

Article

Migration Dynamics in Rejaf Payam, South Sudan: Inbound and Outbound Patterns and Impact on Those Left Behind

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Abstract: Exploring migration patterns in Sub-Saharan Africa is vital for unravelling the intricate interplay of demographic, economic, social, and cultural forces shaping the region. This paper specifically centres on migration patterns within Rejaf Payam, Juba County, South Sudan. Its aim is to shed light on both inbound and outbound migration and their impact on vulnerable individuals who choose to stay in their original communities, with a particular focus on women. This study complements the existing literature that exclusively concentrates on the experiences of internally displaced persons and refugees either at their arrival destinations or during the migration process and overlooks the implications for those left behind. The qualitative research methodology proposed in this study is grounded in the utilisation of focus group discussions, specifically engaging traditional authorities and esteemed community stakeholders. Conducted by adequately trained enumerators, these discussions took place in March and June 2023. The methodology, features of the investigated area, migration patterns, and their effects on non-migrants are detailed, concluding with policy implications derived from qualitative evidence. The qualitative findings reveal that economic opportunities, insecurity, and adverse weather conditions predominantly drive migration. However, migrants are not reaching displaced or refugee camps only. In the investigated area, migration is often transitory or seasonal, with most migrants returning to their communities. The study highlights the adverse effects of migration on non-migrant women, who are left to assume the role of sole breadwinners and face economic hardships, social isolation, and increased vulnerability. The study recommends interventions focused on women's empowerment, skill-building, economic opportunities, awareness campaigns to change societal attitudes, social protection programs, and psychosocial support services to address these challenges. It also emphasises the need for enhanced data collection and research efforts to inform evidence-based policies and interventions. A collaborative approach is crucial for effective implementation.

Keywords: migration patterns; in-and-out-migration; non-migrant women; focus group discussions; South Sudan



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1. Introduction

Research on migration is of utmost importance in understanding the multifaceted demographic, economic, social, and cultural dynamics in Sub-Saharan Africa [1,2]. It provides valuable insights into the complexities of population movements and their implications for the region's development [3]. This research acts as a basis for policymakers to develop informed strategies and policies to manage this phenomenon effectively, mitigate its challenges, and capitalise on its potential benefits for sustainable development. Evidence-based research stands to significantly bolster policies related to migration governance, labour mobility, refugee protection, and diaspora engagement. Studying migration in Sub-Saharan Africa equips decision makers with invaluable insights, enabling them to design and implement effective policies that protect the rights of migrants, promote development, and address the complexities associated with migration [4,5].

Building upon this foundation, most of the literature on migration in Sub-Saharan Africa focuses on forced and international migration [6]. It also emphasises the need to improve the understanding and management of migration in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly for the benefit of poor people [3,7]. Within the literature, a significant focus is directed toward examining the circumstances of migrant women, a critical aspect for comprehending the intricate gender dynamics, vulnerabilities, opportunities, and challenges inherent in women's migratory journeys. These studies delve into various facets of gender-related migration, including issues such as gender-based violence encountered during migration, as highlighted by Pannetier et al. [8], the impact of gender in migration during unexpected disruptions, as explored by Becerra-Valbuena and Millock [9], and the gender-specific experiences associated with returning migrants, as elucidated by Grabska [10].

Research on migration in South Sudan follows a similar approach, with a primary focus on the alarming challenges posed by the displacement crisis, affecting both internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees [11,12]. Overall, these papers highlight the complex dynamics of migration in South Sudan, influenced by conflicts, economic factors, and political conditions. According to World Bank data, South Sudan has a population of 10,913,164 individuals (source: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=SS>, accessed on 1 February 2024), with a nearly equal distribution between genders. With a youth dependency ratio of 77.3, it stands out as one of the youngest countries globally. In 2021, South Sudan ranked 191st out of 191 countries in the Human Development Index (HDI), scoring 0.385 points [13]. Food insecurity, poverty, and hygiene and sanitation conditions have severely worsened over time [14–16]. According to World Bank data, the net migration rate in 2022 was 20.97 migrants per 1000 population, ranking the country second globally in comparison to the world. The predominant migratory trend in South Sudan revolves around forced migration, primarily driven by prolonged conflicts and internal instability in the nation since its independence in 2011 [17]. Recent statistics underscore the gravity of this situation, with approximately two and a half million people internally displaced, as reported by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [18]. Additionally, more than two million international refugees, primarily hosted in Ethiopia, Sudan, and Uganda, further exemplify the magnitude of this challenge, as documented by UNHCR [19].

