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for every child

South Sudan

The impact of the crisis on children

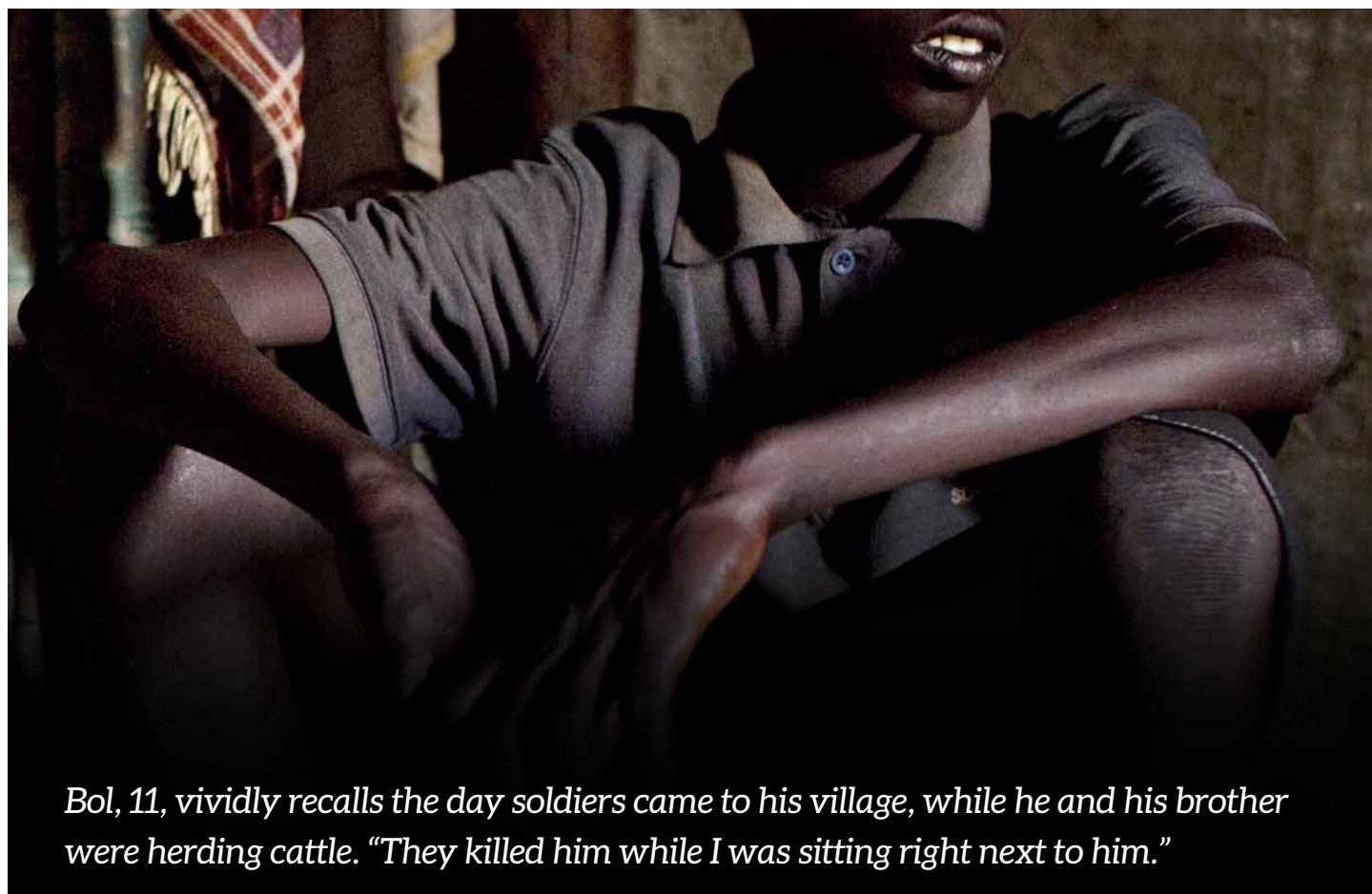
BRIEFING NOTE



CHILDHOOD UNDER ATTACK

The staggering impact of South Sudan's crisis on children

CHILDHOOD UNDER ATTACK



Bol, 11, vividly recalls the day soldiers came to his village, while he and his brother were herding cattle. "They killed him while I was sitting right next to him."

