

A CENTURY OF CHANGE

FOR CHILDREN

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE
IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON CHILDREN,
INCLUDING THE GRAVE CHILD RIGHTS
VIOLATIONS IN SOUTH SUDAN



Save the Children
100 YEARS



Photo: Guilhem Alandry/Save the Children

Baby Wilson at the border between South Sudan and Uganda.

PROTECTING CHILDREN IN CONFLICT



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100 YEARS

Cover Photo: Isabella* is holding her youngest daughter Cecilia*, outside their home in Omugo refugee settlement. She is a strong advocate for the Save the Children Mother and Baby area. Photo: Save the Children

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Joy*, 14-year-old refugee from South Sudan with her baby. She fled her village and made 80km journey 8 months pregnant over 4 days in 30+ degree heat.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

As Save the Children marks 100 years of its existence since it was first established as Save the Children Fund in the aftermath of the First World War in 1918, we are 28 years old in South Sudan. The Country's history in this period is very much the history of the organization, the good and the bad moments notwithstanding. As we celebrate our Centenary, Save the Children commits to our breakthrough to ensure children are protected. In our Centenary year, we commit to ensure Children Affected by Armed Conflict (CAAC) are protected through our Protecting Children in Conflict (PCIC) programming and Stop the War on Children (SWOC) Campaign.

In order to lay the foundation for Save the Children South Sudan work in the two areas, the organization commissioned a situational analysis on the impact of conflict on children with a specific focus on the grave violations of children rights to inform both program and policy and advocacy interventions. The situational analysis was conducted by independent consultants between October and December 2018. The specific objectives of this undertaking were to: analyse the social, political and economic trends/factors that make children vulnerable to recruitment and other grave violations (disaggregated by gender, age, urban/rural, ethnicity, wealth and other relevant factors); examine the immediate root causes and enablers of grave violations; analyse the extent to which duty bearers are fulfilling their obligations to children; identify barriers that prevent vulnerable children from accessing services and opportunities that could protect them from grave violations; analyse other impacts of conflict on children such as displacement, vulnerability to family separation, child labour or socio-economic challenges and lastly; to identify available resources, opportunities and strategic entry points to strengthen activities that prevent and respond to grave rights violations.

2.0 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

In pursuit of the objectives of the situational analysis, the study employed qualitative methodology. To begin with, a comprehensive desktop review was conducted and this focused on existing reports and information available from different sources with a view to establishing trends, existing data and information gaps in relation to grave violations against children and the impact of conflict on children in South Sudan. The findings from the desktop review were used to inform the development of interview guidelines and a list of key informants for interview. The second part comprised in-depth interviews with representatives from civil society (key national and international NGOs), embassies, donors, representatives from humanitarian agencies, as well as representatives from the National Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission (NDDRC) within the government. As part of the interview process, consultations were also held with Save the Children.

The third part included two site visits outside of Juba, namely to Akobo in former Jonglei State, and Kapoeta in former Eastern Equatoria State, which provided first-hand experience on how different types of conflict impact children. At each of these sites, four separate focus groups were conducted with boys, girls, parents/caregivers, and community members/leaders. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with partners working with SC, church leaders, SC child protection case workers, health workers, teachers and chiefs/local government leaders. Interview and focus group guidelines for the different groups of informants were used to ensure appropriateness, accessibility of language and child safeguarding particularly in relation to child focus group guidelines.

This study presents the findings from both the secondary and primary data collected and provides a series of advocacy and programmatic recommendations. Whilst concerted efforts were made to present data in disaggregated form, comprehensive data on key indicators is not available in South Sudan and often relies on



Awel*, 12, & her 2 sisters survived a deadly attack on their village by fleeing into the bush, lost contact with their parents for 3yrs, until Save the Children traced their whereabouts & reunited the family”.

extrapolations from figures dating back to the 2008 Census and 2012 Household Survey data for programming purposes.

3.0 IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON CHILDREN - KEY FINDINGS

Children make up about half of South Sudan’s population of approximately 11.4 million. At least one in two children in South Sudan is affected by the humanitarian crisis that is fuelled by conflict and economic collapse¹. The protracted conflict in South Sudan has had a profound impact on the lives of children and their communities. Children have been systematically subjected by parties to the conflict to the six grave violations that are prohibited by international law against children in situations of armed conflict. Not only has the conflict prevented children throughout the country from growing up in a secure and peaceful environment that is conducive to their physical and emotional

development, but it has also significantly affected their ability to access basic services such as health, education, and basic nutrition. In brief, children continue to face risks such as death, injury, hunger, disease, recruitment into armed forces and armed groups, forced displacement and loss of education opportunities. The study details various ways in which conflict impacts children in South Sudan.

3.1 Displacement and migration

A combination of violent conflict, widespread severe hunger, and poverty have led to the displacement of over 4 million displaced people, about 2 million are internally displaced (IDPs) and more than 2.2 million have fled to neighbouring countries (mainly Uganda, Ethiopia, and Sudan)², one million of which are children³. Of the 2.2 million IDPs, approximately 400,000

¹ UNICEF (2017b), *Childhood Under Attack: The staggering impact of South Sudan’s crisis on children*, UNICEF Briefing Note, 15 December 2017, p.2.

² United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2018), *South Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan: January-December 2019*, (December 2018), p.4.

³ UNICEF (2018b), *3 in 4 children born in South Sudan since independence have known nothing but war – UNICEF*, Press Release, 9 July 2018, https://www.unicef.org/southsudan/media_21722.html (accessed 22 October 2018).

are living in camps and informal settlements, while the rest are living in host communities. An estimated 1.5 million people are located in areas with extremely limited humanitarian access due to insecurity and operational interference. Nearly half of the IDPs are children and more than half are 5 years of age or younger, which poses challenges for children's well-being and access to basic services such as education and health⁴.

Mass displacement has had a devastating impact on the social fabric of communities and cohesion of families. Many communities have been uprooted from their villages and separated, destroying long standing relationships and the community support networks, which has left children and adults displaced and having to fend for themselves, sometimes in areas which are unfamiliar to them.⁵ Families generally try to support each other in light of the difficulties, however with increasing hunger and scarcity of food, few have anything to share⁶. Severe food insecurity is affecting the population as a whole, with IDPs being the most vulnerable. Almost 3 million children are severely food insecure, more than 1 million are acutely malnourished, with more than a quarter of a million severely malnourished⁷.

