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**QUARTERLY
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————— **#Musharaka4Tanmiya** —————

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Table of contents

Message from the Country Representative3

UNFPA recognizes Innovative Solutions by young people to address Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights.....4

A harrowing journey from Khartoum to Renk, Toma’s story of despair.....6

Parliamentarians commit to accelerating progress in enacting the Bill to regulate the practice of nurses and midwives.....8

A year of war on the bodies of women and girls fleeing Sudan crisis.....10

Bride price in South Sudan - a burden, pressure, or pride?12

Work hard, smart, and trust in your ability”, DSRSG Kiki advises the youth of South Sudan....14

Menstruate with dignity- Building a period-friendly South Sudan.....15

Chiefs pledge to end child marriage.....18

Holistic care for survivors of GBV through Clinical Management of Rape.....19

Fuel-efficient stoves transforming women and girls lives.....20

Female Boxing Bout – a journey towards empowerment and gender equality.....22

From Shame to Freedom- An oasis of hope at the One Stop Centres.....24

“Give us our space at the table of decision-making”, - an appeal from the Youth of Upper Nile... ..26

Life skills mentorship program in Lakes State yield fruits.....28

Martha’s journey of embodying determination in pursuit of her dream to midwifery.....29

Finding strength and resilience in positive living through community solidarity.....30

From Despair to Hope: A sex-worker’s journey of transformation.....31

Tea of Hope and Resilience, a story of a 27-year-old mother.....32

Yar Nyok knits her way out of poverty, thanks to seed funding.....33

The transformative impact of friendly spaces in empowering adolescents.....34

Message from the Country Representative



Dr. Ademola Olajide

Dear esteemed readers and partners, UNFPA South Sudan brings you the second quarter Newsletter for the year 2024 which covers the months of April, May and June. This is a collection of stories highlighting the UNFPA Country Office's response as it works around the Humanitarian, Development, and Peace Nexus.

In this Newsletter, you will read stories on empowering young people through innovations, engaging Chiefs at State level in ending child marriage, empowering young people as agents of change and strategic partnership to advance SRH.

UNFPA collaborated with the Parliamentarians to advocate for tax exemption on sanitary pads and to promote better menstrual health management. The law makers also engaged in discussions on the Nursing and Midwifery bill which will be a key landmark in promotion of Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) when passed.

A number of the South Sudanese people continue to be in need of humanitarian support and

UNFPA in the second quarter continued to support the humanitarian response by transforming lives of women through skills training at the Women and Girls Friendly Spaces and support to the One Stop Centers which continue to restore hope and life for the affected vulnerable women and girls. This also included prevention and response to Gender Based Violence as part of the efforts to enhance the dignity of women and girls.

Our commitment to collaborate and to explore innovative ways to tackle humanitarian and development priorities demonstrates a forward-thinking, robust and adaptable approach to programming and support for SRHR. I am optimistic that by adopting new, creative solutions, and staying responsive to changing circumstances, we will together register good strides for South Sudan.

As always, I commend the Government of South Sudan for its leadership in supporting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for all. I am grateful to our Donors and all partners for the fruitful collaboration and partnership in implementation of the Country Program.

UNFPA recommits its efforts to our core mission of delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled.

We look forward to continued collaboration and partnership to continue delivering better for the women and girls, and young people in South Sudan, reaching the farthest to ensure no one is left behind.

UNFPA recognizes Innovative Solutions by young people to address Sexual Reproductive Health.



Winner Rachael Hakim from Reprohealth displaying her dummy cheque

Three youths were recognized and awarded for their exceptional innovative initiatives in a bid to address Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights challenges in South Sudan.

In a long and nail-biting adjudication by a panel of jurists, the enthusiastic youth gathered to see how their innovative ideas to address family planning yielded fruits.

Dr. Ademola Olajide, the UNFPA South Sudan Country Representative, emphasized the need for increased awareness and empowerment of youths to effectively address Gender-Based Violence. He reiterated UNFPA's steadfast commitment to supporting young people through innovative initiatives and advocacy efforts.

Rachel Hakim, the overall winner who bagged USD 2000 expressed joy and gratitude for being recognized for her exceptional efforts to address Gender-Based Violence and sexual reproductive health and rights. Rachel urged parents to prioritize education for their daughters and to empower them to become future leaders and avoid early marriages and pregnancies.



UNFPA Country Rep, Dr. Ademola Olajide addressing the youth

The first and second runners-up of the innovation challenge echoed Rachel's sentiments and called upon the government to support initiatives that enable young girls to access education and fulfill their potential to become future leaders of South Sudan.

