



SECTORAL BRIEF

GENDER AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN SOUTH SUDAN



Introduction

Photo: UN Women

In 2022, the National Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare (MGCSW), in collaboration with the UN Women South Sudan Country Office, undertook a study to develop the country gender equality profile for the Republic of South Sudan. The study built on several initiatives by the two institutions, which have been working closely with relevant Government ministries, civil society organisations, women groups, academia, and other development partners to promote gender equality and women's empowerment and governance.

The country gender equality profile for South Sudan examined the current status of gender equality, leadership and political participation, women's rights, social justice and civic space, and customs and traditions. It also assessed human and capital development and several social, economic, and development sectors, including education, health, agriculture and environment and how the country is complying with national, regional and international policies and normative standards on women's rights and gender equality

Findings reveal that South Sudan has made significant strides in domesticating and implementing gender equality policies and programmes. The country is transitioning and implementing the peace agreement, the Revitalized Agreement for Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS). Citizens are aware of the gender rights provided and actively participate in implementing peace. Yet, women remain constrained by structural and institutional hurdles in various sectors.

This brief on Women and Humanitarian Assistance assesses, analyses and concludes the effects of armed conflict and natural disasters on women and calls for the promotion of gender equality and women's rights by allocating sufficient funding for implementing gender-responsive policies, programmes and plans to improve the lives of women,

girls, men, and boys. The brief provides key recommendations and areas of interventions to be addressed by various government sectors, development partners, UN agencies, and civic groups focusing on legal framework, institutional structures, and socio-economic development.

Background

8.9 Million

South Sudan remains entrenched in a severe humanitarian crisis, with approximately 8.9 million people—two-thirds of the population—requiring humanitarian assistance as of 2022.

Despite its rich natural resources and fertile lands, South Sudan produces only about half of its cereal requirements, relying heavily on food aid and imports to meet the needs of its population.

+600,000 refugees **220,000 returnees**



The South Sudan Humanitarian Needs Overview (2022) estimated that about 8.9 million people (two-thirds of the country's population) need humanitarian assistance. This was an increase of **600,000 refugees, 220,000 returnees** and around 11,000 asylum seekers.

2 million internally displaced **2.3 million refugees**

Another two million South Sudanese are internally displaced, while 2.3 remain refugees in neighbouring countries.

2023 Conflict **2024 flooding**
742,118 displaced **200,000+ displaced**

The 2023 conflict in Sudan displaced more than 742,118 people since mid-April 2023. Coupled to this crisis is the 2024 flooding that has affected over 1 million individuals with estimated more than 200,000 people, most of them women and children, are displaced by the floods. The numbers continue to increase even as the Country approaches the dry season.



¹South Sudan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022 (February 2022): Accessed here: <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-needs-overview-2022-february-2022#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20the%20humanitarian%20community,%20increase%20of%20600%2C000%20since%202021>

²Operational Data Portal. Refugees and Asylum Seekers from South Sudan (2024). Available from Situation South Sudan ([unhcr.org](https://www.unhcr.org)) Accessed on 31/08/2024.

³South Sudan Humanitarian update of 29 July 2024

2013 - 2016



From 2013 to 2016 South Sudan experienced violent conflicts and pockets of inter-communal violence throughout most of the States, resulting in a humanitarian crisis that led to the displacement of more than two million refugees, 3.5 million internally displaced persons, widespread famine and allegations of human rights abuses including sexual and gender-based violations by armed combatants.

2 million refugees

3.5 million internally displaced

2013 - 2018



An estimated 380,000 South Sudanese were reportedly killed during the conflict between 2013 and 2018.

380,000 killed



835 affected

Some parts of South Sudan have continued to experience severe floods since 2020, with an estimated 835 people affected in Jonglei, Unity, Upper Nile, Warrap, Northern Bahr El, Ghazal and Pibor administrative areas.

In the 2022 UNOCHA humanitarian overview 2021, an estimated 8.3 million people are expected to experience severe food insecurity from May to June, with 13 Counties extremely affected. The report further noted that 2 million, including 1.3 million children under the age of 5 and 676,000 pregnant and lactating mothers, were expected to suffer acute malnutrition in 2022.⁵

