

Fear and Want: Children living in crisis in South Sudan

Executive Summary

One year ago, hundreds of thousands of children's lives were uprooted when violence broke out in South Sudan. Today, those children live in fear of violence, are out of school, are unable to return home, and face risks to the rights they – like children all over the world – are entitled to.

After a peaceful independence referendum in 2011, the people of South Sudan were filled with hope that, as the world's youngest country, they could finally leave behind decades of war and forge a brighter future. But the promise of a better life for most South Sudanese was shattered in December 2013, when the country descended into conflict.

In 2014, three years after the world's newest country was born, more than one in three (3.8 million) people require humanitarian assistance.¹ Close to two million people have fled their homes – 400,000 to neighbouring countries.² Several states in South Sudan have seen significant levels of violence, particularly in Upper Nile, Unity and Jonglei states. Some 100,000 people are taking shelter inside United Nations Protection of Civilians³ sites across the country, where they have fled to escape violence.⁴ Millions more have taken refuge in communities and surrounding areas, leaving them unprotected and, for those in hard to reach areas, without access to life-saving aid.

In May 2014, ahead of the Oslo Donor Conference, World Vision published a report on the situation of children in South Sudan, warning decision makers that 'unless urgent measures are taken things will get unimaginably worse' for children.⁵ Sadly, six months later the situation has further deteriorated. More children have been displaced; more have been recruited into armed groups and forces; and more have been separated from their families.

According to UNICEF, out of an estimated 748,000 internally displaced children, 400,000 children are out of school; more than 11,000 children have been recruited into armed groups and forces; and over 6,600 children have been separated from their families.⁶ As 60 per cent of South Sudanese people are under 18, these numbers indicate a grim future for the children of South Sudan, some of whom have already lived through a civil war.⁷

¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'South Sudan Crisis Situation Report No. 60', 30 October 2014,

² United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'South Sudan Crisis Situation Report No. 58', 16 October 2014

³ Protection of Civilians sites (POCs) were established on United Nations Mission in South Sudan bases in December 2013, when civilians sought shelter because of violence. Currently ten POCs across the country host about 100,000 people.

⁴ UNICEF, 'South Sudan Humanitarian Situation Report', 21 October 2014.

⁵ World Vision, *Sounding the Alarm: The urgent needs of children in South Sudan*, May 2014.

⁶ UNICEF, 'South Sudan Humanitarian Situation Report', 21 October 2014.; UNICEF, 'South Sudan Humanitarian Situation Report', No. 19 for 15–21 April; UNIMSS, *Conflict in South Sudan: A Human Rights Report*, 8 May 2014, page 17.

⁷ South Sudan Education Cluster, *Education in South Sudan Cannot Wait*, 16 June 2014.

While emergency programmes have received 63 per cent of the funding needed from international donors, programmes that ensure the protection of people, particularly children, are not even half funded.⁸

World Vision spoke to 160 children in three areas in Central Equatoria and Upper Nile states to find out how they are living and what risks they are coping with every day. Their experiences give a snapshot of the wider conflict and how it is affecting children, and World Vision believes it provides a valuable, unexplored window into the experiences of children and families across the conflict-affected areas of South Sudan.

What children told us

Children live in fear. They believe that the armed conflict may again be directed at them and their families. Many remember when armed men forced them to leave their homes, and most experience fear and distress without the comfort or familiarity of home.

Every child we spoke to expressed a desire to return to school. They say school provides them with a sense of stability, but going to school is often not possible, as the education system in the three most conflict-affected states is severely affected and under resourced. Since the beginning of the crisis, over 1,100 schools in the most affected states (Jonglei, Upper Nile and Unity) have been closed.⁹ In addition, 124 schools are reported as being used for military purposes in violation of international law, according to the United Nations.¹⁰

Children say they spend more time working – sometimes in hazardous or harmful conditions – and that this has replaced time spent learning. Children are expected to generate an income for their families through jobs such as tending market stalls or transporting goods. If this trend continues, and children are working rather than going to school, then the foundation for a peaceful and prosperous future in South Sudan will continue to erode. Protecting children from abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence must be a priority for all those responding to the crisis in South Sudan.

Children's needs are clear:

- End the conflict.
- Enable them to return home.
- Protect them from harm.
- Return them to school.

Perry Mansfield, National Director – World Vision South Sudan

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'In the future, I am afraid of the war. People will be killed again. The shelter does not feel okay. I want to leave to Ethiopia. I am afraid we will run again.'

'They keep going back and forth to Addis to talk about peace, but there is no peace. The whole world is watching and doing nothing and there is still no peace.'

Elizabeth, 15, Tamping Protection of Civilians site, Juba

⁸ Financial Tracking Services, 'Strategic Response Plan(s): Republic of South Sudan - Crisis Response Plan 2014', 2014

⁹ South Sudan Education Cluster, 16 June 2014.

¹⁰ UN Report of the Secretary-General on South Sudan, 30 September 2014.