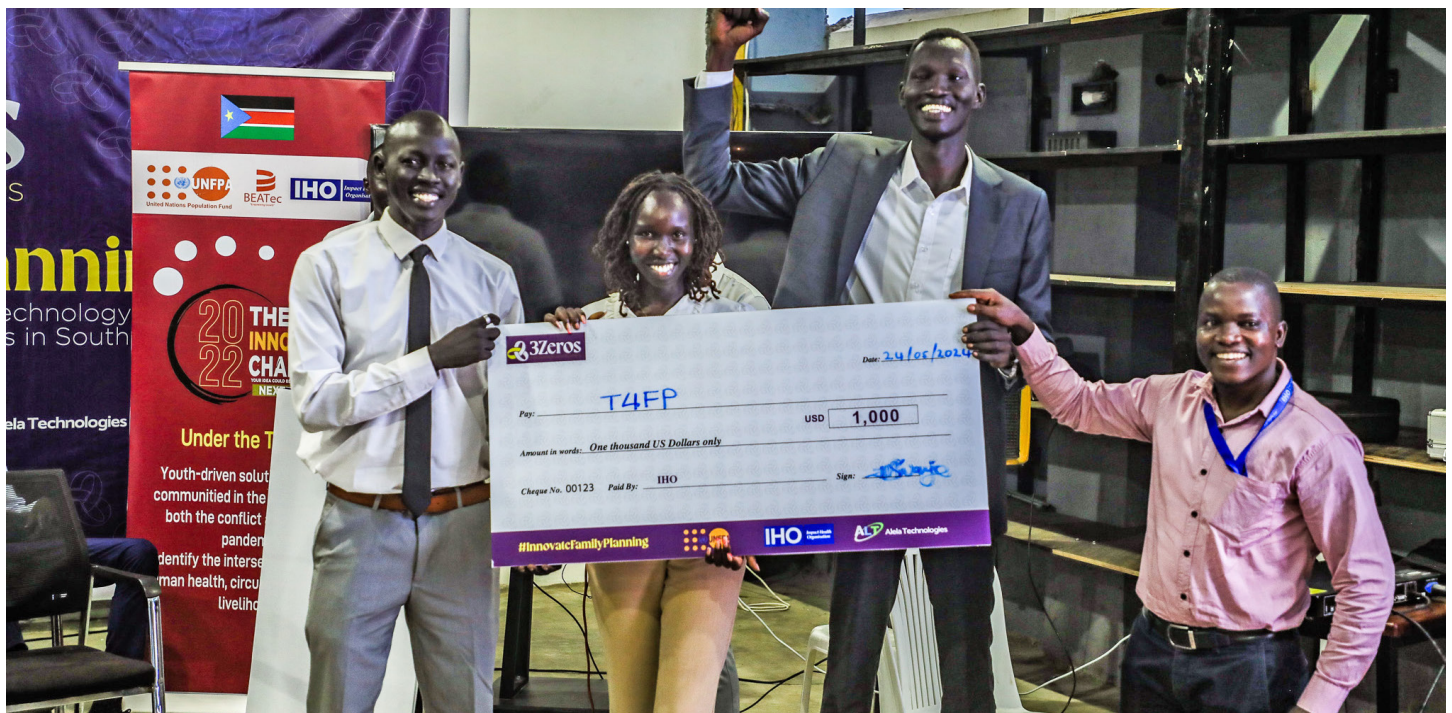
Nelson Kwaje, the Executive Director of Scenius Hub, highlighted the importance of providing technical assistance to existing innovation hubs for creating solutions to tackle Gender-Based Violence, sexual reproductive health, family planning, STI/HIV prevention, and child marriage in South Sudan. He commended the awardees for their outstanding efforts in driving positive change in their communities.

The awards ceremony served as a beacon of hope and inspiration. By showcasing the creativity and

dedication of youths in driving positive change in their communities.

Dr. Jollem Mwange, the Executive Director of Impact Health Organization (IHO), underscored the collaborative efforts between UNFPA, IHO, and Scenius Hubs in advocating for girl-child rights, particularly in education and decision-making, to combat early marriages in communities across South Sudan.

The event, organized by UNFPA South Sudan in partnership with Impact Health Organization -IHO and Alela Technologies, saw young talents from all over South Sudan converge in Scenius Hub-Juba to showcase their creativity and dedication to addressing critical issues affecting women and girls. This is a culmination to last year's pitches that was held at the University of Juba's UNIPOD.



Second-runnerup T4FP displaying their dummi cheque as IHO country director Dr. Jolem cheers up

A harrowing journey from Khartoum to Renk, Toma's story of despair



Women learning new skills at women and Girls Friendly Space operated by IMC in Renk Transit site

Renk-Upper Nile State- Toma Daniel, a 52-year-old fled the Sudan war in April to Renk in Upper Nile State of South Sudan. Like any other war escapee anywhere in the world, she was faced with lots of challenges, the worst was sexual violence by gun men. This is a horror journey she says she will live to remember her entire life.

“I was gang raped by eight men, they were wielding all sorts of guns on me, all the big-big guns some I have never seen in my life were pointed at me. I was filled with fear but also anger. I hated my life, questioning myself what crime I committed to deserve this kind of horror” recounts Toma at the International Medical Corps-IMC women support center in Renk.

Toma, a mother of five, questions the rationale of the actions of the men in uniform who abused her instead of protecting her. She was left unconscious, but thankfully recovered and continued the painful journey to Renk.

Toma fled South Sudan for Khartoum in 2013 a place she considered a safe haven, but ten-years later she is fleeing Khartoum back to South Sudan. Due to underlying health-related complications, she is looking for a means of relocating to Juba by flight as she would not be able to undertake a journey by a boat via river Nile.

She is full of praise for International Medical Corps-IMC staff for the support at the women's center,

“When I arrived at the center, my case was expeditiously handled, I was counseled, and given medication for my other ailments as well as injuries suffered in the hands of the barbaric soldiers as they sexually abused me. I am so grateful to the service providers for they have gone the extra mile to educate us, create awareness on how to take care of ourselves, young girls in terms of hygiene and prevention of risks to sexual violence.”

Toma, says she is gradually recovering from the

trauma that she went through, thanks to the Women and Girls-Friendly Space at Renk. At the center, the bead-making and knitting of tablecloths exercises are helping the women repair the broken hearts as the center teaches them so many survival skills.

It is over a year since war broke out in Sudan and so far there are no signs that it would end soon. Many women and girls like Toma continue to bear the brunt.



A caseworker raising GBV awareness to refugees at Renk Transite Site

Parliamentarians commit to accelerating progress in enacting the Bill to regulate the practice of nurses and midwives



Hon. Majur Babur Ajal addressing parliamentarians as Hon Ruben Madol Arol and Dr. Ademola Olajide listens

Members of the Revitalized Transitional National Legislative Assembly have pledged to pass the Nursing and Midwifery Bill once it reaches the parliament, a legislative move poised to transform maternal health care in South Sudan.

The session organized by the Parliamentary Network on Population and Development (PNPD), in collaboration with the South Sudan Nurses and Midwives Association (SSNAMA), the Association of Gynaecologists and Obstetricians of South Sudan (AGOSS), with support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) the deliberations were passionate about the welfare of every South Sudanese regardless of political affiliation.

In his opening remarks, the Secretary General of the PNPD, Hon. Lumori Simon, emphasized the critical need for legislative support to safeguard the lives of mothers and infants.

