returnees and local residents may engage are examined in a context in which pervasive conflict and insecurity threaten the sustainability of reintegration efforts. The final chapter, Chapter 5, seeks to draw out the main conclusions of the report, highlighting the importance of research and evidence-based programming. It summarizes the main lessons learned through the study, and offers some suggestions that could contribute to more context-sensitive policy and interventions for returnee youth, their families and the local communities as they navigate these turbulent but promising post-independence times. Among other recommendations, it stresses the need for a clearer focus on urbanization processes, calling for a more concerted and coordinated response and adequate attention to intergenerational and gender differences often disregarded in traditional approaches.

2. RESEARCH FRAMEWORKS ON RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

Scholarly approaches to the various components of forced migration, including return and reintegration, have been traditionally dominated by research on the experiences of political refugees. Interest in environmental and development-related displacement has also gained considerable momentum in recent years, as has attention to the mass population movements associated with complex emergencies resulting from a combination of factors. A number of frameworks have been utilized, ranging from legal-normative perspectives to sociocultural approaches. Nevertheless, the impact of return on those displaced, its immediate and long-term consequences on host communities, and the broader sustainability of the return process remain inadequately understood. International agencies have far more experience restoring displaced households to rural lives than to urban settings. Understandings of what constitutes sustainable return often differ markedly among the various stakeholders. Intergenerational differences regarding reintegration needs and aspirations, as well as the desirability of return, warrant more focused consideration than has typically been the case among governmental and international entities working with refugees and migrants.

The case of South Sudan is illustrative of the need to examine return conditions through a broader lens. The factors currently encouraging displaced South Sudanese to return are multiple and generally related to increasingly untenable living and employment conditions – both for IDPs in Khartoum, and for refugees abroad where services provided by the international community have been rapidly dwindling since the CPA – a desire to “be back home,” and expectations of prosperity as a hoped-for peace dividend. While many in the region view the return of displaced persons as an encouraging sign of peace, returnees also present new challenges for the already limited services in South Sudan, including increased competition for scarce resources and employment opportunities. Additional concerns involve changing dynamics of food security with an increasing likelihood of food-insecure people congregating in the urban and peri-urban areas (ANLATG, 2011:34).

As the pressures of responding to the needs and expectations of the vast numbers of South Sudanese returnees continue mounting, reintegration appears to be a loosely defined concept among government officials and international aid organizations. At the same time, returnees constitute a highly heterogeneous group whose motivations and objectives vary according to a number of factors, including family structure, education, socioeconomic status and conditions in exile. Addressing these challenges is essential to providing an environment conducive to the sustainable return of the

disparate groups of displaced South Sudanese, and requires a thorough understanding of an extremely complex and rapidly changing situation. An overview of the main frameworks that have guided the efforts of scholars and practitioners working in the displacement field is a fruitful starting point.

2.1 Legal-Normative Perspectives

While legal-normative perspectives and sociocultural approaches are clearly complementary, there is a tendency in the literature to emphasize either one or the other separately, but rarely simultaneously. From a legal-normative perspective, it has been argued that the right to leave and return to one's country is a fundamental principle founded on natural law (Rosand, 1998:1091). The right to return is established in numerous United Nations General Assembly Resolutions. As the former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan remarked: "The return of refugees and internally displaced persons is a major part of any post-conflict scenario. And it is far more than just a logistical operation. Indeed, it is often a critical factor in sustaining a peace process and in revitalizing economic activity" (Anann, 2005). The right to return is also asserted as a right by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, Article 13(2), which states that: "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country." Yet return has also become a highly politically charged process in a number of contexts, both for returnees and for local residents, pointing to the need to question the notion of an unproblematic return "home". The "voluntariness" of return, the extent to which returnees are able to successfully adapt to the lifestyles and livelihoods awaiting them in their home countries and regions, and the broader sustainability of return and reintegration processes (Black and Gent, 2004:4) are among the issues that must be investigated, rather than assumed a priori.

Despite its firm legal basis, "the right of return has not figured prominently in general discussions of refugee rights. The major thrust of these discussions has been on the right *not* to be returned" (Dawty, 1994). The 1951 Refugee Convention bans the forced expulsion of asylum-seekers and refugees (*refoulement*), but does not specifically address the question of "voluntary" return or repatriation. The issue of "voluntariness" is, however, emphasized in several of the subsequent normative provisions that govern the international community's treatment of refugees and other displaced groups. The Statute of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and regional agreements such as the 1969 OAU Convention and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration recognize repatriation as a key "durable solution" to displacement, and emphasize that returns must only be undertaken voluntarily. In effect, UNHCR identifies three durable solutions to displacement, namely, voluntary

repatriation, local integration in the country of asylum, and resettlement to a third country. The relative importance given to each solution has changed overtime, reflecting evolving geopolitical imperatives.

A combination of humanitarian concern and Cold War logic that saw refugees as “voting with their feet” against oppressive Communist regimes led to resettlement, rather than repatriation, becoming the most widely used solution to displacement, as hundreds of thousands of refugees were offered permanent resettlement in the West. Permanent resettlement opportunities “largely withered away” at the end of the Cold War (Hathaway, 1997:533). At the same time, while local integration also became a less viable option as developing countries – which host more than 70 per cent of the world’s refugees – adopted increasingly restrictive asylum policies seeking to voice their concern over inequitable responsibility for refugee protection between the global North and South. Consequently, repatriation represents the best opportunity for many of today’s refugees to rebuild their lives, a sentiment echoed by the efforts of those working in the refugee and migration fields.

IOM has similarly acknowledged their preference for voluntary return (2004:7). Their Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) programmes have been operating for close to three decades, and have assisted more than 1.4 million displaced persons to return to over 160 countries of origin (IOM, 2008). UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusion No. 40 of 1985 advances the notion that return should take place in “conditions of safety and dignity.” This language is repeated in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as well as in numerous peace agreements, although the meaning of the terms *safety*, and especially *dignity*, is very rarely operationalized. Indeed, UNHCR acknowledges that “the concept of dignity is less self-evident than that of safety,” but the agency’s *Handbook on Voluntary Repatriation* does little to clarify the meaning of the concept in practical terms (UNHCR, 1996). Translating these legal provisions and political agreements into policy and practice has thus sparked intensive debate on questions such the level of security that must be established before repatriation should be facilitated or promoted (Chimni, 1993). Return has thus remained controversial, due in part to the practical difficulty of ascertaining, much less guaranteeing, the voluntariness of the process.

Practical difficulties notwithstanding, the importance of return for both displaced groups and the wider community is widely acknowledged, with efforts to promote the sustainable reintegration of returnees considered an integral component of the larger peacebuilding process. An early case in point is the 1992 UNHCR Executive Committee stressing that “successful reintegration is critical to any national reconciliation and reconstruction process,” and noting that “international security is at stake” (Macrae, 1999:11). In its *Dialogue on Voluntary Repatriation and Sustainable*

Reintegration in Africa, UNHCR further emphasizes that “experience shows that if the issue of sustainability or reintegration of refugee and displaced populations is not addressed properly, the countries concerned will almost inevitably slide back into conflict” (2004a:1). Responding to this realization, a range of AVR programmes, Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) and other interventions have attempted to encourage the sustainability of return and reintegration processes (UNHCR, 1997a), thereby, it is hoped, helping to promote peace.

Further efforts to foster sustainable return processes are exemplified by targeted reintegration activities, such as those facilitated by IOM’s Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes, where reintegration is defined as the “re-inclusion or re-incorporation of a person into a group or a process, for example, a migrant into the society of his or her country of origin or habitual residence” (IOM, 2011a:54). Factors that affect the provision of reintegration assistance under these programmes include “the limitations imposed by donors with regard to the financial support provided to returned migrants. The levels can vary from the provision of cash as pocket money to help with immediate assistance to more sustainable reintegration modalities that can include help with self-employment, work placements, health, education and training assistance” (IOM, 2011b:15). Relatedly, UNHCR (2004b) defines *sustainable reintegration* as: “supporting those who have returned/resettled or integrated to secure the political, economic, legal and social conditions needed to maintain life, livelihood and dignity.” In other words, reintegration efforts are meant to be context-specific. Attention to the differential needs of the various target groups is similarly necessary.

International interest in the human rights issues affecting young people³ in situations of displacement is also increasingly evident. IOM has recently produced relevant documents, including the report *Unaccompanied Children on the Move* (IOM, 2011c). Other related organizations, such as UNHCR, regularly track child migration statistics for refugees and IDPs. They have also issued a series of Executive Committee recommendations and guidelines about refugee children (UNHCR, 1993, 1994, 1997b), intended to clarify and strengthen the protection measures required of all State parties to the 1951 Refugee Convention (as modified by the 1967 Protocol). Although the number of international, regional and domestic treaties and guidelines regulating the treatment of displaced children has steadily increased in recent years, the Convention on the Rights of the Child remains the most important instrument establishing international standards of protection and care for children in all circumstances, including displaced and returnee children. Of particular relevance is General Comment Number 6 on the Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children, adopted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2005. It is worth noting, however, that these international norms are typically not considered applicable

to those youngsters who are accompanied by their families. Legal and normative approaches have tended to construct young people as the recipients of adult care and protection: “They belong to families, and it is their families that act upon their behalf and represent their interest” (Ansell, 2005:12). Efforts to investigate and factor in intergenerational differences regarding displacement, return and reintegration needs and expectations have thus far been largely absent from this type of approach.

2.2 Sociocultural Frameworks

Efforts to study displacement, return and reintegration from a sociocultural perspective have long proven mindful of local contexts, often more so than those emphasizing legal and normative frameworks. Scholarly approaches to return migration, in particular, can be traced back to the 1960s (Cassarino, 2004:253), although it was in the 1980s that focused attention to the return phenomenon and its impact on origin countries became evident, culminating in the production of seminal volumes and critical essays, and in the organization of related conferences (Kubat, 1984; Council of Europe, 1987). A number of approaches emerged, seeking to contribute to our better understanding of return from various perspectives and levels of analysis. Three of them in particular – the structural approach, transnationalism, and social network theory – appear more suitable to guide the investigation of current return and reintegration processes in South Sudan. A fourth perspective – political ecology – while not specifically developed in relation to return, helps elucidate conditions of sustainability as framed by human – environmental interactions, and their implications for the broader viability of reintegration interventions.

