



WORLD FOOD DAY 16th October 2020

URGENT NEED TO STRENGTHEN FOOD SYSTEMS AS COVID-19 DRIVES UP NUMBERS OF HUNGRY PEOPLE IN SOUTH SUDAN

In late March, South Sudan closed all its borders in an attempt to contain the spread of COVID-19, sending a wave of uncertainty throughout the humanitarian community, especially as the start of the pandemic coincided with the lean season and beginning of the main planting season.

Delivering timely emergency assistance and livelihood support to the most vulnerable people in South Sudan became more crucial than ever.

The pandemic of COVID-19 comes at a critical time when many of the humanitarian achievements over the last thirty years in fighting hunger and malnutrition as well as alleviating poverty around the world are being reversed due to a rise in conflict and climate shocks.

In South Sudan, the virus has exposed the fragility of our agri-food systems and is threatening to push millions of people into hunger. This has rekindled our appreciation of food – which some around the world take for granted but many go without.

An Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis, a tool for improving food security analysis and decision-making, conducted in January 2020, estimated that 6.5 million South Sudanese would be severely food insecure from May to July and face varying degrees of

difficulties in accessing food. In July, the projections already estimated that 7.5 million people—over 60 percent of the 11.7 million—living in South Sudan need humanitarian assistance. Additionally, over 9 million are highly reliant on agricultural activities such as farming, fishing and herding, and therefore more prone to severe food insecurity when faced with shocks and stressors.

TRIPLE BURDEN

The unprecedented triple threat of desert locusts, flooding and COVID-19 colluded against the main planting season, causing significant supply shocks due to cross-border restrictions, interrupting access to grazing and watering points for livestock-rearing households and causing shortages of farm labor, especially for high-value crops and small-scale farmers. This increased the cost of doing business due to interrupted supply chains, resulting in the loss of household incomes and substantial disruption of livelihoods. In addition, agriculture extension and advisory services have also faced severe impacts from lockdown measures, reducing farmers' access during critical growing periods.

COVID-19 disrupted the agriculture supply chain, meaning farmers who access inputs from markets were unable to acquire good quality seeds or farming tools.

Movement restrictions also affected other productive sectors such as livestock and fisheries, limiting access to pastures, watering points and fishing grounds for those whose livelihoods depend on these activities.

In line with this year's theme of World Food Day "Grow, Nourish, Sustain. Together," as the world continues to battle the pandemic, we need to put in place collective measures and act to re-grow, to nourish once again and to ensure our efforts are sustainable for future generations.

BUILDING BACK TOGETHER

It is fundamental that the humanitarian community collaborates with governments to treat food production, transport, marketing and distribution as essential services and ensure decent incomes for smallholder farmers and food chain workers. Agricultural activities must help to avert worsening food security, and livelihoods support needs to be maintained and scaled up so households cultivate and ideally expand productivity.

With compounding and intensifying vulnerabilities, social protection programmes including cash-based interventions and the provision of basic services must be a central policy response to COVID-19. The United Nations has adapted many of its programmes, modifying activities, scaling up some while reducing others to optimize their positive impact on livelihoods.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) – this year's Nobel Peace Prize Laureate – have identified several critical pathways to building resilient livelihoods systems, seeking to protect, restore, and improve agricultural livelihoods and increase the resilience of households and communities to shocks and stressors that impact agriculture, nutrition and food security.

Through its resilience portfolio, WFP is providing livelihood support across the country to increase agricultural production and address productivity constraints while providing food assistance in the form of rations to meet short-term hunger gaps. WFP also offers to buy households' surplus for use in WFP's home-grown school feeding programme and enhances market opportunities to smallholder farmers who produce a surplus to generate supplementary income, connecting them to quality markets.

Through WFP's resilience programming, the 2019-2020 harvesting season saw 40 000 hectares of farmland cultivated, 10 500 farmers trained and the distribution of 30 000 post-harvest loss reduction technologies.

WFP's Food Assistance for Assets (FFA) offers communities the ability to create assets that serve them. In 2019, FFA activities supported the construction of 460 km of community access roads and helped households in cultivating 38 000 hectares of cropland and vegetable gardens.

An ongoing Seed System Security Assessment conducted by FAO, reveals the potential availability of up to 2 000 metric tonnes of assorted crop seed from nine counties. Such potential availability will be utilized to fill the supply gap created by COVID-19, using distribution modalities such as voucher systems.

