



A guide to Sudanese cultural and social norms

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Introduction

The following social and cultural information has been produced for front-line agency staff involved in the Home Office funded UK Gateway Protection Programme. It provides a thumbnail sketch of Sudanese cultural norms and the likely expectations of the refugee group. It is designed to orientate staff for the arrival of Sudanese refugees.

Sudan is a very diverse country with customs that differ according to tribe, region, social position and experience. It is therefore unrealistic to accurately reflect all aspects of Sudanese culture and society in this guide. The information is based on individual responses to a questionnaire obtained through one-to-one interviews or email and letter correspondence with UK-based Sudanese refugee community organisations and Sudanese nationals living in the UK. Individuals' experiences have been supplemented by more specific refugee group information provided by the Home Office and international organisations.

The Sudanese refugees on the Gateway Protection Programme have lived in refugee camps in Uganda for varying periods of time. The majority of the refugee group arrived in Uganda between 1993 and 2000. Most of the refugees have been living in the Kyangwali refugee camp in western Uganda on the border of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Prior to living in the Kyangwali refugee camp, all of the refugees were living in refugee camps in northern Uganda. However, due to compelling security concerns, the refugees were moved to a more secure location. Reference has been made to specific situations in camps where possible, but readers should be aware that much of the following information is based on anecdotal evidence and should not be treated as authoritative.

This information is not based on direct contact between the author and the Sudanese refugees to be resettled in the UK. Readers should therefore not assume that refugees on the Gateway Protection Programme will perfectly conform to the information given.

Background



Sudan is the largest country in Africa with an estimated population of 39,148,162¹ and a comparative land area of more than one quarter the size of the United States. This vast country has endured a devastating history of ongoing civil conflict between the Muslim North and the Christian, Animist south.

In 1955, a year before gaining independence from the United Kingdom, 17 years of civil war began due to an apparent lack of commitment from the Arab-led Khartoum government to create a federal system for southerners. This led to an uprising by southern army officers. In 1972, the South was granted regional autonomy on internal matters under the Addis Ababa peace agreement, which led to a cessation of the North/South civil war and a 10-year ceasefire in the ongoing conflict.

In an effort to take control of oil production capacity, President Numayari attempted to link the southern oil rich area of Bentiu with the North in 1982. However, following mass demonstrations, this plan was not progressed. In response, Numayari decided some months later to establish an oil refinery in the North. The plan was to construct an oil pipeline running from the oil fields of the South to the refineries located in the northern harbour of Port Sudan for export overseas.

A year later, in 1983, President Numayari imposed Shari'ah (Islamic law) on Sudanese society, incorporating traditional Islamic sanctions into the legal system. This was frowned upon even among Muslim groups. President Numayari declared a state of emergency in part to ensure that Shari'ah was applied more broadly. In the North, amputations for theft and public lashings for alcohol possession were common during the state of emergency. Southerners and other non-Muslims living in the North were also subjected to such sanctions. In the same year, Numayari succeeded in dividing the South into three regions without public consultation. The three new regions were the Upper Nile, Equatoria and Bhal al Ghazar. This action breached the 1972 Addis Ababa agreement and further reinforced the perception that the North

¹ CIA, *The World Factbook – Sudan*. (July 2004 est), at: www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/su.html

was exploiting the South. These events and other ongoing hostilities led to the resumption of the civil war in 1983, which continues today.

The most recent civil conflict, lasting more than 20 years, has left Sudan devastated with an estimated two million deaths.² A protracted, complex war, rooted in disputes over religion, ethnicity, resources, governance and self-determination has resulted in widespread destruction of community infrastructure, mass displacement and gross abuse of human rights. In recent years, the conflict has extended to East and West Sudan and is no longer restricted to the North and South. As a result, Sudan is one of the poorest countries in the world with a per capita income of around £150 per year and an average life expectancy of 56 years³. Families have been torn apart, livelihoods destroyed, and rape, abduction and violation of basic human rights have become commonplace. The ongoing conflict has displaced over four million southerners⁴ and more than one million Sudanese people are living in exile in other countries⁵. Many areas of southern Sudan have been ravaged by conflict for such a long time that little infrastructure now exists, resulting in chronic vulnerability to poverty and disease among the local population.

A much awaited peace agreement was signed on 9 January 2005 by the two main protagonists of the North-South conflict, the current Government of Sudan (GoS) and the largely southern armed force, the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M). Under the peace deal, there will be a shared central government, wealth-sharing arrangements and southern Sudan will vote on independence in 2011. International efforts are also ongoing to solve the present crisis in Darfur, where a separate civil conflict involving systematic killing, ethnic cleansing, destruction of private property and public infrastructure has resulted in millions being forced to flee.