The same call was re-echoed by the President of SSNAMA, saying the bill, once passed has potential positive impact on healthcare delivery.

Dr. Ademola Olajide, UNFPA Country Representative highlighted the broader implications of the bill, aligning it with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 3, which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all. His words resonated deeply, reminding everyone that behind every statistic is a human life, a family forever changed by the loss of a mother, a child or both.

“This Bill is more than just legislation. It is a human rights issue.”

Hon. Ruben Arol, Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs added a layer of gravitas to the proceedings, ensuring that the dialogue was not just

symbolic but a prelude to tangible action. He stated his Ministry's support for the Bill and expected it to be revised quickly by the Ministry of Health and then tabled to the Council of Ministers and the National Assembly.

"I want to assure you all that my ministry and I are fully with you to deliver on this legislation - The Nurses and Midwifery Bill 2024" - Hon. Ruben Arol A Q&A session led by Hon. Taban, generated candid discussions, reflecting a shared commitment to overcoming the challenges that have long plagued the nation's healthcare system, prompting the Chairperson of the PNPD Hon. Major Babur, to call for the swift passage and implementation of the Nursing and Midwifery Bill once it is tabled in the Parliament.

The legislative session on the Nursing and Midwifery Bill was more than just a meeting; it was a testament to the power of collaboration and advocacy. It highlighted the crucial role of parliamentarians in driving policy changes that can save lives. Most importantly, it gave voice to the silent

cries of mothers who have lost their lives and to those who continue to fight for a safer, healthier future for their children.

As the bill moves closer to becoming law, the hope is that South Sudan will see a drastic improvement in maternal health outcomes, bringing the nation one step closer to achieving its health and development goals. This session, infused with passion and purpose, marks the beginning of a new chapter in South Sudan's journey towards ensuring every mother and child has a chance at a healthy life with quality nursing and midwifery services at the forefront.

South Sudan's maternal health statistics paint a grim picture. With 1,223 women dying per 100,000 live births, the country bears one of the highest maternal mortality ratios globally. This stark reality underscores the urgency for systemic change. The Nursing and Midwifery Bill represents a beacon of hope, promising to establish a robust regulatory framework for the practice of nurses and midwives, thereby enhancing the quality and availability of maternal and neonatal health services.



Deliberations on Nursing and Midwifery Bill at Revitalized Transitional National Legislative Assembly

A year of war on the bodies of women and girls fleeing Sudan crisis



Women in Renk Transit Site

In South Sudan, women and girls face a relentless cascade of challenges such as devastating floods, acute food insecurity, scorching heat waves, recurring internal conflicts, outbreak of infectious diseases, and widespread displacements – all fueling a grim reality of sexual violence, and marking the bodies of women and girls with unspeakable trauma.

In these layers of crises, the critical need for sexual and reproductive health services grows more urgent as the country's health infrastructure struggles, leaving many facilities barely functional and unable to meet essential sexual and reproductive health needs.

The Sudan conflict has so far displaced around 1.3 million people forced to flee to neighboring countries including South Sudan. By the end of

April, more than 670,680 individuals, majority of whom were women and girls, had fled the conflict to South Sudan.

UNFPA, in collaboration with its partners, is actively working to mitigate the suffering by providing essential reproductive health services to displaced women and girls and implementing measures to prevent and respond to gender-based violence at ports of arrival and host communities. These zones include Renk, in Transit centers like Malakal and other areas of destination such as Bentiu, Rotriak, Wau, Juba, Bor, Mayom and Pibor.

In addition to arrivals from Sudan, these locations host persons who have been internally displaced as well as returnees from other neighboring countries.

Support from UNFPA facilitated through partners and referral hospitals, has been crucial in ensuring that women and girls have access to high-quality sexual and reproductive health services. Moreover, UNFPA support to the Women and Girls Friendly Space (WGFS) has been instrumental in restoring hope and rebuilding lives for those affected.

In that space, women and girls find a sanctuary where they are safe physically and emotionally and can recover from trauma. This nurturing environment protects them from violence and abuse, while providing access to vital information, education, and opportunities for economic empowerment.

The WGFS also serves as a crucial entry point for identifying potential cases of gender-based violence and facilitating referrals to comprehensive one-stop centres (OSC). These OSC offer holistic support including medical, legal, and psychosocial services under one roof, ensuring that survivors can access the care they desperately need to transform their lives. At the Centers, survivors are met and served with the care, dignity, and respect they deserve.

UNFPA has also been distributing dignity kits to vulnerable women and girls as well as survivors of gender-based violence. Furthermore, UNFPA supports survivors of gender-based violence with cash through cash for protection mechanism. In all these interventions, UNFPA coordinates closely with partners and counterparts to ensure complementarity and to promote the multisectoral approach.

The funding from the U.S Department Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF) and European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) towards humanitarian response provided by UNFPA has impacted positively in restoring hope and rebuilding lives of women and girls.

However, there is a need to scale up further to other affected areas including host communities, and follow-up mechanisms at their final destination when they leave transit centres.

Dr Demola Olajide, UNFPA Representative to South Sudan, said, *“We call on partners to fund our humanitarian response services. These are mostly sexual and reproductive health needs, gender-based violence prevention and response services closer to those affected by Sudan crisis to ensure that women, girls, families and wider community reach their fullest potential. Peace is the ultimate solution to end the suffering of women and girls for everyone to thrive.”*

Bride price in South Sudan - a burden, pressure, or pride?



Chief Malok Dhuol Akek, among the panelists during the dialogue on bride price, the burden, pressure and pride it comes with

“Bride price is at the heart of the varied challenges facing women and girls in South Sudan” said Kobi Bentley, the Humanitarian and Development Director for the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) leading UK’s international development engagement in South Sudan, during a panel discussion to address the complexities of bride price and its implications on gender relations, women’s rights, and societal well-being.

The panel discussion followed a research publication of findings by Coventry University and Peace Rep on bride price, gender, and Conflict, in South Sudan. It also shed light on the economic, social, and political implications of bride price in the country.