During the 2020 main planting season, FAO distributed 10 000 metric tonnes of seeds and tools to vulnerable populations in need also in most remote areas. Through cash voucher interventions, FAO is supporting almost 400 000 people and injecting almost USD 2 million in support of national seed traders, suppliers and producers while enabling farmers buy seed of their choice. FAO also provided assorted crop and vegetable seed kits to support 4.6 million people during the 2020 agricultural season.

In urban areas, WFP and FAO are mitigating the impact of COVID-19 by boosting productive capacities of city dwellers to access healthy food and generate income. Through their satellite offices, exceptional logistical capacity and robust business continuity plans, the agencies were able to continue delivering support in the country.

CALL TO ACTION

The humanitarian community at large has supported South Sudan since the country was born in 2011 and must now step up and respond to new challenges. Addressing the country's deficiencies and minimizing both the short- and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 crisis requires action.

This must be quick, sizeable, in line with national responses and systems, coordinated across sectors and agencies, and build on existing initiatives and networks, guided constantly by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Agricultural activities must continue to help avert worsening food security and livelihoods support needs to be maintained and scaled up so households cultivate and ideally expand productivity.

However, no action can aspire to be transformative if it fails to be collective or inclusive. Countries, the private sector and civil society, all of us, need to make sure that our food systems grow a variety of food to nourish a growing population and sustain the planet, together.



NEWS FROM UN AGENCIES, FUNDS AND PROGRAMS

PROVIDING SAFE DRINKING WATER TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN SOUTH SUDAN'S CAPITAL



The hybrid solar system water Yard in Hai Baraka. Photo Credit IOM

Chants of cheers on a sunny Saturday morning in Hai Baraka, just on the outskirts of South Sudan's capital city, Juba.

The people of Hai Baraka are celebrating the official inauguration of a water yard constructed by the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) unit, marking a new chapter for the community.

Years of lack of access to safe drinking water in the vicinity of the community brought an amplitude of problems; women and girls being the most affected as they are disproportionately exposed to the risk of gender-based violence as they find themselves having to walk long distances to fetch water for their households.

"This water system has come at the right time especially since the dry season is fast approaching," says 38-year-old Ester Kenneth, a resident of Hai Baraka and the Women's Representative in the community. "Getting water has been very difficult for us.

"We used to fetch water from a stream which is a 30-minute walk from here or we had to buy water from the trucks which we could not afford," adds the mother of four.

In 2018, following an assessment which showed that Hai Baraka did not have any existing boreholes or safe sources for water, IOM's WASH team set out to drill boreholes in the area.

The complex geology of the area led to IOM striking groundwater in only one of the 4 boreholes drilled. As expected, this did not meet the needs of the community.

"We faced a lot of challenges when drilling the boreholes – the ground too hard and geology not favorable to encounter

groundwater," says IOM's WASH Operations Officer, Juliette de Gaultier Laguionie. "But that did not deter us, the people of Hai Baraka needed water and our team was determined to respond to this need."

In order to meet the high demand and assist a larger proportion of the population, IOM's WASH team upgraded the borehole to a larger scale infrastructure. The work which started in July 2020 was completed in August.

"When the borehole was built, it eased our problems because we had access to safe water nearby and we saw a great reduction in the number of sicknesses in our community," says Ester Kenneth. "Before, diseases like malaria, diarrhea, cholera were very common here," she says.

Read the full story: [here](#)

UNICEF CAMPAIGNS AGAINST CHILD MARRIAGE

Linked to the International Day of the Girl Child celebrated on 11 October, UNICEF has rolled-out a campaign against child marriage in South Sudan.

During the campaign girls had the opportunity to express themselves about child marriage through radio shows, blog stories posted on www.unicef.org/southsudan and an editorial in The Dawn and Juba Monitor.

To create awareness for the issue of child marriage, ads were published in several newspapers and the campaign visual was hang on different billboards in Juba. UNICEF will continue to advocate to end child marriage in the coming months. It will work in close collaboration with UNFPA and the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare.



The campaign visual for the end child marriage campaign.

Photo Credit: UNICEF



UNMAS RELEASED LAND IN MOGIRI, CENTRAL EQUATORIA TO ENCOURAGE LIVELIHOODS

Since 21 September, UNMAS has cleared and released 34,800 m² of land to the local communities in Mogiri, Central Equatoria, including areas along the planned Juba-Bor highway.