All of the refugee group on the Gateway Protection Programme come from southern Sudan and have varied experiences of the conflict. Most were separated from immediate family members when they fled their homes. Some may have seen family members killed in front of them, and a number may have been detained and ill-treated. It is likely that many of the women will have been held by government forces for prolonged periods or been subjected to rape and torture.

The physical safety of refugees in the Ugandan refugee camps continues to be a matter of concern for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Many refugees have been relocated from refugee camps in northern Uganda due to attacks from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and insecurity problems with the SPLA/M. Refugees have died due to rebel attacks in the camps. It is against this background that the Gateway Protection Programme is working to provide a route to safety for those refugees whose lives are in continued danger.

² A Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper, November 2004, at: <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/11/18/sudan9668.htm>

³ The IRC in Sudan, p1, at: www.theirc.org/Sudan/index.cfm

⁴ US Department of State, *Background Note: Sudan*. at: www.state.gov/p/af/ci/su/

⁵ *Oil in Sudan: Deteriorating human rights* – Amnesty International, at: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGAFR540012000>

Family structure

Family unity and values

The family unit is an integral part of Sudanese society and community life. Western notions of nuclear family do not exist as Sudanese customs and traditions are intrinsically linked to 'extended' family. Many Sudanese recognise and accept family relation through blood, marriage or honour. However, nuclear family groups may be more apparent in urban areas.

The behaviour of individuals reflects how a family is viewed in the community and for the Sudanese it is important to maintain the 'good name' of the family. Family values are therefore highly regarded and primarily include high morals, mutual respect, discipline, generosity, loyalty, and contribution to the welfare of the family and community.

Role of women

Women are primarily responsible for caring for the family and maintaining the household. In rural areas the woman's role may involve collecting firewood and water, which for some may involve walking up to three miles. In addition to this, cooking, shopping and cultivation may also be undertaken. Some women sell produce at local markets to generate extra income.

Civil war has corroded education in Sudan. Consequently, adult female illiteracy is 49 percent while youth female illiteracy (ages 15-24) is 74 percent⁶. Women tend to have better access to education and employment in urban areas and the North. In southern Sudan, the majority of women are not educated. Women's situations have worsened in the South due to under-development, over 20 years of war and inequalities in power structures⁷. Increasingly, women are forced to find employment due to the worsening economic situation. In areas of conflict and in refugee camps, many women become the family 'breadwinners' as many men have either been killed, fled so they are not killed or have joined opposition armed forces.

A woman's freedom is determined by the varied customs and traditions of each tribe. Southern Sudanese women are not expected to engage in premarital sex, drink or smoke in public however, they do not have to conform to Islamic dress code as is required in the Muslim North regardless of a woman's religion. Once married, some Sudanese women may have to ask their husband's permission to socialise and may not be allowed to go out alone, or be seen with a male who is not a relative. The situation among the educated may be slightly different.

Domestic violence against women continues in Sudan. Attitudes depend upon tribal norms and it is accepted less in some regions than in others. Disputes are often resolved within family circles, who may intervene to offer support and advice. Although violence against women is legal grounds for divorce, women are often reticent to make official complaints as the means for social redress are ineffectual⁸.

⁶ United Nations Development Programme, 2004 at: http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2004/pdf/hdr04_HDI.pdf

⁷ Home Office Country Information Report: Sudan, p.76 Section 6.204, November 2004 (an Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) news 'Special report on women in the south' – August 2003).

⁸ Home Office Country Information Report: Sudan, p.74 Section 6.194, November 2004. (Data taken from US State Department Human Rights (USSD) Report 2004)

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) remains widespread in Sudan. Custom and tradition are frequently cited reasons for FGM, which is reinforced in Sudan, where FGM is performed as an initiation into adulthood. FGM is a means of controlling a woman's sexuality and symbolises the woman as obedient, docile, faithful and the upholder of tradition⁹. In September 2003, the Government reaffirmed its commitment to eradicate the practice of FGM, and Sudanese newspapers contained articles stating that the national Human Rights Advisory Council said it would support the drafting of a specific law to criminalise FGM¹⁰.

Role of men

Men are expected to be the 'breadwinners', the head of the household and to provide for and protect their immediate family, as well as extended family. In rural areas where livestock is the main source of wealth, men are expected to herd and attend the cattle, while women carry out domestic duties. Men will not usually assist the woman with any household duties, for example cleaning or cooking.

Sudanese men's attitudes are changing, but the majority do not regard women as their equals. In rural areas, men are conservative in their mentality and behaviour towards women. In urban areas, the roles of women and men have started to change. Both women and men may work and so the men may assist with domestic duties previously assigned to the woman.

Men and women have designated gender roles that dictate what they do in the home and community. Understandably, there is difficulty in translating such roles into British society as this constitutes a major shift in the family dynamic.