Structural analyses of return consider both the individual experience of those returning, and the social and institutional factors prevalent in the country of origin. Returnees’ experiences are also viewed as framed by both structural (objective) factors and personal (subjective) expectations. Structural approaches are thus an attempt to investigate the extent to which situational or contextual factors in origin countries influence whether return is experienced positively or negatively (Cerase, 1974). The structural approach further contends that the expectations of returnees tend to be readjusted to local realities. If the disparity between structural conditions and returnees’ expectations is perceived as insurmountable and readjustment does not take place, returnees may contemplate re-emigration. “Not only do skills and financial capital shape return experiences, but local power relations, traditions and values in home countries also have a strong bearing on the returnees’ capacity to invest their migration experiences in their home countries” (Cassarino, 2004:259).

Concepts and terminology from transnationalism, initially used in the field of international relations, began to be adopted by migration scholars in the late 1980s. Transnationalism aims at a better understanding of the strong social and economic links between migrants' host and origin countries. Interest in interpreting the back-and-forth, cross-border movements – a phenomenon often overlooked by structuralists – and the dynamics between sending and receiving countries provided the primary impetus for this approach where migration flows are understood as “regular and sustained social contacts over time across national borders” (Portes et al., 1999:219), and return does not necessarily constitute the end of a migration cycle. Instead, return processes are constitutive of a circular system of social and economic relationships and exchanges facilitating – or impeding – the reintegration of migrants who often maintain meaningful links with both their origin and host countries. Returnees' human and financial resources are embedded in an ethnically defined framework of interaction (Hsing, 1998). The regular contacts they maintain with their households in origin countries, as well as the back-and-forth movements that illustrate transnational mobility (Portes, 2001), allow for a better prepared and successful return that may translate into increased sustainability. Subjective perceptions of homeland may rest on various allegiances at social, economic and political levels, which may lead to the emergence and consolidation of transnational identities that shape the behaviours and expectations of the returnees, including the decision to return and the subsequent process of reintegration.

Transnational approaches to return migration highlight the multiple ways in which returnees “maintain economic, political and social networks that span several societies. What defines membership of these networks is a common country of origin or a shared origin” (Al-Ali and Koser, 2002:10). A related approach, *social network theory*, also examines returnees' maintenance of strong linkages with their former places of settlement in other countries and who bear both tangible and intangible resources. Networks of interpersonal relationships that may derive from the returnees' migration experiences are used to secure resources needed back home. The formation and maintenance of these networks, which are responsive to contextual and institutional factors, require long-standing interpersonal relationships, as well as the regular exchange of mutually valued items between actors (Cassarino, 2004:265–266). Social structures increase the availability of resources and information. Thus, the composition of social networks, which consist of a multiplicity of social structures (Eccles and Nohria, 1992), is of paramount importance in facilitating and sustaining the cross-border linkages in which returnees are involved. The social network theory thus provides a framework of analysis which highlights the complexity of return processes (Cassarino, 2004:268).

Both transnationalism and the social network theory have contributed to current views of return as one more stage, rather than the end of the migration cycle. They do not, however, delve into the determinants of sustainable return. Neither does structuralism, beyond positing that perceptions of the success of return will be driven by the extent to which local realities meet returnees' expectations. The consequences of return on the country of origin at large, and the relationship between the absorptive capacity of the host communities and the challenges and opportunities of reintegration have not constituted the focal points of these perspectives. Neither have intergenerational and gender differentials, particularly when households rather than individual returnees have been considered as the principal unit of analysis. Political ecological analysis of local conditions can bridge these gaps. Based on the premise that political, social and economic considerations mediate the dynamic interactions between humans and their environment, the field of political ecology emerged in response to the increasing scholarly and public scrutiny of human-environment interactions, especially in developing countries. Environmental and ecological conditions are analysed as the product of local and global political and social processes (Bryant and Bailey, 1997). This perspective integrates political economy and cultural ecology by exploring the connections between the current and historical influences of the natural environment on human groups, and the impact of larger political and economic forces that characterize the society of which the people are members (Campbell, 1996:6).

While more recent political ecological analyses of the link between environmental conditions – especially focusing on natural resources – and violent conflict abound (see, for instance, Collier and Hoeffler, 2005; De Soysa, 2000; Le Billon, 2001; Ross, 2003; Welsch, 2008), the centrality of young people in debates about the challenges of dramatic socioenvironmental change has generally not received adequate attention. Cindi Katz' discussion of the nature of "cultural-ecological" and "political-economic" global restructuring and their implication for children and young people constitutes a noteworthy exception. Using examples from rural Sudan (as well as New York City), Katz examines how various political ecological factors can cause young people to not receive the knowledge and skills necessary for the work in which they will come of age. Young people in post-independence South Sudan are illustrative of what she refers to as "ruptures in the ecology of childhood and youth" (Katz, 1998:131); their everyday lives juxtaposing traditional livelihoods and modern imperatives both at home and in the diaspora are reflective of the challenges and opportunities afforded by the processes of "growing up global" (Katz, 2004).

2.3 Repatriation, Reintegration and Sustainable Return

The return of refugees and other displaced groups is often viewed as a powerful symbol of the end of conflict and the re-establishment of normalcy. Interest in return has increased in the international policy agenda, and currently constitutes an issue of growing concern for governments and international organizations working in the refugee and migration fields. Indeed, virtually all of the dozens of peace agreements concluded since 1995 contain provisions to facilitate the safe and dignified return of refugees, not only to their countries of origin but also to their original homes (Phuong, 2005).

As already discussed, the end of the Cold War witnessed a hardening of attitudes towards refugees; it also created a “peace dividend,” which opened up new opportunities for return, as states’ resources were freed from military spending. In the three years from 1989 to 1992, the UN launched more peacekeeping operations than in its previous 43 years. Sadako Ogata, then UNHCR, accurately predicted in 1992 that the next 10 years would constitute a “decade of repatriation” (Ogata, 1992). Return began to be seen not only as a solution for individual refugees, but also as a central pillar of peace processes. High-profile return programmes, it was increasingly recognized, help to validate post-conflict regimes, inspiring public and donor confidence in the associated reconstruction and peacebuilding programmes (UNHCR, 1997a:162), while also signalling the confidence of the returning population in the future stability of the country (Petrin, 2002:5). The sustainability of return and reintegration processes can be seen as indicators of a range of other post-conflict issues, such as progress towards development goals, and the “extent to which civil-state relations will be repaired in the post-conflict period” (ibid.). Conversely, protracted refugees’ situations represent barriers to the viability and legitimacy of post-conflict states (Black and Koser, 1999).

While engagement with the concept of return by governments and refugee and migration policymakers has remained strong and growing since the 1990s, understandings of the determinants of “sustainable reintegration” for returnees are more recent and still evolving. Ancient Greek philosopher Euripides’ oft-quoted remark that “there is no greater sorrow on Earth than the loss of one’s native land” (431 BC) remains popular among refugee advocates, but it is no longer accepted as an unproblematic truism. A growing number of scholars have rejected the suppositions that underpin dominant discourses of return, including the “sedentarist analytical bias,” which characterized earlier approaches operating on the assumption that one’s homeland is one’s normal and ideal habitat (Black, 2002; Malkki, 1995; Newhouse, 2012; Weiss Fagen, 2011). For example, Allen and Morsink have called into question the primacy of return, based on “conceptions of a homeland and shared values within a

population which may or may not exist” (1994:7), without necessarily rejecting return as often the most favourable alternative for displaced persons. Malkki critiques the notion that refugees represent a “pathological” deviation from the ideal “national order of things” presumed to have existed prior to displacement (1992:31). Similarly, Warner rejects “concepts of community and home” predicated on unrealistic assumptions of a “world of order and stability” (Warner, 1994:160). Therefore, she concludes, the “durable solution of voluntary repatriation denies the temporal reality of our lives and the changes that take place over time” (ibid.: 171).

Concerns about the significance of return also centre on the practicalities of implementation. The notion of a fixed and unequivocal “home” is particularly problematic in this context. When refugees and IDPs have been away from their places of origin for long periods of time, the places they were forced to flee to are likely to have been transformed. The prospect of going back to one’s place of origin can create unrealistic expectations (Markowitz, 1995), and frustration at the impossibility of returning to an idealized home – a place that may no longer exist (Zetter, 1999), or may never have existed (King, 2000). Black and Koser (1999) suggest that refugees can be more at home in the country of asylum, especially if they have lived there for a long time, or if economic or social opportunities are likely to be denied to them in their countries of origin. As predicted by structuralist approaches, differences between contextual reality and returnees’ expectations regarding factors such as property allocation, economic viability, service provision, governance, and security are paramount in shaping decisions regarding the place where returnees will settle and call home. These structural factors are also known to be integral elements of sustainability. Ascertaining the potential sustainability of return, however, requires more than evaluating the extent to which the provision of shelter, access to basic services, or levels of employment or income fulfils objective, externally determined standards. People’s subjective perceptions of whether their expectations are met or unfulfilled are likely to play a role at least as important, if not more, than objective quantifiable provision figures. In practice, however, time and funding constraints often limit attempts to systematically examine the experiences of returnees.

Additional challenges are posed by understandings of return as a “durable solution” which preclude consideration of further cross-border flows. Relatedly, the emphasis on anchoring returnees in their original places of residence similarly ignores the possibility of further transnational links, and the establishment and maintenance of social networks elsewhere within the country or across one or more borders. Furthermore, because repatriation is unqualifiedly considered to be a desirable goal – as it returns people to the “home” where they are assumed to belong – attention to refugees may be abruptly terminated at the point of return. Field evidence from repatriation processes worldwide indicates that the experience of return may be

more, rather than less, fraught with challenges than the experience of exile (UNHCR, 1997a:153). Reintegration assistance to returnees is not only too often inadequate to satisfy their complex needs and aspirations; the needs of local residents are even more rarely considered and addressed. Political ecological analyses of local conditions in areas of return can contribute to a clearer understanding of the absorptive capacity of the receiving communities, which affects reintegration options and influences the sustainability of return. Investigations of the diverse post-repatriation experiences of returnees remain limited (Hammond, 1999:227), but available evidence does point to the need to re-evaluate old assumptions and consider more context-specific approaches that address the differential needs of heterogeneous returnee and local populations. A recent case in point, Patricia Weiss Fagen's (2011) analysis of IDP and refugee return in cases as disparate as Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Burundi leads her to conclude that returnees do not always wish to settle themselves in the same areas from which they originated. My own research in South Sudan similarly indicates that returnees are interested in maintaining links with countries that hosted them during conflict. Such cross-border social networks may be critical in maintaining the livelihoods of returnees and their families, while return may also provide new opportunities for the establishment of transnational ties in countries that were isolated during conflict. Furthermore, experiences of displacement, return and reintegration are markedly age- and gender-differentiated, and must be considered accordingly.

