



THE STATE OF THE WORLD POPULATION REPORT 2020: CONFRONTING THE SILENT AND ENDEMIC CRISIS OF HARMFUL PRACTICES

Every year, millions of girls are subjected to practices that harm them physically and emotionally, with the full knowledge and consent of their families, friends and communities, according to the State of World Population 2020, released by UNFPA, the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency.

At least 19 harmful practices, ranging from breast ironing to virginity testing, are considered human rights violations, according to the UNFPA report, which focuses on the three most prevalent ones: female genital mutilation, child marriage, and extreme bias against daughters in favor of sons.

In South Sudan, the most prevalent of these harmful practices is child marriage, with 45 per cent of girls married off before the age of 18.

“Such practices may be explained under the guise of tradition, religion or culture. Women and girls have fewer choices as a result and are more likely to have choices made for them that put them under the sexual, legal and economic control of men,” said UNFPA Country Representative Dr. Mary Otieno, during the launch of the report in South Sudan.

Today, 33,000 girls under age 18 will be forced into marriages, usually too much older men. Also, an extreme preference for sons over daughters in some countries has fueled gender-biased sex selection or extreme neglect that leads to their death as children, resulting in 140 million “missing females,” according to the report.

Various human rights bodies have called on all governments to protect women, girls and all adolescents from all harmful practices. The obligation to eliminate harmful practices is explicitly mentioned in several international human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

HIGHLIGHTS

- State of the World report 2020
- UN supports the establishment of a peace center for Journalists
- UNMAS coordinates prevention and mitigation of COVID-19 during Mine Action operations
- UNICEF: Continuing its regular programmes while responding to COVID-19



In South Sudan, the most prevalent of the harmful practices is child marriage, with 45 per cent of girls married off before the age of 18. Keeping adolescent girls in school is one way to keep them out of child marriage. Photo Credit: UNFPA

Mr. Alain Noudehou, Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General to South Sudan, said the Sustainable Development Goals cannot be achieved without empowering women and girls. “We can make this happen by taking down barriers including harmful cultural and traditional practices. The achievement of gender equality, women’s rights and women’s empowerment can make a significant contribution to poverty-reduction, inclusive growth, democratic governance, and peace and justice,” he said.

Vice President Rebecca Garang, who launched the report with UNFPA through a virtual event, said eliminating harmful practices will require multi-sectoral and joint actions. She acknowledged the UN Joint Programme to End Gender-Based Violence as an example.

“We need such joint actions that go beyond one solo action to harnessing the strength of each actor towards our shared vision of ending gender-based violence and harmful traditional practices in South Sudan,” she said.

Hon. Aya Benjamin Warile, Minister of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, said the Government of South

Sudan has taken promising steps by accession to various international and regional normative frameworks that uphold the rights of the women and girls.

To date, South Sudan has ratified or acceded to five out of the nine core International human rights Instruments and the Constitution reaffirms the right to equality, including gender-based equality, the minister said.

While progress has been made in ending some harmful practices worldwide, the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to reverse gains. A recent analysis revealed that if services and programmes remain shuttered for six months, an additional 13 million girls may be forced into marriage and 2 million more girls may be subjected to female genital mutilation between now and 2030.

Mr. Urban Sjostrom, head of the Embassy of Sweden in Juba, emphasized that responding to the call of the State of World Population report is especially important now that the world faces the COVID-19 pandemic, which is heavily affecting women and girls.

“(Women and girls) are especially hit hard by restrictions imposed by many countries as this seriously undermines their ability to obtain basic services and infringes upon their basic rights,” Mr. Sjostrom said. The full report is available at <https://southsudan.unfpa.org/en/publications>

NEWS FROM UN AGENCIES, FUNDS AND PROGRAMMES

UN SUPPORTS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PEACE CENTRE FOR JOURNALISTS



Peace Center for Journalists launched at AMDISS. Photo Credit: UNESCO

UNESCO and UNDP through the UN Peace Building Fund Programme in partnership with the Association for Media Development in South Sudan launched and handed over a fully established Peace Centre for journalists with the aim to promote Peace Education, Research and Access to Information.

The Peace Centre fully stocked with computers and internet will be accessed by at least 20 journalists per day and targeting 100 journalists every week.

Strengthening capacities of local media must be prioritized in order to ensure a sustainable transition to peace and democracy. Understanding the role of media its contribution to conflict resolution is essential if civil society organizations, journalism educators, media associations and journalists are to play an important role in the promotion of peace and reconciliation.

