

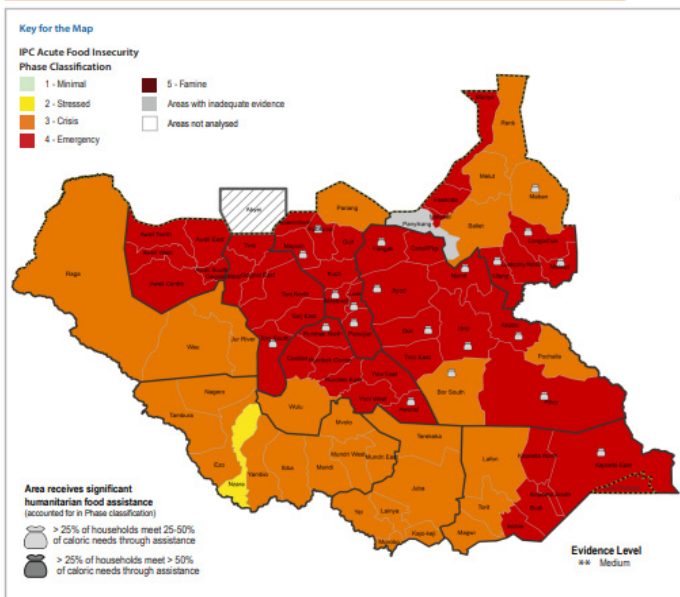


Protecting Children in South Sudan's Food Security Crisis

Exacerbated Food Insecurity in South Sudan Poses an Additional Threat to the Endangered Lives of 3.1 Million Children in Need of Urgent Child Protection Services

Projected Acute Food Insecurity | April - July 2023

 7.8M



Source : SOUTH SUDAN - IPC Acute Food Insecurity & Malnutrition Snapshot (www.ipcinfo.org)

Background

The overall food security situation has worsened across South Sudan due to compounding shocks, including flooding, ongoing conflict, displacement, and cost of living. The impact is expected to result in another year of livestock and crop losses and has eroded the livelihoods and coping strategies of vulnerable communities across the country. Over half of South Sudan's population (63%) are experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity. Parts of South Sudan continue to face the highest levels of food insecurity since the country declared independence 11 years ago. According to the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan, an estimated 7.76 million plus Abyei (187K) people

in the country are in need of food security and livelihood support, including 3.3 million children.¹² The latest IPC report projects that from April to July 2023, over 7.7 million people are facing high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC3+) and over 2.9 million people will be in emergency acute food insecurity (IPC4+). These levels are expected to remain elevated in most areas between October 2023 and January 2024, during which some people are likely to continue to experience emergency food insecurity.³ An estimated 737,812 pregnant and lactating women and 1.4 million children under the age of five in South Sudan will likely suffer from acute malnutrition over the course of 2023. Approximately 345,893 children will need SAM treatment, while another 1,057,703 will need MAM treatment.⁴

At the same time, an estimated 6.1 million women, girls, men, and boys will be or are facing protection risks and violations in 2023, with 3.1 million children urgently in need of immediate lifesaving and life sustaining child protection services.⁵ Approximately 1 million children are in need of mental health and psychological services (MHPSS).⁶ With 2.8 million school-age children already out of school, several more thousand are expected to leave school to find ways to help themselves and their families survive due to drastic food insecurity. One of every two girls are married before the age of 18⁷ and 46 percent of children are engaged in hazardous child labour.⁸ Since 2013, over 19,000 children have been reported to be associated with armed forces and groups.⁹ Child protection actors also report family separation as a key risk tightly linked to food insecurity.

In order to address the interlinkages between food insecurity and children's protection and well-being in South Sudan, it is essential that humanitarian actors, government, and donors commit to addressing children's protection needs and safeguard children from the effects of the hunger crisis.

7.76M plus Abyei (187K)
 estimated in need of food security and livelihood support.
 40% are children.

Over 19,000 children reported to be associated with armed forces and groups since 2013.

2.8M children are already out of school.

3.1M children
 need immediate life-saving child protection services.
 Over 1M need MHPSS services.

46% of children aged 10-14 are engaged in child labour.

52% of girls are married before the age of 18.