3. DISPLACED YOUTH

Central to negotiating continuity and change in any context, youth represent the focal point of the profound transformations that characterize post-independence South Sudan. Interest in “youth” as a category of social, political and economic importance has become increasingly evident in scholarly and policy circles over the past few decades. Most of this focus on young people has been directed to the global south, which hosts roughly 85 per cent of the world’s youth population (Abbink, 2005; Jeffrey et al., 2008). Earlier studies of youth in conflict-affected societies tended to adopt a negative outlook, with younger children typically categorized as victims while adolescents and youth were largely perceived as a potential force for social disruption and upheaval. International attention has progressively shifted from an exclusive concern with the negative impacts of unsustainable development and/or violent conflict to a positive awareness of the creative roles that young people can play as agentive participants in the process of post-conflict reconstruction, not just passive recipients of others’ provisions (Ensor, 2012).

In South Sudan, and other societies where youth constitute the majority of the population, members of the younger generation have the potential to direct the course of events (Boyden, 2008), and are indeed playing a pivotal role in many of the processes that are taking place in their societies. The realities currently facing most young South Sudanese are often fraught with adversity and multiple complex challenges, and also show tremendous potential for renewal and locally generated progress. In particular, the position of displaced youth as stakeholders in the nation-building process is not an easy one given the fragile peace and adverse reintegration conditions they must confront. They nonetheless have a significant role to play in contributing to their new country’s search for viable solutions to its multiple post-conflict return and recovery concerns.

3.1 Children and Youth in South Sudan

Constructions of youth in South Sudan are extremely broad, highly contested, and characterized by criteria that may include being single, non-initiated, not steadily employed and still dependent on family (Jok, 2005:144-145). However defined, the situation of the youngest generations of South Sudanese, both returnees and local residents, warrants focused attention. With the proportion of the South Sudanese population under 5 reaching 21 per cent (NSCSE/UNICEF, 2004:3), over half the population of 8.26 million under the age of 18, and 72 per cent of its people less than

30 years old (Save the Children, 2011:3), the world's newest country is also one of its youngest. Ambivalently valued as either sources of human and social capital, or else viewed as burdens on the fragile economy – or even as a force for social disruption and additional conflict – children and youth in South Sudan have often borne the brunt of the many challenges that have besieged their country. In 2004, the year before the CPA was signed, less than 30 per cent of those living in the south had access to clean drinking water, and every fourth child died of malnutrition and/or preventable and water-borne diseases by age five (NSCSE/UNICEF, 2004). Current conditions are only marginally more favourable. Only 14 per cent of the South Sudanese live within 5 kilometres of a primary health-care centre. Among other issues, this leads to the country having the highest prevalence of maternal mortality worldwide. Educational opportunities are among the lowest in the world, especially for the young. South Sudan also has some of the lowest primary school enrolment rates, highest dropout rates and widest gender disparities. Less than half of the primary school-aged children are in school, and only 27 per cent of the population is literate (SSDDRC, 2012:6–8).

Youngsters' vulnerabilities and resiliencies in South Sudan reflect political ecological conditions where environmental factors intersect with sociocultural dynamics, including gender and intra-household relations, social exclusion, and legal and cultural power imbalances (Holmes and Braunholtz-Speight, 2009). Many continue to face a multitude of protection risks, directly or indirectly related to the long years of war. Data from Lakes State, for instance, suggest that many of the boys and young men who move with the cattle camps⁴, weary of the escalating conflicts over cattle resulting intertribal fighting, are seeking alternative livelihoods. Since pastoralist groups have traditionally perceived farming as undignified, and agriculture is not even always feasible in some of the most arid cattle-raising states, urban life in villages and towns appears to constitute an increasingly powerful lure for these youth. Typically lacking any formal education or marketable skills, many young cattle herders nonetheless express an interest in vocational training and a settled lifestyle. An imminent mass shift to settled lives by former pastoralists is unlikely, given the severe scarcity of services and employment opportunities currently found in urban areas.

Numerous youngsters were targeted for recruitment by armed forces, including the 800 children that the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates to be still associated with the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). In May 2002, 19 years into the Second Civil War, inter-agency assessments identified at least 17,000 children associated with armed groups, with many of them directly involved in fighting at the height of the conflict (Save the Children et al., 2002). The SPLA has reportedly released approximately 3,000 children since the CPA was signed in 2005. Current working estimates put the number of underaged soldiers in South Sudan around 2,000, based on reports by demobilized children themselves. The SPLA does

not have exact total figures, as exact ages are not always recorded and data compiled from the various military bases are not always updated with sufficient regularity (Ensor, 2013). Insecurity in the border areas, tribal clashes, and attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), mainly in the States of Western and Central Equatoria, have all resulted in grave violations of children's rights. Widespread small arms, mines and unexploded ordnances are additional concerns (UNICEF, 2011a).

The Interim Constitution of Southern Sudan prescribed that GoSS and state governments "adopt policies and provide facilities for the welfare of children and youth and ensure that they develop morally and physically, and are protected from moral and physical abuse and abandonment ... [they should] empower the youth to develop their potentials" (Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2009). This sentiment is echoed in the Transitional Constitution, which came into force in 2011 when South Sudan became an independent nation. With only half of primary school-age children currently accessing education, the government has made basic education its main priority in the years since the war. A multitude of NGOs have stepped in to fill the void in skills training. However, the many training programs are operating without any overall framework, using different curricula, varying durations (between three months and three years) and diverse methods of certification. A study by the Women's Refugee Commission found that the informal sector throughout South Sudan is growing rapidly and that private businesses are facing a shortage of skilled workers and are bringing in young workers from neighbouring countries. Very few attempts have been made to link graduates with employment opportunities, particularly in the form of apprenticeships or introductions to growing businesses willing to take on new staff. There appears to be a gap in linking graduates of vocational training courses with employment opportunities and, at the same time, a failure to recognize the capacity of private businesses as training providers (WRC, 2010:11).

3.2 Age and Gender Dynamics

Earlier legal-normative approaches to repatriation tended to be blind to age and gender dynamics of return and reintegration. More recent perspectives have also largely ignored gender and intergenerational relations, instead focusing on women and children as vulnerable victims and members of groups with "special needs". Having become more prevalent in the last few decades, gendered and feminist political ecological analyses have highlighted the role that gender relations play in shaping the interaction of human groups and their environment (Rocheleau et al., 1996), which constitute fundamental dimensions of both displacement and sustainable return. Understanding "how gender inequalities relate to environmental change and conflict" (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:20–23) contributes to further illuminating the differential constraints

and opportunities that females and males face in post-conflict reconstruction and reintegration situations. The situation of South Sudan, as a case in point, clearly illustrates that experiences of conflict, survival, displacement, return and reintegration are deeply gender- as well as age-differentiated, as are the opportunities and hurdles females and males of various ages face in their efforts to contribute to their own survival and the sustainability of their new nation.

Regardless of age, females are typically ascribed lower status in South Sudanese society than boys and men. Females in South Sudan carry the burden of a heavy workload, early marriages and bride prices, while gender roles and negative stereotypes contribute to the unequal distribution of resources. Women and girls spend the majority of their time doing domestic chores such as fetching water, manually grinding sorghum and maize, and cooking food. Resource-dependent livelihoods are time-consuming, especially where households face a lack of modern cooking fuel and clean water. Women typically spend many more hours than men do fetching wood and water, and girls often spend more time than boys do. Females' heavy involvement in these activities often prevents them from engaging in higher-return activities (UNDP, 2011:9).

A study conducted by the New Sudan Centre for Statistics and Evaluation in association with UNICEF in 2004 found that only one of every five school-age children reports to be attending school, and three times as many boys as girls report to be in school. According to the study, the country suffered from the lowest ratio of female-to-male school enrolment in the world, with girls having a much greater probability of dying during pregnancy or childbirth (1 in 9) than of completing primary school (1 in 100) (NSCSE/UNICEF, 2004). The reasons why girls' enrolment and retention rates remain so low are multiple and interrelated. Girls are traditionally responsible for household chores and the care of younger siblings. Parents often favour sons when school fees and other costs preclude them from sending all their children to school. Patriarchal restrictions on women's interactions with non-kin men often impede females' participation in income-generating activities (IRI, 2003). Boys are thus generally better able to raise their own school fees through labour, trade and other means. Furthermore, in a context where few female teachers exist to serve as mentors and role models, parents express concern about sending girls to schools that are dominated by boys and male teachers, worried that their daughters' safety might be compromised, and their value as brides diminished.

In the current post-war environment, a combination of tradition and absence of other alternatives compels many families to marry off their daughters at a young age, seeking to receive dowry payment.⁵ Low levels of educational accomplishment and limited employment opportunities have significantly diminished available avenues for

economic advancement, placing male youth under severe pressure to meet escalating dowry costs. Other recent studies confirm the researcher's findings that high dowries are related to increasing prevalence of domestic violence and adultery committed by husbands who feel that the high price they must pay for their wives justifies their abusive behaviour (Sommers and Schwartz, 2011). Among displaced groups who lost all their assets, sorghum has sometimes replaced cows as a form of dowry payment. A sorghum dowry is, however, not as respected as cattle and, as Pantuliano et al. report: "there is an expectation that the traditional system will resume once returnees have settled" (2007:7).