Types of Disasters

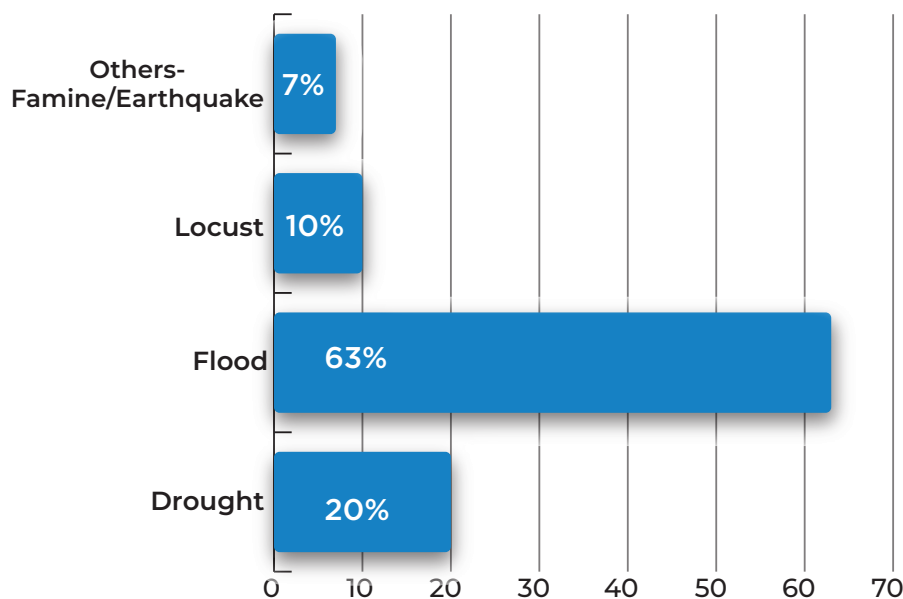


Figure 1: Chart showing types of disasters

⁵South Sudan Humanitarian Needs Overview (2022). Accessed <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-needs-overview-2022-february-2022>



809,000 affected

The UNOCHA South Sudan Hotspot Report 2021 estimated that about 809,000 people in 33 counties in eight States were affected by floods since May 2021.



75% most affected areas

Specifically, Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile States had more than 75 per cent of the people most affected by floods.

The floods affected livelihoods, with crops being submerged in water, livestock drowning, and homes and schools being affected, causing further displacement of those affected by conflict and putting them at greater risk of waterborne diseases.⁶

During the interviews, **85 per cent of the respondents** confirmed having **experienced natural disasters**, more than **63 per cent** had been **affected by floods**, and **20 per cent** had experienced **drought**. When asked if they had received support, 85 per cent of respondents indicated they had received humanitarian support from the UN and NGOs. In comparison, only 25 per cent indicated they had received support from the government.

Support for Respondents

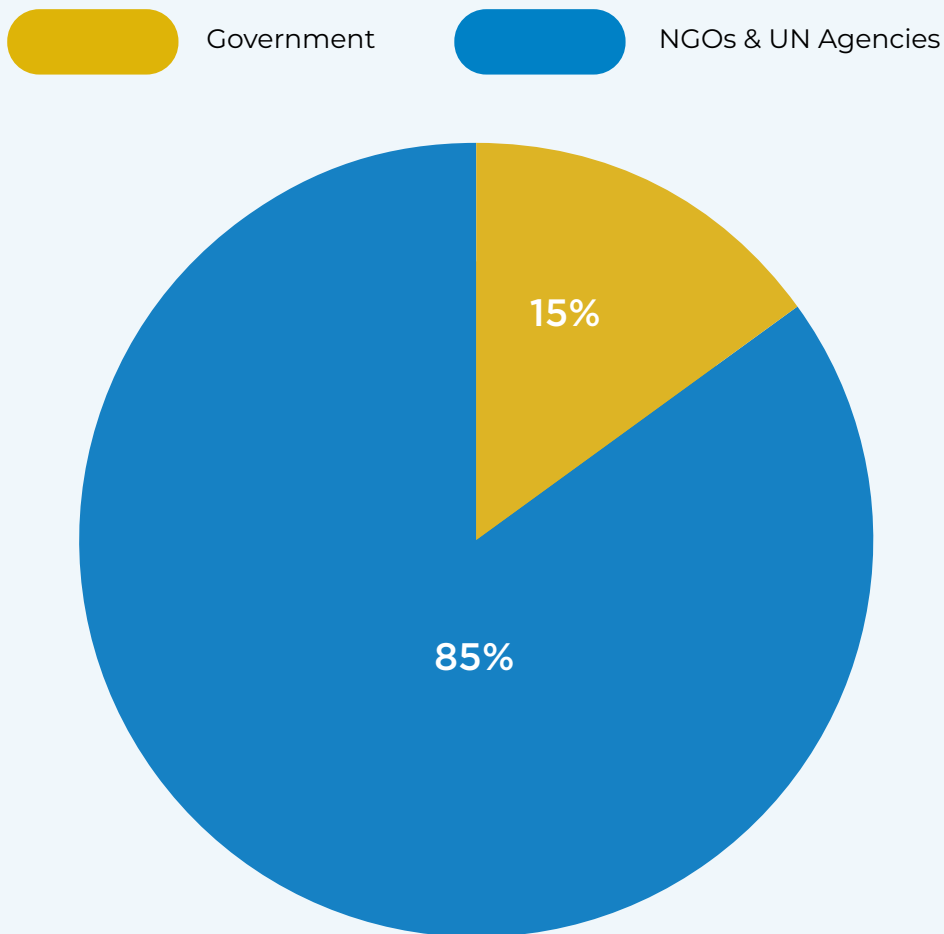


Figure 2: Chart showing support for respondents during the disaster

⁶OCHA South Sudan Humanitarian Snapshot, September 2021

Findings and current situation

South Sudan underwent a series of civil wars throughout the history of the liberation struggle until 2005 when the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed between the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Movement/Army and the Sudan Government. Conflict erupted between the political leaders, plunging the country into conflict from 2013 to date. The conflicts created serious humanitarian crises and allegations of violations of

International Humanitarian Law and conflict-related sexual violence.

