



**South Sudan**



**Quarterly Newsletter**  
**Jan - Mar 2023**

Issue 4

#Musharaka4Tanmiya

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# Message from the Representative

## **Esteemed readers and partners,**

UNFPA South Sudan brings you the first quarter Newsletter for the year 2023. This is a collection of stories highlighting the UNFPA South Sudan Country Office's response as it works around the Humanitarian, Development, and Peace Nexus.

In this edition, focus has been put on interventions around economic empowerment for women and girls to prevent Gender Based Violence (GBV), raising the voices of women at national and global platforms as well as efforts to enhance the dignity of vulnerable women and girls. The newsletter also reflects on access to reproductive health, engagement of young people to make informed choices on their reproductive health and capacity building of health workers as a critical strategy for improving health and developing a prosperous nation.

The month of March was important for UNFPA with the commemoration of International Women's Day which UNFPA actively took part in. A number of events included the International Conference on Women's Transformational Leadership which was opened by HE Salvar Kiir Mayardit, the President of South Sudan and brought together around 400 influential women from across the globe and the UNFPA East and Southern Regional Director. Additional high-level engagements held include CSW67 side event for South Sudan in New York which was led by the Vice President H.E Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior who took the opportunity to highlight to the global community the challenges that confront women in the country, as well as their resilience and agency, including the strides the Government (and partners) in supporting their empowerment.

As is the case in the traditional African context, families gather around fires in the evening to share stories, the UNFPA supported the GoSS to hold



a "TUKUL TALKS" to encourage inter-generational collaboration, surrogating the vision from the country's elders to the young people around the peace building process. The event brought together young people from a cross section of society with representation from the Office of the President led by the key Ministers in the current Government.

UNFPA remains firmly committed to intensifying efforts and partnerships (including with South Sudan's talented creative industry) towards improving health and development outcomes for women, girls and young people by making the right choices about sexuality, engaging men to champion Reproductive Health and end GBV through positive masculinity.

UNFPA recommits its efforts to our core mission of supporting the delivering a a South Sudan where every pregnancy is intended, every childbirth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled.

Through the UNFPA 4th Country Programme of assistance to the Government of South Sudan (2023-2025) which commenced implementation at the beginning of this year, I reaffirm commitment to collective efforts for the prosperity and wellbeing of the people of South Sudan.

**Dr. Ademola Olajide**  
*UNFPA Representative*



## “Shun violence and embrace unity”- South Sudanese urged during Tukul Talks



Photo: UNFPA staff together with delegates during the tukul talks

South Sudanese have been rallied to distance themselves from all forms of violence and embrace unity in their respective diversities, the call was made by the President of the Republic of South Sudan, H.E Salva Kiir Mayardit in a speech delivered by Cabinet Affairs Minister, Hon. Benjamin Marial Barnaba, while addressing a gathering of youth, women, the civil society, and elders at a one-day event dubbed Tukul Talks.

Hon. Marial stressed that it was important for South Sudanese to have honest conversations, set aside their past differences and forge a stronger and unified country,

***“The tukul in South Sudan is a place where families come together and interact, today we are having the Tukul talks as one national family to dialogue and build a better and stronger nation of South Sudan”***

The “Tukul” is an Arabic word to depict a small traditional grass-thatched house, and predominately

in South Sudan, it is where people sit together, discuss, and sleep as a united family.

It is also where pertinent issues affecting/impacting society are discussed and resolved collectively. The Tukul is an equivalent of the famous Liberian “Palava Hut” which were instrumental in the traditional justice system for war crimes in that country. The Tukul Talk cultures have been inherited and passed on from generation to generation by forefathers dating back to the olden days when parents sat around the fireplace to tell stories as well as passage knowledge of lineage.

Ambassador Alier Deng, a prominent scholar who looked back at South Sudan’s history dating back to colonial era before the country seceded from Sudan; he expounded on different agreements leading up to the 2005 comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) that resulted to a referendum and subsequent separation of South Sudan from Sudan. In his lecture, he weighed on the government to stop cattle raids, and communal clashes,



***“Tribalism should be our source of strength rather than division or trouble”, he urged.***

High-level government representation ranging from Defense Minister, Hon. Angelina Teny, Deputy Finance Minister, Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister, Hon Deng Dau Deng, and Youth and Sports Minister Hon. Albino Bol attended the event, with all voicing important concerns on peace. Hon. Albino called upon parents to stop child and forced marriage, stressing that it is high time the country ceased placing a price tag on the girl-child and avoid trading in them as commodities.