In addition to domestic abuse, early marriages can have harmful consequences for girls, including health problems, and the denial of education (Harvey and Rogers-Witte, 2007:11). Girls who do remain in school or return to school after marriage often drop out once pregnant and find it difficult to return after giving birth. In addition to facing the responsibilities and challenges of childcare, females have to contend with the social stigma associated with school girls who are also mothers. Polygyny, practised in many areas in the country, may cause additional difficulties for women. As social norms proscribe sex for breastfeeding mothers, many men choose to stay with another wife during this period. Married women may thus find themselves living alone, often supporting their children without assistance from their husband, for months at a time.

Peace and independence have created potentially positive opportunities to address gender inequalities. For instance, the constitutional process established to develop a permanent constitution entails a national constitutional conference with wide civil society participation, including by women's organizations.⁶ The current Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan is an amended version of the 2005 Interim Constitution, which the president of South Sudan endorsed at independence. It is, however, worth noting that the Interim Constitution recognizes customary law and endorses highly patriarchal views of family relations. Access to property for women and girls, for instance, is controlled by their husbands or fathers, with practices such as *levirate* (widow inheritance by a brother of her deceased husband) often compounding the disadvantaged position of females in traditional local society (Ali, 2011). South Sudanese law granting women the right to own land, houses and other property are negated by deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes and customs which prevent many women from enjoying these rights on an equal level with men (Phelan and Wood, 2006), which, in turn, may negatively impact their children.

While no official figures are available, the proportion of women who became single parents and heads of household during the war due to either spousal death or abandonment is believed to be very high. For these women, some of them barely out of childhood themselves, balancing work and childcare, and supporting children

with income from only one parent, is likely to pose enormous challenges. Forced by necessity to dispense with gender expectations, some of these females, both young girls and women, are increasingly venturing into non-traditional livelihood strategies and income-generating activities. For instance, camps housing expatriate workers offer a source of employment in positions such as preparing and serving meals and beverages, washing and ironing laundry, maintaining the grounds and, for those with administrative skills, as secretaries and receptionists. Engaging in petty crime, prostitution, drug peddling and other harmful and/or illegal activities has also been reported. However unsustainable in the long run, some of these examples do show that social attitudes are not entirely rigid, and that young women are able and willing to participate in new and male-dominated arenas when they see it necessary for the survival of their households.

Efforts towards State-building and nation-building that are currently reshaping the South Sudanese post-independence scene have the potential to address some of these inequalities if the new country's political and economic policies and measures fulfil the commitments made to promote women's and girls' human rights protection. Young returnees, with their more progressive values and often higher education levels, can make a positive contribution to this process. "In turn, empowering women will enable South Sudan to strengthen its economic and political structures and institutions" (Ali, 2011:1).

3.3 Young People as Returnees

IOM estimates that less than 6 per cent of returnees to South Sudan are over the age of 60 years, whereas around 75 per cent are under 18 years. However, the proportion of those under 18 in the whole country is 51 per cent, indicating that returnees are considerably younger than the overall population (ibid., 2012). The life experiences of those displaced by the war have been quite diverse and disparate depending on their migratory trajectories. Long years in exile, which often comprised much or all of their childhoods, have instilled in these young returnees views on reintegration, and even the very desirability of repatriation, which often differ from those of their South Sudan-born elders. Some would have preferred to remain in the diaspora, at least until conditions in South Sudan improve. Others long for resettlement to a western country, a possibility made more remote after the CPA.

More than half of the young people in this study had been orphaned by the war, had lost one parent, or had been separated from their relatives during the resulting conflict-induced displacement. Although the majority of them have been taken in by

other members of their extended families, anecdotal evidence suggests that there are a growing number of children living on the streets which the few functioning shelters are unable to accommodate. Not surprisingly, orphans are more acutely impacted by the loss of kin-based networks of material and moral support, and some mentioned efforts to locate distant relatives with whom they might have lost contact during the war. For young returnees, kin-based networks not only offer material support and assistance in accessing social services, but also serve the critical function of providing the “connections” necessary to find work in the very limited job market. These findings are echoed by multiple studies of refugees’ coping strategies elsewhere, which document the reliance on kinship ties as a common response to adverse circumstances among displaced people worldwide (see, for instance, Boyd, 1989; Chatty, 2010; Clark, 2006; Keown-Bomar, 2004; Plasterer, 2011; Willems, 2005).

Research findings also indicate that, overall, young people are experiencing the greatest difficulties as they strive to (re)integrate into resource-poor rural lifestyles to which they are often unaccustomed. For large numbers of displaced children and youth, many of whom were born in exile or fled home when they were too young to remember it, adapting to life in their new country is fraught with difficulties. Younger children are struggling with a much more restricted diet and more limited access to health care than was the case while their families were based in internationally managed camps and settlement abroad or in Khartoum. Older girls and women also lament the loss of the greater opportunities available to them in exile. Approximately 75 per cent of recent returnee families have settled in rural areas. Unlike older generations, however, many young returnees are completely urbanized and unaccustomed to rural environments and lifestyle. Many young returnees from Egypt, Kenya, Uganda or Khartoum arrived in South Sudan with relatively high educational standards and expectations that local conditions in their new country are currently unable to meet. They often express a hope that their academic credentials will help them to avoid a dependence on subsistence agriculture – digging, in common local parlance – and pastoralism.

Many young returnees who were exposed to functioning cash economies in Kenya, Uganda or Khartoum arrived in South Sudan with higher educational standards and skills for which they do not always find a market. Without adequate targeted interventions, they might remain idle or engage in low-skilled and possibly exploitative jobs, a wasted potential resource to support the country’s reconstruction and development. Conversely, others are disheartened by the difficulties of completing their studies in South Sudan where the lack of qualified teachers and overcrowding are negatively impacting the quality of education. Those arriving from Arab-speaking areas are facing additional challenges as official government policy has established English as the medium of instruction from P4 level – that is, the fourth year of primary

education – onward. This policy is also affecting the reintegration of returnee teachers, further contributing to the shortage of instructors and overcrowded classrooms. Moreover, the lack of affordable secondary education is both discouraging the return of families with school-age children, and leaving many youngsters in South Sudan without viable educational opportunities (Pantuliano et al., 2008:22).

Some youth are choosing to go back to Kenya and Uganda to finish their education in refugee camps perceiving that, for the time being at least, their opportunities are greater there. Limited educational and vocational training opportunities, lack of sports and entertainment facilities, and the isolation created by language barriers and inadequate infrastructure and transportation have combined to create a sense of alienation and breakdown of family relations among some returning youngsters. In some cases, this estrangement has been so acute that older children have run away from their families. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some have gone back to cities like Khartoum where they are reportedly living as street children. Others are engaging in cattle raiding or joining militia groups. The difficulties inherent in finding paid employment in the face of rising expectations and unfavourable socioeconomic conditions are at the core of practices of continuing mobility among young returnees. The “chronic lack of livelihoods and employment opportunities for youth was highlighted by many... as having a much more direct potential for creating or exacerbating tensions than the lack of basic services” (Bennett et al., 2010:86).

In other cases, however, young returnees educated abroad have also introduced new skills and attitudes to a country where both economic and social development were effectively halted for decades. In South Sudan, as in many other African countries, the challenge may not be limited to facilitating more learning; it also requires establishing commensurate employment opportunities to sustain a justifiable faith in the positive correlation between education and sustainable human development (Folson, 2006:147–148). In spite of adverse circumstances and multiple challenges, most young returnees demonstrate remarkable determination in their efforts to overcome a turbulent climate of social instability, deprivation and conflict. Their potential to contribute to the realization of hard-sought prosperity and the dividends of peace and independence can be best examined by situating it in the broader context of the traditional survival strategies found in the country as they relate to the concept of sustainable return.

4. DETERMINANTS OF SUSTAINABLE RETURN

Born on the ashes of decades of armed violence, South Sudan started independent nationhood facing significant constraints, as do all governments in poor countries emerging from conflict. Yet few nations have faced post-war reconstruction needs on the scale of South Sudan. In many respects, the term “reconstruction” is an inaccurate depiction of the process, as the GoSS is confronted with the daunting task of constructing a whole country anew – a new state apparatus and political institutions, along with new health, education, infrastructure and other basic service systems either entirely from scratch or from a very limited starting point.

While independence marked a new era in the history of South Sudan, many unresolved issues, often exacerbated by underdevelopment, have the potential to re-ignite violence and propel the country back into war. The agricultural sector is believed to offer the most viable opportunities for growth and constitutes the current focus of the GoSS’s strategy. Significant investment is needed, however, as the long Civil War took a severe toll on agricultural production. Displacement, insecurity and the likelihood of having household resources requisitioned by warring armed groups discouraged the production of surplus during the long years of conflict. Many were forced to flee, abandoning their crops and livestock. Those who remained saw their mobility constrained and found themselves unable to use methods of herding and farming that relied on traditional nomadic strategies. Further obstacles are represented by the negative social attitudes common among young returnees who grew up in urban areas abroad towards trades that require physical labour, often resulting in a rejection of rural lifestyles and employment preferences that are not reflective of available local opportunities. Significant challenges notwithstanding, agriculture is viewed as a potential engine for economic development and some progress expanding its potential has already been made as illustrated by an increase in cultivated arable land from only 2 per cent during the war to 4 per cent in 2010 (ANLATG, 2011:12).

Clearly, the long-standing civil conflict has been the main cause of insecurity, displacement, loss of lives and lack of development in South Sudan. However, in the post-CPA period, the presence of low-level localized conflicts in the form of ethnic and tribal clashes, resurgence of traditional hostilities, armed insurgencies, cattle raiding and LRA attacks continue to occur, severely affecting livelihoods and food security.

Yet, the enormous challenges should not detract from the immense opportunities. While these large return movements have put tremendous pressure on already stretched resources, in many cases, they have also resulted in the introduction of new skills and more open attitudes to a region. While education remains a principal challenge,

as elaborated on previously, since the 2005 CPA, the primary school population has risen by over 1 million children – a four-fold increase. Classrooms are being built and more teachers are being recruited. Similar improvements are also noticeable in the health and infrastructure sectors, including the construction of clinics and building or rehabilitation of roads (UNICEF, 2011a).