The research found that bride price reinforces negative gender norms, contributes to early marriages and violence against women, and can escalate regional conflict through pressure on men to meet societal expectations.

“Cultural practices that undermine the rights and well-being of individuals especially women and girls in society compromise the sustainable development trajectory of the nation as a whole.” Said UNFPA South Sudan Representative, Dr. Ademola Olajide Dr. Ademola Olajide



UNFPA Country Rep, Dr. Ademola Olajide moderate during the dialogue

Chief Malok Dhuol Akek, who represented traditional chiefs during the discussion defended the cultural practices of South Sudan, juxtaposing modernity with old traditions saying the modern era

lifestyle is eroding the social values of Africans, blaming immorality indiscipline, and lack of values to modernity.

The Executive Director of Men for Women and the condomize champion who participated in the discussion noted that *“Men feel pressured, and burdened but fear to open up on matters related to paying bride price”*.

South Sudan is a paratracheal society with social norms and cultural beliefs that undermine women and girls' rights.

Recommendations from the report include holistic legal reforms and pragmatic regulations to address bride price practices, promoting marriage as an individual union rather than a family arrangement.

The panel discussion, attended by young people, experts, and partners from various organizations, emphasized the urgent need to address the deeply rooted challenges stemming from bride prices in South Sudan.



A participant from the audience posing a question

“Work hard, smart, and trust in your ability”, DSRSG Kiki advises the youth of South Sudan.



DSRSG/RC/HC Ms Kiki Anita Ghebo engaging with youth at Scenius Hub

“*Work hard and believe in yourselves*”, in a session with the young people on “Youth engagement in development and humanitarian discourse in South Sudan”, Ms Anita Gbeho Kiki, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General/ Resident Coordinator/ Humanitarian Coordinator, delivered this powerful message to the youth at Scenius hub, Juba.

She emphasized the importance of persistence, hard work, and self-belief, saying, “*What will make you stand out is your ability to keep going, work hard and smart, and trust in your ability.*” Her interaction with the young South Sudanese highlighted the incredible potential they possess to drive positive change in their communities. With over 50 youths from across Juba participating in the event, Ms Kiki engaged in a dialogue to understand the challenges faced by young people regarding development and humanitarian issues in the country. She reassured them of her office’s commitment to collaborate with, and support the youth in their endeavours.

Organized by the UNFPA country office through IHO, and in partnership with Scenius Hub, the

program aimed to facilitate discussions and gain insights from the youth on how best to involve them in shaping the Country’s future.

The event shed light on various initiatives that have been implemented to actively engage the youth in South Sudan’s development and humanitarian efforts.

Expressing her enthusiasm for the youth’s potential to transform their society, Ms Kiki’s words resonated deeply as she urged them to believe in themselves and embrace their pivotal roles in driving positive change. The event served as a platform for meaningful interactions and learning opportunities, paving the way for a more inclusive and empowered youth community in South Sudan’s development journey.



Dr. Ademola speaking to the youth

Menstruate with dignity- Building a period-friendly South Sudan



School Girls learning skills on making re-usable sanitary pads

In South Sudan, the price of sanitary pads remains high, hence unaffordable to many households due to widespread poverty. Out of a total population of 13 million, about 10.6 million (82.3%) people live below USD 1.9 daily in South Sudan. The taxation on disposable pads has added another burden to an already difficult situation for poorer households.

Due to taboos and lack of menstrual health facilities and supplies, girls often drop out of school and this disrupts their education and limits their prospects and opportunities for a better life.

In a bid to address this challenge, Amref Health Africa in partnership with UNFPA, initiated an integrated Menstrual Hygiene Management Program through the Comprehensive Sexuality Education.

This approach is transforming the lives of school girls by improving access to menstrual pads and building their capacity to make reusable menstrual pads. This has yielded results in Yambio, Maridi, and Juba.



School Girls learning skills on making re-usable sanitary pads

Poor Menstrual Hygiene Management leads to discomfort, missed school days, and a sense of shame and stigma. The sessions on making reusable pads in schools have tackled this issue head-on by equipping schools with the resources to produce their reusable pads.

Modong Manuela from Amref and a Peer educator Asha Juan, train girls and teachers on how to make these pads, fostering self-reliance and dignity.

The program also provides vital education on menstrual hygiene management, breaking down taboos, and promoting healthy practices.

Through the collaborative support of UNFPA, Amref Health Africa in South Sudan is proud to be a part of a solution paving the way for a “period-friendly world” in a country where girls are empowered with the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to manage their periods with dignity and stay in school.



AMREF's Emmanuela Modong demonstrating hands on training on making reusable pads

Chiefs pledge to end child marriage



Hon. Peter Lokeng Lotone addressing the chiefs during the conference in Torit

In a remarkable show of unity and determination, over 40 traditional chiefs from the 8 Counties of Eastern Equatoria State convened for a three-day Chiefs Conference in Torit. They gathered to engage in dialogue to end child marriage which is very high in South Sudan largely due to the bride price attached to it.

State Minister of Local Government and Law Enforcement, Hon. Peter Lokeng Lotone, emphasized the importance of empowering daughters through education.

“Empower our daughters with education, for as long as they are still left behind with studies, we are far from ending child marriage.” Saying education plays a critical role in combating early marriages.

Hon. Jennifer Nabongorika, State Minister of Gender Child and Social Welfare acknowledged.

the chiefs for their pivotal roles in representing the government at the grassroots level where most cultural practices that are harmful to women and girls are highly practiced.

The conference was to build on the commitments made in previous Chiefs’ conferences and develop actionable plans to accelerate progress in ending child marriage. With alarming statistics indicating that **52%** of girls in South Sudan marry before the age of 18, concerted efforts are needed to safeguard the rights and well-being of young girls in South Sudan.

The Strategic National Action Plan -SNAP by the government of South Sudan aims to End Child Marriage by 2030.

The chiefs Conference is an annual event organized by UNFPA under the leadership of the Ministry of Gender, Child, and Social Welfare at the national level.

