

SOUTH SUDAN

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The conflict that began in December 2013 in South Sudan continues to affect the lives of millions of people: violence is widespread and human rights violations and abuses are commonplace. Insecurity and active hostilities continue despite the signing of peace agreements by the parties to the conflict. The Government and the Opposition Forces have also signed a commitment to stop and end grave violations against children, but grave violations of children's rights continue to be reported through the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), including killing, maiming, abduction, sexual violence and recruitment.

Since the start of the current conflict, over 16,000 children, mainly boys, have been reported to be in use, or associated, with armed forces and groups and require release and prevention for further recruitment. For girls, the conflict has further heightened the risk of sexual violence. Thousands of children have become separated from their families and an estimated 500,000 girls and boys are in need of psychosocial support.

Following the signing of the new peace agreement which requires all armed actors to release all children, UNICEF and the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission are leading the finalization of a strategy to respond to the possible releases, together with partners from the Child Protection Sub-Cluster.

RELEASE OF CHILDREN IN THE GREATER PIBOR ADMINISTRATIVE AREA

While the conflict continues in many parts of Greater Upper Nile States, a fragile peace has been attained in the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA) in Jonglei State. The GPAA comprises the former Pibor, Pochalla and Boma counties under the Chief Administration of David Yau Yau, the former commander of the SSDA Cobra Faction. The SSDA Cobra Faction is now being integrated into the South Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) through which the release of children associated with the Cobra Faction is being facilitated.

Following several meetings with the top commanders of the Cobra Faction, UNICEF was informed that there are an estimated 2,000 children that will need to be separated from the Cobra Faction before integration into the SPLA. The children have now been disarmed and released to the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (NDDRC) who will in turn handover the children to the UN for further support.

UNICEF & PARTNER RESPONSE

Following the final planned release of children associated with the Cobra Faction, the total number of released children is 1,755, including 5 girls. The majority of the children are aged between 14 and 17 years and a smaller number are aged between 11 and 13 years. Nearly all the children have said that they want an education. The majority of these children have never been to school while a few had attended a few years of primary school. It was also observed that the majority of the boys were carrying arms and have been involved in combat, and many said that they had been part of the SSDA Cobra Faction from two to four years.

SITUATION IN NUMBERS



16,000

Children estimated to be associated with armed forces or armed groups across South Sudan



1,755

Children released to date in Pibor, Gumuruk, Fertet, Lekuangle, Pochalla and Labrab



30%

Children released in Pibor are under 13



6,200

Children newly enrolled in schools in GPAA



35,182

People reached with safe water

UNICEF & PARTNER RESPONSE

Family reunification: All children released so far have been reunified with their families. When reunified, children are receiving three months worth of food rations. They have already received various basic necessities including civilian clothing, blankets, cooking gear and fishing gear.

Follow up visits also continue for released children to ensure they are not recruited back into armed groups and to monitor their transition back to their families. No re-recruitment has been reported. To date, 1,070 children have been followed-up in their homes after reunification at least once. Follow ups remain challenging as children return with their families to remote villages, requiring partner staff to travel, often on foot, long distances.

Interim Care: Interim Care Centres (ICC) were constructed in Gumruk, Pibor, Lekuangole, Pochalla and Labrab to support the demobilized children. The main components of these centres included the provision of interim care services, such as foster care arrangements (including food, clean water and shelter), psychosocial services, and Family Tracing and Reunification (FTR) assistance. This is being largely provided through partners and where necessary, UNICEF supports with direct implementation. As demobilized children have now been reunified with their families, these centres are being used as youth centres, known as Centres for Community Transformation, hosting economic and social reintegration activities and psychosocial support.

Preliminary evaluation of psychosocial support programming shows:

- Marked reduction in violence and aggression among the sample of 30 boys aged between 13 and 15 years screened;
- Marked reduction in withdrawn behaviour;
- The small number of boys who, on reception to the ICC, were displaying institutionalized and militarized behaviours has reduced to zero;
- A higher number of boys displaying no behaviours indicative of concern.

Education: A key aspect of each child's successful reintegration will be the provision of schooling (including accelerated learning programmes), vocational skills training and livelihood opportunities. Schools are being reopened in the GPAA and additional temporary learning spaces are being established to support the return to learning of the released children but also for out of school children from host communities. A total of 20,000 children will be supported through the Back to Learning in the GPAA.

UNICEF continues accelerating its education assistance to the GPAA and to date, over 6,490 students are enrolled in reopened schools and newly established temporary learning spaces. The lack of trained teachers remains a challenge to accelerate education in the GPAA. UNICEF and partners are expanding education in the GPAA by establishing learning spaces, providing education supplies and training teachers. Through UNICEF advocacy, Pibor Boys and Girls Schools, Gumuruk Primary School and Kondako Primary School in Pibor have been vacated by armed forces and are being rehabilitated for use.