Relationships and marriage

In Sudan, the legal age for marriage is 18 although in rural areas it is not uncommon for girls to be requested by a suitor at an earlier age. The suitor pays part of the dowry until the girl can legally marry. The age at which people marry varies according to region and tribe. For example among the Dinka¹¹ tribe in the rural South, marriage is associated with the acquisition of cattle as the bridegroom's family gives cattle to the bride's family. Wealth is traditionally measured in terms of cattle, so a man may not be able to marry until his financial status is acceptable, usually late twenties to early thirties.

In the cities, people are expected to marry at an older age. If girls have the opportunity to attend university, they are expected to marry immediately after graduating (early twenties). Polygamy is legal in Sudan and men are allowed up to four wives according to Islamic Sharia law. Polygamy is seen as a source of wealth, power and social status. Big families tend to get more respect in Sudanese society than their smaller counterparts.

Marriage customs vary depending on tribal traditions. In the South, communities encourage children to stay with their parents until they are married or mature and economically independent enough to live on their own. Marriage in many southern Sudan communities is a social affair, which may involve many members of the extended family. Among some tribes, the approval of the maternal uncle is essential

⁹ Home Office Country Information Report: Sudan, p.78 Section 6.212, November 2004 (SOAT report 1999)

¹⁰ Home Office Country Information Report: Sudan, p.78 Section 6.216, November 2004 (IRIN report September 2003).

¹¹ The Dinka is the largest of the numerous black African tribes in Sudan. They are cattle herders.

in marriage decisions.¹² However, urbanisation and camp life has significantly changed such values. The consent of both sets of parents and the acceptance of the dowry are regarded as the real seal between the two partners.

It is customary for the groom to pay a bride price or dowry to the bride's family for her hand in marriage. Men are usually responsible for negotiating dowries on behalf of their daughters after consulting with their wives. In their original rural settings, marriage may involve a huge dowry paid in livestock to the bride's family.

In the Muslim North, it is customary for parents to arrange marriages for their children. Premarital sex is considered a social taboo as the woman is expected to be a virgin at marriage.

Marriage in Sudan establishes an alliance between two families which makes divorce for a woman very difficult as she usually has to gain support from her family. Divorce is not common in Sudanese culture and is regarded as divisive to communities. Elderly members of the family will normally try to resolve marital disputes before divorce or separation is considered. In the event of divorce, the woman's family may have to return the bride price which means that the family is very often reluctant to allow the separation to proceed.

In the North, divorce is not common but is on the increase. Women who divorce are often treated as outcasts within their community and may find it difficult to form new relationships, intimate or otherwise. They would not be regarded as eligible for marriage. For men it is not as difficult, but some, especially in close-knit communities might find themselves ineligible to re-marry.

Homosexuality is illegal in Sudan¹³. It is not discussed and is considered a sin. A person involved in homosexual activity or a relationship may be shunned for bringing shame to their family and community. In the UK, the discussion of same sex relations in the context of sex education may make some Sudanese people feel uncomfortable.

Sudanese values are generally conservative with regard to public displays of affection. Courting is usually very secretive and public displays of kissing and cuddling are frowned upon. For many Sudanese people, the UK cultural norm of living with a girlfriend or boyfriend is viewed as immoral.

Children and childcare

Children are a shared responsibility within Sudanese communities. Extended family members, particularly grandparents and uncles, may play a prominent role in the childcare and disciplining process. It is common for people to take in their nieces and nephews and bring them up with their own children. This is important to note because the Sudanese interpretation of what constitutes a family differs greatly from Western notions.

The average number of children in a rural household is between five and eight per family, however this depends on the number of wives in the family. In some tribes it

¹²A maternal uncle is a mother's brother; he has considerable influence over his sister's children.

¹³Under the 1991 Criminal Code, homosexuals are subject to lashes, imprisonment, and in some cases the death penalty; Lesbianism is also a taboo subject however no penalties apply; Home Office Country Information Report: Sudan, p.81, Section 6.231, November 2004.

is common for families to have as many children as possible to increase labour potential for tilling land and engagement in other rural economic activities. This picture is changing with the opening up of rural areas to education and modern economic development.

In both urban and rural areas, children are usually cared for by the mother although relatives and older siblings will often help out. The father's responsibility is to ensure financial support for the general welfare of the child.

The community is seen as the 'broader' family and as such gives anyone the right to challenge a child's misbehaviour. For example, in a Dinka community everybody, not only parents and relatives, is responsible for disciplining children. Caning, smacking and skin pinching (practised by women only) are acceptable and regarded as part of the child-rearing process.