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In South Sudan, the world's youngest country, children have become the face of a humanitarian tragedy fuelled by conflict and economic collapse. An entire generation of children is at stake as they face death, injury, hunger, disease, recruitment, forced displacement and loss of schooling.

At least one in two children in South Sudan is affected and there are fears the situation could get even worse as an escalation of the conflict and security restrictions are preventing aid from reaching many of the areas where it is most needed.

Malnutrition, food insecurity and displacement have reached all-time highs. Almost 3 million children are severely food insecure, more than 1 million are acutely malnourished, with more than a quarter of a million severely malnourished, while 2.4 million have been forced to flee their homes.

More than 2,300 children have been killed or maimed and about 19,000 have been recruited and associated with armed groups. Many more are growing up traumatized by the violence they witness and the hardships they endure,

and an estimated 900,000 children suffer from psychosocial distress. Widespread and horrific sexual violence has also been reported, including against children. Although the full extent of sexual violence in the country is not known, nearly 25 per cent of documented incidents of conflict-related sexual violence affect children.

Education too has been severely disrupted, and if the current situation persists, only one in 13 children are likely to complete the full cycle of primary education.

In South Sudan, only about 50 per cent of the population have access to basic water supply and only 10 per cent of the population have access to basic sanitation, while more than 61 per cent are practicing open defecation.

Weakened by the crisis, children are also particularly vulnerable to diseases, and thousands have been affected by a major cholera outbreak.

When it gained independence from Sudan in July 2011, the country was among the world's poorest, and was already scarred by decades of fighting between government troops and rebels from the south.

“No child should ever experience the horrors and deprivations children face daily in South Sudan. They need support and protection, or they will become a lost generation, putting the very future of their fragile young country at risk.”

- Mahimbo Mdoe, UNICEF Representative in South Sudan.

Just two years after independence, South Sudan was again engulfed by a civil war that has killed thousands of civilians, and left medical clinics, schools and numerous other buildings in shambles.

A major economic crisis, with an inflation rate that has at times reached 800 per cent, has further exacerbated the situation, plunging millions of people deeper into poverty and food insecurity, and leaving children ever more vulnerable. Many teachers, health workers and other civil servants have not been paid in months, severely affecting education and health care.

UNICEF and partners have provided relief across the country from day one of the crisis. They face formidable challenges

delivering life-saving support to millions of children in a country that ranks among the world's most dangerous for aid workers. Over the past four years, UNICEF and partners have vaccinated 3,386,098 children in conflict areas against measles, provided primary health care services to 3,631,829 children, treated more than 600,000 for severe acute malnutrition, provided access to safe water supply for 1.8 million people and delivered life-saving supplies to 250,438 children as part of rapid response missions.

And yet much more needs to be done, and additional funds are required if the children of South Sudan are to be given a chance to survive and thrive.

Nyajim, 7

“Our home used to be a good place,” says seven-year-old Nyajim. But now, she adds, “there is only conflict and destruction. People are slaughtered while you sleep at night.” She shudders as she recalls the day her village was attacked. “We hid in the bushes when the soldiers started burning down our houses. They found my father and killed him. We found only his bones and clothes. So, we buried them.”

Nyajim and her remaining family walked 10 days to reach a United Nations Protection of Civilians camp. Her life, she says, has improved a lot. “It’s good to be in the camp. It’s not like outside. I have friends. Now I focus on what I’ll do when I grow up. In the future, I want to be a doctor and work in a hospital.”