The abovementioned literature recognises the specific impact of migration on women and explores the links between gender, mass violence, climate change, and displacement, emphasizing the vulnerability of women in the face of civil war, environmental challenges, and displacement.

Nevertheless, few studies highlight that migration dynamics in South Sudan exhibit a nuanced complexity, particularly concerning their distinct impact on women who choose to stay in their native villages while men or other community members embark on migrations [20–22]. However, these aspects lack proper understanding in the literature on South Sudan and, more broadly, on conflict and insecure settings. This lack can largely be attributed to the pressing priority placed on addressing forced migration, particularly by United Nations agencies, and the substantial obstacles impeding data collection due to limited accessibility.

Considering this gap in the literature, this present study starts providing an account of the intricate migration patterns within Rejaf Payam, located in Juba County, within the Central Equatorial State of South Sudan. This first part of the analysis aims to comprehensively capture the features of all inbound and outbound migration patterns in addition to those set in place by refugees and IDPs. The features of the investigated area that influence migration dynamics complete this information.

This initial analysis also aims to improve our understanding of how migration affects individuals who choose to stay in their original communities. In this respect, this paper places particular emphasis on the vulnerable individuals who remain, with a specific focus on the experiences of women within this context.

Evidence from focus group discussions involving local authorities and highly reputed people was collected in March and June 2023, which allowed us to contribute to the limited picture of migration trends in South Sudan. This, in turn, offers new entry points for policy interventions in this field.

The organisation of the rest of the paper is as follows. After the methodology presentation in the next section, this paper illustrates the features of the investigated area followed by the migration patterns and their effect on non-migrants by village. The last section discusses the qualitative evidence and highlights their policy implications.

2. Methodology

The quality of this study critically depends on the accurate consideration and implementation of key methodological aspects. These aspects, summarised in Table 1, collectively form the bedrock of the study. Each facet was carefully designed and executed to navigate challenges like limited information, security concerns, and the need for nuanced insights into migration patterns. Together, these methodological considerations ensure the quality, reliability, depth, and inclusivity of our research findings.

Table 1. Key methodological aspects.

Methodological Aspect	Major Elements Addressed
Justification for Qualitative Research	- Limited information on migration in Rejaf Payam and the Central Equatorial State of South Sudan. - Security concerns limiting access to certain villages.
Rationale for Focus Group Discussions	- Focus groups recognised as valuable for exploring cognitive processes, conceptualisations, dispositions, and experiential narratives. - Migration seen as an enlightening domain for applying focus group methodology.
Structured Focus Group Discussions	- Three primary areas: nature of migration, effects on non-migrant populations (especially women), and recent shifts in migration patterns. - Four key aspects explored in migration characteristics.
Participant Selection and Representation	- Traditional authorities and esteemed community members involved. - Three tiers of Chiefs in local governance. - Inclusion of representatives from Deputy Chiefs, Treasurers, Consultative Members, teachers, and primary school headmasters.
Participant Characteristics	- Eleven males and twelve females participated. - Participants were organised into smaller groups corresponding to specific villages or clusters.
Enumerators and Training	- Five enumerators selected based on experience and skills. - Professional training for enumerators, including ethical considerations. - Emphasis on obtaining oral consent and ensuring confidentiality.
Logistical Planning	- Thoughtful approach due to security challenges. - Discussions in Gumbo and secure villages with UNOCHA and local informant assistance.

Table 1. Cont.

Methodological Aspect	Major Elements Addressed
Quality Assurance	- Presence of an observer to monitor and actively listen. - Key informants used for unclear or additional clarification.
Creating an Open Environment	- Rules for respect, active listening, and confidentiality defined. - Neutral venue, buffet, and circle arrangement for inclusivity. - Facilitator-led introductions to ensure confidentiality and build trust.
Addressing Gender Dynamics	- Attention to potential hesitations among women. - Female facilitators present for a more relatable atmosphere. - Smaller discussion groups created for more intimate and conducive environments.
Timeline and Implementation	- Focus group discussions organised in March 2023, with some postponed to June 2023 due to security considerations.

The present paper uses focus group discussions as the method for data collection. This qualitative research method is justified by the limited amount or absence of complete information available on migration in the surveyed area comprising the urban district of Gumbo-Sherikat and the rural villages of Nesitu, Mori, Mogiri, Bilinyang, Mapao, Jebel Lemon, Kodoro, and Adodi in Rejaf Payam in the Central Equatorial State of South Sudan (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Surveyed area.