Conflict, displacement and hunger have also led to a disruption of traditional gender roles, as male breadwinners have been killed or recruited into armed groups or armed forces, thus resulting in many women becoming heads of households. Women have been forced to flee their towns and seek protection and food for their children and themselves; they have become the lifeline for family survival.⁸ To assist their mothers, girls engage in additional work in the home, care for sick and elderly persons, whilst doing their regular chores. They might

also have to carry out tasks that are physically overwhelming such as carrying firewood or water while traveling long distances to access the precious commodities. In some instances, girls have had to take on the traditional male role of cattle-herding or work outside the home to support the family⁹. Similarly, in some cases boys perform tasks traditionally allocated to girls such as washing utensils and cooking¹⁰. In instances where both parents have been killed, many young boys and girls have also had to step up to care for younger siblings in the absence of family and community protection mechanisms¹¹.

The need for young girls and boys to contribute to their families', or their own, survival has resulted in negative coping practices such as limited or disrupted school attendance, child labour, joining armed groups, gangs, and engaging in criminal activities. It has also led to the widespread reliance by families on child early and forced marriage. Not only have children been displaced internally but also beyond the country's borders. South Sudan's refugee situation is characterised as a children's crisis since approximately 63% of refugees are children (under 18 years of age).¹² Over 1.3 million children have fled in the past four years, including over 75,000 who have made the journey across the border unaccompanied or separated from their parents or usual care-givers.¹³

3.2 Family separation

Family separation is considered one of the key drivers to psychosocial stress for children and caregivers¹⁴. It is also one of the factors that increase their vulnerability and exposure to the six grave violations. Since the beginning of the crisis, over 19,000 unaccompanied, separated

⁴ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2018), *South Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan: January-December 2019*, (December 2018), p.8.

⁵ UNICEF: https://www.unicef.org/southsudan/Child_Protection.pdf (accessed 23/01/2018)

⁶ Key informant interview in Kapoeta

⁷ UNICEF (2017b), *Childhood Under Attack: The staggering impact of South Sudan's crisis on children*, UNICEF Briefing Note, 15 December 2017, p.2.

⁸ Julia A. Duany and Wal Duany (2001), *War and Women in South Sudan: Role Change and Adjustment to New Responsibilities*, *Northeast African Studies*, New Series, Vol. 8, No. 2, Special Issue: Dimensions of Gender in the Sudan, p.63.

⁹ Save the Children (2018), *Children's consultations. Voices from Juba and Bor*, (Nairobi: SCI-ESARO), p.36.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.34.

¹¹ "Conflict in South Sudan: How does it affect women?", Press release: <https://relief-web.int/report/south-sudan/conflict-south-sudan-how-does-it-affect-women> (accessed 22/01/2018).

¹² UNHCR (2018a), *South Sudan Situation Regional Update July 2018*, (UNHCR: Juba, 2018). p.1

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ UNICEF (2017a), "South Sudan Conflict: 5,000 children reunited with family by Save the Children, UNICEF and partners", Press Release, 18 October 2017, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/south-sudan-conflict-5000-children-reunited-family-save-children-unicef-and-partners> (accessed 24 October 2018).



Photo: Tico Justin/Save the Children

After 4 years of separation, 6,000th child is on the way with her case worker to be reunified her mother.

and missing children have been registered in the national child protection database for family tracing and reunification (FTR). Unaccompanied and separated children are more susceptible to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, hence the need for prioritising FTR or family-based alternatives and reintegration into family and community structures.¹⁵ In particular, separated, unaccompanied and orphaned children tend to experience higher levels of insecurity. They are less likely to attend school due to the inability to pay school fees and buy educational materials, are more likely to suffer from health issues due to neglect from unsupportive extended family or guardians¹⁶. Where an extended family is unable to assist a separated young girl, she might also be forced to get married¹⁷.

Save the Children, UNICEF and partners have successfully reunited over 6,000 children with

their families¹⁸. This has been achieved through the joint efforts of 31 implementing partner agencies working across all the 10 former States in South Sudan. The partners are also members of the Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) Working Group that coordinates family tracing and reunification activities, provides technical support to its members and analyses and shares reports on a weekly and monthly basis to inform the situation in the country¹⁹. Almost 8,000 children in South Sudan are still missing or separated and in urgent need of family tracing²⁰.

3.3 Child labour

There are no official estimates regarding the extent of child labour in South Sudan. A 2011 inter-agency report, based on 2008 census data, found that almost half of 10-14 year olds (46%) spent at least some time each week

¹⁵ UNICEF (2018c), "Making South Sudan's families whole again", 12 December 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/stories/making-south-sudans-families-whole-again>, (accessed 22 January 2019).

¹⁶ Plan International (2018), Adolescent Girls in Crisis: Voices from South Sudan, May 2018, <https://plan-international.org/publications/girls-crisis-south-sudan>, (accessed 22 January 2019), p.15.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ <https://southsudan.savethechildren.net/what-we-do/child-protection> (accessed 24 October 2018).

¹⁹ South Sudan Protection Cluster (2018b), *Protection Trends South Sudan: January – December 2017*, April 2018, p.10.

²⁰ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2018), 2019 South Sudan Humanitarian Needs Overview (November 2018), p.27.

performing economic activity²¹. Of these children, 72% tended to be in unremunerated family employment, predominantly in the agriculture sector²². Technically, some of this economic activity might not qualify as child labour since the Child Act sets the minimum age for light work at 12 years. Nonetheless, it is likely that both paid and unpaid work, particularly by younger children, is higher in view of the impact of conflict, population displacement, disruption to education, and loss of family income which have led to children spending increasing amounts of time working, both inside and outside of the home, including under harmful or hazardous conditions²³.

Whilst different forms of child labour existed prior to the conflict, children currently tend to devote more time to child labour because of lack of access to schooling or shorter school days²⁴. Child labour is one of the factors that put children at risk from completing their education. Children in South Sudan engage in the worst forms of child labour, including in armed conflict and commercial sexual exploitation²⁵. Boys often earn money outside of their homes, by engaging in different kinds of work, including hard labour. Examples include moving goods in wheelbarrows, rock breaking, brick making, and construction, or working in market stalls – something that girls also do. Girls are often asked to assist with domestic chores such as fetching firewood and carrying heavy jerry cans of water, whilst they are also exposed to dangers such as maiming, abduction and sexual violence. Child labour not only harms children's emotional, cognitive, social, and physical development but also robs children of future opportunities.

In December 2017, the country adopted the

²¹ L. Guarcello, S. Lyon F.C. Rosati (2011), *Labour Market in South Sudan*, Understanding Children's Work (UCW) Programme Working Paper Series, December 2011, http://www.ucw-project.org/attachment/Labour_market_in_South_Sudan_childlabour_youthemployment20120131_173344.pdf (accessed 27 January 2019), pp.24-26.

²² Ibid.

²³ World Vision International (2014), *Fear and Want: Children living in crisis in South Sudan*, (World Vision International: 2014), p.12.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ United States Department of State (2017), *2017 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: South Sudan*, p.1.