Part of the land was a former battlefield and was polluted with abandoned munitions and unexploded ordnance from past conflicts.

“People in Mogiri are going to benefit from the cleared land. I will start cultivating crops. I thank UNMAS for sending a team to clear our precious land,” said James Wani, a local farmer.

The clearance also enabled the road construction company to continue to build the Juba-Bor highway which will allow the local community to benefit from improved infrastructure and development opportunities.



A deminer used a metal detector to detect potential explosive hazards for removal and destruction in Mogiri, Central Equatoria.

Photo Credit: UNMAS

SOUTH SUDAN COMMEMORATES THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO INFORMATION

South Sudan joined the rest of the world to commemorate the International Day for Universal Access to Information that took place from 28-29 September 2020 in Juba. UNESCO in Partnership with the Information Commission brought together stakeholders from government, media, academia and CSOs.

This year’s national celebration was marked under the theme: “Access to Information in Times of Crisis”.

The theme was timely, as it sought to tackle the significance of access to information in times of crisis and advocate for the strengthening of associated legal frameworks and ensure their implementation.



Ms. Ayaa Irene making her presentation on the role of media in promoting Access to Information in times of crisis.

Photo Credit: UNESCO

At the event, Hon. Baba Medan, Deputy Minister for Information, Telecommunication and Postal services, said; “Access to Information is a right that every citizen should enjoy, he further stated that the government was committed to ensuring implementation of this right, as it’s the only means through which citizens can access information on health matters, peace and the nation building process”.

JOINED-UP EFFORTS UNDERWAY TO ALLEVIATE HUNGER AND BUILD SELF-RELIANCE IN YEI AND LASU

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency continue to work to enhance food security for forcibly displaced. In Yei and Lasu refugee camp, UNHCR and its partner MASS, along with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the Ministry of Agriculture tested food crop seeds for viability before distribution to some 900 families.

Rolled out in May 2020, the project aims at supporting farmers to increase crop production through the provision of quality seeds including maize, tomatoes, eggplant and okra. Training for 170 refugees, internally displaced and host community farmers also took place on crop management, post-harvest handling and pest management, key elements for sustainable farming, improving livelihoods and self-reliance.

In addition, MASS with support of UMCOR distributed over 10,000 fruit plant tree seedlings to 950 families, aimed at providing a nutritional safety net and income generation for communities affected by displacement.



Six species of fruit trees to be distributed to farmers.

Photo Credit UNHCR

POLIO EXPERTISE STEERS THE COVID-19 RESPONSE IN SOUTH SUDAN

When fever and body weakness gripped John Achuil, he feared it might be COVID-19. The symptoms were somehow familiar to ignore. The 28-year-old called a hotline number for help.

The rapid response team sent by the Public Health Emergency Operations Center in Rumbek in South Sudan's Lakes State included an epidemiologist with polio expertise. The team ensured a test sample was collected correctly and taken for testing immediately.



A member of the rapid response team conducting an interview.

Photo Credit: WHO

Following the positive diagnosis of COVID-19, Achuil was isolated and treated in a designated treatment facility. "I can't imagine what could have happened to me. My illness could have deteriorated if the team that came did not know what to do," recovered Achuil says. "probably, I wouldn't have been alive today".

Across South Sudan, polio experts have been at the forefront of South Sudan's coronavirus pandemic response. Drawing on their experience in the country's polio eradication work, more than 300 polio team members are now helping to strengthen disease

STATE OF YOUTH REPORT LAUNCHED

The Ministry of Youth and Sports, together with UNFPA, UNESCO, the Embassy of Sweden and other partners launched the 2019 South Sudan State of Adolescents and Youth Report, the first comprehensive overview of the current status, needs and aspirations of young people, as well as recommendations for actions required to address the issues.

The report provides easy access to data and information on South Sudan's young people to inform programmes that aim to support them.

The lack of age- and sex-disaggregated data and absence of a centralized information management system accessible to all is a key problem in South Sudan and this situation makes it difficult to adequately plan, monitor, and advocate for effective solutions to the pressing issues that affect young people's overall welfare and well-being.



Juba. Photo Credit: UNFPA

surveillance in communities and health facilities as well as contact tracing and data management.