Furthermore, the challenges in accessing certain villages within this area due to security concerns further bolster the rationale for this qualitative research approach. Moreover, the literature underscores the utility of focus groups as a valuable and versatile research methodology recognised for their efficacy in elucidating the intricate facets of individuals' cognitive processes, conceptualisations, dispositions, and experiential narratives concerning a particular topic [23,24]. In this regard, exploring migration, characterised by

its profound ramifications on society, emerges as a particularly enlightening domain for applying the focus group methodology.

The focus group discussions were structured around a set of predetermined questions categorised into three primary areas of interest: the nature of migration, its effects on non-migrant populations, particularly women, and recent shifts in migration patterns. Concerning the characteristics of migration, these discussions delved into four key aspects: the significance of migration within village life, the identification of groups (such as young men or specific socioeconomic and ethnic groups) more inclined to migrate, the destinations of these migration flows, and the potential reasons for return. Regarding the impact of migration on non-migrant populations, the focus was on communities as a whole, with a specific focus on women. Finally, the conversations honed in on changes in migration patterns over the past five years, examining how these shifts were perceived and their overall impact on the community and women. Participants were also questioned about village-specific attributes that influence migration, including economic structures, security conditions, and the presence of vulnerable groups, among other factors. Throughout these discussions, moderators actively recorded unique characteristics as well as commonalities across various villages.

The participation of traditional authorities and esteemed community members in the focus group discussions ensured the reliability of the responses, even though the number of participants was limited. Traditional South Sudanese authorities hold a substantial role in local governance and decision making, offering a profound understanding of the village-level circumstances [25]. In the studied region, there were three tiers of Chiefs: the Chief, Subchief, and Headman or Headwoman. The Chief, often referred to as the Paramount Chief, and the Subchief are associated with territorial units like the Payam and Boma, respectively.

As per the accounts of those interviewed, the Chief holds the foremost position as the most pivotal and influential traditional leader within the community [26,27]. The Headmen or Headwomen assist this leader in a village's governance, whose appointment is determined through a process involving the village community.

Specifically, the village community elects the Chiefs, while the appointment of the Heads is made through collaboration between the Chief and the executive members, typically comprised of elders without administrative roles. This appointment of Heads becomes necessary when the village population grows to a size where a single Chief cannot effectively manage all responsibilities. Additionally, the designation of a Headwoman occurs when there is a prominent female figure within the village who can aptly represent the reference community.

Since the Chief does not make unilateral decisions on all matters, they routinely consult with village elders to arrive at decisions beneficial to the village. Furthermore, within the traditional local authorities of the studied region, certain functions are delegated to Deputy Chiefs, Treasurers, and Consultative Members. Hence, interviews were inclusive of representatives from these categories whenever possible. In addition, respected members of the community, such as teachers and primary school headmasters, were also included in the focus group discussions due to their significant standing within the community.

A total of 9 males holding positions such as Chief, Deputy Chief, Treasurer, or Consultative Member in the village and the district of Gumbo-Sherikat, along with 2 male teachers and one headmaster of the district of Gumbo-Sherikat, actively participated in the focus group discussions. Additionally, 12 females, acknowledged as Headwomen in each village, contributed their insights. In line with the approach suggested by Bristol and Fern [28], we organised participants into smaller groups that corresponded to the specific village or cluster of villages they represented. This decision was motivated by the sensitive nature of the topics being discussed and the prevailing security circumstances, which, in many instances, precluded the assembly of large groups within the individual communities under examination.

Five enumerators conducted the focus group discussions. They were selected based on their previous experience in this role and other specific skills identified as compulsory for the activity, such as a good understanding of the subject and proficiency in the languages used during the discussion in terms of good knowledge of the English and vernacular languages [29]. Gender representation was also accounted for.

These enumerators underwent professional training to enhance their interviewing skills and ensure the effectiveness of the data collection process. During this training, a significant emphasis was placed on addressing ethical considerations [30]. For instance, enumerators were instructed to obtain oral consent from participants using a predefined form that was distributed to and discussed with them. Furthermore, the enumerators were diligent in upholding confidentiality throughout the discussion sessions.

Meticulous attention was devoted to planning logistical details recognizing their critical importance. Given the security challenges prevalent in the project area, a thoughtful approach was adopted. Consequently, the discussions took place partly in Gumbo and the remainder in villages where security had been assured, with the assistance of both UNOCHA and local informants.