Labour Act which prohibits forced labour and the worst forms of child labour and includes minimum wages for work, light work, and hazardous work. However, Article 12(2) allows children between ages 14 and 18 to engage in the worst forms of child labour, in violation of international standards²⁶.

3.4 Trafficking

Some of the grave violations being committed against children in South Sudan such as recruitment and use of children by armed groups or armed forces, sexual violence and abduction, overlap with the trafficking of children. In addition to these overlaps, however, South Sudan is also a source and destination country for men, women and children subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking by persons other than armed groups. South Sudanese girls, particularly those from rural areas or who are internally displaced, are vulnerable to domestic servitude, where they are sexually abused by household male occupants or forced to engage in commercial sex acts to either support themselves or contribute to family livelihoods²⁷. In spite of the foregoing, the reports notes that South Sudan is not a signatory to the UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol (2000). It does not have any laws or policies to protect victims from prosecution for crimes committed as a direct result of being subjected to trafficking. South Sudan's 2008 Penal Code and 2008 Child Act do criminalise some forms of labour and sex trafficking, the buying or selling of a child for the purpose of prostitution, the procurement of a child for prostitution and the facilitation of the prostitution of a child by the child's parent or guardian. Poor or weak capacities for investigation, prosecutions and successful convictions of people complicit in human trafficking offenses, corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes present major concerns that impede law enforcement action²⁸.

²⁶ United States Department of State (2017), *2017 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: South Sudan*, p.4.

²⁷ Romeo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative (2017), *South Sudan Country Report: Children & Security*, (Romeo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative: Halifax, Canada, 2017), p.16.

²⁸ US Department of State (2018), *2108 trafficking in Persons Report: South Sudan*, <https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2018/282749.htm> (accessed on 28 October 2018), p.391.



Boys queue up outside the Outpatient therapeutic programme (OTP) to receive treatment. Kapoeta County, South Sudan.

Photo: Louise Leeson/Save the Children

3.5 Physical violence, sexual violence and other harmful practices

3.5.1 Physical violence

Physical violence against boys and girls can occur in the home (including Protection of Civilian sites), the community, schools, or as a result of the armed conflict (in the form of injuries, assault, maiming, killing, and punishment). In the first half of 2018, physical violence, commonly by an intimate partner, or someone known by the survivor, continued to be the most common form of gender-based violence, accounting for 42% of 2,300 reported cases²⁹.

In a recent study, it was found that both women and men regarded physical violence against girls in the home as a common form of violence. Perpetrators can include parents, uncles and brothers³⁰ and is often related to poor performance of the housework or girls

arriving late to the home³¹. Physical violence in the home has also been linked to boys leaving their homes to live on the streets in urban areas. In particular, corporal punishment, as a form of discipline, is still a daily experience for the majority of children in South Sudan, despite the fact that it is prohibited by legislation. During focus groups discussions in Akobo, some parents/caregivers indicated that they would get a 'light cane' to discipline the child if he or she did something wrong³². The pervasive use of corporal punishment to discipline children was also reflected in the answers provided by children in focus group discussions in Akobo and Kapoeta. For instance, in Akobo, boys did not identify the home as a safe place. When probed as to why this was the case, one child said: 'it is not a safe place if they beat you'³³. Similarly, when children were shown a picture of a boy crying, children in focus group discussions in both Akobo and Kapoeta mentioned that this was so because of the war and because adults in the home and

²⁹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2018), 2019 South Sudan Humanitarian Needs Overview (November 2018), p.26.

³⁰ Global Women's Institute (2017a), No Safe Place: A Lifetime of Violence for Conflict-Affected Women and Girls in South Sudan: Summary Report 2017, (George Washington University: Washington DC, 2017), p.17.

³¹ Focus group discussion with girls, Akobo town, 14 November 2018.

³² Focus group discussion with parents/caregivers, Akobo town, 13 November 2018.

³³ Focus group discussion with boys, Akobo town, 13 November 2018.

community beat the child³⁴. Teachers also make use of corporal punishment to discipline children for late arrival at school and failure to complete homework.³⁵

3.5.2 Sexual violence

Sexual violence is often subsumed under gender-based violence (GBV), which is a persistent and serious concern in South Sudan, affecting men, women, boys and girls. However, GBV disproportionately affects women and girls (98%), as evidenced by data collected by the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBV-IMS) during 2016³⁶. Gender, age and disability can increase risks to GBV, with adolescent girls, unaccompanied children, elderly women and persons with disabilities among the populations most at risk.³⁷

In the first half of 2018, approximately 2,300 cases of GBV were reported, representing a 72% increase in reporting of GBV compared to the same period in 2017. Of these reported cases, 97% affected women and girls, and 21% of survivors were children (79% adolescent girls). Sexual violence represented 20% of the GBV reported cases³⁸. More generally, even though the full extent of sexual violence in the country is not known, nearly 25% of documented incidents of conflict-related sexual violence affect children³⁹. Over and above direct conflict-related aspects, much violence against girls is indirectly conflict-related. In particular, the conflict has exacerbated family violence, child forced and early marriage, and sexual harassment, which are rooted in societal attitudes and values, and has expanded the actors engaging in such violence.

³⁴ Focus group discussion with boys, Akobo town, 13 November 2018; Focus group discussion with boys, Kapoeta town, 13 November 2018.

³⁵ Child Protection in Emergencies Desk Review (2014), Country Profile South Sudan, <http://cpaor.net/sites/default/files/cp/CHILD-PROTECTION-IN-EMERGENCIES-DESK-REVIEW-final-12.03.2014.pdf> (accessed 23/01/2019), p.13.

³⁶ GBV Sub-Cluster Strategy: South Sudan 2017, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/gbv_sub-cluster_strategy_final_1.pdf, (accessed 22 January 2019), p.1.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2018), 2019 South Sudan Humanitarian Needs Overview (November 2018), p.26.

³⁹ UNICEF (2017b), Childhood Under Attack: The staggering impact of South Sudan's crisis on children, p.2.

Sexual violence has remained rampant in South Sudan and continues to be used as part of a strategy to degrade, shame and humiliate both survivors and communities, often along ethnic and/or political lines⁴⁰. As a result of its shocking scale and level of brutality, it is likely to leave physical, psychological, and social impacts for decades to come. A recent study found that up to 65% of women and girls in South Sudan have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from a partner or non-partner at least once in their lives⁴¹. More specifically, the study also found that up to 33% of women living in conflict zones in South Sudan reported experiencing non-partner sexual violence (including rape, attempted rape or any other unwanted sexual acts) during their lifetime⁴². Perpetrators of non-partner assault can include police officers or other armed actors, strangers or known persons. In that same study, male respondents also reported experiences of sexual violence including rape, attempted rape, unwanted touching, being forced to undress⁴³, and being circumcised by force⁴⁴.