WASH: UNICEF and implementing partner IAS have now reached approximately 35,182 people with safe water in GPAA, including rehabilitation undertaken directly by UNICEF staff:

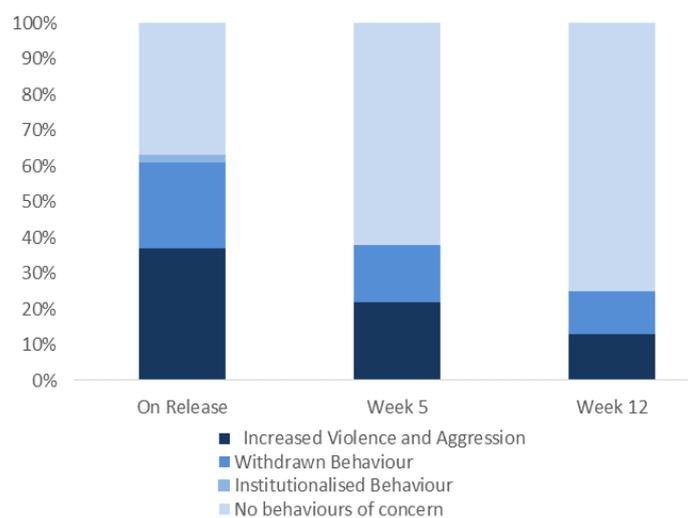
- Established bladder water systems in Gumuruk, Pibor and Lekuangole ICCs with water from the newly rehabilitated water system in Pibor with also covers the majority of Pibor town;
- Rehabilitated 19 boreholes in Pibor and Lekuangole which are serving 6,000 people;
- In Labrab, two community "lifeflow" water filters were installed at the ICC and two more at the school along with a 250L water tank to benefit 400 students. Two water attendants trained for each site;
- 15,000 people received WASH items (buckets, jerry cans, water treatment supplies and soap).

Water trucking continues in Gumuruk where, due to poor ground water potential, it has not been possible to drill productive boreholes. As an alternative, a surface water treatment system will be established.

In terms of sanitation, UNICEF has constructed latrines, showers and hand washing facilities in the ICCs as well as in 14 schools with 2,145 school children in Gumuruk, Pibor, Lekuangole and Labrab. UNICEF has also mobilized 3,000 households in Pibor to construct their own latrines with UNICEF supplies (latrine slabs and pit liners) to increase community ownership of the facilities.



Gumuruk - Released Children Comparative Data



Education services in the GPAA will continue to be scaled up by UNICEF and Education Cluster partners to ensure that children interested in pursuing education receive this support. This will include rehabilitation of learning spaces, teacher training and provision of supplies as well as Accelerated Learning Programmes and a WASH in schools component, as required. Those who missed out on basic education shall be encouraged to participate in accelerated learning programmes widely implemented by UNICEF and implementing partners guided by Ministry of Education and the Department of Education within the GPAA.

In addition, children between 14-18 years old who choose to pursue income-generating employment are being linked to opportunities for vocational training, entrepreneurship and job placement, in close collaboration with the Information, Counselling and Referral Services (ICRS) of the NDDRC and implementing partners. Eighty-five released children have received training in dairy technology, solar technology, fish processing, baking and leather tanning. Seven released adolescents who completed apprenticeships in baking have been very active in the local bakery, preparing to open their own bakery. As the market for individual trades in GPAA remain limited, UNICEF and partners are working to diversify vocations in which children will be trained. ICRS counsellors will advocate with potential employers to offer favorable work terms and conditions, in a non-hazardous environment, as well as providing them the opportunity to pursue educational opportunities available to them. Counselling and vocational orientation will be crucial because predicting markets and matching skills with potential market opportunities for children 14-18 years, who have had difficult experiences will be complex and challenging.

The project is providing a combination of individual and community based social and economic reintegration assistance, delivered by a network of social workers, child protection agencies, non-governmental and community-based organizations, private service providers and relevant departments of the GPAA. It will also include livelihood support, including agriculture and livestock, depending on the preference and opportunities in the children's communities. Distribution of livestock in Pibor and Boma reached 1,680 children with two goats and some goats have already given birth. Over the next year, 3,510 children (including all released children as well as an equal number of other vulnerable children in their communities, based on Paris Principles) will receive two goats or sheep and around five chickens; and training on how to care for their livestock. An additional agricultural livelihoods initiative has commenced, combining farmers' groups, school gardens and demonstration plots. 260 children including 25 per cent of female were selected for the activity. This inclusive approach to reintegration can prevent re-recruitment of at-risk and vulnerable children and community monitoring systems are also being established to monitor the reintegration. UNICEF will partner with WFP for food provision, FAO for agriculture and related activities and with ILO on capacity development for the economic reintegration of children.



Released boys choosing goats in Pibor.

CHALLENGES

- **Re-recruitment:** Without education and vocational training, allowing the demobilized children to imagine a better future for themselves, they are at a high risk of voluntary or coerced re-recruitment by armed forces or groups.
- **Stigmatization:** For every child UNICEF assists during the demobilization, UNICEF will also support at least one vulnerable child from local communities. This means an additional 2,000 girls and boys in the communities who are considered to be the most vulnerable to recruitment and other protection risks will benefit from services. By helping the entire community, it will reduce the likelihood of children being stigmatized or taking up arms again.
- **Lack of services:** The Greater Pibor Administrative Area is remote and has traditionally been underserved in terms of health, nutrition, water, education and other basic services. UNICEF will need to work with all partners to provide a comprehensive response in these communities to ensure released children receive adequate services to properly reintegrate into the community. Release and reintegration services require a multi-sectoral, multi-year investment. In communities as impoverished as those in the GPAA, this challenge is amplified.

More information on the situation in South Sudan and UNICEF response, including the latest situation reports, can be found at www.childreofsouthsudan.info

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