Ms. Josephine Achiro, Chairperson Community Media Network South Sudan, noted that community media plays a key role in promoting democracy, good governance and setting the agenda for its citizens, roles that cannot be underrated. She, therefore, called-on for community media policies to be strengthened to ensure progress and growth of the community media sector in South Sudan. Growth and sustainability of the sector will benefit many citizens specially those at the grassroots and marginalized groups.

PREVENTION AND MITIGATION OF COVID-19 DURING MINE ACTION OPERATIONS

Despite the fast spread of COVID-19, UNMAS has maintained its operational capacity to provide lifesaving, emergency responses and to support critical partners and the civilian population to mitigate the threats posed by explosive ordnance in South Sudan.

To ensure a safe and secure environment in the rapidly evolving situation, UNMAS is coordinating the development of guidelines on mitigation measures for COVID-19 during mine action operations in collaboration with implementing partners.

The document will be annexed to the National Technical Standards and Guidelines (NTSGs) for humanitarian mine action operations in South Sudan, a living document that serves as a reference for mine action implementation within the local context and defines quality assurance standards and accreditation criteria in the country.



This anti-personnel mine was handed over to the UNMAS team in Juba, Central Equatoria by a South Sudan People's Defense Force soldier in May

Photo Credit: UNMAS

UNICEF: CONTINUING ITS REGULAR PROGRAMMES WHILE RESPONDING TO COVID-19

Since the beginning of its COVID-19 response in South Sudan, UNICEF has procured and distributed supplies worth 5 million USD to help contain the spread of the virus in the country. Supplies include personal protective equipment (PPE) for front line health workers, pharmaceuticals to treat symptoms among infected people, water, sanitation and hygiene commodities to prevent and control infections among households and in health facilities, as well as information, communication and educational materials to sensitize and engage local communities on preventive public health measures.

While UNICEF is engaged in the response to the COVID-19 disease along with its partners, it continues as much as possible to implement its regular programmes to ensure access to critical and life-saving health and nutrition services for children, to provide remote learning opportunities for children, to guarantee access to water, sanitation and hygiene to the most in need, and to organize child protection services. See <https://www.unicef.org/southsudan/press-centre>



Immunization in Juba. Photo Credit: UNICEF

UNMISS HELPS CHILDREN MOVE FROM LESSONS UNDER ANCIENT TREES TO BRAND NEW CLASSROOMS IN WESTERN EQUATORIA

Under the branches of an ancient tree in Bazumburu, children gather together, excited and eager to hear the wise words of their teacher. Their only option for education is to take lessons in the open air because their classrooms were destroyed during the South Sudan conflict.



The new classroom block in Bazumburu constructed by UNMISS.

Photo Credit: UNMISS

Whether under the sweltering sun in the dry season or in heavy downpours during the seasonal rains, the children turn up, day after day, for these outdoor lessons. UNMISS peacekeepers on regular patrols in Western Equatoria were moved by the plight of these children.

They were inspired to build them a new school under the Quick Impact Project scheme, so they have the chance to learn and reach their full potential.

“Despite the conflict in South Sudan, we always say: “let us give the child a pen and a book instead of giving the child bullets and guns,” said Moses Baggari, UNMISS Child Protection Assistant. The local community tirelessly joined the construction effort to support their children.

“Previously when it rained, we closed the school and children were sent home. But now we are very happy because these newly built classrooms will give our children a better learning environment,” said Bazumburu resident, Mary Sebit.

UNHCR USES MUSIC TO SEND OUT COVID-19 PREVENTION MESSAGES

“It’s not the end of the world, don’t panic. “This is the beginning of a special song composed by the community youth in Wau – Western Bahr el Ghazal State, to boost the COVID-19 risk communication campaign.

Youth from the IDP and the host communities, in collaboration with community mobilizers were supported by UNHCR and International Medical Corps to create and recorded a series of songs, dramas, and voice messages on COVID-19.

The songs feature key topics endorsed by the Ministry of Health. They are currently broadcasted on the radio in 6 different languages. And this is not all, the creative group has also renovated UNHCR external office’s walls to reach out to people with hearing impairment. Listen to the full song here: [link](#)



The UNHCR external office walls have been painted with COVID-19 key messages targeting people with hearing impairment.

Photo Credit: UNHCR

WHO AND UK HANDS OVER 160 OXYGEN CONCENTRATORS TO SUPPORT THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH IN THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19 IN SOUTH SUDAN



The WHO Country Representative, Dr. Olu, handing over the donation certificate to Dr. Mayen, Under Secretary, Ministry of Health in the Presence of Chris Trott. Photo Credit: WHO

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) today handed over 160 oxygen concentrators to South Sudan’s Ministry of Health to support the country’s in their response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The 160 oxygen concentrators will be distributed across the country to treat patients requiring oxygen.

