



BRIEF / DECEMBER 2020

Enhancing peace, safety and security in Maridi, South Sudan

In this brief we provide a context update about the current situation in Maridi – one of eight counties in Western Equatoria in South Sudan. We present safety and security challenges for communities, local government, sub-national and national governments as well as the international community to consider and we provide recommendations for how best to address these challenges.

Maridi is considered to be relatively peaceful compared to other counties in Western Equatoria state. For instance, most people in Maridi did not join the rebellion against the government that started in December 2013. Nevertheless, the county has been affected by incidents of insecurity stemming from attacks on roads connecting Maridi to Yei and to Mundri, allegedly by elements of the National Salvation Front.

Major livelihood sources in Maridi county (and most of Western Equatoria) are agriculture, hunting for bush meat and bee-keeping. Western Equatoria received relatively good rainfall between May and September 2020 – suggesting a promising harvest in December 2020, with the potential to reduce poverty and hunger in 2021. However, the peak of the rainy season in July and August 2020 caused flooding, which destroyed farmlands in some payams¹ in the county.

Between October 2015 and February 2020 – when the government increased the number of states in the country from ten to 32 – Maridi was a separate state. However, when the government decided in February 2020 to return to the original ten states, Maridi reverted to being a county in Western Equatoria. Western Equatoria is allocated to the Sudan's People Liberation Movement-

In Opposition as part of the implementation of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic South Sudan. Alfred Futuyo was appointed governor of Western Equatoria in July 2020 and has since embarked on peacebuilding and building confidence and trust among communities. The governor visited Maridi in September 2020 and assured people of his commitment to serve all despite their political allegiances. He urged citizens to embrace forgiveness, unity and peace in spite of the slow pace of implementing the revitalised peace agreement which people welcomed.

Like their fellow citizens in other counties in Western Equatoria and the country at large, people in Maridi face a daunting economic situation. This is compounded by several factors including poor road network connections, insecurity on major roads connecting Maridi to Juba and other locations, and high prices of basic commodities resulting from the declining value of the South Sudanese Pound and runaway inflation.

In this brief, we highlight some of the safety and security challenges identified by participants in a two-day roundtable event in Maridi town conducted by Saferworld and its partner, Maridi Service Agency (MSA) on 17–18 September 2020. This brief aims to reflect the views of participants and does not necessarily reflect the views of Saferworld and MSA. The roundtable event was attended by government officials from Western Equatoria state, Maridi county authorities, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), national civil society organisations (CSOs), women's groups, faith-based groups and youth unions in Maridi as well as representatives from the business community.

Safety and security

In this briefing paper, **security** is defined as the protection of people and their assets from violence or theft. It relates to potential harm that may be caused by intentional actions by people, when their actions are intended to harm others directly, or when acts intended to harm others also pose a further threat to more other people. Safety is connected to but is broader than security. **Safety** is defined as the protection of people from harm. Such harm may arise as consequence of insecurity but also accidents, including fire, flood, disease or other causes including threats posed by the environment or animals.

Safety and security challenges

While there was a wide-ranging discussion on conflict drivers in Maridi, participants highlighted the following as the most pertinent safety and security issues.

Ineffective law enforcement

Participants pointed out that Maridi and Western Equatoria in general are facing challenges related to inadequate, undisciplined and lack of well-trained law enforcement personnel in all *payams* and *bomas*² - with the worst conditions experienced at community level. As a result of the conflicts in 2013 and 2016, law enforcement agencies are not able to deliver security and safety services to communities in the state and in Maridi county in particular. Lack of motivation and delayed salaries, coupled with the difficult economic situation have exacerbated the inability of the police and justice institutions to properly execute their duties and functions.

Participants argued that many law enforcement officers were former combatants, who were absorbed into the police service after the end of the second Sudanese civil war in 2005, without proper police training.

People also complained about the lack of responses from security providers to distress calls from communities, for example when the police are called to respond to or intervene in violent situations or when civilians are under attack from criminals. Lack of adequate and timely responses to communities' security needs has strained relationships between communities and the police in Maridi county and Western Equatoria at large.

Movement by neighbouring pastoralist communities to Maridi county

Participants highlighted the continuous movement by cattle herders from neighbouring Lakes state and Terekaka county of Central Equatoria into Maridi county as another safety and security concern. As herds move in, they destroy farmland, crops and beehives – the main sources of livelihood for local communities. Cattle keepers are well armed and this threatens peace and security in villages in Maridi county. Participants also noted that relationships between communities in Maridi and pastoralists have deteriorated due to the above reasons. People urged the government and CSOs to play an active role to bridge the gaps between citizens in the county and the state by organising conferences and dialogue meetings between people from Maridi and pastoralists from neighbouring Lakes and Terekaka.

Land management in Maridi town

Participants noted that in Maridi, land disputes have surfaced recently as a result of inadequate land regulation and policies, especially when Maridi was made a state in 2015. Participants argued that the process of land acquisition has loopholes which resulted in the fraudulent sale of land by individuals connected to surveyors in the previous Maridi state's Ministry of Physical Infrastructure, and for people to undo this, county authorities must revert to the previous land management laws as stipulated in Western Equatoria state land act, 2009.