As a result of the civil war, many children have been forcibly conscripted¹⁴ witnessing and participating in atrocities against civilians and sometimes their own family. The long-term psychological effects of this are unknown. Within refugee camps children are often told to keep quiet for fear of giving away information that is dangerous to their family. Consequently, children may be affected by a general atmosphere of insecurity and fear.

The elderly

Elderly people are highly respected and regarded as custodians of the community. They are a source of family oral history and reconcile conflicting parties, bless marriages, and lead their communities. They are considered to be the 'backbone' of the family and wider community

As a sign of respect, elderly people are rarely called by their first names. In a Dinka community for example the men are called 'uncle' or 'uncle + first/nick name'. Young people must address elders with reverence and not answer back when they are giving advice on contested issues. They are also expected to give up their house space and bedding for any visiting elders.

Unlike the UK, there are no residential homes for the elderly in Sudan. Sudanese have difficulty in understanding why the elderly in Britain are put in social care and view this as a denial of responsibility to their parents. There are no social services in Sudan and family members and the wider community take care of their elderly until death. Life expectancy in Sudan is around 56 years of age.¹⁵

Housing

Housing is entirely dependent upon social background and financial status. Housing standards differ significantly between rural and urban areas. The majority of Sudanese people live in rural areas. Those who live in urban areas are usually either employed by the government, private sector or carry out small-scale business. Most homes in rural areas are traditionally built using local materials consisting of grass for thatching roofs, wood, bamboo and twigs for the structure of the main hut.

¹⁴United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Background Paper on refugees and asylum seekers from the Sudan, July 2000, p.14. at: www.unhcr.ch

¹⁵ Home Office Country Information Report: Sudan, p.31 Section 5.92, November 2004 (UNICEF)

Interior and exterior walls are plastered using mud mortars and cattle dung, giving it a smooth lasting finish.

Each rural homestead normally consists of a number of huts built in a circle with a courtyard in the centre, which becomes the family living room in the evening. Each homestead consists of a number of huts shared out among members of the family according to age and gender. One or two huts are reserved for visiting relatives or friends. There is usually a hut specifically allocated for cooking; in other areas, people cook outside. There are no bathrooms so people usually either bathe in a river, pond or lake or collect water and have a bath at home.

In urban areas, homes range in style from mud-wall and grass thatched roofed huts to modern brick and mortar villas or bungalows. The majority of urban homes do have kitchens and some have toilets though their quality does vary. Those who do not have their own toilets may have access to public toilets nearby or they may have to use the nearby woods. In design, kitchen and bathrooms tend to be neglected as they are seen as a necessity and not for show. Bathrooms tend to be in the hottest areas of the house and the cooler areas are preserved for the bedrooms. Bathrooms consist of a toilet, bath and basin. In traditional houses, the bathrooms are a hole in the ground, most have a flush.

Households vary in size from 2 to 10 people in a family. Some families may have more than 20 people though they may not be living together in the same home. It is quite common for visitors to spend days in the household being looked after by the family. In urban areas, families generally tend to be small but they often entertain guests, which account for their fluctuating sizes.

Some of the refugees arriving on the Programme have previously been accommodated in very basic conditions in the Kyangwali refugee camp (western Uganda), which houses 17,000 refugees. Other individuals were living in a refugee camp in northern Uganda. The refugees were housed in areas according to their nationality. Families were given the materials to make a one or two-roomed mud hut with a straw roof and mud floor. There was no electricity in the refugee camp, and refugees were given the means to grow their own crops under a self-reliance strategy operated by UNHCR Uganda.

Privacy

Personal space and privacy is important even in rural areas as everyone in the homestead is allocated his or her space, for example allotment of cultivation plots to family members. Generally, there is not as much privacy as in the UK, doorways tend to be open and neighbours or visitors may pass by at any time.

Social interaction

In Sudanese culture gatherings among the family and community take place frequently. These gatherings provide a forum for elders to counsel and offer advice. The Sudanese are sociable people who greet friends and relatives very warmly and respectfully. Handshaking is a very important and common greeting, as is hugging, kissing cheeks and touching shoulders. Both men and women may shake hands as many times as they can upon meeting each other. In the North, contact between men and women is kept to a minimum and kissing is not usually accepted. Handshaking between men and women is usually accepted and if they know each other tapping the right shoulder followed by a handshake using the right hand.

Contrary to British culture, direct eye contact is considered disrespectful. In general, a young person will avoid eye contact with someone older as a sign of respect. This also applies to women when engaging in conversation with men or people of high social standing.

Ethnicity, language and religion

Ethnicity

In Sudan, there are over 500 Arab and black African ethnic groups and many more sub-ethnic groups. The largest ethnic groups are Nilotics including the Dinka, Nuer, and Shilluk from the South, the riverain African/Arabs from the North and central Sudan, black Arab/African from the western regions and Nuba from the Nuba mountains. The main ethnic groups in the refugee group are the Acholi, Kuku, Nuer, and Bari.