Supplemental oxygen is the first essential step for the treatment of severe COVID-19 patients with low blood oxygen levels and should be a primary focus for treatment in countries like South Sudan.

“We are grateful to receive the best type of oxygen concentrators”, said Dr Mayen Machut Achiek, Undersecretary at the Ministry of Health while receiving the donation certificate. “The 160 oxygen concentrators from the People of Great Britain to the People of South Sudan will be used to treat severely ill patients with respiratory distress at designated COVID-19 treatment health-care facilities”.

“We are very pleased that DFID’s multilateral contributions to WHO are making a difference in South Sudan”, said Chris Trott, British Ambassador to South Sudan. “Preventing transmission of the disease in the first place is key but these oxygen concentrators will be crucial in treating the most severe cases”. [Read more](#)

THE FACES BEHIND THE MASKS: WFP AND LOCAL NGO INITIATIVE EMPOWERS WOMEN

At the Women’s Advancement Organization’s (WAO) headquarters in Munuki, tailors abound and the sound of sewing machines fills the air. WAO mostly employs single mothers struggling to eke out a living due to the impact of COVID-19 to make face masks. Through support from WFP, the organization is changing their lives for the better.

Women like Naila Peter can now put food on their tables. “If it wasn’t for this initiative, I would be sitting at home and struggling.” WFP has bought over 10,000 masks from this inspiring initiative for its staff and contractors. Visit <https://insight.wfp.org/the-faces-behind-the-face-masks-98a9e2320656> for the full story.



Naila Peter is among the women that WAO employs to make face masks. Photo Credit: WFP

COMMUNITY MEDIA STAKEHOLDERS KEEN ON PROMOTING COMMUNITY MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY IN SOUTH SUDAN

Community media stakeholders from over twenty broadcast community radio stations participated in a two-day media engagement in Juba.

The 2-day stakeholders' workshop aimed at exploring ways to further strengthen sustainability of the community media sector in the country at both policy and practice levels.

Over the years, community radio has proved to be effective in providing platforms for marginalized groups to access information, providing opportunities for the women and youth to participate in community matters/issues.

During the 2-day stakeholders' engagement, Community Media Sustainability and the UNESCO Policy Series on Community Media Sustainability were discussed, and key recommendations developed with the aim to strengthen community media sustainability in South Sudan.

MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT BRINGS OPTIMISM TO WOMEN'S GROUP IN WAU, SOUTH SUDAN



Members of the Women's Support Group at the Cathedral Collective Centre in Wau, South Sudan. Photo Credit: IOM

A group of women sit under a large mango tree inside the Cathedral Collective Centre in Wau. They sit barefoot with their legs stretched out under the tree that boasts succulent yellow mangoes hanging low from the branches. Scattered around is a kaleidoscope of beautiful kitenge cloth, a popular African wax fabric made up of colorful prints.



Community media stakeholders pose for a picture after a meeting.

Photo Credit: UNESCO

This group which include widows, young mothers and survivors of GBV are part of the IOM's Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Women's Support Group. MHPSS trains different cohorts of women on various skills, including sewing and craft making, to help the women generate a small income. MHPSS team uses the trainings as an avenue to offer the women psychosocial support creating a safe space that allows the women to discuss different issues including situations at home.

Thirty-seven-year-old Christina Gabriel Mongu is a member of the Women's Support Group. She lives in the Collective Centre with her husband and eight children, aged between 9 years and eighteen years old. The close-knit family as Christina describes it, came to the Collective Centre after South Sudan descended into a second wave of conflict in July 2016. Before then they were living in a village called Ndokala, a 40-minute drive from Wau town.

Each member of the group can keep a few items — dresses, skirts that they make, and the rest of the items are pooled together and sold by for an average price of 1,000 South Sudanese Pounds, approximately USD 6 at local trade fairs. Profits are shared between members to supplement their needs at home; The money generated is also used to buy more material for making more items. Members spend an average of three months in one group focusing on developing one skill then at the end of the period they rotate to another group.

IOM's MHPSS team uses the training in sewing, dressmaking and beadwork as an avenue to offer psychosocial support to the women. The team has created a safe space that allows the women to discuss issues on different topics including situations at home. IOM's Psychosocial Support (PSS) facilitators and animators are always present during the activities encouraging the women to express their ideas, opinions and perspectives freely. The presence of facilitators also helps to instill respect and compassion between members. Read full [story](#)