To ensure the quality of the discussions, an observer was present to closely monitor and actively listen to the proceedings. Furthermore, any responses that were unclear or required additional clarification were thoroughly examined through subsequent discussions with key informants. These key informants included teachers and catechists who are known for their significant influence within South Sudanese society.

The mixed gender in the focus group discussions required specific attention to establishing an environment that promotes open and honest group discussions. This concern was addressed by implementing several key strategies. Firstly, the rules emphasizing respect, active listening, and confidentiality to foster a safe space for open dialogue were clearly defined during the planning phase and communicated to the participants. Creating a welcoming atmosphere involved providing a buffet, selecting a neutral venue, and arranging participants in a circle to foster inclusivity. At the commencement of the discussion, led by a neutral and skilled facilitator, participants introduced themselves and the confidentiality of the discussion was ensured to build trust. Active listening from both participants and the facilitator was encouraged during the time allocated for the discussion. This time was allocated to ensure participants did not feel rushed and break longer discussions conducted toward directions outside the purpose of the session. Summarizing key points enhanced clarity while encouraging questions and seeking clarification aimed to improve overall communication.

In cultivating an inclusive environment within focus groups, particular attention was paid to addressing potential hesitations among women when expressing concerns. This involved creating a setting that valued their perspectives and prioritised their comfort. The presence of female facilitators contributed to a more relatable and understanding atmosphere. Additionally, when the probability of possible hesitancy was suspected, the focus group was broken into smaller discussion groups to encourage a more intimate and conducive environment for open expression.

The focus group discussions were organised in March 2023, except for those scheduled for Mori, which, due to security considerations, were postponed and eventually conducted in June 2023.

3. Results

3.1. Features of the Investigated Area

As previously mentioned, the present study encompasses villages within the urban district of Gumbo-Sherikat and several rural settlements, namely Nesitu, Mori, Mogiri, Bilinyang, Mapao, Jebel Lemon, Kodoro, and Adodi. These villages are situated within the Rejaf Payam, along the banks of the White Nile, within Juba County, in the Central Equatorial State of South Sudan.

The Gumbo-Sherikat district stands out as a densely populated region distinguished by rapid urbanisation and extensive housing development, primarily attributable to its close proximity to Juba, the capital city of South Sudan. Focus group discussions pointed out that agricultural self-sufficiency in this district is limited to individuals with small land parcels, predominantly cultivating okra and grains. These observations find confirmation in the literature. For example, Grant and Thompson [31] emphasised the explosive demographic and infrastructural expansion of Juba, while Ladu et al. [32] discussed the impact of urbanisation on agricultural land use in Juba, leading to the loss of arable land.

In contrast, the other villages included in this study's sample largely rely on agriculture as their primary economic activity, with the majority of residents being farmers. Discussions highlighted that agriculture assumes paramount importance in ensuring food security and sustaining livelihoods for the local population. Key crops cultivated include sorghum, beans, okra, groundnuts, and a variety of vegetables, particularly onions and cabbages. Some of these vegetables find their way to local markets, especially during the dry season. Furthermore, small-scale businesses are prevalent within all the agricultural villages.

However, in the village of Jebel Lemon, there is also a highly productive quarry and a paint factory.

In this village, as in Mafao, Mori, and Mogiri, the participants in the focus group discussions indicated that there is strong pressure exerted by armed cattle keepers of the pastoralist tribes on the land cultivated by the local farmers' communities. This ongoing land dispute has had detrimental repercussions on agricultural practices in recent years [33,34]. Farmers are compelled to permit the entry of cattle into their fields, resulting in the consequent destruction of crops, without any compensation for the damages incurred. Moreover, in Mafao, discussions reported that a new ethnic group had recently arrived in the village. This ethnic group not only reared cattle and entered the village forcefully, but also grabbed people's land for farming and habitation, further complicating the ability of the host community to sustain their agricultural activities. The population of this village also gathers firewood and burns charcoal as an alternative source of livelihood, especially during the hunger season. Similarly, in Adodi, which is an improved village, the community diversifies its economic activities by crafting pots, notably water pots, in addition to engaging in farming. In Nesitu, residents harness the resources of the forest to generate income during the dry season for similar purposes.

In the village of Mori, participants in the focus group discussions pointed out that agricultural activities encompass the cultivation of fruits such as mangoes, guavas, and lemons. This village benefits from fertile soil thanks to its proximity to the Nile River, which provides an ample water supply.