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FACTBOX



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FACTBOX



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MORE THAN 1 MILLION CHILDREN MALNOURISHED

Despite the deployment of a massive humanitarian effort, people in South Sudan still face the very real risk of another famine as a result of armed conflict and high food prices. Extremely poor diets, very limited access to health services, disease outbreaks and low coverage of sanitation facilities have led to high levels of acute malnutrition. In early 2017, South Sudan experienced the world's first famine in six years. An increase in international aid helped end the famine in June, but the nutrition situation remains critical.

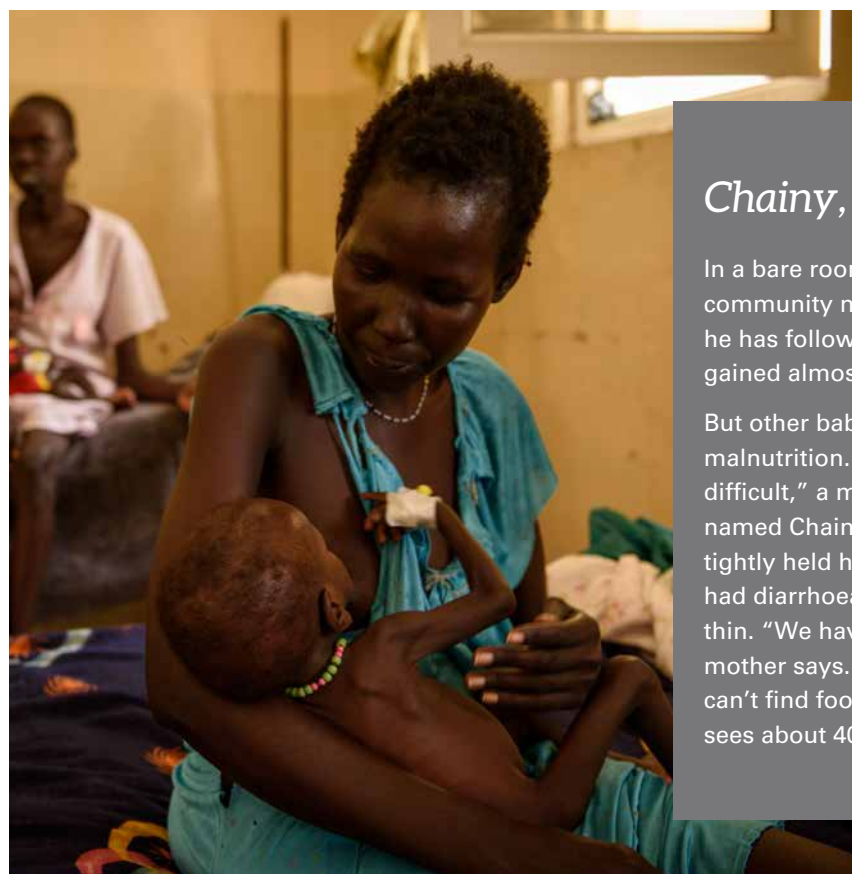
Consider the following: Almost five million people out of a population of ten million are severely food insecure. A total of 1.3 million people are considered to be on the brink of famine. An estimated 1.1 million children are acutely malnourished, including close to 280,000 who suffer from severe acute malnutrition, a potentially life-threatening condition.

Malnutrition rates are even increasing in Equatoria, a region of South Sudan traditionally considered the breadbasket of the country, but now the scene of bitter fighting and desolation.

The vast majority of the population rely on farming, fishing or herding for their livelihoods, but fighting has forced huge numbers of people to abandon their homes, their fields and their cattle. In all, some four million people – over 60 per cent of them children – have fled their homes to other parts of the country or across national borders. Food resources in centres hosting the displaced people are becoming increasingly scarce.