***“We need to change our mindset of looking at girls as commodities to be sold out, give them a chance to complete their education to realize their full potential, and allow them to marry whom they would choose to marry at the right time rather than force them into marriages”, Hon. Albino emphasized.***

During a panel discussion on the role of young people in peace and nation-building moderated by UNFPA Country Representative, Dr. Ademola Olajide said,

“Systems rooted at the community level must be enabled to facilitate intergenerational dialogue that ensures convergence between the vision



Photo: Dr. Ademola Olajide, UNFPA Representative giving remarks during the Tukul Talks

of the elders and the aspirations of the youth on peace and nation building”

Edmond Yakani, the executive director for Community Empowerment Organization (CEPO) a civil society organization called on South Sudanese to desist from the culture of solving differences by the barrel of the gun, “If we disagree with you politically or in any way, a gun should not be the last resolve, we can use other methods of ironing out our differences in another way” Yakani urged.

The event comes a day after the departure of Pope Francis whose call to the leadership of South Sudan centered on peace and accountability, and these were also reechoed by the Public Service Minister, Hon. Joseph Bangasi Bakasoro, who thanked UNFPA for the initiative of bringing participants from the ten states and the three administrative areas for the event. “After the visit of the pope, we as a Country must set aside our pain, hatred, and anger, we should ask ourselves where we came from, where we are today, and where we are headed to, let’s stay away from tribalism” Bakasoro stressed.



Photo: Hon Angelina Teny, The Minister of Defense and Veterans' Affairs during the Tukul Talks

One of the major challenges facing South Sudan is pockets of communal violence, cattle raids, and abductions as it is trying to overcome fragmentations within the society resulting as an outcome of long civil wars.

It is through the Tukul Talks initiative that UNFPA, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs brought over 300 participants from the country's ten states and the three administrative areas to talk about bridging collectively for a peaceful South Sudan.

***'A peaceful South Sudan can only be achieved through dialogue, South Sudan is entering an important phase of constitutional making, and everybody, especially the youth have to be fully engaged' said Musa Gasama, a Representative from UNMISS***

The country has a youthful population where young people below the age of 30 comprising an estimated 73.6 percent.



Photo: Participants hold up the South Sudan Flag as a show of unity during the Tukul Talks



Photo: Ag. Foreign Affairs Minister, Deng Dau Deng, Public Service Minister, Joseph Bangasi Bakasoro, flanked by UNFPA Representative, Dr. Demola Olajide, Mr. Musa Gasama, a Representative from UNMISS during the Tukul Talks



## Strength of a woman – Women’s Transformational Leadership in South Sudan



*Photo: (L-R) H.E Mama Rebecca Nyandeng, Vice President South Sudan, H.E Salva Kiir Mayardit, The President of the Republic of South Sudan and Hon. Ayaa Benjamin, Minister for Gender, Child and Social Welfare during the Guwa Tamara womens leadership conference.*

For the first time in history, since South Sudan got its independence in 2011 the government under the leadership of the Vice President Mama Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior organized an International Conference on Women’s Transformational Leadership in Juba. The three-day conference attended by more than 400 local, regional, and international delegates was held under the theme “Transformational Leadership in Women, Peace, and Security” with an Arabic slogan “Guwa Ta Mara” Meaning strength of a Woman.

South Sudan President Salva Kiir Mayardit officiated the conference. In his keynote address during the launch of the conference, President Kiir said his government was honored to host the first-ever international women’s conference in Juba.

President Kiir pointed out that the conference came at a time when both the government and partners have jointly gained momentum to empower women in the country. They fought for freedom to enable women to take an active role in nation-building and share their experiences with other women in the global society.

***“During our liberation struggle, one of the principles we fought for was to free our citizens***

***and part of this freedom was also for women to take an active role in nation-building and share their experiences with other women. This conference fulfilled that vision,” he said.***

On her part, Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior, Vice President for Gender and Youth Cluster said the conference will empower women by sharing their life experiences of the conflict and learning from the experience of women leaders including former women Presidents from other countries in Africa.

***“This conference provided a forum for a political space for women to share opinions in the decision-making process, share powerful voices, rich experiences and create a safe space for our women at the grassroots to network with those from around the world,” said H.E Mama Rebecca Nyandeng.***

The forum discussed critical issues such as women’s leadership, and governance, women’s economic governance, women and climate change, and women issues and civil society gender as well as the involvement of women at the commu-



nity level.