The participants in the focus group discussions, on the other hand, indicated Kadoru as a less affluent village characterised by a significant proportion of widowed women facing limited support. Positioned in close geographic proximity to the Gumbo-Sirikat district, Kadoru is an area experiencing housing expansion and improvement. Bilinyang is another village within this study's sample that, according to focus group discussions, faces relative economic challenges. In addition to farming, the residents engage in livestock rearing, encompassing poultry (chickens and ducks), goats, sheep, and cows.

3.2. Features of the Migration Process and Impacts

The presentation and discussion of results pertaining to migration patterns and their impact on non-migrants are structured on a village-by-village basis. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the distinctive characteristics of migration and the perceptions associated with these patterns at the district and village levels. At this micro-level, the phenomenon analysed presents specificities and nuances that can be easily overlooked when focusing on larger geographic areas. In this situation, a village-level analysis is essential for gaining a comprehensive understanding of migration phenomena, as it takes into account the unique characteristics and specificities of individual communities. This ap-

proach allows for more precise insights, better-informed policies, and a deeper appreciation of the complex interplay of factors that drive migration at the grassroots level.

3.2.1. Gumbo-Sirikat District

In the villages within the Gumbo-Sirikat district, migration inflows primarily revolve around individuals seeking rental housing and relocating to urban areas in pursuit of employment opportunities, confirming the evidence from Yor [35] and Moses et al. [20]. The rapid urbanisation of this district, which began in earnest upon its establishment in 2005, has served as a magnet, drawing in residents from nearby rural regions.

Rental costs for housing have been steadily rising in South Sudan due to ongoing inflationary pressures. Unfortunately, this escalating price trend has rendered accommodation unaffordable for numerous households. Consequently, many are compelled to seek residence in areas with more budget-friendly housing costs.

In response to this housing challenge, the Government of South Sudan has taken proactive steps by offering land to individuals who can prove their land ownership rights within the villages of the Gumbo-Sirikat district [36,37]. Those with legally recognised land rights have taken the initiative to construct homes for settlement. However, during the group discussions, the participants highlighted that it is worth noting that some individuals are acquiring plots of land made available by the government either for lease or for constructing houses to be rented out. This trend has led to an increase in rental availability in the Gumbo-Sirikat district, making it more attractive for migrants.

Migrants who either rent or own homes tend to get to know one another, and if they share common values and culture, they often come together to form a community for efficient management. This phenomenon is particularly prominent among individuals who speak the same language.

The findings from focus group discussions revealed that the majority of migrants in the Gumbo-Shirikat district are young people, with limited participation from older residents. This information is corroborated by the literature suggesting that migrants to Gumbo are typically under the age of 17 [38]. This influx tends to spike during the rainy season when floods displace and force populations to migrate. Most of these migrants possess low levels of education (a significant portion of them have limited access to, or attainment of, formal education) and skills, which severely limits their access to the formal labour market. Consequently, their primary option is to seek employment in the informal sectors. Furthermore, the presence of high-quality educational institutions in these villages serves as an additional incentive, attracting many young people. The villages in the Gumbo-Sirikat District are also the destinations of people fleeing insecure locations in several South Sudanese States. When the situation improves, some of these individuals return to their communities. Nonetheless, young men and women choose to stay in Gumbo and Sirikat, drawn by the prospect of a better life in town.

The influx of individuals in the villages of the Gumbo-Shirkat district is combined with increased malpractice problems, such as prostitution and gangs, particularly baby gangs. Additionally, families residing in these villages often find themselves accommodating additional members from neighbouring communities, adding to their already heightened vulnerability.

3.2.2. Kaduro Village

The focus group discussions unveiled that Kaduro village experiences negligible emigration, which does not target any particular demographic group.

Individuals classified as migrants in this village typically depart from their homes in the morning to secure sustenance for their families and consistently return by evening. As Bryceson et al. [39] pointed out, for Sub-Saharan African countries in general, the absence of markets presents a significant challenge to this rural village, particularly given the heavy reliance of both men and women on agriculture. Consequently, the limited income opportunities within the local market drive this migration pattern. This current

migration trend is a daily movement and diverges from the past when security concerns rendered these daily movements impractical, resulting in migration being predominantly a long-term phenomenon.

Participants in the discussions pointed out that the increase in migrants coming to Kaduro can be attributed to the construction of new housing units. Consequently, these arrivals include both individuals and their family members. Through the construction or rental of these new houses, the local population has initiated the formation of fresh communities to enhance their overall governance, mirroring the pattern observed in the neighbouring Gumbo-Sirikat district. Kaduro, being in close proximity to this district, is recognised as an area experiencing housing expansion.

