

STRUCTURED SUMMARY

NARRATIVES OF CHANGE

Women's reflections on evolving productive roles in the Agar Dinka community

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Motivation

Among the Agar Dinka of South Sudan, men are increasingly absent due to conscription into militia forces and migration in search of work. As a result, women who remain in the villages are taking on a growing share of productive activities.

Purpose

This issue brief seeks to examine women's traditional and current roles in production, the drivers of these evolving roles, and the benefits and challenges associated with the changes.

Approach and methods

Between January and February 2025, the research team conducted 25 focus group discussions (FGDs) across 23 villages in four counties of Lakes State, engaging 212 participants. Semi-structured questionnaires and participatory rural appraisal methods guided the discussions.

In addition, 29 key informant interviews (KIIs) were carried out to verify and triangulate insights from the FGDs.

Care was taken to foreground women's voices and present their perspectives in their own words, acknowledging that women are often underrepresented in policy-making processes.

Findings

Agar Dinka women have long played central roles in crop cultivation, livestock care, food management and income generation. With men increasingly absent, their responsibilities have expanded – particularly in rural settings where women now frequently lead activities such as cropping and livestock rearing.

Displaced women in urban areas are assuming new roles in humanitarian work, wage labour and small-scale enterprises.

Younger women tend to be more receptive to these emerging opportunities, while older women often express concern about the erosion of traditional social structures and mutual support systems.

Policy implications

Agricultural and livelihood policies in South Sudan should acknowledge and respond to the shifting roles of women.

Women's participation in decision-making is essential; they should be active contributors to policy and programme design rather than passive recipients of interventions historically targeted at men.

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