UNFPA East and South Regional Director Ms. Lydia Zigomo appreciated the leadership of South Sudan for bringing together women across the world to discuss, celebrate each other, and share experience on critical issues concerning women.

In her presentation on women during the conference in the plenary on Peace and Security; Women's Leadership Role in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding Ms. Zigomo recognizes that all forms of insecurity have detrimental effects on the 3 transformative goals.

***"It is unfortunate that the well-being of women & youth, particularly their Sexual Reproductive health (SRH) gets the least attention in peace-building & conflict resolution, yet they are the most affected during and after times of conflict. UNFPA will continue to advocate for and support to restore dignity of women and girls including humanitarian settings" Ms Zigomo said.***



Photo: Ms. Lydia Zigomo, Regional Director UNFPA East and Southern Africa giving remarks during the Guwa Tamara Women's conference



Photo: Dr. Ademola Olajide (middle), UNFPA Representative with ushers during the Guwa Tamara women's conference held in Juba, South Sudan







## “Lost in Love” celebrating Valentine’s Day

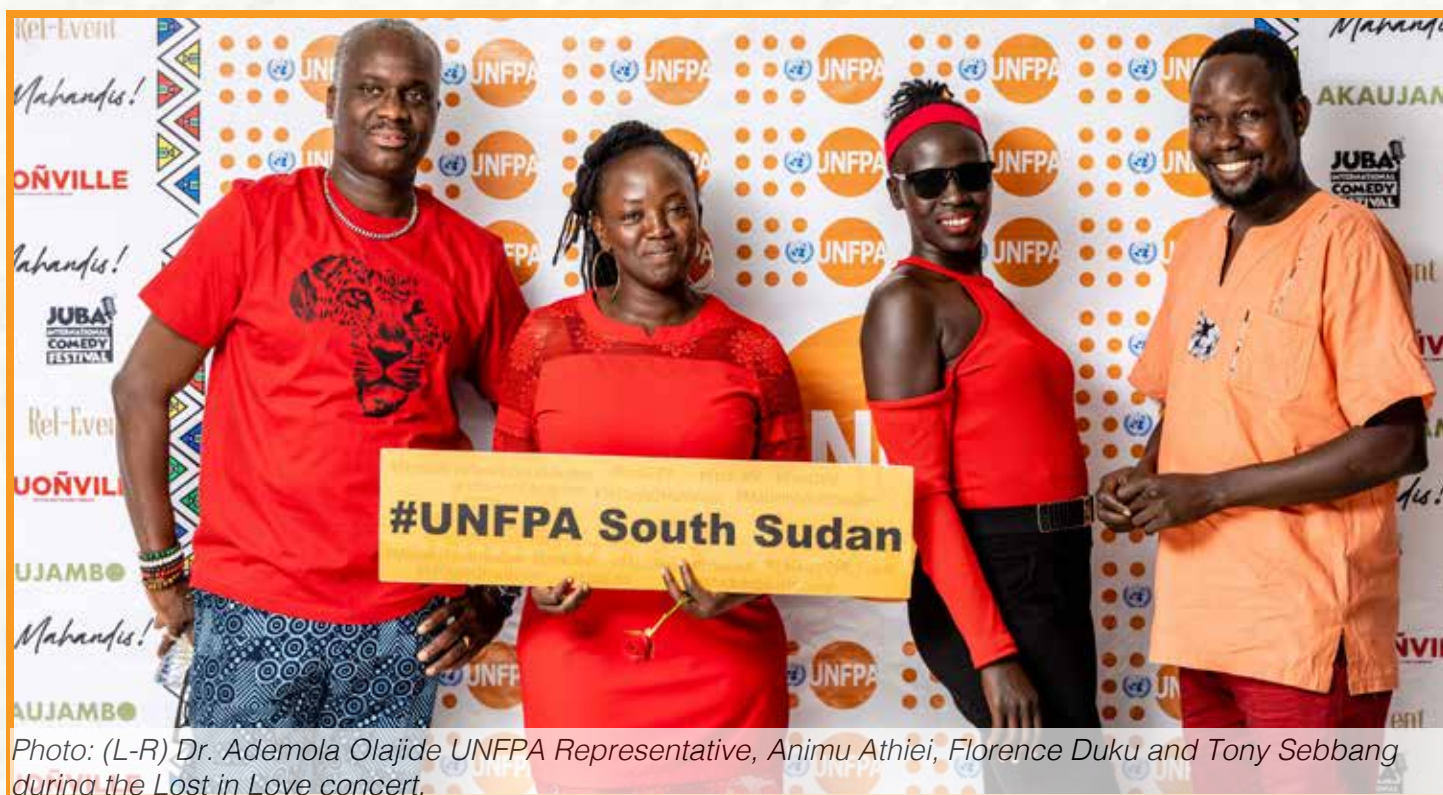


Photo: (L-R) Dr. Ademola Olajide UNFPA Representative, Animu Athiei, Florence Duku and Tony Sebbang during the Lost in Love concert.