3.2.3. Jebel Lemon Village

The focus group discussions revealed that the Jebel Lemon community experiences a significant influx of migrants due to the economic landscape of the village, which is shaped by the presence of a flourishing quarry and a paint factory. The quarrying industry serves as a major source of employment in this village. Consequently, the predominant newcomers to the area are young, economically active men and women who are seeking employment opportunities within this sector.

Another instance of migration into the area highlighted during discussions is associated with individuals returning to homes they had previously built or due to the increased housing rent in the communities where they lived to an unaffordable level.

There is also emigration in the Jebel Lemon village, particularly during the rainy season. This phenomenon is often prompted by heavy rainfall, leading to the displacement of certain households.

Economic male out-migration is a prevalent reality in the village, and this situation often engenders difficult emotions, especially among women who are left alone when the men migrate in search of income opportunities to support their families. In such circumstances, women assume the role of sole breadwinners, even though most of them have not received formal education and lack job skills. Consequently, finding suitable employment becomes a daunting task, leading these women to often accept low-paying or precarious jobs.

Moreover, gender roles in South Sudan adhere to traditional norms, with distinct expectations for men and women. In the deeply patriarchal South Sudanese culture, women typically carry out household chores, childcare, and agricultural activities without owning land or other productive assets [40]. Men serve as heads of families with authority and control over their family members and important decisions. A woman is expected to be submissive to her father before marriage and her husband afterward. They are obligated to obey the male relatives of their husbands, even if they are very young children. Challenging these cultural norms and engaging in a “gender renegotiation” presents significant challenges for women. Participants in the discussions also indicated that this sense of unease is also connected to the departure of close friends and family members due to migration, leaving the women who remain behind feeling a deep sense of loss.

Additionally, forging new social connections can be challenging and time consuming. In South Sudan, social relationships hold immense significance for women. They serve as a crucial support system, offering emotional support, guidance, and practical assistance. These relationships play a vital role in helping women navigate challenges and overcome difficult circumstances, enhancing their capacity to cope with adversity.

3.2.4. Mogiri and Adodi Villages

During the focus group discussions, out-migration emerged as a significant aspect of life in the Mogiri and Adodi villages. It was noted to be most prevalent during the dry season and times of insecurity, involving both men and women. These migrations primarily led to Juba city. However, during the rainy season, migrants return to the villages to engage in agricultural activities like land cultivation and harvesting.

The issue of cattle herding primarily influences insecurity-related migration. This problem arises when cattle keepers from different ethnic backgrounds come into conflict over grazing land and water resources, which are vital for the farming communities residing in these villages. These conflicts often escalate into violence, causing displacement and triggering migration.

The migration patterns observed in the Mogiri and Adodi villages are not confined solely to Juba city but also extend to neighbouring countries such as Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia. During the discussions, participants emphasised that international migrants frequently encounter various difficulties, including limited access to fundamental services like healthcare and education, substandard living conditions, and instances of discrimination, as evidenced in the literature [41]. Despite these challenges, migration was identified as a vital coping strategy during periods of insecurity and drought.

The discussions unveiled that in the Mogiri and Adodi villages, those most adversely affected by the migration are individuals with disabilities and those who cannot move, predominantly women and children. They are left home alone in a situation where they are already disadvantaged. South Sudan experiences a high prevalence of disabilities attributed to various factors, including armed conflict, inadequate healthcare infrastructure, insufficient sanitation facilities, and limited access to clean water [42]. People with disabilities encounter a multitude of challenges in accessing education, healthcare, employment, and social services under normal circumstances. During migration, these challenges intensify due to the absence of any form of assistance from family members. Participants in the focus group discussions pointed out that women and children bear the brunt of men's migration and, at times, couples' relocation from the village to the city to seek employment to provide for their families. This leaves them on their own without daily support. Additionally, since migration predominantly consists of young men and women, the community's overall well-being is compromised by the departure of economically active members.

3.2.5. Nesitu Village

Participants in the focus group discussions unanimously acknowledged that out-migration is a fundamental aspect of life in Nesitu village. People often embark on migrations in search of food in neighbouring villages or Uganda or due to security concerns. These migrations encompass all family members, especially during times of insecurity, or individuals, mainly men, being the primary participants. They typically return to the village when security conditions stabilise or when they have secured food.