Questions of ethnicity, and national identity are very complex due to protracted political conflict between northern and southern Sudan. Most people tend to identify themselves by regions, such as 'Southerner' or by one of the many different ethnic groups and languages in Sudan.

Relations between ethnic groups vary greatly. Ethnic tension and division between the North and South has resulted from an imbalance of political and cultural power. Until the peace agreement was reached, the North controlled much of the economy and held most of the political power.

Language

There are 142 recorded languages in Sudan, 134 of which are living languages and eight of which are extinct.¹⁶ Arabic is the official language and the most common medium for the conduct of government, commerce and urban life throughout Sudan. English is, however, used as the lingua franca in southern Sudan, particularly among the educated. Older generations who received their education during British rule speak English well. In the North, English is usually only spoken in government offices.

The Sudanese speak their own tribal languages in addition to dialects of Arabic, which vary according to region. In the South, a pidgin Arabic (Juba Arabic) has developed and is used as a lingua franca. Speakers of mainstream Arabic would have great difficulty understanding this. Refugee communities from southern Sudan are mainly speakers of Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, Zande, Bari, Lotuko, Acholi, Madi and other tribal languages.

The two main languages spoken by the refugee group are Arabic and English.

Religion

Approximately 70 per cent of the population are Sunni Muslims, 18 per cent Animists, and 9 per cent Christian. Most Christians and Animists live in southern Sudan. Religion plays an important part in Sudanese life. New Year and all major religious festivals are celebrated by every community in accordance with individual beliefs. Birthdays, christenings, coming of age, marriage and death are also celebrated. In all cases respect is shown for original African beliefs.

¹⁶ Home Office Country Information Report: Sudan, p.7 Section 2.6, November 2004 (Ethnologue 2004)

Education

People are very aware of the importance of education. The civil war and constant displacement of people have created a 'lost generation' of young adults in southern Sudan who have had little or no chance of education. Adult illiteracy levels in Sudan are 40 percent¹⁸. The majority of the refugee group is literate.

Under 5s

Educational provision for the under 5s is available in urban areas but non-existent in the war-affected areas of southern Sudan.

Over 5s

The Government provides free primary education for children aged six to thirteen years. In Sudan, children start school between the ages of six to seven. In southern Sudan, the school week usually runs from Monday to Friday with lessons scheduled in the morning. In northern Sudan, the school week usually runs from Saturday to Thursday, with Friday as the main prayer day. Children in southern Sudan are used to inadequate school facilities and a lack of qualified teachers. Many schools have poor or non-existent sanitation facilities and lack sources of clean water.

In contrast to the UK, class composition is not based on age but on ability and availability of resources. Consequently, there is often a mixture of ages within a single class. The age difference, coupled with the language barrier, may cause great difficulty when Sudanese children enter the British education system.

In Sudan, teachers are highly respected by their pupils. In the UK, children are encouraged to work alone under supervision but in Sudan, children are usually taught in a more directive and traditional manner, and often rely heavily on the teacher for guidance and support.

Due to the civil war, many of the refugees have had interrupted or no schooling in Sudan. In Uganda, primary school education is free. Based on our knowledge of the refugee group, the majority of children of school age, including teenagers attended primary school in the refugee camp¹⁹ in Uganda. Those who could afford it or those who received assistance were able to attend secondary school. Most of the children will have a basic understanding of English because it is taught in the Ugandan education system.

Adult education

A huge educational gap has developed during years of war in southern Sudan between the educated few and children who have gone without schooling for over two decades.

There are around 30 university and further education institutions in Sudan. The accessibility of higher education in Sudan is limited due to lack of resources and expensive fees. As a result few students have the opportunity to further their

¹⁸ World Bank, 2003, adult literacy rate for age 15+, at: www.worldbank.org/data/countrydata/aag/sdn_aag.pdf

¹⁹ Kyangwali refugee camp in the west of Uganda

education. Popular university courses are medicine, law, veterinary studies, engineering, economics, agriculture, and teaching.

Most of the refugees on the programme have completed their primary education in Sudan although a couple of adults have had no schooling. The refugee group is unlikely to know much about how the education system works in the UK but are nevertheless likely to have high expectations. They may not realise that certain courses are not free, particularly university courses.

Employment and money

Occupations

The dominant source of employment in Sudan is subsistence farming. In urban areas, there are two main streams of employment: people employed in the public sector (for example, local government authorities, police, and armed forces), and people employed in the private sector (for example, private companies, small businesses and shops).

Members of the refugee group have a variety of work experience although many were still at school or at home raising children at the time they fled Sudan. Most were working in a rural environment in southern Sudan. When the refugee group moved to the refugee camp in Uganda, the majority were unable to continue their former employment and have worked as peasant farmers.