While participants noted that the poor management of land by local authorities was a trigger and/or driver of conflict, many people acknowledged that conflict has also stemmed from the multiple sale of land – mostly in urban centres – by relatives and family members to different people in an attempt to make more money in a 'double or multiple sale'. This practice, along with unclear policies in the county land department, has led to conflict between people.

Drug and alcohol abuse

Participants raised concerns over drug and alcohol abuse by young people in the county. People consider overconsumption of alcohol and smoking of weed/shisha – with resultant social and other harmful effects – as one of conflict drivers in Maridi and other parts of Western Equatoria. To reverse this situation, government agencies and communities should develop strategies to address this. State law enforcement agencies do not check trucks and commercial vehicles entering into the state. This is believed to be one of the ways illicit drugs enter Maridi and other parts of Western Equatoria through porous borders with the Democratic Republic of Congo and other border points.

Gender-based violence

Participants deplored the increased instances of gender-based violence in Maridi – rape and early and forced marriages were some of the issues specifically raised. Girls as young as 16 or 17 have been forced by parents into marriages, denying these girls the right and opportunity to pursue higher education. Communities also expressed concern over the misuse of contraceptives by health professionals in Maridi county hospital. Participants argued that contraceptives shouldn't be made readily available to young girls of school-going age as it inadvertently encourages them to engage in sex – with the assumption that they would not conceive. They believed this had in turn led to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), such as HIV/AIDS, among teenagers and young adults in the county. The above is reflective of widespread misinformation and gendered social norms around girls' use of contraception. However, participants did not discuss, for example, the use of contraception to prevent STDs and HIV/AIDS as a safe sexual practice; issues girls are likely to face around consent and the role of men and boys in sexual relations with girls; and equal responsibility for involvement in 'sex' for both boys and girls rather than placing responsibility for abstinence solely on girls.

Women and girls in Maridi and in other parts of Western Equatoria are not adequately represented in decision-making processes, both at the community level and in government. There are few women chiefs or heads of local government institutions at county and state levels. There is also discrimination against women and girls when it comes to inheritance and ownership of property such as land or other assets. As is the case in many communities in South Sudan, women and girls in Maridi do not have the right to inherit the properties of their parents or deceased spouses.

Recommendations

To solve the overarching challenges to peace and stability identified, participants made the following recommendations to state and national governments, international organisations, civil society, UN agencies and the communities of Maridi county and Western Equatoria.

To state and national governments

- The police – particularly the criminal investigation department – should increase the monitoring capacity and tracking of importation of illegal substances into Maridi and Western Equatoria state.
- County and state authorities should consider regulating the sale and consumption of alcohol, including issuing licences and specifying times of operation.
- State and county governments should implement the resolutions of the 2015 cattle migration agreement which limit the number of cows entering into Maridi from neighbouring states and should work with communities (pastoralists and landholders/farmers) to come up with workable solutions for both communities.
- State and county government should carry out a comprehensive, uniform and peaceful disarmament initiative in Western Equatoria and neighbouring states.
- County health authorities should regulate the issuance of contraceptives to young girls of school-going age through qualified practitioners to provide girls with free accessible comprehensive sexual reproductive and health information and services.
- Government should monitor and ensure that contraceptives are not being sold to underage and school-going children by health authorities and that health authorities make comprehensive sexual reproductive health services freely available and accessible to young people.
- Police at state and national levels should monitor, investigate and discipline (where found guilty) police personnel accused of corruption.
- County and state land departments should maintain proper land allotment and keep records through state and county land registry systems.

To civil society

- CSOs and faith-based groups should sensitise communities in Maridi on the legal procedures governing land management, use and sale of land in order to reduce conflict.
- CSOs should carry out awareness-raising campaigns in the state on the negative impacts of gender-based violence in communities.
- CSOs and religious leaders should condemn and challenge harmful societal norms and behaviours that relegate women to second-class citizens, violate their human rights, and deny them the opportunity to participate equally in the affairs of their communities.
- National CSOs and community groups, with support from INGOs, should conduct community dialogues in Maridi between host communities and cattle herders to amicably address conflicts related to cattle movement into Western Equatoria.
- The CSO network in Maridi and Yambio should work with youth and politicians to make the latter aware of the damaging effects of excluding of women in important decision-making processes and in governance at community and local government levels.
- Health-focused CSOs and community-based organisations should create awareness in communities about the importance of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health rights for young people.

To communities

- Chiefs and elders in communities should condemn and work to bring an end to bride-price, child marriages, and bride-wealth demanded by the families of girls.
- Chiefs and elders in communities should discourage and condemn forced marriages and gender-based violence, and encourage parents to prioritise the education of their children, particularly girls.

¹ Payam is the second lowest administrative unit at county level.

² Boma is the third lowest administrative unit in a county.

About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. With programmes in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa, we work with people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace.

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

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

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