The discussions highlighted that this situation has a more profound impact on women when men migrate. In such circumstances, women are responsible for providing food and other forms of support for the entire family within the village.

3.2.6. Mafao Village

Participants in the focus group discussions indicated outflow migration as a major phenomenon in Mafao over the past year. This migration was prompted by the arrival of aggressive and violent cattle herders in the village. In response to this precarious situation and with the aim of averting violence within their community, whole families have opted to migrate either to the nearby Gumbo or to the residences of their relatives in Juba town. Furthermore, the village's population lives in fear of the cattle herders and refrains from farming due to concerns that their crops will be destroyed by this hostile group, leading to substantial losses.

Discussions revealed that this situation is affecting the mental thinking of women, especially those who are not migrating. They are preoccupied with finding ways to feed their families. Most women rely on vegetable farming for their livelihood and food security. The influx of cattle herders, with the loss of their land and limited access to the market, has contributed to increased malnutrition. Unfortunately, managing the issue of the cattle herders extends beyond the community's control. Consequently, the popula-

tion, particularly women, is experiencing frustration and a sense of hopelessness about the future.

3.2.7. Bilinyang Village

As per the discussions in the focus groups, migration is not a customary practice within the Bilinyang community. Instead, the village experiences an influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs), primarily from Bor town. This migration pattern is driven by natural events, especially floods [43]. Many of these IDPs return to their places of origin when security or weather conditions ameliorate. This surge of incoming migrants has placed additional strain on the village's already scarce resources, leading to a negative perception of the newcomers and complicating their integration.

3.2.8. Mori Village

The focus group discussions highlighted that migration is an inherent aspect of life in the Mori village. This outward migration is predominantly directed toward neighbouring counties, towns, and villages, becoming more pronounced during the dry season. Generally, this migration is of a temporary nature, with migrants returning to the village when conditions improve.

Respondents also mentioned a wealth transfer associated with this migration trend, which contributed to an enhancement of the community's socioeconomic status. However, it led to a decrease in agricultural activities, with adverse effects on the most economically vulnerable segments of the community.

This phenomenon disproportionately affects young girls. The migration of adult family members leads to a reduction in their school attendance, as they are compelled to take on additional household responsibilities instead of attending school. Early marriages become more prevalent in such circumstances, with young daughters often being married off to older men in exchange for bride prices. Because of their domestic duties, they are forced to discontinue their education and frequently experience domestic violence due to their inexperience in managing household tasks. Early marriages can be seen as an indication of the Mori community's economic hardship. In fact, this practice is commonly observed in South Sudan when households are in dire need of bride prices, and it was particularly widespread during the wartime period [44].

4. Discussion

Interviews with key informants and focus group discussions enabled us to identify the intricate nature of migration within the studied villages. Domestic migration dominates, with migrants primarily seeking economic opportunities and security, aligning with the existing literature [45]. More specifically, in the study area, migration serves as a means to escape the harsh impacts of weather conditions, insecurity, and poverty, reaffirming the findings in the body of literature on the drivers of rural–urban, environmental, and insecurity-related migration in Africa [46–50].

This phenomenon is often temporary or seasonal, with most migrants returning to their home communities, a phenomenon already pointed out by Atta El Moula [51], who observed the rural areas of Western Sudan. The present study highlighted that agricultural ties largely influence this tendency in the villages of origin and the migrants' attachment to their communities. In the study areas, households primarily consist of farmers. Additionally, limited resources discourage international movements. Rural–urban migration, on the other hand, has a dominant and permanent component. There is a trend for young women and men to stay in the city, hoping for a better life.

The adverse consequences of migration on those who remain in their home communities primarily impact women. In contrast to international migration data indicating that women constitute half of the country's migrants [52,53], migration is predominantly perceived as a male phenomenon in the study area. Consequently, women are often left alone in villages and become the sole breadwinners, challenging traditional family dynamics

in a male-dominated, hierarchical society. This situation can lead to economic difficulties as women may struggle to meet basic needs and provide food for their children. They may need to seek alternative sources of income, often in low-paying and precarious jobs. The absence of male family members due to migration can result in social isolation and emotional strain for women. Women left behind may become more vulnerable to various risks, including early marriages. The absence of male family members can also hinder children's access to education. Girls, in particular, may be affected as they might be required to assume additional responsibilities at home instead of attending school or even be forced into early marriages.

Consequently, this paper emphasises the necessity of expanding the examination of how male household heads influence migration. This expansion should encompass not only their spouses, as demonstrated in the study by Matz and Mbaye [54], but also extend to include female family members, with particular attention to those in the school-age bracket.