The rapid response team sent by the Public Health Emergency Operations Center in Rumbek in South Sudan's Lakes State included an epidemiologist with polio expertise. The team ensured a test sample was collected correctly and taken for testing immediately.

For decades, many countries in Africa battled against polio, a vaccine-preventable disease. A heightened attack was mounted in 2014 after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared polio a public health emergency of international concern in several African countries, including South Sudan. The critical work of the polio response in South Sudan and across the continent led to Africa being declared free of wild polio in August of this year.

"The diligent work of all public health responders has contributed to the country's mild COVID-19 experience so far, with only 55 deaths reported and 2 817 cases in 24 counties to date, said Dr Olu. WHO Country Representative. Read more: <https://www.afro.who.int/news/polio-expertise-steers-covid-19-response-south-sudan>

KEEPING DISPLACED PERSONS SAFE FROM COVID-19 IN SOUTH SUDAN



POC residents fetching water at a borehole. Photo Credit WHO

As the world's youngest country readied measures to prevent widespread COVID-19 infections, its years of conflict and natural disasters suddenly presented an unparalleled challenge: protecting thousands of displaced persons from COVID-19 within the sites set up over the past decade as refuge.

Of the 1.7 million displaced persons in the country, nearly 168 000 currently live in one of the 116 camps or settlements, where conditions meant physical distancing is virtually impossible. Basic services in camps can sometimes be limited, with water, sanitation and hygiene services as well as food and shelter supply outstripped by the needs of camp residents. Just like much of the country, many of the displaced persons sites have inadequate health care provision and limited ability to care for severely sick patients.

Protecting people in overcrowded conditions

By the end of March, a nationwide awareness-raising campaign through radio and SMS messaging was urgently explaining the virus and how people could best protect themselves and their family. The campaign extended into the displaced persons camps and settlements, where leaders, teachers, outreach volunteers, local committees and partners were also engaged to help protect their camp communities.

WHO, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and other partners, supported the training of nearly 400 health care workers in the camps and settlements on caring for COVID-19 patients and how to prevent and control the spread of the virus.

Any resident of a camp or a settlement for the displaced confirmed to be infected with COVID-19 and in need of surveillance. This allowed rapid identification, testing and isolation or treatment in a dedicated facility is to government-run facilities.

“The COVID-19 outbreak poses an enormous threat to vulnerable populations in camps and settlements, where overcrowded living conditions and inadequate access to social services challenge effective coronavirus prevention and control,” says Dr Olushayo Olu, World Health Organization (WHO) Representative for South Sudan.

Having moved into the camps away from civil conflict, war, famine and /or flooding, the residents thought staying put was their safest option. “I believed if things are going to get worse, then I would rather be here under [the United Nations Mission in South Sudan protection], where I know they will have to do something rather than me going away and most likely face difficulties I’m not equipped to handle,” explains a leader of the 1921 residents of Bor Protection of Civilian Site in Jonglei State.

Preventing the coronavirus from reaching any community in the country or the camps became a priority of the government, the United Nations and local and international non-government organizations – all coming together in response.

“The South Sudan national COVID -19 response plan addressed the needs of displaced persons camps and settlements, and WHO provided guidelines, tools and kits to partners to facilitate enhanced case and mortality and isolation of cases as well as contact listing and quarantine to prevent the risk of widespread outbreaks,” explains Dr Joseph Wamala, Country Preparedness and International Health Regulations Officer for WHO South Sudan in Juba.

Given their limited capacity, additional isolation facilities were established for every camp and settlement hosting more than 5000 individuals. The United Nations is supporting 14 isolation centres for displacement camps and settlements.

In mid-April, South Sudan closed its schools, suspended internal flights between states and established a curfew. The camps and settlements were included in the lockdown in a bid to reduce movement and the potential spread of the virus. Community leaders in some camps took ownership of certain containment measures, such as gate control and deciding who, when and how people enter the camp. So far South Sudan's vulnerable displaced populations have not experienced a huge number of COVID-19 cases.

The prevention and control measures taken appear to have helped. As of 30 September, only 59 cases among displaced persons had been confirmed from the camps and settlements. And as of 12 October, the country had recorded 2798 cases of COVID-19 and 55 deaths. Read more:

<https://www.afro.who.int/news/keeping-displaced-persons-safe-covid-19-south-sudan-0>