In addition, hyperinflation has sent food prices skyrocketing, leaving many families unable to buy enough provisions. In October 2017, a 3.5 kilo bag of sorghum – a staple food – cost 395 South Sudanese Pounds in Juba stores, as compared with 16 pounds in January 2015. In June 2017, during the lean season, the price had shot up to 462 pounds.

And hundreds of thousands of people are not receiving aid because of insecurity or restrictions imposed by the armed groups. All sides have targeted aid workers, attacked convoys and looted supplies. Since the conflict started in 2013, 95 aid workers have been killed, including 25 humanitarian aid workers killed so far, this year. In July 2017 alone, 136 humanitarian access incidents were reported.



Chainy, 12-months, Bedong, 10-months

In a bare room at the Bentiu hospital's stabilization clinic, a community nutrition worker smiles as he looks at a baby boy he has followed for nearly a month. "He is improving, he has gained almost a kilogram since coming here."

But other babies clearly show signs of severe acute malnutrition. "Since the fighting began, it has been very difficult," a mother says, cradling her tiny one-year-old baby, named Chainy Char. "My child is very sick." Another mother tightly held her 10-month-old son, Bedong Both. The child has had diarrhoea for two months and has become dangerously thin. "We have been affected by the fighting since 2013," the mother says. "We have been forced to leave our village and can't find food. There are many problems we face." The clinic sees about 40 women and their children every day.

UNICEF AND PARTNERS HAVE:

- Deployed teams across the country to provide treatment for severe acute malnutrition, as well as promotion and support of infant and young child feeding practices and micronutrient supplementation.
- Treated 161,000 children for severe acute malnutrition (January–October 2017).
- Trained 1,141 health and nutrition workers on Training of Trainers and community management of acute malnutrition (April–October 2017).
- Supported the development of a maternal, infant and young child nutrition strategy. As of July 2017, almost one million pregnant and lactating women had received counselling for appropriate feeding.
- Continued nutrition surveillance through SMART surveys, Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring Survey, and Urban and adhoc Mid-Upper Arm Circumference assessments.
- Finalized the Integrated Food Security and Nutrition Causal analysis report and presented it to the Ministry of Health for endorsement.

CHILDREN UNDER ATTACK

After soldiers killed his brother, 11-year-old Bol left his village in search of safety and became separated from his family. “Along the way, women and young girls were raped, and we were beaten,” he says.

The violent conflict has taken a staggering toll on the new nation’s youngest, whose lives and rights are constantly under threat.

In total, 3,739 incidents of grave violations against children were reported to the United Nations Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism between December 2013 and October 2017. These reported incidents have affected 117,386 children. But those are only the figures that could be documented and the actual numbers are feared to be far higher. Lack of access to some areas, and major reporting challenges make it impossible to document the full scale of the violations.

The reported cases include:

- The recruitment of more than 19,000 children.
- Over 3,200 children abducted.
- More than 1,200 children affected by sexual violence.
- Some 293 incidents of military use and attacks on schools, affecting over 90,000 children.

Children are targeted and killed for their ethnic background or for the political affiliation of their relatives or community members.

Since the beginning of the conflict over 1,200 children have been affected by sexual violence. Ninety-nine per cent (1,190/1,204) of the children were girls. Fear, stigma and shame often accompanies sexual violence. We know that it is only a small percentage of survivors who come forward for help and so the real magnitude of this violence remains unknown.

Children are routinely abducted and forced to join the fighting forces, becoming both victims and perpetrators of grave violations. While progress was made in 2015 when UNICEF oversaw the release of 1,775 children – 13 per cent of them under the age of 13 – recruitment of children has since resumed. More than 19,000 children are currently believed to be associated with armed groups, despite leaders’ commitments to ending child recruitment.

Attacking schools and health centres, and denying children humanitarian aid, are serious violations of children’s rights, while using sexual violence as a weapon of war constitutes a crime against humanity.