Protecting women from the adverse effects of male and community members' migration in the study area necessitates a comprehensive and multifaceted approach. Findings from focus group discussions suggest at least six potential avenues for interventions that should be accurately tailored at the village to account for the specific socioeconomic features.

Implementing empowerment and skill-building programs is paramount to equipping non-migrant women with the skills and knowledge needed to pursue economic opportunities and achieve self-reliance. The relevance of these interventions is clearly stated in the literature [55,56]. However, the present paper adds to the literature the fact that these interventions must actively involve and gain acceptance from the community, particularly the male members, to bring about lasting change. This aspect is currently underrepresented in the existing literature. Therefore, exploring best practices and developing guidelines in this area should be a vital focus of future research endeavours. In fact, this study's evidence indicates that traditional gender roles and societal expectations on women could pose significant constraints to the effectiveness of these interventions and subject women beneficiaries to substantial societal pressure. For instance, as previously mentioned, women in this context are under the authority of their fathers before marriage and their husbands afterward. This limited autonomy severely restricts their decision-making capacity. Gender roles are well-defined, with women typically responsible for tasks such as food production, gathering water and fuel, managing the household and family, and fulfilling reproductive duties [57].

Consequently, women cannot inherit land or initiate businesses to attain economic independence and reduce their vulnerability. This situation complicates the effectiveness of a second critical set of interventions aimed at creating and promoting economic opportunities for women. Therefore, initiatives supporting the establishment of women-led businesses and cooperatives, granting access to credit and financial services, and encouraging income-generating activities must be socially acceptable to uplift women in this context effectively.

Considering these factors, initiating awareness campaigns aimed at transforming societal attitudes and behaviours that sustain gender inequality emerges as a third crucial avenue for intervention. This involves promoting gender-sensitive norms, dispelling harmful gender stereotypes, and involving men and boys as advocates for gender equality and a more inclusive society.

Another set of interventions involves implementing social protection programs, including cash transfer schemes, food assistance, and healthcare support, specifically designed for vulnerable women impacted by male migration. Over the last three decades, the expansion of social protection has experienced a deceleration in Africa [58,59]. Nevertheless, African nations consistently demonstrate a robust determination to broaden coverage, acknowledging the pivotal role of social protection in alleviating poverty, combating inequality, advancing gender parity, and fostering comprehensive socioeconomic progress. The present paper supports that these programs can enable women to more effectively

manage the difficulties they encounter in the absence of male family members. Findings from the focus group discussions also underscore the significance of offering psychosocial support services, such as counselling centres and support groups, to women affected by male migration. These services are essential for mitigating the psychological impact of separation.

The present study also underscores the imperative of enhancing data collection methodologies and research endeavours to acquire a more profound comprehension of the unique facets characterizing the migration dynamics in South Sudan, with a specific focus on the obstacles confronted by women within a milieu characterised by male-dominated migration patterns. The availability of precise and comprehensive data is a fundamental prerequisite for formulating evidence-based policies and targeted interventions [60]. This study argues that accurate data are crucial for facilitating progress monitoring in mitigating gender disparities and fostering gender equity within the context of migration. This endeavour assumes paramount significance in pursuing more equitable and informed policy initiatives conducive to ameliorating gender-related challenges associated with migration in South Sudan. Techniques, such as the population monitoring estimation model suggested by Teng et al. [61], can help monitor the long-term spatiotemporal characteristics of the population in a context where the census is poor.

Effectively implementing these interventions necessitates a collaborative endeavour involving government institutions, civil society organisations, community leaders, and international partners. Embracing a holistic approach is vital to safeguarding women's rights and well-being in the context of male migration in the studied area. Moreover, this multidimensional effort ensures that interventions are comprehensive, sustainable, and rooted in the local context, ultimately contributing to more effective and equitable outcomes.

5. Conclusions

In summary, the study reveals that domestic migration, driven by economic motives and security concerns, dominates the studied villages. The temporary nature of this migration, often influenced by agricultural ties, contrasts with more permanent rural-urban migration. The adverse consequences of migration disproportionately affect women left behind, challenging traditional family dynamics. To address these challenges, the study recommends multifaceted interventions, including empowerment programs, economic opportunities, awareness campaigns, and social protection initiatives. Accurate data collection and collaborative efforts are emphasized for evidence-based policies and effective interventions, ensuring the well-being of women in the context of male migration.

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