



for every child



A young girl stands in an assembly line at her school in Yambio, South Sudan. UNICEF has partnered with social mobilizers under to help promote positive social change. © UNICEF/UNI315625/Ongoro

CHILD PROTECTION IN EMERGENCIES: *UNICEF's Response to Gender-Based Violence in South Sudan*

A FINAL REPORT PREPARED FOR DINING FOR WOMEN

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Program Summary

With support from Dining for Women, UNICEF is building safer and more responsive environments for girls and women in South Sudan. Your support has been especially meaningful during this difficult period of instability and uncertainty.

Throughout 2019 and 2020 the situation in South Sudan has been dire. The multidimensional crisis has been characterized by continued violence, severe food and nutrition insecurity, economic upheaval and disease outbreaks. The unresolved conflict has prevented displaced people from returning home and has severely hampered access to basic services for 7.5 million people, including 4.1 million children.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the most critical threats to the protection and wellbeing of women and children in South Sudan. The full magnitude of the problem is unclear. However, studies indicate that 65 percent of women and girls have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime, and 51 percent have suffered intimate partner violence. The majority of girls and women experience sexual violence for the first time under the age of 18.

COVID-19 has exacerbated the “shadow pandemic” of gender-based violence. Since the start of the pandemic, GBV reports have increased as women and girls who experience violence at home have been trapped with their abusers. Restrictions on movement and the closures of some facilities have meant that services to respond to gender-based violence are largely unavailable or inaccessible to women and girls at the very moment when they need them the most. Evidence and data show that COVID-19 mitigation strategies have contributed to a surge in gender-based violence worldwide. In other words, the measures meant to keep populations safe often have the opposite effect for women and girls.

Despite immense challenges, there have been some signs of improvement.

South Sudan has experienced relative stability since the signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict. This has enabled UNICEF to obtain improved access to previously hard-to-reach locations along main supply routes. Progress has also been made in the area of child protection. In February 2020, parties to the revitalized peace agreement signed the Comprehensive Action Plan to halt and prevent the six grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict. The action plan is the first of its kind in South Sudan and sets a strong precedent for future action to protect children.

In South Sudan, UNICEF uses a comprehensive approach to combat and

address gender-based violence. This approach includes advocating for policy reform and implementation, as well as the coordination of both gender-based violence prevention and response efforts that foster a safe and supportive environment for all women and children. UNICEF promotes the capacity building of health, social welfare, legal, and security personnel to recognize and monitor gender-based violence, while also providing survivors with appropriate care, support, and protection services. On a local level, UNICEF supports community discussion, dialogue, and mobilization to address norms of discrimination and change harmful behaviors.

Support from Dining for Women has played an important role in enabling UNICEF to meet the needs of women in girls in South Sudan. Today, UNICEF and partners are working across four states in South Sudan to provide psychosocial support, medical care, and case management to vulnerable individuals, including the survivors of GBV. By scaling-up and adapting GBV services during the pandemic, UNICEF has ensured the continuity of vital resources for South Sudan’s most vulnerable women and girls.

The Six Grave Violations Against Children During Armed Conflict

1. Recruitment and use of children
2. Killing or maiming of children
3. Sexual violence against children
4. Attacks against schools or hospitals
5. Abduction of children
6. Denial of humanitarian access

The Impact of Your Support

Dining for Women's investment has been instrumental in enhancing the recovery and resiliency of women and girls affected by gender-based violence in South Sudan. Your support has helped UNICEF achieve the following results during the period of January 2019 – September 2020.

KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

- 2,985 girls and 8,605 women were reached with specialized gender-based violence services.
- 118,033 girls accessed psychosocial support activities in child-friendly spaces and schools.
- 79,762 individuals were reached with GBV risk mitigation and messages on prevention and positive social norms transformation.
- 739 unaccompanied and separated girls were identified, registered and provided with support, including Family Tracing and Reunification Services.