Holistic care for survivors of GBV through Clinical Management of Rape



Participants on a group photo after the training in Akobo West

In the heart of Akobo West, where hope often feels distant amidst challenges, a transformative initiative unfolded, spearheaded by Doctors Without Borders and Hope Restoration South Sudan in collaboration with UNFPA and generously funded by the Government of Japan. This initiative aimed to equip local health service providers with essential skills in specialized Clinical Management of Rape (CMR).

Over the years, the community of Akobo West had struggled silently with the aftermath of sexual violence, lacking the necessary resources and expertise to support survivors adequately. This changed when dedicated trainers arrived, bringing knowledge and compassion to guide local healthcare professionals through intensive CMR training. The intense training covered forensic evidence collection, psychosocial support, and legal aspects all crucial components in the holistic care of survivors.

Nurse Rebecca Nyachot was one of the trainees, whose dedication to her profession and community propelled her to attend the training,

“I knew this training would change lives, I now see each survivor not just as a patient, but as a testament to the transformative power of compassionate care. With ongoing support, we can ensure every voice finds healing and justice “ she recalls, reflecting on the profound impact it would have on her practice.

Armed with newfound knowledge and skills, Nurse Rebecca Nyachot and her peers returned to their respective health facilities with renewed determination. They hope to transform health facilities into sanctuaries of healing, where survivors of sexual assault find not just medical treatment, but compassionate care and unwavering support.

The success of the CMR training in Akobo West fostered a ripple effect of empowerment and hope. Survivors, once marginalized and silenced, began to step forward, driven by the assurance of being attended to by competent healthcare professionals.

Fuel-efficient stoves transforming women and girls lives



Group of Women molding energy efficient cookstoves in Bentiu Women and Girls friendly Space

Efficient cookstoves reduce the amount of fuel needed to cook, thus reducing the burden on families who would otherwise have to collect it, buy it, or trade their food for it. Reducing risks of sexual violence for women and girls while gone to collect firewood in bushes.

In Bentiu, Hope Restoration South Sudan, with the support of UNFPA, has trained over 600 women and girls in fuel-efficient stove-making skills with a premise to change and revolutionize daily life in communities across South Sudan. Amidst the challenges of conflict and displacement, these women and girls have embraced the opportunity to learn and innovate, turning adversity into a catalyst for positive change.

Nyakuma 34 years, a mother of four from Leer never imagined she would one day be crafting stoves that not only conserve precious resources but also promote safety and health.



Women making final touches on cookstove

“Before this training, we struggled with traditional cooking methods that were not only inefficient but also posed health risks,” she shares. “Now, I feel empowered to contribute to my family’s well-being while protecting our environment. After mastering stove making through training, I’ve found a new path to support my family. Now, each stove I sell represents not just income, but empowerment and a brighter future for us all. I will always know that challenges do not always destroy instead they can promote, strengthen, and increase you. My heartfelt thanks to HRSS and UNFPA for navigating my darkest movement with the light that shines within me”. She said.

The impact of these efforts extends beyond

practical skills. By equipping women and girls with the tools to build fuel-efficient stoves, Hope Restoration South Sudan is fostering economic independence and environmental stewardship where communities are embracing these innovations, recognizing the dual benefits of sustainability and improved quality of life.

In partnership with UNFPA South Sudan and the generous support of the Global Affairs Canada, Hope Restoration continues to champion initiatives that empower women and girls. This ground-breaking initiative is paving the way for sustainable change through women and girls-friendly spaces. The WGFS spaces are not just places of refuge; they are empowering hubs where resilience and skill-building thrive.



Female Boxing Bout – a journey towards empowerment and gender equality.



Cecelia Khamis tussling it out with Barbara Lam in the ring

Boxing as a sport has been male-dominated, but in South Sudan, the trend is changing as UNFPA and partners are working to reverse the narrative. Dubbed *“Challenging negative gender norms through sports”*, UNFPA, in partnership with South Sudan Boxing Federation (SSBXF) organized a bout to showcase the talent and skills of female boxers.

The jam-packed boxing federation hall attracted spectators from all walks of life male, female, young and old including the physically challenged.

Cecelia was elated after being declared a winner of the bout *“I am happy to be the winner. I can't believe that I made it to the top since I was fighting a great fighter like Babra. This is just the beginning of my journey, more fights and more achievements are yet to come. I want to thank my fans, and not forgetting the event sponsors”*.

UNFPA Country Representative, Dr. Ademola Olajide, called on the community members to use sports as an important activity that changes gender norms. *“One hand can't clap alone unless you use both hands to hear sound. Every society needs involvement of women to work hand in hand with men to develop, therefore we challenge negative gender/social norms that hinder gender equality through sports.”*



UNFPA Country Rep, Dr. Ademola Olajide recognizing Barbara's effort after the bout

He also noted that *“Socio-economic development cannot be optimized until social and gender norms that undermine gender equality are addressed. Sports remains a formidable platform to facilitate these critical changes.”*

The Technical Director at the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Mr. Peter Baptist Abaker appreciated UNFPA for the continued support to the youth in South Sudan, especially the girl-child who previously could not partake in sports such as boxing.

Barbra congratulated her opponent for coming out stronger, *“I tried my level best to prove to her, unfortunately, it is what it is in all games – a winner and loser. Next time I will bounce back stronger than this. I encourage fellow girls to join sports and ask the parents to support their daughters. Sports builds confidence, discipline and focus on a better lifestyle”.*

She asked parents to allow their kids to join any type of sports in the country, saying it is an access pass for them in the future and a source of discipline.

The two female boxers engaged in a thrilling 12-minute bout of four rounds that saw Cecelia who was the crowd’s favorite, carry the trophy. The excited spectators were supportive to the female boxers and requested more of the bouts to be organized to support South Sudan female in sports.



The referee (centre) declaring Cecelia Khamis winner



Leaving no-one behind, winner Cecelia Khamis celebrating her victory with the physically challenged man as Dr. Ademola cheers on

From Shame to Freedom- An oasis of hope at the One Stop Centres.