4.1 Returnee Livelihoods in South Sudan

As the new GoSS works to solidify its leadership, the challenges all South Sudanese face in re-establishing sustainable livelihoods are many, but they are not insurmountable. The two most important drivers of development in the country since the signing of the CPA have been official aid flows and oil revenues. Continued reliance on external aid risks creating dependence and undermining local efforts. Until disagreement with Sudan over oil charges prompted South Sudan to shut down oil production in January 2012, oil revenues accounted for 98 per cent of the GoSS's budget (ANLATG, 2011:1). They were, however, projected to decline quite steeply from 2016 (UNESCO EFA GMR, 2011:4). Furthermore, oil production has not translated into a large-scale provision of jobs for the local population as, even when jobs are created, they require a skill level that cannot yet be met by South Sudanese workers. This situation is particularly problematic and could potentially create new tensions and exacerbate existing ones.

Ecologically and socioculturally diverse, South Sudan is one of the areas richest in natural resources in sub-Saharan Africa, with water, wildlife, forests, oil and minerals present in great abundance (NSCE/UNICEF, 2004). Traditional livelihood⁷ systems in Southern Sudan rely on a combination of agricultural production (around 85% of households cultivate land), cattle rearing (around 65% of households own cattle), fishing, gathering of wild foods and trade (WFP, 2011). Hyperarid areas, especially those in the States of Eastern Equatoria and Jonglei, are suitable only for pastoralism. Cattle-keeping has particular economic and cultural significance throughout all of South Sudan. Cattle are the primary long-term assets for many families, and the size of a herd connotes both wealth and status. Livestock products, including meat and milk, are the most important food sources for households in the arid south-eastern region. Cattle ownership and exchange also form the basis for social interactions and networks, with dowries often being paid in cattle (ANLATG, 2011:16), as discussed in previous sections. The reliance of individual households on each of these activities varies from state to state; most rely on multiple food and revenue-generating activities to diversify their options and minimize the risks (WFP, 2006). The division of labour typically reflects gender and age considerations made more flexible by war-time

survival imperatives, with young girls and boys often assisting their older counterparts in gender-appropriate activities as soon as physically capable.

The country has an immense agricultural potential. More than 90 per cent of South Sudan's land is suitable for agriculture, although the vast majority remains uncultivated except for subsistence practices. Among the main crops produced are sorghum, maize, cassava and millet, particularly in the heavy-rainfall, fertile regions such as the Nuba Mountains and the area surrounding the country's capital, Juba. In the flood plains and the zones surrounding the Nile and Sobat rivers, gathering of wild plants, fishing and hunting are more prevalent (WFP, 2006). Overall, however, there is limited crop diversification with an overreliance on cereals as the main source of food (ANLATG, 2011:12) which is neither sustainable nor conducive to adequate nutrition levels, especially for children.

Related to the inability of current agro-pastoralist practices to satisfy the needs of the rapidly growing population is the high prevalence of food insecurity, a particular threat to sustainability which severely affects both residents and returnees, especially the youngest ones. Dubbed a "silent and largely invisible emergency" by UNICEF, the majority of the over 1 million South Sudanese children under age 5 are at risk of malnutrition in all 10 states. Food insecurity continues to be a result of a combination of structural effects exacerbated by frequent exposure to multiple and recurring shocks. Low agricultural productivity and income, low human capital, knowledge and skills, limited access to social facilities, and poor market integration are some of the most common structural causes (ANLATG, 2011:11). High rates of global acute malnutrition (GAM)⁸, which regularly exceed the emergency threshold of 15 per cent, contribute to excess child morbidity and mortality among vulnerable population groups in South Sudan. According to the 2006 Sudan Household Health Survey (SHHS), the latest published representative results for South Sudan, 22 per cent of children were acutely malnourished with severe acute malnutrition (SAM)⁹ rates of above 4 per cent. Seven out of 10 states had rates above the emergency level of 15 per cent (ANLATG, 2011:23). Inadequate food intake compounded by illness constitutes the direct cause of child malnutrition, while food shortages caused by recurrent shocks, poor infant and young feeding practices, poor hygiene and sanitation, and poor access to quality health services are among the contributing factors (ibid.:25). Nutrition surveys have also recorded higher rates of child malnutrition during specific periods of the year, including the "hunger period" from March through September. During seasonal peaks,¹⁰ the prevalence of GAM in South Sudan is often double the World Health Organization (WHO) cut-off for emergencies of 15 per cent (Harvey and Rogers-Witte, 2007:12–13).

Restricted diets and insufficient food supplies are among the main factors limiting the absorptive capacity of host communities and constitute a primary concern for returnees, especially those with younger children more likely to be affected by inadequate nutrition. Numerous host families reported eating only one meal a day in an effort to share limited resources with returning relatives. There is evidence that the burden of providing for the needs of the returnee population is straining family relations, especially in cases where displaced and resident kin members were separated for many years.

Reflecting these concerns, the Growth Strategy drafted by the GoSS (2010) states that “broad-based economic growth must focus on growth in the agricultural sector.” The proposed plan seeks to transform traditional subsistence agriculture into a productive and sustainable surplus-generating enterprise. It identifies insecurity, poor infrastructure, multiple taxation and “lack of skills and tools,” as well as “traditional attitudes to gender,” as key constraints to growth and productivity. This strategy appears, at least on paper, to be in line with current understandings which view human development through a joint lens of sustainability and equity, and acknowledge the differential challenges and opportunities faced by women, children and other traditionally disempowered groups (UNDP, 2011). What it does not consider is the negative attitude towards rural lifestyles common among young returnees who grew up in urban areas abroad, whose lifestyle and employment preferences prompt them to settle in Juba and other larger towns.

Those with higher education levels and good English skills may be able to find employment with international organizations or foreign companies. Many other returnees acquired skills abroad in trades such as carpentry, masonry and auto mechanics. Demand for this kind of qualifications is rising as the urban economy expands, although not fast enough to keep pace with the rapidly increasing numbers of job-seekers. The main sources of employment available to unskilled returnee males – as well as their local counterparts – in urban areas include collecting firewood, breaking stones, brick-making, digging latrines and similar forms of casual labour, while females clean and cook at restaurants and hotels, carry water on constructions sites, and engage in various forms of petty trade and small business. Job allocation, however, commonly reflects ethnic affiliation and often relies on kin networks, placing uprooted returnees at a clear disadvantage. Furthermore, jobs are seldom reliable sources of income, including for those working for the government, as salary payment has remained erratic after independence. The predominant income-generating activity is thus usually complemented by a range of other livelihood strategies which may include part-time farming as a way to supplement food availability, rather than as the primary way for returnees to support themselves and their families.

4.2 Insecurity and Conflict as Threats to Sustainability

South Sudan remains unlikely to meet the Millennium Development Goals by its target year of 2015, especially in the context of severely diminished revenues and austerity measures in the wake of the shutdown of South Sudan's oil industry. As discussed above, agriculture, the traditional mainstay of the economy of South Sudan, is believed to offer the most promising immediate source of livelihood. Challenges affecting this sector are thus of particular concern. As is often the case in conflict and post-conflict situations, however, uncertainty over land ownership is still to be resolved, and displaced individuals often identify lack of security regarding their families' land holdings as a disincentive to returning. It has also been noted that efforts to revitalize a predominant herding sector could cause further instability in the region, as disputes between cattle owners and land owners over grazing rights have been a historic cause of conflicts between rival ethnic communities. Breakdowns in traditional mechanisms for negotiating herders' access to land risk exacerbating such conflicts and making them more difficult to resolve. A further obstacle to both security and livelihood provision is the presence of as many as 1 million landmines left over from the war (UNCHR, 2006), many of which are yet to be cleared.¹¹

Conflict has a multidimensional effect on livelihoods. Insecurity disrupts cultivation; limits movement and trade; restricts access to markets, schools and health-care facilities; and exacerbates vulnerabilities with women and children almost always disproportionately affected. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs (OCHA) reports that while LRA attacks accounted for only a minimal number of civilian casualties, they led to 20 per cent of the displacement in South Sudan that occurred in 2010, with 45,000 persons displaced in that year. These attacks are mostly concentrated in Western Equatoria, a state which the GoSS describes as "the bread basket of Southern Sudan" (SSCCSE, 2010), under normal circumstances, but Western Equatoria was one of three states that became *more* food insecure in the first half of that year (ANLATG, 2011).

In South Sudan, drivers of conflict vary across the country and over time, but include lack of employment opportunities for youth (Bennett et al., 2010:86); competition over natural resources; cattle-raising; land disputes, including land grabbing by powerful individuals and large-scale land acquisition by private investors (Deng, 2011); ongoing Sudan–South Sudan tensions; abuses by armed groups; conflict between the SPLA and rebel groups; and spillover from neighbouring (regional) conflicts (Barber, 2011). The corrosive impact of these conflict drivers is exacerbated by the fact that the role traditionally played by tribal chiefs in non-violent conflict resolution has been eroded by displacement, urbanization and the proliferation of small arms.

Livelihood-related conflicts¹² are also becoming increasingly prevalent. The United Nations OCHA Incidents Database recorded some 225 reported incidents in South Sudan in 2010. Endogenous incidents seem to be tribal-based and related to deep-seated unresolved historical and cultural conflicts. This pattern of continued conflict, insecurity, and displacement have disrupted livelihood activities, resulted in loss of assets, impeded physical access to markets and social facilities, reduced movement of people and commercial food and non-food supplies, and undermined the realization of sustainable development as a hoped-for peace dividend (ANLATG, 2011:29–32).

The situation has been exacerbated by the as yet only partially successful disarmament attempts by the GoSS, which have left communities that have surrendered arms feeling vulnerable towards others that have not. At the same time, the LRA has continued attacks and abductions in Western Equatoria and Western Bahr el Ghazal (Macdonald, 2010:5). Contributing to the potential establishment of a vicious circle of violence, some youth are joining militia groups allegedly in an effort to protect themselves and their loved ones given the government's inability to do so. Some families are refusing to surrender their weapons, or are even acquiring new ones. For young men, in particular, the possession of weapons continues to be perceived as essential for protection and survival. Disarmament plans, even when linked to longer-term rehabilitation and recovery efforts, are unlikely to succeed until sufficient trust has been built between local people and properly functioning governance systems (CICS, 2005:41–42).