Refugees' expectations of finding suitable employment in the UK may be high, and they may experience frustration if the skills and work experience they gained back home do not help them find a suitable job in the UK. Employment is a key issue giving people an opportunity to earn their own income and to gain a sense of worth, as well as aiding the integration process.

Many Sudanese currently living in the UK send money back to Sudan to help family members and their community. It is likely that Sudanese refugees on the Programme may want to do the same and budgeting advice may be useful.

Welfare benefits

The unemployment rate in Sudan is very high due to prolonged civil war. In rural areas of Sudan, there is no welfare or state benefit system. People turn to the community, family and friends as their primary support mechanism and are therefore likely to be shocked by the lack of community life in Britain, which seems very individualistic by comparison. People who are used to earning their own income are not always comfortable with receiving money from the state.

Money

Before the civil war, the official currency was the Sudanese pound. However, this changed to the Dinar under the Islamic government. Foreign currencies such as the US dollar and the British pound are sought after because of their strong purchasing power in comparison to the weak Dinar.

People in rural areas are not familiar with debt as many will be used to subsistence living with no need to budget for monthly or quarterly bills. In urban areas, people are more aware of debt and how to deal with loans and the banking system. As credit is easier to obtain in the UK, debt could be an issue for people who are not used to managing large sums of money.

In Sudanese families, it is usually the women who manage the day-to-day household finances. Women have direct access to money in the UK, either from an earned income or state support, for example child benefit. This shift in financial empowerment may cause tension at home.

Health

Provision for health care in Sudan is minimal and people cannot expect to rely on help from the state. Years of war, poverty and natural attrition in southern Sudan have denied the region basic health care infrastructure and created an urban/rural imbalance. If people fall ill they tend to seek help locally, if at all, and some will also resort to traditional remedies.

Medical professionals are acknowledged and respected, and people will seek their advice whenever possible. People are usually content to be seen by both female and male doctors. It is very important that people are aware of the health services and support available to them in the UK.

Physical health

People are generally strong and physically fit because they do not lead a sedentary life. However, people's general health and fitness is below average due to lack of proper medical treatment, adequate diet and good sanitary conditions in war-affected areas. Famines in the 1980s and 1991 have had a serious impact on general health.

Mental health

Due to the ongoing conflict, mental trauma and illness have increased. Generally, people with mental illness will seek help from native healers due to social stigma, illiteracy and the shortage of mental health provision. In Sudanese culture, mental illness is not something that is openly discussed as it is generally regarded as a sign of weakness. It is unlikely that refugees on the Programme will have received any counselling before coming to the UK if they have experienced mental trauma.

Sexual health

People consider sexual relations to be an intensely private matter and discussion of sex is considered a taboo in Sudanese communities. The ongoing conflict and extreme poverty has contributed to a higher prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the South. Awareness of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases is slowly increasing through awareness building programmes promoted by international aid agencies.

Premarital sex is considered to be a sin and is punishable by law but double standards exist and it is acceptable for a man to have premarital sex. Attitudes vary according to tribe.

A small minority, mainly educated groups use contraception. There is little education about family planning and contraception in rural areas. Family planning is considered alien in some areas of Sudanese tradition, which believes in expanding the community and hence the power and wealth of different tribes.

Dental and eye care

People in rural areas have no proper and supervised access to dental care. In urban areas, people have access to dental care but due to costs and limited resources, visits are not regular. Sudanese in rural areas tend to use traditional methods to take care of their teeth using small, light twigs and charcoal ashes. In urban areas, people use toothbrushes and toothpaste.

People tend to have a good standard of dental hygiene because there is little sugar in their diet. The refugees on the programme may not be aware that they will need to take more active care of their teeth as a result of diet change in the UK.

People have very limited access to eye care except for occasional health programmes that pass through rural areas. Services only exist in urban areas where there are hospitals however most people generally cannot afford to visit them or buy glasses.

Smoking

Smoking is quite common for men. Some women smoke but not publicly as it is not culturally accepted by society.

Leisure

Going out

Sudanese people are very outgoing and enjoy getting together for social and cultural events within the community. In semi-urban areas, people go out to watch football, volleyball and basketball games. In urban areas, people socialise by going out to bars, parties and the cinema. It is however, socially unacceptable for women to go to bars or clubs alone.

Time-keeping in traditional rural areas is guided by the movement of the sun so when people arrange to meet they often use sunrise, midday or sunset to describe a meeting time.

Music

Music plays a very important role in Sudanese culture and is played during marriages, funerals, harvest time and other festivities. Besides traditional dances and folk music, the younger generation are fond of African music, church music and pop music. Congolese African pop music is very popular in southern Sudan. In the North, Middle Eastern and Western music is popular.