Impact of the Food Crisis on Children's Protection and Well-being

Unmet basic needs, such as food, are recognized as universal risk factors that exacerbate harmful outcomes for children. Global evidence shows that food insecurity impacts children's protection and well-being in four main ways.¹⁰ In South Sudan, according to the CPIMS+, 18,800 child survivors of various child protection concerns have been reached through case management assistance since January 2014 to date. The concerns below were reported as main root causes of their child protection concerns.

1. Food insecurity is linked to poor mental health and psychosocial distress of children and caregivers. Increased stress, anxiety, and aggression trigger various forms of child protection risks, including neglect, physical and emotional violence, peer violence, and exposure to intimate partner violence.

In South Sudan, 52% of girls are married before the age of 18. Conflict over the distribution of resources, such as food, between co-wives in polygamous families were reported to be particularly frequent and intense.¹¹ Men's increased abuse of alcohol, which was exacerbated by their loss of property and lack of jobs and employment opportunities, was cited as a trigger for physical abuse of wives, exposing children to intimate partner violence.¹²

2. When families do not have enough food to eat or enough money to buy food, they may resort to extreme coping mechanisms in order to acquire food. These coping mechanisms include family separation, child labour, child marriage, recruitment and use by armed forces and armed groups, and sexual exploitation.

In South Sudan, a study on children's recommendations for the hunger response in 2021 revealed that girls aged 9-12 years old reported joining their parents or neighbours on farms or begging on the streets to cope with hunger, while boys reported working in construction, mines, hotels, and restaurants, and brewing alcohol. Boys also reported resorting to crime, such as stealing vehicles or cattle, to make money. Girls aged 13-17 years old reported collecting firewood, brewing alcohol, working at construction sites, farms, or working in the local markets, while boys aged 13-17 years old also reported leaving school to beg or live on the streets due to lack of food at home.¹³ When caregivers seek livelihood opportunities away from home, children are left behind and separated from families.

3. When children are forced to produce, search for, or prepare food to meet their food needs, children may also be exposed child protection risks such as neglect, hazardous child labour, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, recruitment, and use by armed forces and armed groups, and dangers and injuries such as road accidents, falls or burns.

In South Sudan, girls and women are at risk of sexual violence and exploitation from community members, security forces, and opposition forces if they venture outside of protected sites to get food, farm, collect firewood, or engage in livelihood activities.¹⁴

4. Interventions implemented to address food insecurity, can expose children to protection risks such as dangers and injuries, psychosocial distress, sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as discrimination.

Previous reports have documented instances where humanitarian actors and community leaders demand sex in exchange for food and other essential supplies.¹⁵

Adolescent girls, in particular, face multiple burdens during food crises. They play a key role in their families' food production and preparation, sacrifice meals for younger children and other family members, and see their education cut short. In South Sudan, adolescent girls are more frequently reported to engage in informal, small-scale livelihood activities in the marketplace, as opposed to formal paid employment.¹⁶ Out of school adolescent girls also have less access to livelihood opportunities or formal employment, earning less money and recognition for their work compared to their male peers. Harmful gender norms and lack of available services and social safety nets further puts adolescent girls at risk of food insecurity and protection risks.



Part 3: Key Recommendations

Recommendations for National and State Government:

1. Strengthen **access to and delivery of quality essential services for the most vulnerable children and their families**, including food security and child protection services, and establish **accountability mechanisms** to ensure the most vulnerable children and families can access basic services safely and equitably.
2. Create opportunities for **national and local organisations** including women-led and rights-based organisations, civil society actors and community-based structures to be included in key decision-making bodies that contribute to children's protection and food security.

Recommendations for donors:

1. **Do not divert funds from the hunger crisis response to other emergencies.** Recognising the horrific crisis caused by the dire situation in the country, the increasing number of people in need, and the benefits of food security to children's protection, **urgently provide the funding required for food security interventions in South Sudan.**
2. Recognise the clear link between child protection risks and food insecurity and **prioritise specialised child protection interventions for children and their caregivers as part of the hunger crisis response.**
3. In decision-making on funding for food crisis responses, include **allocation for stand-alone child protection interventions and inter-sectoral needs assessments, analysis, and responses** that address children's multiple protection risks resulting from food insecurity.
4. Fund **multi-year integrated Child Protection and Food Security programmes** to address the multi-sectoral needs of food-insecure children and families.
 - o Support the development of program models and approaches which aim to prevent and respond to child protection risks associated with food insecurity and fund evaluations to strengthen evidence-based programming.
 - o Invest in and advocate for building capacities of child protection and food security actors to collaborate and design integrated programs which prevent and respond to child protection risks in food crises.
5. Ensure that the linkages between food security, child protection, and children's participation and empowerment programmes are established within the **criteria for funded proposals.**
6. In line with the Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action, promote **child protection mainstreaming considerations**, alongside protection mainstreaming, within food security proposals and program design.