Women and girls are prone to sexual violence outside the home any time that they might come close to armed actors, particularly, during attacks on villages, during searches of residential areas by armed actors, along roads and at checkpoints, and following abduction or detention⁴⁵. Attacks include rape or gang rape of women and girls (including with the use of sharp objects), forced sexual acts, torture, and

⁴⁰ Remarks of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, to the Security Council on South Sudan, 18 December 2018, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/statement/remarks-of-the-special-representative-of-the-secretary-general-on-sexual-violence-in-conflict-pramila-patten-to-the-security-council-on-south-sudan-18-december-2018/>, (accessed 24 January 2019).

⁴¹ Global Women's Institute (2017a), No Safe Place: A Lifetime of Violence for Conflict-Affected Women and Girls in South Sudan: Summary Report 2017, (George Washington University: Washington DC, 2017), p.12.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid, p.13.

⁴⁴ Save the Children (2018), *Children's consultations. Voices from Juba and Bor*, (Nairobi: SCI-ESARO), p.25.

⁴⁵ Amnesty International (2017), *Do Not Remain Silent: Survivors of Sexual Violence in South Sudan Call for Justice and Reparations*, (London: Amnesty International), https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/2017-07/Sexual%20Violence%20in%20South%20Sudan.PDF?2_LQwjicG2O-n67YLVwVY0v6vgLQpquwC (accessed 25 January 2019), p.9.

mutilation of genitalia⁴⁶. Men and boys have also been subjected to rape, castration, or other forms of torture, including having their testicles pierced with needles, and having to witness parents or siblings being gang-raped⁴⁷.

Every young girl and woman is at risk of these attacks; elderly women, young girls and pregnant women have not been spared⁴⁸. In terms of children, those who need to walk long distances to access education or health services, unaccompanied children, separated children, girls who work in the farms or have to collect firewood and water, or who walk to markets to sell produce are particularly vulnerable.

A number of factors prevent women and girls from reporting or sharing information about violations, and seeking medical help. Key amongst them are stigma, feelings of shame and rejection by family members. If they speak out, women and girls face being abandoned by family members and subjected to further abuse and violence, including being blamed or being ostracized for fear of being HIV positive⁴⁹. Similarly, boys who are raped or sexually abused are highly unlikely to report such incidents since, in a patriarchal society such as the South Sudanese, sexual violence against boys and men carries an even deeper stigma for the survivor⁵⁰.

3.5.3 Harmful Practices

3.5.3.1 Discrimination

Discrimination against women and girls begins early. Girls are less likely than boys to be educated. Even when they do attend school, girls often leave before completing their education to get married. Girls are generally marginalized from any decision-making processes. As a result of the conflict, and the imperative to assist in

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.10; United Nations Human Rights Council (2018), *Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan*, (A/HRC/37/71), 13 March 2018, p.6.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Amnesty International (2017), *Do Not Remain Silent: Survivors of Sexual Violence in South Sudan Call for Justice and Reparations*, (London:Amnesty International), https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/2017-07/Sexual%20Violence%20in%20South%20Sudan.PDF?2_LQwjicG2O-n67YLvwV0v6vgLQpquwC= (accessed 25 January 2019), p.10.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.60.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p.41.

the home, girls more than boys also tend to be overburdened with housework and care for the elderly and younger siblings.

3.5.3.2 Child early and forced marriages

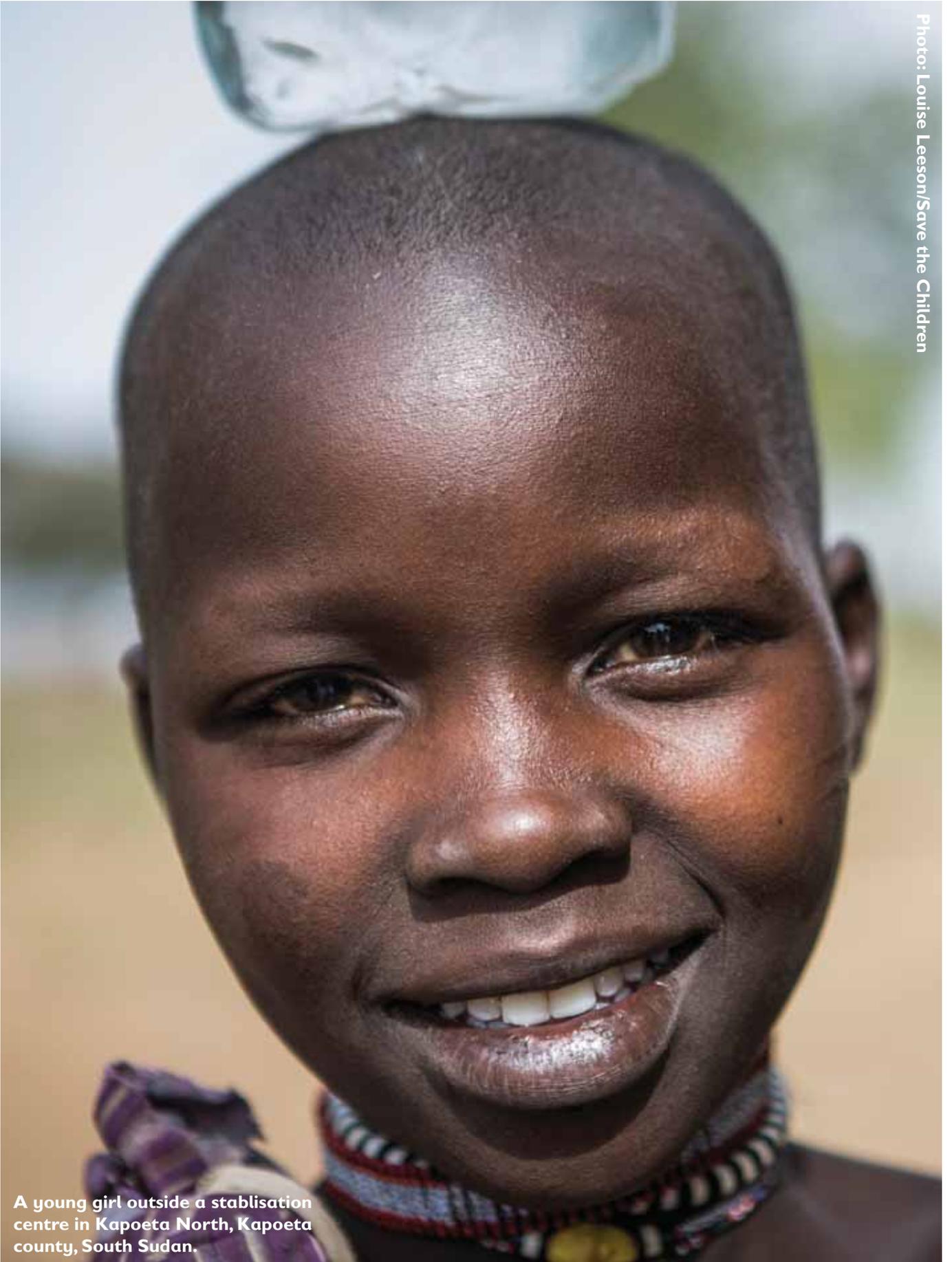
Approximately half of girls in South Sudan are married before reaching the age of 18⁵¹. Early and forced marriages are a common feature of South Sudanese society, particularly in rural areas. Girls are regarded as being ready for marriage at the onset of menstruation. Existing legislation (Transitional Constitution and the Child Act) expressly protects children under the age of 18 from forced and early marriage; however, child forced and early marriages continue to be a common practice, especially as families are displaced, lose their sources of livelihood, poverty levels rise and they marry off their young girls to secure an income from the payment of bride wealth. This was corroborated in focus groups carried out with young girls in both Akobo and Kapoeta, where young girls mentioned, amongst the top factors that made them sad, was their mothers telling them that they need to get married and leave school⁵².