Sport

The most popular sports in Sudan are football, basketball, volleyball, tribal wrestling, and hunting but only a small number of Sudanese are able to enjoy sporting activities due to a lack of facilities and money. There are many traditional children's games, for example hide and seek, and drum beating games

Communication

Mobile phones are generally used in Sudan as the postal service is unreliable and phone lines have been destroyed by warfare. Internet services were introduced in 1997 but access in rural areas is very limited due to high cost and inadequate infrastructure.

Newspapers

Newspapers are privately owned although there are less government restraints than in television. Literacy levels, lack of money and a limited circulation mean that relatively few people in Sudan have access to newspapers, particularly in the South. People who have access can read newspapers on the Internet.

Radio and television

Radio and television are government controlled and must reflect government policies. The Sudan National Broadcasting Corporation (SNBC) operates two channels and has a permanent military censor to ensure that news reflects official views. There are no privately owned television broadcasters apart from a cable service, which is owned by the Government and private investors. The Government also controls Sudan's domestic radio services and private stations are not permitted.

Radios are widely used in southern Sudan as a source of public information and people usually listen to news, music and cultural programmes on the BBC World Service, African stations and other international stations their receivers are able to pick up. Several opposition and clandestine radio stations broadcast to Sudan.

Television was quite popular in southern Sudan before the war but is now almost non-existent due to the destruction of basic infrastructures. People are familiar with televisions in urban areas, but access is limited due to the high cost of purchasing and maintaining a television as well as reception problems.

Books

Books are not widely available in southern Sudan as there are no bookshops and libraries. The few literate people in southern Sudan enjoy reading books written and published by African writers.

Driving

Car ownership is limited and few people have a valid driving licence, although driving without one is not uncommon. People in refugee camps have no access to cars and may not be familiar with driving rules and regulations. There may be a temptation for some individuals to start driving in the UK without a licence. Sudanese drive on the right hand side of the road, the opposite to the UK.

Food

Types of dishes and ingredients

When the agricultural system is not disrupted and food is distributed normally, the Sudanese diet is a healthy one. People eat freshly grown produce and are likely to find the British preference for pre-packed and pre-prepared food an alien concept.

The kind of food available and methods of preparation vary according to region and tribe. Some popular ingredients and dishes include:

Foul (dried broad beans) is a popular breakfast dish.

Maize, flour, millet, lentils, rice, sweet potatoes, beans and yam.

Cassava (a root that can be ground into flour, the flowers and leaves can also be eaten).

Meat ¹⁷stews (usually beef, sheep, goat, chicken or fish).

Okra, pumpkin, green and red peppers, groundnuts, sesame seeds, beans, onions, peanuts and peas.

Ta'mia (fried, crushed chickpeas)

Aseedah (sticky like porridge)

Desserts tend to be fruit or milk based puddings with dried fruits.

Kisara - thinly fried flat bread made with sorghum flour and commonly eaten with a sauce called Mulaah served with vegetables, meat or fish.

Cumin, coriander, garlic, onions, chillies, ginger, in addition to tea, salt, pepper and sugar.

Curry sauces made with meat and chicken served with green leafy vegetables like; spinach, or mulokhiya (green leafs) and potatoes.

Shopping

The above foods are available in African and Caribbean shops but are expensive. People enjoy spicy food and the availability of Indian spices in the UK will be a bonus.

Sudanese people are not familiar with self-service supermarkets as most do their shopping in small stores and open markets.

Cooking

In rural areas, most Sudanese use charcoal or firewood for cooking. Food is prepared in large clay cooking pots. Utensils are largely the same as in the UK, with the exception of electric utensils. People eat together in age groups and men and women separately; children are usually served before adults. Cooking is normally done by the women of the family so single men may need help and advice with regard to cooking for themselves.

¹⁷Pork is not eaten by Muslim people. Most Sudanese, Muslim or otherwise normally eat Halal food.

Drinks

The consumption of alcohol is prohibited by the Islamic government, but alcohol is generally available. Sudanese alcohol consumption is low and so refugees on the Programme may be shocked by British people's high consumption of alcohol and the generally accepted drinking culture.

Soft drinks and beer are popular beverages. In northern Sudan, locally made non-alcoholic fruit drinks are popular and in southern Sudan locally brewed beer called 'Mariytha' made from water mixed with sorghum flour is widely consumed. Tea is always consumed after food and in the morning.

Hygiene and personal appearance

Hygiene

Sudanese people have a high level of personal hygiene. People use soap to wash themselves. Although sanitary products are available in cities, they are rare in rural areas because of their expense. Women in rural areas may use cotton or grass instead of tampons or pads.