UNICEF's response aimed at ending gender-based violence in South Sudan focuses on the following five outcome areas:

GBV RISK MITIGATION AND SUPPORT

In South Sudan, UNICEF uses a multi-sectoral and comprehensive approach to mitigate the risk of gender-based violence. This includes creating practical action plans at the local level to implement context specific gender-based violence mitigation interventions. **Support from Dining for Women has helped UNICEF reach a total of 79,762 individuals with gender-based risk mitigation and messages on prevention and positive social norms transformation.** During this period, scaling up gender-based violence risk mitigation across all of UNICEF's Emergency programming in South Sudan was a main priority. Collaborating with other sectors, including Child Protection and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH), culminated in an increase in access to safe sanitation facilities that are designed to provide additional privacy and safety to users.

UNICEF's GBV program strategy also provided care and support for those who have experienced sexual or gender-based violence. **Your support helped UNICEF reach 2,985 girls and 8,605 women with specialized gender-based violence services.** In addition to specialized case management to help children overcome the trauma they have experienced, UNICEF offered skills building courses, access to women and girls friendly services, information about how to mitigate the risk of GBV, and referrals for other specialized services.



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PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

Cultural and age appropriate psychosocial support is crucial for supporting the recovery of child survivors of gender-based violence. **Your support helped UNICEF reach 118,033 girls with psychosocial support activities in child-friendly spaces throughout South Sudan.** These spaces are allowing children to engage in stimulating sports and games inside safe and stable environments, further contributing to their overall wellbeing. The services, which include counselling and support, help children who have been affected by traumatic experiences, such as gender-based violence or abuse, to develop coping mechanisms and foster resiliency.

Women and Girls also accessed protection and support at Women and Girls Friendly Spaces (WGFS). WGFS are venues designed to make women and girls feel physically and emotionally safe. UNICEF works in partnership with implementing partners in six WGFS to provide an opportunity for women and girls to gather and socialize, and access critical services including case management and psychosocial support. WGFS are used as a platform for conducting structured group activities and other knowledge and skills building sessions. WGFS also provide referral information to other services and can offer direct psychosocial support.

AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

Gender inequality and harmful social norms remain impediments to women and girls' health, wellbeing, and full enjoyment of human rights. To help address these underlying factors that contribute to the prevalence of gender-based violence, UNICEF continues to engage with communities, faith-based organizations, and civil society groups to raise awareness about the risks of gender-based violence. The goal is to facilitate a process to explore, debate, and ultimately alter social norms that influence individual behaviors, collective practices, and widely held beliefs that contribute to gender-based violence. UNICEF invites all members of the community to participate in these discussions, in recognition of the fact that shifting social norms requires support from men and boys, as well as the collaboration of key local decision makers who are committed to making their communities healthier and safer for every child.

UNICEF's *Communities Care (CC)* has become of central part of UNICEF's strategy to raise awareness about GBV. The program is designed to promote gender equitable social norms to support survivors of GBV and to transform inequitable gender relations that drive GBV. UNICEF implements the CC program in three States (Central Equatoria, Warrap and Jonglei) and has enrolled 618 community members (384 women, 234 men) in the social norms transformation discussions and action courses. **As a result, in 2019¹, a total of 9,452 beneficiaries (1,992 girls, 1,399 boys, 2,905 women, 3,156 men) were directly reached with messaging on promoting positive social norms in line with GBV prevention and response, and on child marriage.** In addition, 25 staff (12 women and 13 men) from implementing partners were trained on 2 weeks course on social norms transformation, GBV risk mitigation, child marriage and community engagement facilitation skills to prepare them for scale up of GBV prevention through social norms change.

CAPACITY BUILDING

UNICEF and its partners continued to work towards strengthening national capacity to provide quality gender-based violence risk mitigation and response services. In collaboration with its partners, UNICEF rolled out a trainers' manual for teachers and facilitators, targeting child protection and education personnel, as well as a step-by-step practical guide on the social reintegration of girls who have formerly been members of armed groups. The practical guide provided additional guidance and resources for local actors who are working to support girls, including those who have been affected by conflict related sexual violence.