The strained relationship between South Sudanese youth and their new government is cause for concern, with disappointment and frustration over government responses to youth needs, and the marginalization of youth voices in government policy, being consistently reported by resident and returnee youth alike. Interviews with government officials reveal conflicting views of the Government's capacity to satisfy youth expectations. The slow government response to unresolved youth grievances resulting from the Government's inability – if not disinclination – to satisfy the needs of their huge youth constituency is exacerbating tense relations and has the potential to escalate into renewed violence (Sommers and Schwartz, 2011).

An additional factor hampering economic and social integration is the fundamental differences in values between residents and returnees. Local residents often associate unacceptable behaviour – including alcohol consumption and drunkenness even among young adolescents, prostitution, and increasing rates of HIV/AIDS – with returnees. Refugee women, especially younger ones returning from East African countries, are often perceived as excessively liberal, while those who were displaced in Khartoum are stigmatized for their Arabized attire (Ensor, 2013). Returnees in general and youth in particular are perceived as having a weaker sense of family and community.

Having grown accustomed to leading more independent and individualistic lives, their attitudes may clash with traditional South Sudanese lifestyles which revolve around patriarchal and gerontocratic constructions of the family. At the political level, “antagonism between those who lived in Government-controlled areas during the war – usually Juba or Khartoum – and those who lived in SPLA-controlled areas or who left for Uganda” (Pantuliano et al., 2008:13) constitutes an additional source of tension and mistrust which hinders efforts at nation-building and reconciliation.

4.3 Reintegration towards a More Resilient Future

South Sudan’s capacity to overcome its current state of fragility will depend, in large measure, on the sustainable reintegration of its returning refugees and IDPs. In particular, opportunities must be made available for the vast numbers of young returnees to contribute to efforts to build a resilient future for their newly independent country. Successful reintegration is an essential component of stabilization, and will be pivotal to minimize future risks of increased conflict, especially in areas facing high levels of return. Tension and frustration over slow government response notwithstanding, most repatriated refugees, young and old, do often express a desire to (re)build their own livelihoods and futures and contribute to the establishment of a viable and peaceful South Sudan. The GoSS’s expectations that returnees would be welcome back by their former neighbours have, however, not always proven to be accurate.

The GoSS has struggled to meet a wide range of simultaneous demands, ranging from establishing its credibility as an effective institution of governance in the newly independent country, to meeting the enormous challenge of rebuilding and rehabilitating a vast territory devastated by years of war and neglect. As described in a DFID/Joint Donor Team-commissioned report:

South Sudan ... can be described as an early recovering but deeply fragile context with the political will but not yet the institutional capacity to perform critical functions necessary for the security and welfare of its citizens (Murphy, 2007:3).

The legacy of the protracted war, during which external assistance dominated large-scale humanitarian operations, has created a “dependence syndrome” in South Sudan. The Government appears to be focusing principally on state-building, security and rebuilding major infrastructure, but continues to rely on the international community for all other aspects of reintegration, including supporting local absorptive capacities and meeting immediate needs. Furthermore, it has prioritized return over reintegration, as made evident by the Social and Humanitarian Affairs Draft Budget Sector Plan,

which reports in detail on the former but fails to provide a clear agenda or strategy for supporting the latter (GoSS, 2007).

Efforts to support sustainable return and reintegration must respond to the challenge of delivering solutions targeted to the enormous diversity of the returnee population. Indeed, the term *returnee* covers a broad spectrum of people, with different reasons for returning and very different economic and social prospects on their arrival in South Sudan. In addition to the gender and generational differences already discussed, the population of returnees can be divided into three broad categories which comprise both youth and adults of both sexes: (1) those who spent the majority of their exile in rural areas, (2) semi-skilled returnees, and (3) more highly educated returnees. Those who spent their years of exile in rural areas are less likely to have had the opportunity to acquire an education or develop marketable skills. Not surprisingly, members of this group have an easier time integrating socially and adapting to the agricultural livelihoods to which they are already accustomed. They also appear to have a more flexible outlook on job acceptability, and are less critical of the limited services available in their receiving communities. Semi-skilled returnees, both IDPs and refugees, are those who managed to gain a modicum of education during their displacement, typically through internationally managed assistance programmes. Members of this group report having the greatest difficulty adapting to the prevalent living conditions in South Sudan. Often uninterested in agricultural work, their skills rarely afford them the hoped-for superior employment opportunities in urban centres either. Many in the last group of more highly educated returnees were part of the South Sudanese diaspora during the war. Some are returning from Kenya and Uganda; others were resettled to third countries, such the United States and Australia. “Many of these ‘elite’ returnees have secured high-status, well-paid jobs with the Government or with United Nations agencies, international donors, or NGOs. Most categorically reject any kind of manual labour, especially farming, which they see as incompatible with their urban lifestyle and beneath their superior qualifications” (Ensor, 2013).

Regardless of their level of education, more than half of the returnees in the current study indicated that they did not intend to return to their area of origin. Preferences regarding final destination showed marked generational differences, with older returnees expressing a desire to return “home” eventually, although not necessarily straight away, while younger respondents often rejected the prospect of returning to rural life and agricultural work, especially if they had experienced urban living during their displacement. Although only a small proportion of refugees and IDPs originated from Juba town, the country’s capital continues to attract large numbers of returnees because of the marginally better services and superior employment opportunities it is believed to offer compared with rural areas and other towns in South Sudan. As more returnees choose to settle in Juba, the available jobs, housing, education and other

opportunities are proportionally insufficient to meet the growing demands, generating frustration and disappointment. The Japan International Cooperation Agency is among the organizations most committed to supporting programmes in Juba town, although their specific focus is physical infrastructure. In general terms, accommodating the particular needs and expectations of urban returnees has proven highly problematic. The international organizations facilitating reintegration processes have admittedly been poorly prepared to cater to returnees' preference for Juba and other urban centres over rural areas. As Pantuliano et al. (2008:10) observe: "UNHCR funding was for return to states such as Eastern Equatoria, Jonglei and Upper Nile, rather than to Juba.... [Similarly] IOM has inadequate funding for onward travel from Juba for those who want to return to rural areas."

Overall, approaches to return and reintegration vary widely among the international agencies involved, according to their overall mission and mandate. While service provision and protection of returnees are most commonly emphasized, efforts to strengthen the absorption capacity of host communities are largely lacking. The SSRRC is the GoSS's counterpart which has taken the lead in return and reintegration operations. Suffering from very limited capacity and unclear assignation of responsibilities in relation to line ministries, the SSRRC has mainly focused on supporting the organized return process. Organized return, however, presents some noteworthy disadvantages for would-be returnees. In particular, it results in a loss of legal refugee status and the associated ability to return to the country of exile and take advantage of what many perceive as superior services. Instead, many resort to alternative approaches including "scouting" and "family splitting."

Family splitting is a common approach to return whereby an adult male – the male head of household or another able male family member – returns first in order to scout – assess local conditions and find job and a place to live – before having the rest of the household join him. Secondary return to Uganda and Khartoum has been reported on grounds that conditions in South Sudan are worse than in areas of displacement. The feasibility of going back to what is now the separate country of Sudan, however, has been decreasing since independence. It is also common for younger members to stay behind with older relatives in order to take advantage of the generally better educational opportunities in the country of exile, especially Uganda. Family splitting is an established coping mechanism in South Sudan, and was widely practised during the war as families sought to minimize the risk by maintaining a base in several different locations, while maximizing the available opportunities and provision of services.

Land issues have also emerged as a powerful determinant of sustainable return. The SPLM placed great emphasis on the right of local communities to land during the CPA negotiations. Access to land is of critical importance for the successful reintegration

of returnees. In rural South Sudan, land is owned communally, with access and rights administered by traditional leaders. In urban centres, on the other hand, “land is usually acquired by the state from traditional landowners through expropriation and is then gazetted as urban state land” (De Wit, 2004:16). Disputes over contested land, in most cases, entail returnees trying to regain access to land they were forced to abandon upon displacement, and often occur along ethnic lines. Specific problems identified during the study include land grabbing by the military and other powerful members of the community, illegal sale of communally owned land, occupation of and/or unauthorized building on abandoned property, and the difficulties encountered by women in upholding their right to land despite more progressive provisions in the Interim Constitution of Southern Sudan which was subsequently replaced by the current Transitional Constitution of South Sudan.

As the previous discussion illustrates, the Republic of South Sudan has entered the international state in a complex context straddling the humanitarian-development paradigm. Its children are heirs to a society where centuries of struggle for political dominance by remote governments, and even humanitarian interventions during its protracted civil war, have created a legacy of dependence on outside agencies for leadership and services. This very young country has a long way to go in fostering positive feelings of national identity, community participation, and a sense of ownership in the new nation-State which, even after the official ceasefire, is still confronting alarming levels of conflict and insecurity. Nevertheless, reconstruction and reintegration efforts remain ambitious, reflecting the high hopes and aspirations of the young country’s parents and children.

5. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

On 9 July 2011, the Republic of South Sudan became the world's 196th independent State. After decades of civil conflict, the people of South Sudan at last have an opportunity to build a better future. The moment of opportunity that independence represents remains, however, marred by a climate of continued insecurity. Tense relations with Sudan and escalation of violence in the border region, attacks by the LRA and fighting in the disputed border areas, are also factors that shape the daily lives of many young women and men in South Sudan, and threaten the sustainability of their new nation. Tribal clashes, often related to cattle raiding, water scarcity, and contested access to grazing land, contribute to the climate of violence. The country also suffers from one of the least developed economies on earth, which contributes to the challenging return and reintegration conditions. While a certain degree of narrowly focused instrumentalism¹³ was sometimes evident, the majority of NGO and international agency officers interviewed identify the same general challenges facing South Sudan. These include managing the complex internal divisions that characterize this ethnically diverse country, and meeting the growing aspirations of the population for the development of all core public services such as education, health, food security, housing and employment opportunities. Most also highlight the need for South Sudan to establish formal agreements with its neighbours on a wide range of issues, particularly border management and the implementation of an effective framework for refugee returns.