In a culture that disproportionately discriminates against women, raising concern about their issues is a challenge. With all the inequalities women face, gender-based violence is prevalent among communities in Malakal, Upper Nile State, and among all the forms of Gender-based violence; the rate of sexual abuse is alarming.

Mary*, not her real name, is a 16-year-old girl survivor, currently seeking support at the Malakal One-Stop Centre, managed by SAADO with UNFPA support. She encountered sexual violence and was raped by an unknown person on the outskirts of Malakal as she went to the bush to collect firewood. Being young, scared, and naïve, Mary did not disclose the incident to anyone as she was afraid of being shunned and stigmatized and felt indebted to protecting her family's image.

Shame and fear perpetuate stigma and increase abuse because perpetrators' power thrives on victims' fears. For Mary and many other girls like her, the fear keeps them from accessing medical services and justice. By reporting early, Mary would have had an examination to assess any physical injuries and would have received services to address sexually transmitted infections, HIV and pregnancy.

Silently battling with the nightmares of her assault, the shadows of the event eating at her core every passing hour, leaving her soul void. The once colourful life of a 16-year-old girl turned into a gloomy emptiness that echoed in her behavior and temperament. Once a bubbly girl, Mary became



Mary with the caseworker in Malakal one stop centre

a shell of herself and often contemplated sharing the ordeal with her mother to lighten the load.

“Every time I tried to speak of the incident, I was too afraid, and I froze” she sadly narrated. Not once did she cry herself to sleep as she could not verbalize this mammoth pain.

Weeks after her assault, Mary began falling ill.

“One day, I got so sick, and my mother rushed me to the hospital where after several tests, it was discovered that I was pregnant alongside other infections.” She sadly narrates.

She had presumed that missing her periods was normal. Besides, she explains that not having her periods was a relief given the challenges that accompany it, from cramps to the inaccessibility of sanitary products. Sadly, thousands of women still cannot afford sanitary towels in a seemingly progressive society. How dire is the situation that for a girl to miss their periods for months is welcomed with relief rather than worry!? Mary had to stop school to focus on her progressing pregnancy and with the support of her family, she carried a lighter burden.

With routine awareness in communities through social workers, Mary learned of One Stop Centre (OSCs) where girls like her can seek GBV response services. The OSCs are an oasis offering information and support regarding medical, physical, emotional, and physical support to survivors of S/GBV. At the One Stop Centre, SAADO seeks to restore the confidence of these survivors through psychosocial support in group therapy and together navigate the realities of their new life while slowly mending the broken pieces of their past.

Mary joined the skills training at the Women and Girls Friendly Space (WGFs), where they share

experiences and receive positive parenting sessions with fellow young mothers. Mary also enrolled in a life skills class on bedsheet knitting.

“I didn’t know my life could change like this; I appreciate the services at offered at One Stop Centres and the Women and Girls Friendly Spaces for what they have done to restore hope and skills for survivors. I hope you continue the good work you are doing for the people of Upper Nile” She noted.

Mary’s story is not unique, but without awareness and sentencing perpetrators, sexual abuse will never gain enough traction to attract change-makers.



“Give us our space at the table of decision-making”, - an appeal from the Youth of Upper Nile



“The youth are not a problem, they are a great opportunity and agents of change” said Brian Williams, from the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) to the youth in Upper Nile who converged for the Youth Leading Peace Project validation workshop. William was a member of a visiting PBF delegation to Upper Nile to assess the impact of the project that UNFPA and UNESCO are implementing with partners.

While interacting with the youth, he urged them to be prepared for the challenges but also opportunities ahead of them.

“There is going to be elections and it is during this time that you need to put aside your differences. It’s during that period the youth should manage different opinions and ideas to find constructive solutions for peace and development of the country.”

William noted, stressing that elections are about ideas and there maybe disagreements as seen in other countries but youth who comprise the largest population of South Sudan should be at the forefront of peace.

The participating youth voiced concerns about being excluded in the decision-making process of the country saying they need to be given a platform to actively participate in making decisions in the affairs of South Sudan. They also called for the passing of the Youth Policy.

Ambassador Stephane Rey from Switzerland, also a member of the UNSG’s Peacebuilding Fund Advisory group, pledged to pass the concerns and voices of the youth of South Sudan to the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

“The young people of Malakal and South Sudan in general, you are the leaders of today not tomorrow, and you are our peace ambassadors everywhere you go, so lead by example. Revenge should be no more as we depend on one another, desist from fights, do not allow to be engaged in destructive activities such as conflicts”, Hon. Pia Philip the Under Secretary, Ministry of Peacebuilding, cautioning the youth,.

Hon. Pia emphasized that wars do not move communities and countries forward but backward.

He thanked the donors for their generous contribution towards the Peacebuilding fund, *“these little coins you have invested in South Sudan will not go in vain, the stability you are seeing so far is as a result of the donations you made”* he noted.

One of the youth participant Nyadeng Aketch thanked the organizers of the dialogue, saying it changed her perspective on so many things, *“Going forward, I spread the message of peace in my community, I will no longer put tribalism first”*

While 19-year old Anna Nyawal Mathew said her takeaway is about women empowerment, noting

that it was an eye opener as she learned about gender-based violence and effects of negative cultural norms where girls are often times married off young. She pledged to champion and advocate for the education of the girl-child.

The Peace-Building Fund project, under the “Youth Leading Peace” aims to establish participatory and inclusive local and national mechanisms for the implementation of the Youth Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda in South Sudan and institutionalize youth participation in peacebuilding processes.

The project employs an innovative, participatory, and institutionalized approach to meaningful engagement of young women and young men in peacebuilding processes that encompass strategic partnerships and consultations with the youth and their organizations; capacity building of young women and young men on understanding UNSCR 2250, 2419 and 2535.

It is implemented jointly by UNFPA and UNESCO, through partners like Search for Common South Sudan and Hope Restoration South Sudan. So far the ten states of South Sudan and the three administrative areas of South Sudan have conducted similar the training.