Child marriages are often a consequence of rape, as families – and even customary courts - often force girls to marry their rapists to protect the family reputation. Child and teenage pregnancy puts girls at grave risk since their bodies are immature to carry and deliver a child.

To address the prevalence of child marriage, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), in cooperation with Save the Children and partners, recently developed an action plan to combat child marriage, which is expected to be implemented in 2019. The plan is centred on the mobilisation of key community actors (i.e. local government and traditional authorities), supported by government ‘champions’, as well as a social media campaign.

⁵¹ Global Women's Institute (2017b), *Intersections of Violence against Women and Girls with State-building and Peace-building: Lessons from Nepal, Sierra Leone and South Sudan*, (George Washington University: Washington DC, 2017), p.81.

⁵² FGD Kapoeta; FGD with young girls, Akobo town, 14 November 2018.



A young girl outside a stabilisation centre in Kapoeta North, Kapoeta county, South Sudan.

3.5.3.3 Cattle-raiding and revenge killings

The proliferation of weapons and the normalisation of violence have had serious repercussions on traditional practices such as cattle-raiding. Whereas cattle-raiding has existed for many years, it has become deadlier. As one writer put it, 'raiders who once mounted attacks with spears are now armed with AK-47s available for as little as the price of two cows'⁵³. Interviewees in Kapoeta raised the fact that during cattle raids, which are a constant occurrence, cattle as well as children are abducted. Young children herding cattle and working in the cattle kraals are most at risk of abduction. According to the interviewee, during the last quarter of 2018, 15 young boys were abducted during a cattle raid in Kapoeta.⁵⁴ Interviewees in Akobo raised similar concerns regarding the regular abduction of both girls and boys, enabled by the availability of guns in the community. Very recently, approximately 40 people, mostly women and children, were killed as part of a cattle raid in the area⁵⁵.

3.5.3.4 Girl compensation

A traditional remedy for homicide amongst some communities in Eastern Equatoria is for the perpetrator and his or her family to compensate the victim's family for their loss through the payment of a certain amount of cattle⁵⁶. However, in the event that families are unable to afford such compensation, customary courts often allow a perpetrator's family to give one of their daughters to the family of the homicide victim. This practice in essence results in girls being forced into unwanted marriages, being sent to live with families where they might experience significant prejudice and hardship, whilst at the same time failing to deter premeditated murders committed by those who are willing and able to

pay compensation⁵⁷.

3.6 Mental health and psycho-social support services

Of the 3.4 million babies born in South Sudan since independence in 2011, 2.6 million, or 76%, have been born in war⁵⁸. A significant number of children are growing up distressed as a result of having lost loved ones, witnessed brutal violence and attacks, and endured the hardships of conflict, forced displacement and hunger. Since 2013, more than 1 million children have been affected by psycho-social distress⁵⁹, whereas the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is estimated to be very high (41- 53%)⁶⁰.

Comprehensive studies on mental health issues experienced by children are not available but a recent study conducted in the country identified IDPs showing a range of symptoms commonly associated with mental health disorders such as PTSD and depression⁶¹. These included having nightmares, getting angry easily, being unable to concentrate, and considering suicide⁶². Participants also mentioned headaches, stomach pains, and heart palpitations, which tend to be physical manifestations of psychological stress⁶³.

The brutality and volatility of the conflict are having an enduring impact on the lives of children. In another recent study, young girls highlighted the levels of fear and apprehension that they experience daily. In particular, boys and girls both indicated that fear of being attacked prevented them from walking to attend school⁶⁴.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.26.

⁵⁸ UNICEF (2018b), *3 in 4 children born in South Sudan since independence have known nothing but war – UNICEF*, Press Release, 9 July 2018, https://www.unicef.org/southsudan/media_21722.html (accessed 22 October 2018).

⁵⁹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2018), *2019 South Sudan Humanitarian Needs Overview* (November 2018), p.27.

⁶⁰ Brigitte Rohwerder (2018), *Disability in South Sudan*, Institute of Development Studies, 16 March 2018, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Disability_in_South_Sudan.pdf, (accessed 22 January 2019), p.2.

⁶¹ Amnesty International (2016), 'Our Hearts Have Gone Dark': The Mental Health Impact of South Sudan's Conflict, (London:Amnesty International), <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR6532032016ENGLISH.PDF> (accessed 25 January 2019), p.7.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