South Sudan needs to develop a gender-sensitive national disaster response policy given the country's high disaster rate, increasing climate change, and worsening inter-communal violence. Women must be involved in humanitarian responses and decision-making in disaster management.

Gaps and Challenges

1

Limited Access to Resources and Support for Women:

Despite constituting a significant portion of the displaced population, systemic barriers prevent them from accessing necessary resources, such as financial assistance and healthcare. As illustrated in the chart, the challenges they face in accessing loans reflect a broader issue of gender inequality that hampers women's ability to recover and rebuild their livelihoods post-disaster.

2

Inadequate Disaster Preparedness and Response Mechanisms:

The recurring flooding and its impact on livelihoods highlight a serious gap in disaster preparedness and response strategies. Current measures may not adequately address communities' specific vulnerabilities, particularly those most affected in Jonglei, Unity, and Upper Nile, resulting in repeated displacement and food insecurity cycles.

3

Insufficient Health and Nutritional Support:

With projections indicating a high number of individuals, particularly children and pregnant or lactating women, facing acute malnutrition, ensuring sufficient healthcare and nutritional support is available in the wake of climate-induced disasters is a critical challenge. This underscores the need to prioritise health services and nutritional programs in disaster-stricken areas.

4

Long Distances to Access Water

Mothers, pregnant women, and children are often required to walk long distances to fetch water, which poses significant health risks, including dehydration and fatigue. This burden disproportionately affects women, who already face numerous responsibilities in caring for their families, and can lead to increased vulnerability and stress, particularly during crises.

⁷United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (2022). South Sudan: UN report highlights widespread sexual violence against women and girls in conflict, fueled by systemic impunity. Accessed <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/03/south-sudan-un-report-highlights-widespread-sexual-violence-against-women>.

⁸Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2014). Humanitarian Crisis In South Sudan Gender Alert 2: May 2014. Accessed <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2014/IASC%20Gender%20Reference%20Group%20%20Gender%20Alert%20South%20Sudan%20May%202013%202014%20Refo%20%20%20pdf.pdf>.

5

Pollution of Water Sources Due to Flooding:

The severe flooding in South Sudan has contaminated vital water sources, exacerbating public health concerns and increasing the risk of waterborne diseases. The pollution of these water resources directly affects the availability of safe drinking water for mothers, pregnant women, and young children, compounding the challenges they face in ensuring their families' health and well-being.

6

Limited Data and Understanding of Gendered Impact:

The data presented reflects the overall humanitarian crisis but lacks a nuanced understanding of the specific gendered impacts of climate change and disasters on affected populations. This gap limits the ability to tailor interventions that address the unique needs of different demographic groups, hindering the effectiveness of disaster risk reduction strategies and humanitarian assistance programs.

Conclusions

The 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview for South Sudan reveals a critical situation affecting about 8.9 million people, an increase of 600,000 from the previous year, driven by ongoing conflict and the internal displacement of nearly two million individuals, 55 per cent of whom are women. Severe flooding since 2020 has had a devastating impact on communities in Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile, worsening food insecurity projected to affect 8.3 million people, particularly harming children and pregnant or lactating women who are

highly vulnerable to acute malnutrition. The flooding has destroyed livelihoods, inundated crops, drowned livestock, and damaged infrastructure, thus compounding health risks, including waterborne diseases. With most individuals reporting experiences with natural disasters, the situation highlights the urgent need for disaster risk reduction strategies that specifically address the needs of women and other vulnerable groups to enhance resilience and facilitate recovery.

Recommendations for the Government of South Sudan



The government should develop a gender-sensitive long-term disaster and flood response policy and funds to respond to and curb climate change shocks. Women must be central to the decision-making process of disaster response and management. These policies and programs should include relocation plans, temporary shelters, and improved access roads to affected communities.



Develop early warning and resilient programs in communities affected by floods and develop alternate means of survival and farming



Expedite the establishment of the Women Enterprise Fund and other economic laws necessary for improving women's economic empowerment to strengthen their ability to recover and rebuild their livelihoods post-disaster.



Provide sufficient healthcare and nutritional support, particularly during climate-induced disasters. The government should also provide clean drinking water to reduce dehydration-related diseases and other health risks.