Hon. Philip Pia addressing the youth as the delegates

Life skills mentorship program in Lakes State yield fruits



Rosanna Awutkok with a group of young girls in Rumbek flashing on the sanitary pads

South Sudan is a deeply patriarchal society, and as such conversations related to Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights often face resistance and are deemed as taboo. The Comprehensive Sexuality Education in schools and for girls out of school is regarded as a game-changer as it empowers girls and young boys alike to be informed and make the right choices in life.

This drove Rosanna Awutkok, a member of the UNFPA Youth Advisory Panel, who hails from Lakes State to embark on a journey to empower

girls in her state with a mentorship program on CSE and career guidance, and her target is young girls in primary and secondary school who are at risk of early and unintended pregnancies.

“Young people should stand up as change-makers and their genuine actions will speak for them, I took the initiative to empower them with information and knowledge to reduce the rate of school dropouts and reduce teenage pregnancies and I am proud to say the girls are embracing it” said

Rosanna Awutkok, a member of the UNFPA Youth Advisory Panel



Feeling empowered with life skills

Martha's journey of embodying determination in pursuit of her dream to midwifery

Martha Amok Mating is a 27-year-old midwife from Rumbek East County in Lakes State and is one of the 48 midwives and 30 nurses who graduated from Rumbek Health Science Institute (RHSI) in December 2023. Her journey is a testament to the resilience and determination of a woman who perseveres in the face of challenges.

In 2018, Martha sought employment at Rumbek Civil Hospital, showing her eagerness to contribute. , Martha's determination caught the attention of the medical director at the facility, and she was offered a position in the theatre, where she worked alongside the anaesthetist for two years, determined to advance her career. She enrolled in the institute in 2021 despite having been married in 2019 and welcoming a baby in 2020, which presented additional hurdles and sacrifices including weaning her child early to focus on her studies. With minimal financial support, Martha relied on the income from her work in the theatre, balancing her studies, work and family responsibilities.

“Although facing challenges, my unwavering spirit shone through. I entrusted my child to my supportive mother to concentrate on education and work. Moving into the school dormitories to avoid further obstacles, I dedicated myself to mastering midwifery skills,



Martha Amok Mating tossing her graduation hat as a sign an achievement

seizing every learning opportunity available”. Martha shares. Her perseverance paid off as she successfully completed her midwifery program, emerging as a qualified diploma midwife.

Today, Martha proudly embraces her role as a midwife and assistant anesthetist, embodying strength, dedication, and resilience in pursuit of her dreams.

Martha's efforts found the needed support with of Doctors with Africa CUAMM intervention at Rumbek Health Science Institute, supported by UNFPA with the aim of strengthening the institutional capacities for the training of nurses, midwives, and other health care professionals.

The resources made available to CUAMM through the UNFPA funded by other complementary donors like Canada, enabled the Health Institute to function in conditions, maintain quality and an enabling learning environment for students. CUAMM is facilitating access to and the completion of the pathway leading to the diploma for health professionals.

Finding strength and resilience in positive living through community solidarity

For over 30 years, a 36-year-old mother of 5, Rena (not her real name) has lived a fulfilling life with her family in Palakal Payam, Kapoeta South County, nestled in the serene landscapes of Eastern Equatoria State. Despite numerous advocacy efforts, workshops, and radio shows aimed at encouraging people to get tested and know their HIV status, Rena remained hesitant.

Everything changed for her when Rena interfaced with peer counselors from the National Non-Governmental Organization, National Empowerment of Positive Women United (NEPWU) during a community outreach program in Hai-Tarawa. That day, she mustered the courage to undergo HIV screening and testing. When her results came back positive, Rena was engulfed in shock and devastation. However, counselors from NEPWU stepped in, providing immediate counseling, and referred her to Kapoeta County Hospital for further support.

“The counseling sessions at the hospital proved transformational. With newfound knowledge and courage, I began to embrace life positively. Determined to overcome stigma and with the support of the peer counselors, I have initiated a subsistence farm to supplement my diet.” Says Rena

Rena started a small vegetable shop to improve her livelihood and that of her family. In a remarkable turn of events, she gave birth to a healthy, HIV-negative child with assistance of midwives.

Empowered by the unwavering support from NEPWU, Rena now plays a crucial role in her community. She actively participates in peer-to-peer support groups, helping new members embrace a positive but productive life. Her story is a beacon of hope, illustrating the power of resilience and community support.

“I would like to sincerely thank UNFPA for their support and NEPWU Kapoeta for their unwavering follow-up and assistance throughout my journey to prosperity. More community councilors across South Sudan would save more lives and restore hope of those affected.” Rena shares enthusiastically.

Today, with the support of UNFPA and the Global Fund, NEPWU continues its vital work, reaching out to sex workers with HIV, STI, and TB prevention programs, offering GBV prevention, family planning referrals, Hepatitis screening, and distributing condoms.

Rena’s journey demonstrates the incredible impact of compassionate care and community solidarity.

From Despair to Hope: A sex-worker's journey of transformation.

In the heart of Yei's Sobe Area, Trice (not her real name) embarked on a journey that changed her life forever despite the health and living conditions challenges. For years, she worked as a sex worker clinging to the fragile hope of a better future. But as time passed, her dreams were shattered, and her life spiralled into despair.

Amid her struggles, a ray of hope emerged when the National Empowerment of Women United (NEPWU) brought HIV Testing Services (HTS) to the lodge where she worked. Trice decided to get tested for HIV, and the results came back positive.

"The news was devastating. I received counseling immediately and was enrolled for treatment, but the weight of the diagnosis felt insurmountable" says Trice

Gripped by anger and despair, Trice's initial reaction was to curse the world. She contemplated spreading the virus, feeling a deep sense of injustice. Alcohol became her refuge, and she continued engaging in unprotected sex from one hotspot to another, neglecting her treatment and her health deteriorated and her health suffered a terrible setback.

On one fateful day, peer counselors from NEPWU visited Trice and had a peer conversation sharing their own experiences of resilience, striking a chord deep within her. She was inspired by their lives as they were now living positively, and Trice decided to change. She began adhering to strict protocols of her medication, which subsequently suppressed her viral load.