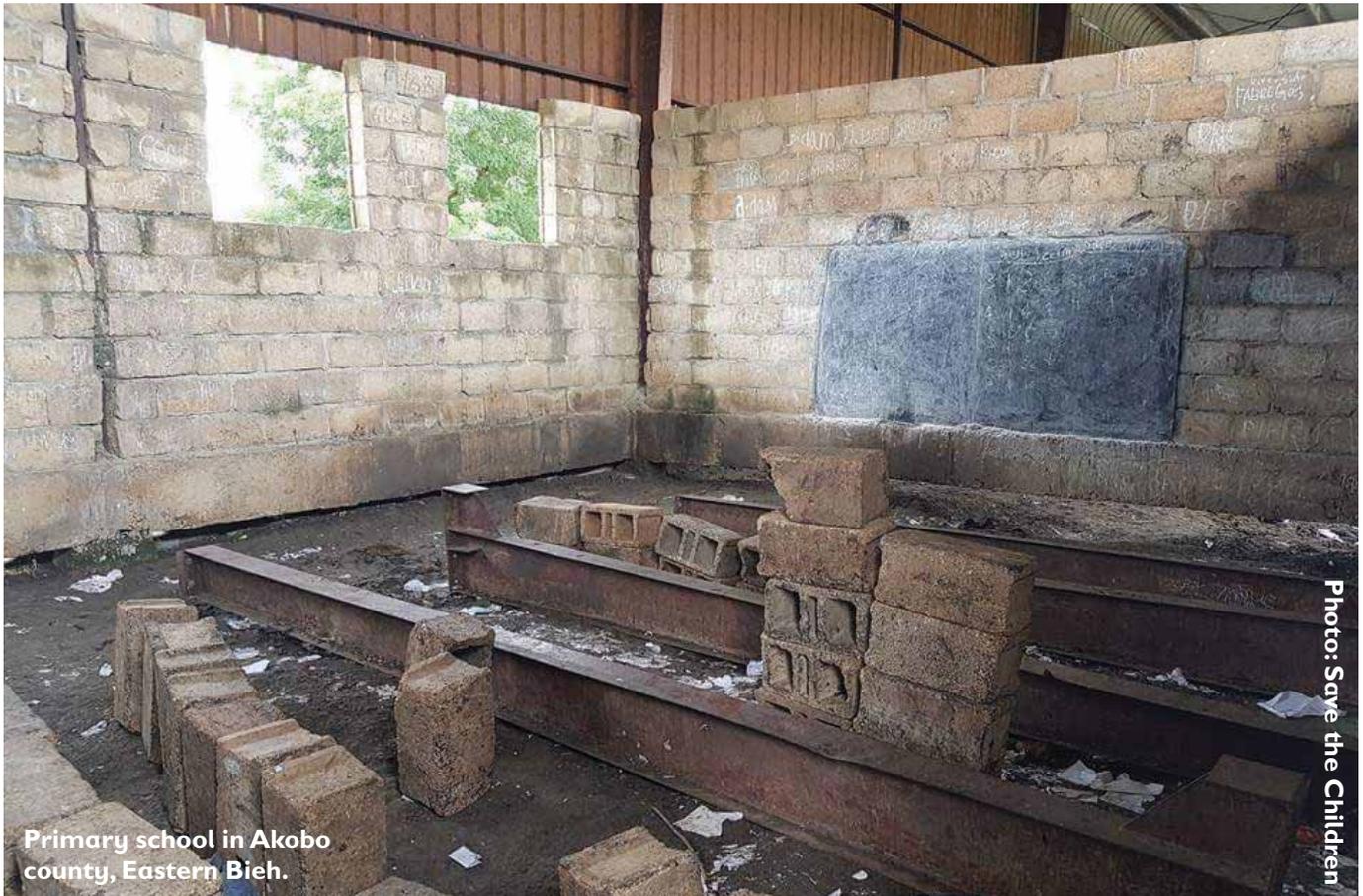
⁶⁴ Plan International (2018), *Adolescent Girls in Crisis:Voices from South Sudan*, May 2018, <https://plan-international.org/publications/girls-crisis-south-sudan>, (accessed 22 January 2019), p.14.

⁵³ Hannah Wild, Jok Madut Jok et al. (2018), "The militarization of cattle raiding in South Sudan: how a traditional practice became a tool for political violence", *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* (2018) 3:2, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-018-0030-y> (accessed 20 January 2019), p.2.

⁵⁴ Key Informant Interview, Kapoeta 2018

⁵⁵ "At least 40 dead, 78 wounded in cattle raiding in Bieh", 9 January 2019, <http://www.eyeradio.org/40-dead-78-wounded-cattle-raiding-bieh/>, (accessed 25 January 2019).

⁵⁶ David Deng (2013), *Challenges of Accountability: An Assessment of Dispute Resolution Processes in Rural South Sudan*, p.58.



Primary school in Akobo county, Eastern Bieh.

Photo: Save the Children

Girls also mentioned that they fear abduction, sexual and physical violence by soldiers living in the bush, looting, and being killed when having to travel long distances⁶⁵. Boys highlighted their fears in relation to forced recruitment, robbery, arbitrary arrest and physical violence by strangers⁶⁶.

Children who participated during the focus groups conducted as part of this study echoed the above views; they mentioned being afraid of people with guns, hearing gunshots and walking alone. Further, when asked about places that were not safe, both girls and boys mentioned that they would not go to the ‘soldiers’ homes’ (i.e. barracks) or the market. Parents repeatedly mentioned that the school should be fenced so that children can be safe.

Despite a massive need to provide mental health and psycho-social support services (MHPSS), there are only two practising psychiatrists for

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

the entire country, one psychiatric nurse, 30 psychologists and 20 community mental health workers in all of South Sudan; mental health patients are routinely housed in prisons instead of receiving the care and treatment they need⁶⁷. There is a dire need for specialized MHPSS services in South Sudan to address mental health conditions.

Against the existing overwhelming demand, the provision of MHPSS depends predominantly on the work of national and international NGOs and UN agencies. At present, they are reaching approximately one quarter of all psychologically distressed children countrywide⁶⁸, which, whilst a massive number, represents only a proportion of all those who require the assistance.

⁶⁷ WHO (2016) WHO Scales-up Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in South Sudan, 27 November 2016, available at <http://www.afro.who.int/news/who-scales-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-southsudan>, (accessed 24/01/2019).

⁶⁸ According to UNICEF, as at 31 October 2018, the Child Protection Sub-Cluster had reached 241,129 children with PSS services (see https://www.unicef.org/appeals/south_sudan.html, (accessed 25 January 2019).



Photo: Save the Children

Children participating in recreational and psychosocial support activities by facilitators at Child-friendly Space in Akobo, South Sudan.

3.7 Education

South Sudan has the highest proportion of out-of-school children in the world. Over 2.2 million children across the country are out of school – more than 70% of those who should be attending classes⁶⁹. This is a trend that is likely to continue and reach over 2.4 million in the next two years, if the peace agreement does not hold⁷⁰. South Sudan's education system is characterised as a low investment, low capacity, but high demand system. The education system consists of 8,000 primary schools (grades 1-8), 120 secondary schools (grades 9-12) and one university. There is only one functional teacher training college in the country to meet the demand for training teachers⁷¹.

The impact of conflict on education have been **substantial. It has pushed hundreds of thousands**

⁶⁹ UNESCO (2018), Global Initiative on Out of School Children: South Sudan Country Study, May 2018, (UNESCO: 2018), p.10.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Global Partnership for Education (2019), Education: a passport for the children of South Sudan, <https://www.globalpartnership.org/country/south-sudan> (accessed 23/01/2019)

of children out of school, with 1 in 3 schools damaged, destroyed, occupied or closed since 2013. A child of school entrance age can only expect to receive 4.9 years⁷² of schooling, a figure that represents half of the average number of years that a child can expect in countries with low human development.