***“It’s time to change the narrative. Using Art, drama, poems are ways to share messages that words can’t complete. Women and girls go through worst times of their lives like and worsen when there’s conflict, dealing with gender-based violence and other harmful practices in communities; but it’s time for us to Love without hurting or making others suffer in the name of love” – Ms Lydia Zigomo, UNFPA East and Southern Regional Director said during the celebration of Valentine’s Day***

Those were powerful words from Ms Lydia Zigomo, the Regional Director for East and Southern Africa to over 300 youth who gathered to celebrate Valentine’s Day organized by UNFPA South Sudan. It was a moment to learn and unlearn other social norms in a show dubbed “Lost in Love” showcasing the cultural practices that harmful but done in the name of love.

The event was characterized with music, dance and Drama, all re-echoing positive masculinity, advocating for a society free of Gender Based Violence, and ending child marriage.

Poet Mandela Matur also known as Ade, wowed the crowd with his poem “Shadow half” where he dwelled on domestic violence, intimate partner violence and conflict,” Love is not violent, rather you do not show love /affection by beating or perpetrating violence, Ade adds.

UNFPA Country Representative, Dr. Olajide Ademola, urged the youth in South Sudan change the status quo to address the negative social norms.

***“The young people have the knowledge, the energy, and the creativity to tackle negative social norms. We can and must change the narrative starting with youth to make conducive environment for everyone to thrive in the societies” Dr. Olajide Ademola said.***

Ms. Lydia Zigomo thanked UNFPA for thinking critically to tap into energies of the young people to drive positive change in Society stressing that UNFPA will continue to support and work with the young people to shape and change society through areas of Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights as well as peace.



***“The culture that love must hurt through physical beating can be changed, the only time when love hurts should be when a woman loses a loved one, love endures and understands, we will support and empower the young, and we will be working on an agenda for empowerment throughout the country ,not only in cities so that no one is left behind” said Ms. Lydia Zigomo.***

The event, Lost in Love engaged the youth with information, educative, entertainment with responsible lifestyle, ending GBV, and child marriage role play that caught everyone’s attention and commitment

Dr Ademola urged the young to live meaningfully, be responsible citizens, make right decisions and choices in their lives to be able to attain their full potential.

***“Today young people have the power to choose, so please do rightfully! South Sudan has talents beyond what people out there think, let’s show the world. Make the right choices for the good of South Sudan and Africa as a whole” Dr Ademola urged.***

The fun filled event involved sharing key of “In The name of Love” messages through music and interaction with the young people. Ms. Zigomo spared no time as she was pulled on to an energized dance with the young people and gestures of love shared among participants to show that love shouldn’t hurt but be peaceful and respectful. She pledged UNFPA’s commitment to support the young people in South Sudan.



Photo: Ms. Lydia Zigomo, Regional Director UNFPA East and Southern Africa giving remarks during the lost in love concert



Photo: Performer serenading the crowd during the lost in love concert







## I still matter and I deserve to live happily, tailoring is my tool



Tongota continued to say that,

*“...the Women and Girls Friendly Space (WGFS) supported by UNFPA has made me feel that I am important and that I still matter and I deserve to live and be happy. I will work hard with my tailoring skills to earn income”.*

I and my friend share the same tailoring machine, we make clothes and sell in the market. My friend is here, she said pointing at her and narrated to her what she was telling the interviewer. They both smiled and she said,

*“Our devastating moments are over, we are tailors now and from it we can make a living, I do not need to stay with a violent man because he buys me food or clothes, if I work hard, I can make a living. One day I will travel to Juba and open a shop because I heard in Juba women like fashion and I will get many customers for my clothes”. Said Acui (Not real name)*

My name is Tongota (not real name), am 18 years of age and I opted to do tailoring at the Women and Girls Friendly Centre because I love fashion. As a GBV survivor, when I was referred to this centre, I thought I was being brought for medical treatment only but to my surprise after taking me to the health facility, I was asked to come back to the centre and register for some activities.