Indeed, as this report has illustrated, the future viability of South Sudan is inextricably linked to the dynamics of displacement and refugee reintegration. Displacement, in all its modalities, reshapes societies, economies, cultural values and notions of identity. The massive return of refugees and IDPs to already deprived areas is putting further strain on the limited local resources and, in some cases, contributing to heightened levels of food insecurity and tense relations between returnees and residents. The situation of the members of youngest generations is rather conflicted. As South Sudanese anthropologist Jok Madut Jok has noted, youth have been “at the forefront in articulating the grievances of the South” (2005:145) throughout South Sudan's recent history. Study findings suggest that, while many young returnees are struggling to adjust to the prevailing adverse reintegration conditions, they are also well-situated to contribute to their country's sustainable future if their potential and determination are adequately nurtured and supported. In effect, although South Sudan started independent nationhood amid enormous challenges and immediate threats, it also has a unique opportunity to break with a past blighted by war.

Promising child- and women-friendly initiatives are already evident, at least at the policy level. “[E]mpowering vulnerable groups and providing safeguards for people living in extreme poverty” is among the GoSS’s stated priorities, as reflected in the South Sudan Development Plan which guides the “core policies on social protection ... [that] are being developed” (GoSS, 2011b:2). Specifically, the GoSS aimed to provide a “nation-wide child benefit cash transfer” to households with children under six years, and to “have a comprehensive social protection system in place” by 2013 (ibid.:14). This, together with many other planned social programs, suffered considerable delays when the GoSS stopped oil production – and with it 98 per cent of the State’s revenue – in January 2012. Although oil output was resumed in April after protracted negotiations, austerity measures are expected to continue until the end of this year. Furthermore, programmes specifically targeting youth – as opposed to younger children – appear to be lacking. It remains to be seen whether the proposed measures actually materialize and succeed in improving the welfare of young people and their families, as South Sudan moves forward as an independent nation.

5.1 Importance of Evidence-Based Programming

The findings of this study illustrate the inadequacy of standardized approaches to refugee and IDP reintegration which fail to consider the high diversity of the returnee population. While gender and age are universal variables shaping the position of displaced persons – and indeed any individual – in a given society, other sources of social variability must also be investigated and considered in context rather than assumed a priori. In the case of South Sudan, different migratory trajectories have resulted in quite disparate exilic experiences for those uprooted by the long years of war. In turn, the language, professional skills and level of education acquired during displacement, the rural or urban environment in which the lives of refugees and IDPs took place, and their level of exposure to functioning cash economies all emerge as salient factors which, together with gender and age, are shaping returnees’ needs and expectations as well as their ability to fulfil them.

Understandings of what constitutes sustainable return may thus differ markedly among the various groups of returnees, as well as between displaced groups and those organizations seeking to facilitate their reintegration. Intergenerational differences regarding reintegration needs and aspirations, and even the very desirability of return, are rarely considered as the “tyranny of the urgent” prevails in a context of multiple pressing concerns, and immediate survival needs are prioritized over targeted solutions more conducive to long-term sustainability. Support to post-conflict return and reintegration challenges the conventional distinction between “humanitarian aid,” which demands immediate attention, and longer-term “development programming,”

which takes place over many months and often years. Carefully conceived and implemented reintegration and recovery strategies based on up-to-date understandings of local conditions are not only desirable but also an absolute imperative if return and reintegration processes are to successfully meet the needs of the target population and the post-conflict recovery of the country as a whole is to gain momentum.

Gathering relevant information in a large country like South Sudan where baseline data are largely lacking, issues of concerns are numerous and vary from state to state, and large areas remain inaccessible part of the year due to the absence of roads, flooding or conflict is admittedly not an easy endeavour, but noteworthy efforts are being made. IOM has recently completed the field-based research project, Basic Services in High Return Areas of South Sudan, which entailed the collection of data on basic services in 30 counties of high return in the country. The data, which has been gathered since February 2012, describes conditions in over 800 *bomas*, groups of small villages, in 30 of the 78 administrative areas in the country. This is the most extensive survey to date in South Sudan and will provide invaluable tools to analyse gaps in services and identify key areas for development across the country. The data are being analysed in relation to returnees' access to livelihood opportunities, protection services, water and sanitation, education, and health in those counties, with the findings scheduled for public release some time in 2013.

The results of this large-scale assessment of basic services – which constitute some of the structural or objective determinants of return – will contribute to laying the ground for a more coherent and efficient approach to returnee reintegration. These findings, I argue, must be complemented with a clearer understanding of people's perceptions – or subjective determinants – as both attitudes and behaviours tend to be motivated by a combination of objectives and subjective factors. At the time of writing, while progress on a number of recovery concerns is already noticeable to observers, the slow pace of improvement has largely failed to fulfil the often highly unrealistic expectations of residents and returnees alike. Many appear to have assumed that the end of the conflict and subsequent acquisition of the hard-fought-for independent nationhood would be followed by immediate peace dividends in the form of rapid development and prosperity. However, countless host communities are struggling to absorb hundreds of thousands of returnees who made their way back to South Sudan since the formal end of the conflict, safety and stability remain elusive, and most development indicators are far from reaching satisfactory levels.

A number of additional reports on the post-conflict, post-independence situation have appeared in the last few years (see, for instance, Murphy, 2007; NRC, 2010; OCHA, 2011; Pantuliano et al., 2008; Save the Children, 2011; UNDP, 2011; UNESCO, 2011; UNICEF, 2011a, 2011b; UNHCR, 2006; WRC, 2010), most of

them produced or commissioned by international donors and aid organizations. These assessments offer essential information on the rapidly changing situation of specific sectors, typically reflecting the respective agencies' particular focus and mandate. More holistic, longitudinal scholarly analyses of what is an inevitably long-term and highly complex process are also necessary if the lessons that the case of South Sudan has to offer are to be properly understood and placed in a broader context of expanded significance.

Seeking to make one such contribution, this study provides a glimpse into the current conditions of repatriation, highlighting some of the defining features of post-return life for South Sudanese youth. Young people's disparate experiences during displacement have combined to reconfigure their expectations for their future, which is in many cases associated with South Sudan's rapidly urbanizing towns. Continuing mobility among youth, rather than being symptomatic of failed reintegration, must be viewed as a sign of the broader shift in the aspirations of the country's largest demographic segment.

5.2 Making Return Sustainable

The signing of the CPA and the subsequent establishment of the GoSS signalled the need for a gradual shift from the humanitarian assistance mode, which drove external aid to South Sudan during the decades of conflict, to a focus on recovery and development. The inauguration of the Republic of South Sudan as an independent nation paved the way for new hopes for a more peaceful and prosperous future for all its citizens after years of conflict. The international community has, however, struggled to accommodate the specific needs of recovering societies which, like South Sudan, are straddling the humanitarian-development continuum (Murphy, 2007). As the previous discussion has illustrated, long-term conflict in this country has had a multidimensional effect on the sustainability of the various livelihood strategies employed by the South Sudanese population to provide for themselves, their families and communities. Despite seven years of recovery and reconstruction efforts by the GoSS and its partners, the capacity of the new country to support the reintegration of the vast numbers of returnees remains very weak. Processes of political dialogue have often failed to produce substantive results due to lack of trust among national stakeholders. Chronic poverty, the high and multiple vulnerabilities of most Southerners, and limited infrastructure and basic service provision following the civil wars have diminished the local population's capacity to cope with even minor shocks. Continued insecurity, adverse environmental conditions, and the pressures of accommodating the influx of returnees can cause communities to revert from survival to crisis.

Challenging circumstances for both returnees and residents, limited resources and services, and occasional outbreaks of localized violence notwithstanding, the ceasefire formalized in 2005 through the CPA has largely held an extraordinary achievement in itself (Pantuliano et al., 2008:1), and both the Referendum Day and Independence Day were celebrated peacefully. In spite of the many (re)integration and protection challenges it entails, the arrival of returnees “carries the promise of new skills and fresh ways of thinking” (WLCAC, 2007:12), and is likely to remain a significant factor in shaping the national character of South Sudan in years to come.

Policies relating to return migration and repatriation must account for the continuing mobility of the population, with urbanization playing a major role in large-scale return movements. Reintegration measures should support returnees’ choices about how and where they wish to settle, avoiding unwarranted assumptions about a “return to a rural past.” Customary “seeds and tools” packages may need to be replaced with alternative support measures such as vocational training geared to building capacities more suitable to urban contexts. Assisting urbanized and highly mobile returnees presents significant challenges for organizations more accustomed to restoring displaced households to rural lives. Nevertheless, efforts to understand and support the aspirations of young returnees of both genders – which may or may not echo those of other members of their households – must be acknowledged as a sine-qua-non precondition of sustainable return.

Young people have often been the focal point of the many processes that characterize the rapidly changing South Sudanese scene. The long-term outcomes of the post-independence period, and the very viability of South Sudan as a new nation, will be influenced by its success in harnessing the enormous potential of its very young population. A focus on the members of youngest generation, both female and male, is justified by reasons that include their demographic preponderance, the likelihood that their priorities may differ significantly from both those of their older displaced relatives and those of their counterparts who stayed in the country during the war, and the still enormous gap between the needs and aspirations of the very young population and their capacity to achieve them. Intergenerational tensions are resulting from many migrant youth’s aspirations to a “modern” – often meaning urban – way of life perceived as incompatible with traditional livelihoods and social relations. In turn, these dynamics are impacting the way in which access to material assets, political participation, justice and other key resources is negotiated among migrant groups and those who stayed behind. Significant gender differences are also evident.

At the same time, it is also important to consider the impact of return on the host community as well as the longer-term consequences for the country as a whole. In other words, making return sustainable requires making the process viable on a

community-wide basis and not just for individual returnees. As this report illustrates, reintegration is often not limited to the return of IDPs and refugees to their original place of residence, but requires innovative strategies to support the needs of disparate groups with very different life experiences and expectations who are coalescing under conditions which often involve secondary displacement and a rapid and organic process of urbanization. What has become abundantly clear is that permanent peace, stability and resilience hinge critically on the new government and its aid partners delivering an early and visible peace premium of which sustainable return must be a core element. As the possibility of a definite oil sharing agreement between Sudan and South Sudan remains elusive, the austerity measures implemented after the shutdown of the oil industry include drastic spending cuts on infrastructure and vital services such as schools, health care and water systems. The return process is at a heightened risk of exceeding the capacity of the government and the international community to adequately support it, and will require higher levels of planning, coordination and resourcefulness on the part of all involved. Successfully addressing the challenges of urbanization and reintegration over the next few years will be crucial to the future peace, stability and prosperity of South Sudan. The lessons learned from both positive achievement and failed practices must be learned.

