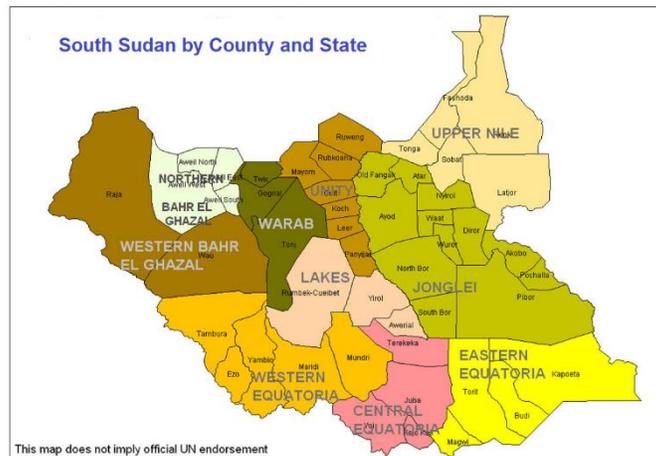




SOUTH SUDAN: 10 YEARS SINCE INDEPENDENCE



Introduction:

Ten years ago, the people of South Sudan voted almost unanimously to secede and create their own independent nation. Tragically, after initial celebrations came years of brutal conflict, hunger, poverty, and economic instability – but throughout it all, communities have held on to the promise of their new nation.

Oxfam In South Sudan’s Country Director, Adil Al-Mahi said:

“Ten years since South Sudan gained its independence, intercommunal violence, hunger, extreme climate impacts – and now the COVID-19 pandemic - continue to plague the nation. Just over six months ago, it was declared that hunger levels were at “famine-likely” levels in Pibor, along with a dire report warning of extreme hunger across the country.

“Despite frustratingly slow progress, women are continuing to push for their rightful place in making the decisions at all levels to forge peace and shape the nation’s future. All parties must prioritize reaching a sustainable, inclusive peace and work together to solve their collective challenges. This anniversary is the perfect time for South Sudanese leaders and communities to recommit to push for peace and work together to tackle the issues they face and can solve together.”

Insecurity and Governance:

Insecurity continues in many parts of the country and increased efforts through dialogue, reconciliation, and mediation are needed to sustain peace at all levels. While the intensity of fighting has decreased in recent years since the signing of the R-ARCSS, South Sudan’s leaders continue to struggle to implement the Revitalized Peace Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS).

The formation of the revitalized unity government was an important step forward in South Sudan's journey towards sustainable peace, but it was not the last. Security remains tenuous in many parts of the country. This included provisions for the formation of required institutions and mechanisms, joint local peacebuilding activities, and an improved environment for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to many areas. In addition, all 10 ten states governors and deputies have been appointed, including commissioners. Local government executives and technocrats have been appointed, but there is still work to do to ensure gender equity: 90% of the appointed Governors are male whereas 10% (1) is female; 70% (7) of Deputy Governors are male while 30% (3) are female.

Although the peace agreement is holding, pockets of organized conflicts and intercommunal violence have continued. Escalated violence between armed groups has forced nearly 2.3 million South Sudanese to flee to neighbouring countries and displaced nearly 1.9 million others, the majority of whom women are children. Women continue to face additional challenges, including gender-based violence, unequal access to aid and other resources, and continued lack of representation in leadership.

Hunger:

In the world's youngest country, the current hunger situation is at its highest levels since independence was declared, with 82% of the population living in extreme poverty, and 60% - or 7.2 million – currently facing crisis levels of hunger. In three states, 108,000 people are currently suffering famine-like conditions. Children and women are most impacted by the food crisis, as over 15% of children under five are stunted, and over one-third of women of reproductive age are anaemic.

While people go hungry, the risk of disease spreading also increases. Food insecurity continues to remain a key challenge as levels of malnutrition also increase. Malnutrition weakens the immune system, making the body more susceptible to disease and lessening its capacity to fight off illness. Similarly, unsafe water and sanitation can cause diarrhea, which prevents the retention of water and nutrients required to survive. Diarrhea is an increased threat risk in flood-affected communities, such as in Pibor and Akobo states that have reported higher-than-usual levels of open defecation and access only to contaminated water sources that cause illness.

The threat of malaria and cholera, which rise in the rainy season, and the new risk of the spread of COVID-19, are severe risks for vulnerable communities. An added climate-related issue impacting food security is the recurring threat of locusts, which have impacted some communities already with crops destroyed in some parts on Eastern Equatoria.