In 2019, UNICEF trained a total of 30 (14 female, 16 male) partners on GBV with an emphasis on risk mitigation measures to be taken by partners as well as ensuring timely referrals for women and girls including survivors of GBV services. During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF has increased its investment in building the capacity of local partners and the government to respond to GBV (see results below). By investing in local actors, UNICEF aims to both improve the quality of services and contribute to longer-term, more sustainable solutions to GBV in South Sudan.

¹ 2020 data for the Communities Care program is not yet available.

COVID-19 PROTECTION RESPONSE

To ensure continuity of services during lockdowns, the social service workforce must be able to work and respond to the increased vulnerabilities of women and girls. UNICEF has advocated that services to address gender-based violence be recognized as lifesaving and officially designated as 'essential' for the COVID-19 response and that staff providing such services are equipped with the necessary protective equipment to operate safely.

In South Sudan, UNICEF focused on keeping its gender-based violence programs operational and safe. Modification to services (e.g., providing handwashing stations, reducing the number of participants and offering remote service delivery) has allowed some centers to stay open, providing women and girls with continued access to safe spaces and needed services. UNICEF and partners have assigned social workers to work alongside healthcare staff in one stop-centers in Yei and Yambio Primary Health Care Centers to ensure that survivors accessing clinical management of rape services at health facilities are adequately supported. **A total of 26 law enforcement and legal actors were trained on gender-based violence core concepts as well as customary/ justice systems and the role of the police and community chiefs in addressing GBV cases.**

When a semi-lockdown was introduced in South Sudan, it became more difficult for GBV survivors to seek help as there was no means of transport to access services and the number of people who could be at a center at the same time was limited due to the COVID-19 regulations. To ensure that women could still access support during the lockdown, UNICEF supported a hotline that was operated by the American Refugee Committee (ARC). Information about the hotline was printed and distributed in public places such as Primary Health Care centers, nutrition centers, churches and mosques, for more women to be aware. The hotline became the lifeline for many women during the pandemic.



"Many people don't have money to call, so this is the sign that we should call them back," Laura Abuk Ajang says. She is a case worker at the women friendly center that is also operating a hotline for gender-based violence. "Before, the women would come to the center to seek guidance, get counselling and for referrals, but COVID-19 changed that," Laura explains. @ ARC/Lual Deng

The Way Forward

Support from Dining for Women has helped UNICEF deliver life-saving gender-based violence services in South Sudan at a time when many women and girls need these services the most.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created additional barriers to accessing services that address gender-based violence. Despite these challenges, UNICEF and partners are delivering services and sharing information using innovative strategies and by adapting programs. As the pandemic evolves, programs must continue to adapt to meet the needs of gender-based violence survivors and mitigate emerging risks. For this approach to be successful, more efforts are needed to include gender-based violence response in macroeconomic planning and cross-sectoral responses, and commit to longer term systems strengthening alongside the emergency response.

In the year ahead, UNICEF will continue to work in close partnership with donors, clusters and sub clusters, UN agencies and international and national organizations, including women led organizations, to ensure better attention to GBV related concerns. Key priorities in the year ahead include:

- **Investing in capacity of local partners and Government:** By investing in local actors, UNICEF aims to both improve the quality of services and contribute to longer-term, more sustainable solutions to GBV in South Sudan.
- **Integrated Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM):** Child Protection actors join these missions to better understand the needs on the ground, to inform advocacy and future programming as well as to support partners to mitigate GBV.
- **Addressing Child Marriage:** UNICEF provides technical and financial contributions to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare to implement the Strategy National Action Plan (SNAP) to address Child Marriage in South Sudan.

Looking ahead, UNICEF will seek to build on the progress already made and continue working towards a day when every girl and woman can live free from the fear of gender-based violence.

On behalf of children in South Sudan, thank you for your support!



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