Children also have been affected by the breakup of families, in large part because of fighting and displacement. Since the beginning of the crisis, over 16,000 unaccompanied, separated and missing children have been registered for family tracing services. Many children have lost loved ones and witnessed brutal attacks that have left them with deep psychological scars. An estimated 900,000 children suffer from psychosocial distress.

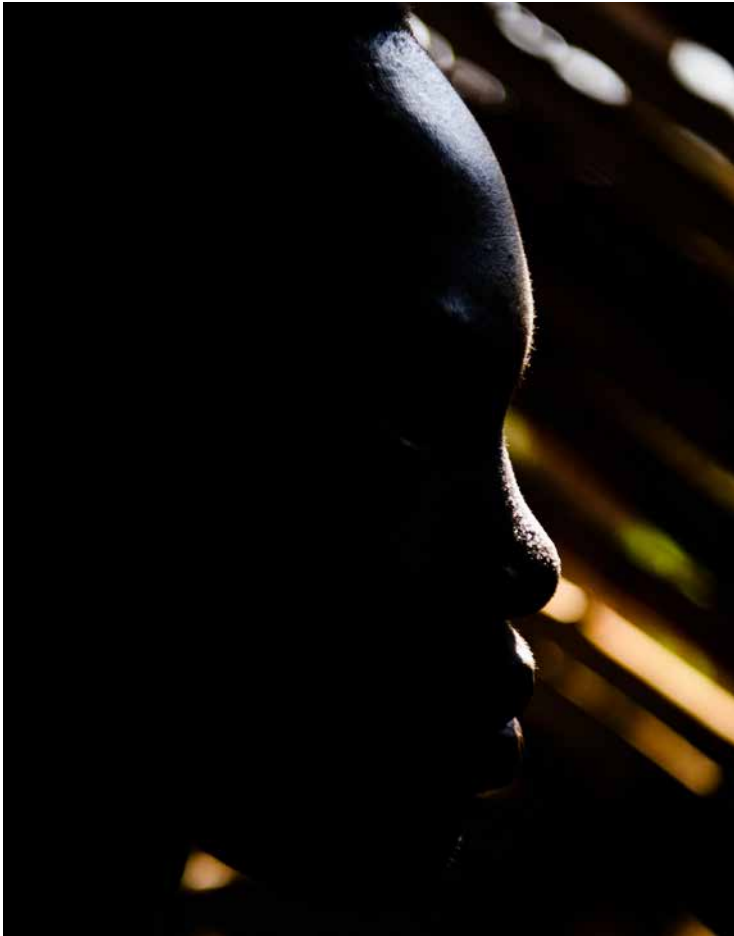
FACTBOX



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CHILDREN UNDER ATTACK

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Yangde, 17 *

Yangde says he was 12 when he joined an armed group in 2012. "We had nothing at home, no food. I thought it was better to go to the bush and join the Yau-Yau rebellion, get my own gun, and fight against the government." Life as a child soldier was tough for him and the other children his age. "We were trained how to shoot and how to fight, but they didn't treat us well. They punished us, told us to cook, bring water, make fire... We lived always on the move, sleeping in the bush. When the enemy defeated us, we'd be running for several hours. There wasn't enough food and there was no water. We didn't even have a jerrycan. You'd just have to wait until the next watering hole." He says he was happy to leave the fighting behind when more than 1,750 children were released by the rebel force.

"I wanted to be released because my colleagues died during operations against the government ... I wanted to forget about the guns." Yangde, who is now 17, says he went straight back to school. "It wasn't going well at first – it's a big difference between the military and school, and it took around three months to change my mindset."