Recommendations for Child Protection and Food Security Actors:

1. Recognising food security actors' and child protection actors' **shared responsibility to children's holistic well-being and development**, collaborate together during food crises to assess, prevent, mitigate, and respond to children's protection issues through the lens of gender and inclusivity.
2. For stand-alone Child Protection and Food Security programs, plan interventions in **overlapping geographic areas** and work together to ensure that vulnerable children and their families can access both Child Protection and Food Security interventions. This includes establishing **functional referral pathways** between child protection and food security actors.
3. Jointly develop and contextualise **selection and beneficiary targeting criteria** to ensure that the most vulnerable and excluded children and families can access timely and quality food assistance, livelihood opportunities, and child protection services.
4. Jointly design, implement, monitor, and evaluate **integrated Child Protection and Food Security programs** to address the multi-sectoral needs of food-insecure children and families.
 - o Develop program models and approaches that aim to prevent and respond to child protection risks and negative coping mechanisms associated with food insecurity and ensure interventions target vulnerable children and families with a package of child protection and food security interventions.
5. **Prioritise child safety, dignity, and wellbeing during food insecurity programmes** to avoid causing harm. Meaningful and inclusive consultations with children and adolescents to understand their needs, priorities and coping mechanisms, including preferences, is essential to designing safe, inclusive, age and gender appropriate programs.
6. Strengthen **children's participation and empowerment** in food crisis response and ensure that all **accountability mechanisms**, such as feedback and complaints mechanisms, are child-friendly and accessible to children in all their diversity. This can contribute to promoting children's meaningful participation in influencing humanitarian and development programming.
7. Ensure all data is at minimum disaggregated by **sex, age, and disability.** Ensure a **gender and age analysis** informs the development of all prevention and response programs.

Endnotes

- 1 UN OCHA. [South Sudan: Humanitarian Response Plan](#) 2023.
- 2 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. [South Sudan Report](#), November 2022.
- 3 Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET). [South Sudan – Food Security Outlook](#), June 2023 – January 2024.
- 4 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. [South Sudan Report](#), November 2022.
- 5 UNOCHA. [South Sudan: Humanitarian Response Plan](#) 2023.
- 6 Child Protection Sub-Cluster South Sudan. [Child Protection Sub-Cluster Strategy](#); South Sudan 2019-2021.
- 7 Girls Not Brides. [South Sudan](#).
- 8 US Department of Labor. [Child Labor and Forced Labor Reports](#); South Sudan.
- 9 UNICEF. [Release and Reintegration: Child Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups](#).

- 10 Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility and Plan International. [Child Protection and Food Security: An Evidence Review of the Linkages in Humanitarian Settings](#), October 2022.
- 11 World Vision. [Child Marriage and Hunger Crisis: South Sudan Case Study](#). 2021. Ellsberg et al. "If You Are Born a Girl in This Crisis, You Are Born a Problem": Patterns and Drivers of Violence Against Women and Girls in Conflict-Affected South Sudan. *Violence Against Women*. 2021;27(15-16):3030-3055.
- 12 Ellsberg et al. "If You Are Born a Girl in This Crisis, You Are Born a Problem": Patterns and Drivers of Violence Against Women and Girls in Conflict-Affected South Sudan. *Violence Against Women*.
- 13 Save the Children. [Children's Recommendations for the hunger responses in South Sudan](#). 2021.
- 14 Ellsberg et al. "If You Are Born a Girl in This Crisis, You Are Born a Problem": Patterns and Drivers of Violence Against Women and Girls in Conflict-Affected South Sudan. *Violence Against Women*.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Plan International. [Adolescent Girls in Crisis: Voices from the South Sudan Crisis](#), 2018.