The conflict is depriving millions of children of the education they need, in addition to pre-existing poor education indicators before the conflict started. The active destruction of schools by armed groups, the forced displacement of millions of families and children as a result of the violence, and the minimal investment in education are just some of the factors contributing to the current state of affairs. A systematic failure to invest in quality education has further aggravated the situation. Teachers' salaries are low and paid irregularly and, as

⁷² United Nations Development Programme (2018), *Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*, http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2018_human_development_statistical_update.pdf, (accessed 27 October 2018), p.25.

a result, 31% of teachers have stopped going to school due to non-payment of salaries⁷³. According to UNICEF, if the current situation persists, only one in 13 children are likely to complete the full cycle of primary education⁷⁴.

Rising poverty levels make school fees overly burdensome for many families to send their children to school. Although the Constitution and the Child Act provide for free primary education, in practice, parents are often expected to pay teachers' salaries⁷⁵. Socio-cultural beliefs and practices, including those that devalue education for girls or put children to work at a young age, also act as a major barrier to a child being in school⁷⁶.

In focus group discussions held with children in Kapoeta and Akobo, they were unanimous in mentioning school and having food as the top factors that made them happiest.⁷⁷ School provides them with a sense of stability and a level of protection. Children attending school in a safe learning space has the potential to reduce the risk of forced recruitment by armed groups, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), early marriage, teen pregnancy and child labour.

3.8 Healthcare and sanitation

Malaria remains the main cause of morbidity and mortality among children⁷⁸. Malnutrition rates are alarmingly high; more than 1 million children are malnourished, including 300,000 severely so and at risk of death⁷⁹. In addition to malnutrition and possible famine, thousands of children have been affected by a major cholera outbreak, whilst malaria, pneumonia and diarrhoea claim

children's lives on a regular basis. Anaemia among children under 5 was over 47% in the first half of 2018⁸⁰.

Approximately 70% of South Sudanese lack access to adequate health care⁸¹. Medical facilities have been indirectly damaged during the conflict, but parties to the conflict have also directly attacked medical facilities and personnel as a tactic of war, and such actions qualify as one of the grave violations against children⁸². Not only have health facilities been looted or destroyed, but also many health workers have not been paid⁸³. As at December 2017, at least 20% of the country's 1,900 medical facilities had closed and about 50% were functioning at extremely limited capacity (e.g., with severe shortages of medicines, equipment, and staff); 400 health facilities were fully operational⁸⁴.

This situation is exacerbated by the lack of basic water and sanitation across the country. Approximately half of the population have access to a basic water supply and only 10% of the population have access to basic sanitation; more than 61% practice open defecation⁸⁵. In some areas, the fighting has made it impossible to repair or maintain basic sanitation facilities, while in comparatively safe areas, large influxes of people fleeing the fighting have further strained them. In the absence of safe water sources, families rely on water from contaminated rivers or streams. Linked to this, a cholera outbreak, which started in June 2016, led to more than 20,112 cases, including 388 deaths. Close to half the cases were among children under the age of 15⁸⁶.

⁷³ UNICEF (2017b), *Childhood under Attack: The staggering impact of South Sudan's crisis on children*, p.8.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁷⁵ United States Department of State (2017), *2017 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: South Sudan*, (Bureau of International Labor Affairs: Washington DC, 2017), <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/south-sudan>, (accessed 22 October 2018), p.2.

⁷⁶ UNESCO (2018), *Global Initiative on Out of School Children: South Sudan Country Study*, May 2018, p.13.

⁷⁷ FGD Kapoeta (2018)

⁷⁸ UNICEF (2019), *Humanitarian Action for Children: South Sudan, January 2019*, <https://www.unicef.org/appeals/files/2019-HAC-South-Sudan.pdf>, (accessed 22 January 2019).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ UNHCR (2018b), *South Sudan Regional Refugee Response Plan: Uganda: 2018 Mid-Year Report*, (UNHCR: 2018), p1.

⁸¹ Watch list on Children in Armed Conflict (2018a), "Everyone and Everything Is a Target": The Impact on Children of Attacks on Health Care and Denial of Humanitarian Access in South Sudan, (Watch list on Children in Armed Conflict: New York, April 2018), p.4.

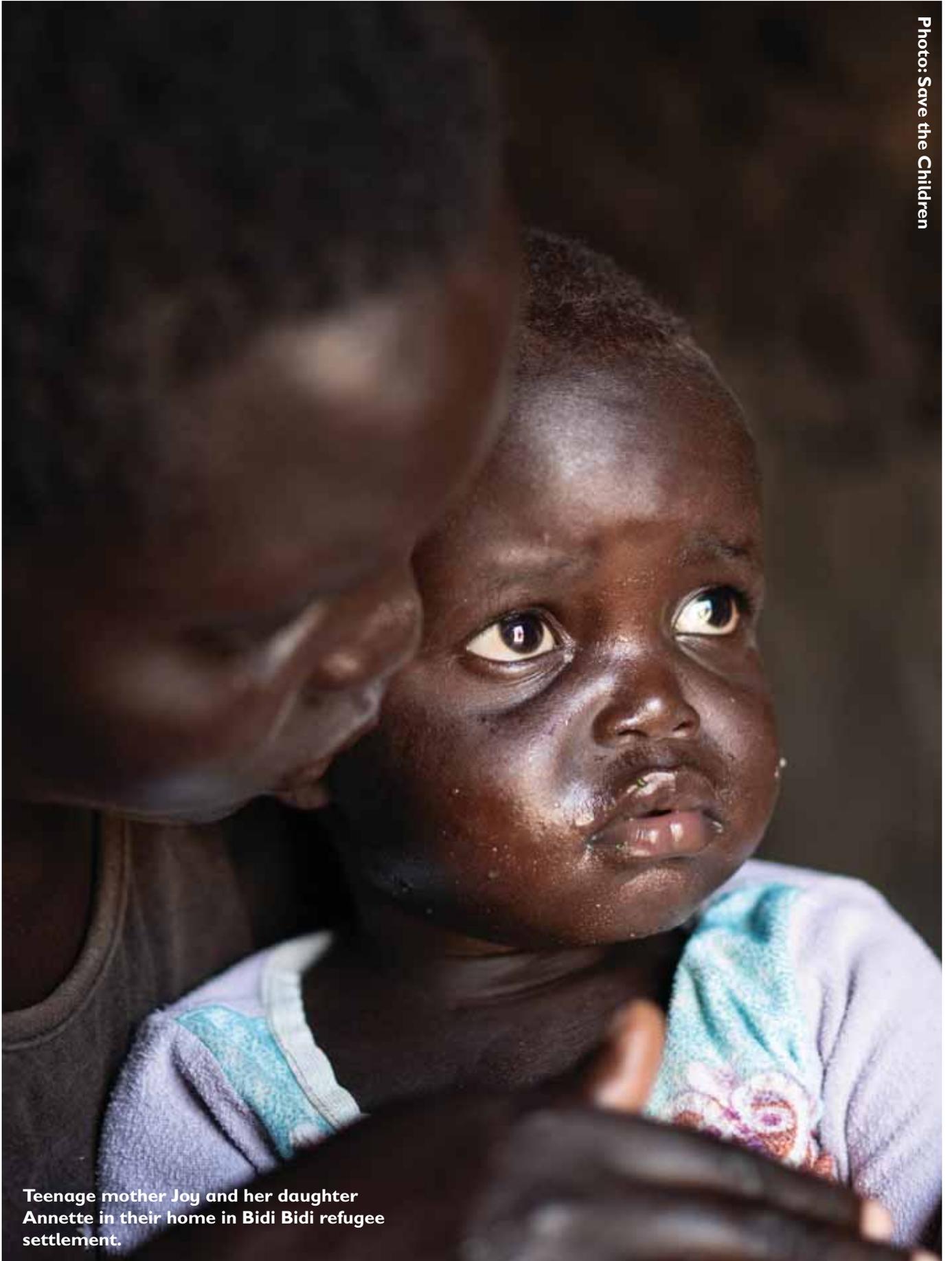
⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ UNICEF (2017b), *Childhood under Attack: The staggering impact of South Sudan's crisis on children*, p.7.