*name changed

UNICEF AND PARTNERS HAVE:

- Helped organize the release of over 1,900 children from armed forces and groups, placing them into reintegration programmes that provide them with psychosocial support, livelihood and educational opportunities.
- UNICEF, UNMISS and the National Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration Commission are currently undertaking joint verification missions in both Jonglei and Western Equatoria to arrange the further release of over 700 children from different armed forces and groups.
- Provided dedicated psychosocial support to almost 230,000 children in 2017 so far.
- By end of October, helped reunite 5,247 separated and unaccompanied children with their immediate families.
- Reached almost 62,000 children with mine risk education in the first six months of 2017.
- Monitored and reported on grave violations against children, and advocated for respect for child rights.
- Provided Gender-Based Violence prevention and response services to over 100,000 women, girls, boys and men.

FACTBOX



FACTBOX



WEAKENED BY CONFLICT AND MALNUTRITION, CHILDREN FACE EXTREME THREATS TO HEALTH

South Sudan's health system, already fragile before the conflict, is at breaking point. Health facilities have been looted or destroyed and many health workers have not been paid. Disease outbreaks have become more widespread, and more deadly.

The conflict has severely restricted access to safe water and basic sanitation facilities. In some areas, the fighting has made it impossible to repair or maintain facilities, while in comparatively safe areas, large influxes of people fleeing the fighting have further strained water and sanitation facilities. In the absence of safe water sources, families draw water directly from contaminated rivers or streams.

The lack of adequate health, water and sanitation services provide fertile ground for the spread of diseases at a time when fighting, displacement and malnutrition have weakened communities, leaving children particularly vulnerable.

Malaria, pneumonia, and diarrhoea are major killers of children in a country where one in every 10 children dies before reaching the age of 5, and almost one in 100 births results in the death of the mother. More than 1.3 million people fell ill with malaria in the first nine months of 2017. Every week, the mosquito-borne disease kills nearly 220 people, most of them children under five.¹

A cholera outbreak, which started in June 2016, could have devastating consequences if it is not brought under control. In the first eight months of 2017, more than 20,112 cases,² including 388 deaths, had been reported. Close to half the cases are among children under the age of 15. Among those affected are communities who live in remote, hard-to-reach areas, and cattle herders, whose movements are difficult to predict. Limited financial resources, and the need to respond to numerous health emergencies simultaneously are further complicating efforts to contain the outbreak.

¹ <http://www.afro.who.int/news/south-sudans-malaria-toll-highlights-disease-burden-war-torn-nation>

² <http://www.afro.who.int/news/south-sudans-malaria-toll-highlights-disease-burden-war-torn-nation>



Mary Nyakuma Peter, 15

A few months ago, Mary Nyakuma Peter lost her 13-year-old sister, who died after suffering from diarrhoea. Mary blames the death on unsafe water.

"I'm feeling so sad about what happened, it was all because of the dirty water, if the clean water was there then she might've not become sick and passed away. We trusted each other all the time and we loved each other."

Waterborne diseases are a major killer of children in South Sudan, where already poor water and sanitation services have been severely affected by the conflict. UNICEF and partners are working hard to improve conditions, including at Mary's school, where a water pump was recently rehabilitated through a USAID-funded initiative.



UNICEF AND PARTNERS HAVE:

- Provided most of the supplies needed for medical management of cholera cases.
- Participated in major awareness-raising campaigns in response to the cholera outbreak and in support of immunizations.
- Provided essential primary health care services to more than 1.5 million people, 44-46 per cent of them children in 2017.
- Vaccinated more than 1.7 million children in conflict areas against measles in 2017.
- Vaccinated some 3 million children against polio in March 2017.
- Provided maternal, newborn and HIV services to more than 81,318 women in 2017.
- Provided more than 755,000 people with access to safe water, and about 230,000 with access to appropriate sanitation facilities in 2017.
- Since March 2014, participated together with the World Food Programme, in 140 joint rapid response missions to provide life-saving support to more than two million people, including over 400,000 children under five. Small teams, travelling by plane or helicopter, deliver supplies, conduct vaccinations and provide health and malnutrition treatment to children and mothers in remote areas.

CHILDREN DEPRIVED OF EDUCATION



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