Domestic

Most cleaning products tend to be solid (soap) or powder so people may benefit from an introduction to some of the British cleaning products and their dangers. People may also need to be shown how to use and clean toilets in the UK as many Sudanese will only have experience of pit latrines.

Laundry

Very few Sudanese have access to washing machines, even in the cities. Clothes are generally washed by hand or by using a washboard. Those with washing machines do not use them often due to frequent power cuts and lack of pipe water. In rural areas, laundry is usually washed in the rivers.

Clothes

People may not be aware of the need to dress for different seasons and are not likely to have experienced cold weather.

People take a great interest and pride in their clothes and appearance and tend to buy new clothes for big feasts like Easter and Christmas. People are quite modest in the way they dress and like to have clothes that cover the whole body. In the North, women are expected to adhere to certain dress codes, according to Islamic law.

Resettlement and expectations

The following information was received from UK based Sudanese refugee community organisations in response to questions asked about their individual experiences and knowledge of resettlement and expectations about life in the UK.

The refugee group is likely to view life in the UK as a chance to escape from a life of fear and poverty and to improve their quality of life. To the refugee group this will mean finding employment, having decent accommodation, good health care, acquiring new skills and qualifications, enjoying liberty and freedom of speech and having the opportunity to help family members and friends who remain in Sudan. The group is likely to have high expectations of the UK education system and may not realise that certain courses are not free.

It is not only the immediate needs of the arrivals that need to be considered but also their more general and longer term needs. Contact with UK-based refugee community organisations is vital and should be encouraged as it will help individuals to feel less isolated, to gain a better understanding of what to expect in the UK, ensure they are informed of services available to them and ultimately aid integration into the local community¹⁸. Some of the UK-based Sudanese refugee community organisations are listed on the back of this booklet.

¹⁸Advisers should ensure that the client is aware of refugee community organisations but should not contact them without explicit permission of the individual concerned.

Further information

Amnesty International Report on Africa, 2004, at:
www.web.amnesty.org/report2004/2af-index-eng

BBC Country Profile on Sudan, at:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/country_profiles/820864.stm

Reports on current events, at: www.bbc.co.uk

A website magazine on lesbian and gay affairs in Africa, at: www.mask.org.za

Health information for professionals and voluntary agencies working with asylum seekers and refugees in the UK, at: www.harpweb.org.uk

US Committee for Refugees, World Refugee Survey 2004, at:
www.refugees.org/worldmap.aspx

US Department of State, Background Note: Sudan, at:
www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5424.htm

US Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Sudan, at:
www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41628.htm

US Department of State CIA, The World Factbook, at:
www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/su.html

Further information on female genital mutilation, at:
www.amnesty.org/ailib/intcam/femgen/fgm1.htm

For up to date news and general information about refugees in Africa, at:
www.unhcr.org.uk

Home Office, Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Country Information Policy Unit - Sudan Country Report October 2004,
at:www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/0/country_information/country_reports.Maincontent.0041.file.tmp/Sudan%20Oct%202004.pdf

Sudanese online newspapers and information:

www.sudan.net, www.sudanile.com, www.sudaneseonline.com,
www.southsudan.net, www.splmtoday.com

Sudanese refugee community organisations

Sudanese Midlands Refugee Community

Association
Suite 1, Elliott House
Elliott Road
Selly Oak
Birmingham
B29 6LS
Tel/Fax: 0121 472 6405
Email: dedutyai@hotmail.com

Equatoria Women Self Help Society

17 Station Road
New Barnet
Hertfordshire
EN5 1NW
Tel: 020 8275 3304
Fax: 020 8275 3301
Email: eqwom97@yahoo.co.uk

Sudanese Children in Need

9 Sheridan Court
47 Belsize Road
London
NW6 4RY
Tel: 020 7722 5031
Email: kkhogali@hotmail.com

Sudanese Organisation Against Torture

Argo House
Kilburn Park Road
London
NW6 5LF
Tel: 020 7625 8055
Fax: 020 7372 2656
Email: info@soatsudan.org
Website: www.soatsudan.org

Sudanese Supplementary School

37 Chapel Street
London
NW1 5DP
Tel/Fax: 020 7724 5623
Website: www.sudaneseschool.com

Windows for Sudan

109 Digbeth
Birmingham
B5 6DT
Tel: 0121 643 9850
Email: winsudan@yahoo.co.uk

Manchester Sudanese Cultural Society

C/O MRSN
95a Princess Road
Moss Side
Manchester
M14 4TH
Tel: 07814 752 028
Email: gaaferali@yahoo.co.uk

DIASPORA

3 Bradbury Street
Unit C2
London
N16 8JN
Tel: 020 7923 3533
Email: enquiries@diaspora.org.uk

Registered address:
Refugee Council,
240-250 Ferndale Road, London SW9 8BB

Charity number: 1014576
Company number: 2727514