COVID-19:

On top of all of these ongoing challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken lives and put more pressure on the efforts to reach peace and stability. South Sudan has officially registered nearly 11,000 cases of COVID-19 and 117 deaths as of July 7, 2021. While some activities related to implementation may have to be put on hold to keep South Sudan safe from the spread of the virus, continued implementation of the peace agreement – to the greatest extent possible – and the commitment of all parties to the ceasefire will be especially important to ensure vulnerable communities receive the assistance they need during this crisis. The pandemic has shown just how important it is to end conflict and have united leadership to respond and save lives.

Climate:

The severe floods that impacted the country in 2019 and 2020 affected an estimated 856,000 people and caused the displacement of hundreds of civilians. Although the flooding has subsided, areas in Jonglei, Upper Nile, Lakes and Unity states continue to be severely impacted. Water sources have been contaminated by floods and communities are increasingly at risk of water-

borne diseases like cholera and diarrhea. The already limited and fragile healthcare infrastructure has been impacted by the floods and are therefore not always functional. In addition, displaced people, often in remote areas, do not have access to healthcare and are put further at risk during this rainy season. Continued above-normal rainfall will jeopardize future agricultural activities.

Gender Justice:

South Sudan is one of the most dangerous countries in the world to be a woman. Most women cannot access basic health and education, and experience unspeakable acts of sexual violence and abuse. Up to 65% of women and girls will experience sexual and/or physical violence in their lifetime. One in five pregnant women dies in childbirth. Of the children still in school, only 40% are girls. According to the UN, an adolescent girl in South Sudan is three times more likely to die in childbirth than to complete primary school.

There has been a spike in sexual and gender-based violence against the backdrop of COVID-19. The ongoing financial crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic has also placed increasing pressures on female learners to support income-generating activities for their households, which will make it difficult for them to return to being students when schools re-open.

Oxfam's Response:

Oxfam has operated in what is now South Sudan for over 30 years and currently works from 6 bases across the country to respond to the humanitarian crisis. As well as meeting the most urgent needs, we're supporting people to become stronger to survive the shocks of conflict, insecurity and natural disasters, and to thrive by training with more productive farming techniques, developing business skills, and promoting access to education.

Oxfam is continuing its response with a new focus on the impacts of COVID-19. Oxfam is providing clean water and sanitation supplies and promoting public health, distributing food with WPF or providing cash to meet food needs, helping families produce their own food and incomes, supporting education, and advocating alongside South Sudanese civil society for women to have a voice and the chance to lead.

Aid provided by organizations like Oxfam is largely credited with saving lives and supporting people in urgent need since fighting started in December 2013. The crisis in South Sudan is also a political one, which is why Oxfam also invests in good governance work because until some of these governance issues are addressed the humanitarian problems will continue.

Recommendations:

- **Fully fund the South Sudan 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan** to reach 6.6 million people - out of 8.3 million people estimated to be in need - with urgent life-saving assistance and protection by the end of the year. Of the US\$1.68B total required in the plan, only US\$500M (roughly 30%) has been funded to date. While the U.S. is the top donor contributing over US\$364M to date, more is required from all donors to ensure the Plan is fully funded.
 - The South Sudanese government must ensure that there is safe humanitarian access to the most vulnerable and hard to reach populations.
- **Humanitarian assistance funding should be complemented by increased investment in longer-term resilience activities and development assistance:**
 - Support tailored long-term investments in food security and livelihoods.
 - Increase funding for transportation access and the development of infrastructure, especially for year-long road access to the most vulnerable populations.
- **Redouble efforts to ensure sustainable peace and stability, with a focus on women's engagement in the peace process.** The regional and international community must continue

to reinvigorate actions to realize peace, urge parties to commit to the peace agreement, and ensure that all South Sudanese, especially women, can participate in peace in a meaningful way.

- The South Sudanese government, the regional leaders, and the international community must commit to implementing the 35% quota for women's representation at every level of authority.
 - Harmful practices, like child marriage and gender-based violence, must be addressed as a matter of priority for the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity. Donors should direct more funding to community-led efforts that help to tackle gender-based violence and child marriage.
 - The South Sudanese government should, with support of UNMISS, stop inter-communal violence with funds for peace building and conflict mitigation, and prioritize the protection of women including calling for an end to sexual and gender-based violence.
 - The South Sudanese government should open political space for Civil Society Organizations to freely engage in civic activities.
 - Donors and humanitarian agencies must support female-led and women's rights organizations, as well as education and awareness raising activities that challenge existing norms and expectations that marginalise and oppress women and girls.
- **Ensure that response to the COVID-19 pandemic fully takes a gender perspective into account.**
 - Ensure appropriate gender expertise in interventions and proactive efforts to reach vulnerable women and girls in programming, including water and sanitation and food security activities.
 - Ensure the continuation and enhancement of protection services, including gender-based violence prevention, mitigation, and response.