Trice's transformation would not have been possible without the steadfast support of the compassionate NEPWU personnel in Yei and the work of peer counselors who provide outreach services to their peers. Disclosure was a daunting process, especially as her partner was HIV-negative. However, the peer counselors made it easier, guiding her through each step. Today, Trice is happy in her marriage and free from the stigma that once overshadowed her life.

"My journey has been difficult, but it has also been one of profound change and hope. I am grateful for the support that helped me reclaim my life and health. My story is a testament to the power of community and the impact of compassionate peer counseling and support." She narrates.

Her journey, marked by profound change and hope, stands as a testament to the power of community and compassionate support. Trice's story highlights the resilience of the human spirit and the transformative impact that organizations like NEPWU can have on individuals' lives.

Tea of Hope and Resilience, a story of a 27-year-old mother



Nyaluak talking to Hope Restoration staff at her tea shop

The recurring conflicts because of communal violence have had a devastating impact on the lives of women and girls in communities across South Sudan. Such a circle of violence puts the lives of women and girls at a great risk.

This situation is not unique to Nyaluak. Her story is just one of the many women who are faced with this kind of challenges; the mother of two from Rupjesh camp, separated from her husband following the conflict in Khartoum, arrived in Leer last July and encountered by a lot of challenges including sexual assault. She was introduced to the women 's-friendly space at Joung Center, this was a lifeline. Nyaluak was provided medical care, shelter, and essentials and the staff enrolled her in the Cash Based Incentives (CBI) program.

“Before coming to the centre, I felt isolated and stressed, but the counseling and education classes helped me heal and I found strength. Today, I share my story, inspiring others. As I serve tea, I see hope and community grow.”

Nyaluak has now set up a tea shop, after being supported by Hope Restoration South Sudan (HRSS) with funding from UNFPA, through the Women and girls-friendly under the cash-based Initiatives (CBI) and income-generating activities (IGA) to survivors and at-risk individuals.

“I earn around 5000 per day (2\$) and I support my children’s education and planning to expand into baking. This business not only sustains us but has given me purpose and sense for a better life.”

Nyaluak said, beaming with a smile.

Nyaluak, now joyful and resilient supports fellow survivors. Her mantra, ‘Where there is tea, there is hope,’ embodies her journey. Sharing her story has empowered her and others.

Her story demonstrates the transformative power of support and resilience. Through support at WGFS and life skills interventions, she not only found stability but thrived, symbolizing hope amidst adversity.

Yar Nyok knits her way out of poverty, thanks to UNFPA seed funding.



Women knitting in the women and girls friendly space

Women in South Sudan like many others in post-conflict countries suffer the sharp fang of poverty. A large population of South Sudan lives in severe poverty with an estimated 80% living below the absolute poverty line.

The long cycle of war for independence, pockets of communal violence as well as climate factors such as floods have had a dire impact on the lives of the population, and women sufferer the most. This is so reflective of 35-year-old Yar Nyok who hails from Nigel locality in Bor-Jonglei State.

The 35-year-old widow heads her family following the demise of her husband who was killed during sub-national violence in 2019. Life was so challenging for her until she was introduced to IMA women empowerment program in Bor, after undergoing rigorous training sessions in knitting, financial literacy as well as training on Sexual

Reproductive Health and Rights including guarding against GBV. Yar finally graduated amidst the challenges.

"I appreciate the training they offered us and the start-up capital. I am running a successful hand-craft business that is supporting the payment of my children's school tuition, medical bills, and their feeding. Most of my peers who are suffering from emotional stress have expressed their interest to learn skills to self-sustain their families and I am training them at home as part of my contribution to humanity." Reveals Yar

In addition to running a good crafts shop in Bor, Yar has since enrolled as a lead mother and community action group leader who raises awareness in her community on how to mitigate the risk of GBV especially among adolescent girls, thanks to IMA World with support from Canada through UNFPA in South Sudan.

The transformative impact of friendly spaces in empowering adolescents



Women and girls listening to instructions at the friendly space

In today's rapidly changing world, adolescents and youth face a myriad of challenges ranging from educational hurdles to navigating complex social issues. Recognizing the importance of providing safe and supportive environments for young people to thrive was realized with support from UNFPA and implemented by Amref by establishing Youth-Friendly Spaces (YFS).

With support of line Ministries; Ministry of Health, Ministry of Youth and Sports, and Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, UNFPA support through Amref identified a pressing need to create spaces where adolescents could access vital resources, engage in meaningful activities, and receive support tailored to their unique needs. With this vision in mind, we collaborated with local partners, health workers,

community leaders, and youth to establish Youth-Friendly Spaces in strategic locations where coverage and access to SRHR services is possible for the adolescents and youth of which the hospitals were more convenient. Hospital administrators located specific strategic locations as Youth Friendly Spaces leading to the establishment of AYFS in 3 health facilities (Maridi Hospital, Yambio Hospital and Juba Teaching Hospital).

With these spaces, there is a record of positive impact among adolescents and youth at individual level which has extended beyond individual empowerment, influencing social norms, community dynamics, positive social change and laying the foundation for sustainable development.

To achieve these by the AYFS have a number of creative and engaging set ups:

Safe and Welcoming Environment for adolescents to gather, socialize, and express themselves freely, Comprehensive Services tailored to the needs of adolescents, empowering Voices through Peer Education, breaking barriers through Creative Expression allowing adolescents to explore their talents and passions through games and sports, Music and dance among others, and Transforming Lives through Skill Development:

As we celebrate the success of AYFS, Amref with support from UNFPA remain steadfast to the

commitment to nurturing the potential of young people. By scaling up efforts, strengthening partnerships to create a world where every adolescent and youth has the opportunity to thrive.

“The success of Adolescent and Youth-Friendly Spaces serves as a testament to the transformative power of investing in young people. Through collaborative efforts and a steadfast commitment to youth empowerment, we can unlock the boundless potential of the next generation, shaping a brighter future for all” – Manuela Madong, AMREF





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