⁸⁴ Watch list on Children in Armed Conflict (2018a), "Everyone and Everything Is a Target": The Impact on Children of Attacks on Health Care and Denial of Humanitarian Access in South Sudan, (Watch list on Children in Armed Conflict: New York, April 2018), p.4.

⁸⁵ UNICEF (2017b), *Childhood under Attack: The staggering impact of South Sudan's crisis on children*, p.2.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.7.



Teenage mother Joy and her daughter Annette in their home in Bidi Bidi refugee settlement.

3.9 Excluded children

3.9.1 Children living and working on the streets

The impact of the conflict, coupled with the dire economic situation, have led a number of children moving to urban centres and to live on the streets⁸⁷. Factors pushing children to live and work on the streets include war-induced displacement and rural urban migration; parental loss, separation and family disruption; economic constraints on children and families forcing children to work to support the household and large size of the family leading to a crowded environment with subsequent mistreatment and domestic conflict⁸⁸.

Many of these children have fled the conflict, and are either orphaned or have become separated from their family members. To survive these children search for scraps of food and most do not attend school⁸⁹. According to some organisations, the number of street children could be as high as 10,000 throughout South Sudan, including 3,000 in Juba alone⁹⁰.

3.9.2 Children with disabilities

Decades of conflict in South Sudan, poverty and poor access to services have increased the rate of disability and rendered people with disabilities more marginalised and excluded due to the numerous attitudinal, environmental, and institutional barriers they face, and the lack of concerted efforts to include them⁹¹.

Children with disabilities face many barriers to inclusion including a lack of specialised services, difficulties accessing mainstream education, health and other services, in addition to stigma.

Children with physical disabilities (i.e. missing limbs, blindness) also face significant mobility impairments due to the lack of assistive devices⁹². Traditional gender roles limit women and girls with disabilities to access education and employment making them more vulnerable and dependent. Children with disabilities are also at a greater risk of being unable to flee under attack, and to suffer physical and sexual abuse during attacks⁹³.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the foregoing, the study makes the following recommendations:

- The Government of South Sudan (GoSS) and all parties to the conflict to work towards full realization of the prospects for peace envisaged in the peace deal. This demands that parties to the conflict remain true to their obligations and cease the fighting. Interventions aimed at stemming the proliferation and availability of arms will also have a marked impact on the conflict and the operating environment.
- The government with support of donors and development agencies to urgently work towards strengthening weak institutions and state-building through ensuring strong and supportive national policy and legislative frameworks; ascension to international and regional instruments and development of government systems such as the civil registry database, through Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS) and other data gathering interventions.
- The government, donors and development partners to effectively support the rebuilding of community structures through scaling up the role,

⁸⁷ Stefanie Glinski (2018), In South Sudan, civil war drives more children onto the streets, into work, 13 February 2018, (Thomson Reuters Foundation: 2018), <http://news.trust.org/item/20180213100021-ctxmr/>, (accessed 22 October 2018).

⁸⁸ Save the Children (2018), *Children's consultations. Voices from Juba and Bor*, (Nairobi: SCI-ESARO), p.32.

⁸⁹ The Peninsula (2017), 'South Sudan children bear brunt of three-year conflict', 21 January 2017, <https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/21/01/2017/South-Sudan-children-bear-brunt-of-three-years-conflict>, (accessed 22 October 2018).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Brigitte Rohwerder (2018), *Disability in South Sudan*, Institute of Development Studies, 16 March 2018, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Disability_in_South_Sudan.pdf, (accessed 22 January 2019), p.5.

⁹² Save the Children (2018), *Children's consultations. Voices from Juba and Bor*, (Nairobi: SCI-ESARO), p.32.

⁹³ Amnesty International (2017), *Do Not Remain Silent: Survivors of Sexual Violence in South Sudan Call for Justice and Reparations*, (London: Amnesty International), p.42.



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Masonry student, Jay*, participates at Save the Children's vocational training centre in South Sudan.

- function and capacity of community-based child protection mechanisms and the transfer of critical skills in terms of lay counselling, mediation and conflict-resolution.
- The government and all actors in South Sudan to work towards strengthening the social fabric of society through interventions aimed at family and community cohesion and which revolve around the protection of children, through awareness raising (i.e. on peace deal and the Six Grave Violations, creating gun/violence free communities), sensitisation on children's rights, aimed at changing attitudes and behaviour, encouraging child participation (child safe spaces) and local ownership of the interventions in the long-term. Such interventions should be tailored to specific realities and experiences of the different vulnerable groups targeted (e.g. boys and girls associated with armed actors).
- The Government, donors and development partners to devotedly work towards strengthening the MRM process through interventions aimed at improving reporting and verification of violations and responding to releases and reintegration of children associated with armed forces or armed groups, using the profile of different stakeholders at different levels to strategically improve coordination and collaboration within the clusters.
- That Child-focused agencies organisations to invest and work towards capacities to deliver on their mandate, through interventions aimed at improving access to communities where the grave violations are most prevalent, optimising the potential of collaboration with other entities such as UN bodies to fast track delivery of services and support the development of systems of government in collaboration with partner organisations.

Tico Justin/Save the Children



Youth group graduated from a 9 months skills training program in Rumbek, South Sudan.

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