5.3 Recommendations

As South Sudan endeavours to put behind decades of conflict to become the world's newest nation, a number of lessons can be learned. Some of them are youth-specific. The majority are not, as young people's lives do not take place in isolation of the factors, events and processes that affect their families and communities, although they may well be differentially impacted by them. Clearly, the (re)establishment of sustainable positive peace and security is paramount to ensuring that South Sudan continues moving in the right direction. Peacebuilding efforts should be considered within a broader framework of sustainable livelihood support as well as equity so that the dividends of peace can be reaped by all, not only those in privileged positions. It is thus vital to engage all sectors – ages and genders – of the population in the rebuilding. They must be consulted and included and, in fact, they must lead the process.

Sustained protection initiatives coupled by broad-based livelihood programming would serve to address deep-rooted causes of conflicts, and counter potential triggers of recurrent conflicts such as competition for resources. Until all regions of the country are reliably food-secure, the short-term food and non-food needs of vulnerable households, including returnees, must be provided for through targeted transfers. Long-term dependence on these transfers must be carefully avoided through sustainable livelihood and education programmes designed and implemented in ways that are

complementary and reflective of conditions on the ground. Both formal and non-formal education programmes and livelihood programmes for returning IDPs, refugees, as well as receiving communities must be effectively coordinated to provide the people of South Sudan with the skills and knowledge they need to rebuild – or, in some case, establish for the first time – sustainable ways of making a living. Providing assistance to returnees should also consider the needs and priorities of the host population, as an overemphasis on returnees could create feelings of favouritism, and foster tensions between returnees and hosts. Reintegration assistance should thus be broad-based and beneficial to all those involved (OCHA, 2011:34).

National institutions need to be accountable and inclusive – especially with respect to traditionally excluded groups such as women and youth – to enable the meaningful participation of civil society and foster popular access to information. A prerequisite for participation is open, transparent and inclusive deliberative processes. The successful and largely peaceful celebration of the Referendum of Independence on 9 January 2011 is a significant accomplishment in that regard. Increasing evidence confirms the premise that inclusive approaches lead to both more equitable societies and more sustainable outcomes (UNDP, 2011:12). It is also known that while female participation is important in general terms, the extent and conditions under which this participation occurs are also critical. The GoSS has written into its constitution an affirmative action clause reserving 25 per cent of government positions for women – a positive development seeking to foster female participation. While the Government is currently unable to find qualified candidates to reach this percentage, this law – and its potential for employment – may inspire girls to stay in school and their parents to allow them to do so. It is to be hoped that this will be indeed the case in the near future as power inequalities, mediated through political institutions, are known to affect the sustainability of livelihoods and contribute to negative socioenvironmental outcomes (ibid.:10).

The GoSS and its partners need to facilitate productive exchanges about how South Sudan's cultural conservatism confines and restricts many youth's options by imposing cultural expectations and restrictions – for instance, the negative impact of dowries on both females and males and social attitudes regarding the acceptability of certain jobs. Enforceable programmes and legislation aimed at combating the pervasive perception of female youth as mere property in dowry transactions, and its link to high incidences of rape and domestic violence, are also of paramount importance. Current responses to youth's needs appear to have limited reach and fail to address youth's priorities. Targeted initiatives by the GoSS and its local and international partners must thus be significantly expanded in this regard (Sommers and Schwartz, 2011). In particular, government and non-government agencies should increase access to and improve the quality of appropriate education and job training work for South Sudanese

youth, striving to address youth expectations for employment opportunities. Efforts must also be made to combat nepotism in government hiring practices, including the establishment of clear and explicit job descriptions for government posts.

Overall efforts to overcome the current state of fragility in South Sudan must encompass effective reintegration initiatives implemented in a continuum between humanitarian and development strategies. While improvements in some areas are already noticeable, a greater focus on recovery efforts targeting both host and returnee populations would greatly contribute to the sustainability of return and reintegration processes. Specific efforts to make reintegration efforts more responsive to the needs of returnees should aim at enhancing their chances of becoming self-reliant. These should include mechanisms to address potential conflict over issues including access to resources and land, ensuring security of tenure and appropriate land allocation for landless returnees. National and international institutions involved in facilitating return processes must recognize that returnees' refusal to settle in their places of origin does not necessarily signal a failure to integrate. "To the contrary, such choices may create valuable opportunities for war-affected civilians to escape poverty and discrimination, opening doors to new forms of economic, political and social participation. But this will occur only if protection and assistance for the formerly displaced are well targeted to their actual needs" (Weiss Fagen, 2011:3). Insisting on restoring refugees and IDPs to past livelihoods that may no longer be viable would deny them a sustainable future in their new nation. Given the returning population's high prevalence, support to returnees in both peri-urban and urban settings should be strengthened, including livelihood assistance and improvements in access to housing, markets, schools, health and other basic services. At the same time, strategies to make rural areas more attractive to returnees should be considered, as settling in urban centres is likely to remain an unrealistic option for many returnees. These must be supported by appropriate funding mechanisms that provide for flexible responses to fluctuating needs in a rapidly changing context.

Given the still limited capacity of the GoSS, the participation of the international community remains vital to uphold the safety and dignity of returnees. Implementing viable and durable integration programmes for returnees and other war-affected populations – whether in their places of origin or elsewhere – is undoubtedly a costly investment, but one that diminishes insecurity and the likelihood of renewed conflict, and reduces poverty and the need for long-term humanitarian assistance. Focusing attention on the role of young returnees themselves – as peacebuilders or spoilers, agents of resilience, or factors of fragility – is an important dimension of this process. The overall findings of this study may inform return and reintegration programming so that it better responds to the age- and gender-differentiated needs and aspirations of diverse displaced groups, hence paving the road for a more sustainable return.

Given the very high proportion of children and youth among the population of most sub-Saharan countries, and the high prevalence of migratory flows in the region, the experiences of this age group must be better understood and factored into projects for migrants in South Sudan and, by qualified extension, other comparable States.

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ENDNOTES

1. Many South Sudanese maintain that their fight for independence from the North began in 1955, a year before the country as a whole became independent from the United Kingdom.
2. *Return* is generally classified into three categories: 1) *Spontaneous return*, with people scheduling and organizing their return themselves. 2) *Organized return*, with international aid agencies providing transportation and other forms of assistance during the return process; and 3) *Assisted voluntary self-repatriation*, with material assistance to be used for the process of return provided to potential returnees in their place of displacement (Pantuliano et al., 2008).
3. Defined as those under 18 years of age.
4. Cattle-herding in South Sudan has traditionally been an exclusively male activity. A common strategy is for cattle to be owned by the family, herded by males, and milked by the females under the control of the head of the household.
5. While the anthropological term for this practice would be *bride price* or *bride wealth*, South Sudanese people commonly refer to it as *dowry*. Cattle, and some times land, remain the preferred forms of dowry payment.
6. Chapter II, Article 202 of the Transitional Constitution.
7. The term *livelihood* “comprises the capacities, assets and activities required to make a living. A livelihood is sustainable if it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide livelihood opportunities for the next generation” (Horst, 2006:9).
8. *Global acute malnutrition* (GAM), also identified as *total malnutrition*, refers to the proportion of children aged 6–59 months whose weight-for-height z score falls below -2, children who are less than 60 per cent weight-for-height, and children with bilateral oedema (Sphere Project, 2004).
9. *Severe acute malnutrition* (SAM), which is even more serious though less common, includes children whose weight-for-height z score is less than -3. GAM includes children who also fall in the category of SAM (Sphere Project, 2004).
10. Acute malnutrition exhibits seasonal patterns in South Sudan, with a peak from April to June, which coincides with the dry season and links to the high incidence of diarrhoea and, to some degree, with livestock and population movements and the agricultural lean season. A second smaller peak is associated with increased malaria incidences during the height of the rainy season in August and September (OCHA, 2010:24).
11. A third year secondary female student from one of the schools I visited in Yei, Central Equatoria State, was killed on 28 August 2011, in a landmine explosion while digging in her kitchen garden. The Commissioner of Yei River County noted that this was the third such tragedy in the County in 2011.

12. Some examples of this type of conflict include Jurbel agriculturalists and Dinka agro-pastoralists in Wullu and Mvolo Counties (Lakes and Western Equatoria States, respectively), Misseriya nomads and their Dinka hosts (Western Bahr El Ghazal), Bari and Mundari in Juba County (Central Equatoria State) (OCHA, 2011:29–30).
13. The tendency to look at things from the perspective of one's profession. This concept is also known as "the law of the instrument," or "Maslow's hammer," after Abraham Maslow's famous remark, "I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail" (1966:15).

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More than 2 million Southerners have returned to South Sudan since 2005, following the end of the North–South civil war. Building on research conducted in South Sudan, as well as Egypt and northern Uganda, Ensor examines the process of reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons returning to South Sudan since the signing of the 2005 Peace Agreement. The study focuses on the role played by displaced youth as they find themselves differentially situated vis-à-vis the various determinants of sustainable return and reintegration. The research finds that intergenerational tensions are a result of many displaced youths’ aspirations to a “modern” – often meaning urban – way of life perceived as incompatible with traditional livelihoods and social relations. In turn, these dynamics are impacting the way in which access to material assets, education, employment opportunities, political participation and other key resources is negotiated among displaced groups and those who stayed behind. The study also finds evidence of significant gender differences.

As the pressures of responding to the complex needs of the vast numbers of returning individuals continue to mount, reintegration remains a loosely defined concept among government officials and external assistance agencies and, furthermore, understandings of what constitutes “sustainable return” differ markedly among the various stakeholders. Intergenerational differences regarding reintegration needs and aspirations, and even the very desirability of return, are rarely considered. This report shares primary research findings that may support return and reintegration programming so as to better respond to the age- and gender-differentiated needs and aspirations of diverse migrant groups in South Sudan.



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