I was very happy to learn that I could undertake a tailoring course. I got another friend at the center who shared her sad story with me. Just like me 16 years at that time and was forced to get married to the man who booked her when she was still in her mother's womb. When the time came but refused, her promised husband's family abducted her and handed her over to the husband to be, who in turn raped her as others watched.

After all the suffering we went through, we are both at the WGFS here and happy that we got help.

### About the Women and Girls Friendly Space in Pibor

The WGFS, which is the only safe space in Pibor is supporting 174 women and girls with life skills in tailoring, handcrafts, bedsheet making, hair dressing, tea making, production of reusable sanitary pads, Tea making and functional skills including literacy and numeracy classes.

The center supports GBV survivors, women and girls at risk of GBV including sexual exploitation and abuse as well as work with men and boys on GBV prevention through awareness raising.

The WGFS which is supported with funding from Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the Victims Trust Fund (VTF)



## “Spread the Love”: Empowering Young People with SRHR knowledge and positive norms



*Photo: UNFPA Regional Director for East and Southern Africa Ms. Lydia Zigomo having joyful moments with young people during the spread the love event.*

Social behavior change and positive norm building are critical components of building a healthy and safe society. Young people are the future and empowering them with the right knowledge and tools to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) is essential.

Impact Health Organization (IHO) and its partners, Shabab le Shabab, YEO, AfriYAN, and YAP, organized a “Spread the Love” Valentine’s Day event in Juba City funded by UNFPA South Sudan. The goal was to reach out to over 400 young stakeholders and spread messages about SRHR and gender-based violence (GBV). The event was not just informative;

The “Spread the Love” Valentine’s Day event was not just an event; it was also entertaining, with music, art performances taking center stage, and a movement towards positive change in Juba City. The event empowered young people with the right knowledge and tools to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health and rights. The music and art performances, as

well as the informative panel discussions, left a lasting impact on the young people who attended the event.

Ms. Lydia Zigomo, Regional Director for UNFPA East and Southern Africa ignited the young people into total excitement and invited the young girls for a social dance. She further alluded that

***“The future of South Sudan lies in the hands of the young people as they compose the biggest percentage of the population of this country. Make the right decisions for your health and be agents of peace for the good of South Sudan and Africa as a whole” she advised.***

Vicky Marvel, a visually impaired artist, proved that disability should never be a hindrance to universal access to safe and quality SRHR/GBV services. Her musical lyrics were inspirational – discouraged GBV and child marriage. Her performance was so touching and left the young people pledging to take up the messages positively and become ambassadors of positive SRHR.



Dr. Demola, South Sudan UNFPA Country Representative pledged UNFPA's commitment to supporting access to and availability of quality youth friendly SRH services for youth, engage men, women, and people with disabilities in South Sudan without discrimination.

The event's table talk panelists were also exceptional, providing valuable information on body autonomy, positive masculinity, dos and don'ts of safe SRH practices, HIV/AIDS (STIs), mental health, and substance abuse. The interactive session was enlightening and left a lasting impact on the lives of the young people who attended the event.

As part of the event, IHO distributed over 108 menstrual sanitary pads to in-school, and out-of-school girls, including those in the orphanage. This gesture was a response to menstrual health management as a contributing factor to school dropouts among young girls in South Sudan and Africa at large. This act of kindness will not only ensure that girls can stay in school but also improve access to safe SRHR/GBV services by young people, enhancing positive norms towards girls and ending child marriage in our communities.

The Regional Director Ms Zigomo encouraged young people to take lead to seek and promote gender equality, prevent gender-based violence, not to accept child marriage but complete their education as the bright future lies in their hands, and strive for peace for a better South Sudan. The event was not only informative and empowering, but it was also heartwarming and touching.



*Photo: Adolescent girls enjoying dancing to performances during the spread the love concert.*



*Photo: UNFPA country representative Dr. Demola Olajide engaging with young people during the spread the love event.*



## South Sudan ranks second in GBV prevalence rate in East Africa – a new study indicates.



*Photo: Dr. Augustino Ting, from the SUDD institute presenting the validation report of gender based violence prevalence survey. During the launch of the validation report*

Juba-South Sudan-South Sudan accounts for the second highest prevalence case of GBV in the region; this was revealed during a validation workshop held on March 22, 2023, on the findings of a nationwide GBV prevalence survey in South Sudan.

A study conducted by WHO in 2018 indicated that Uganda reported the highest rates of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) among married women aged 15-49 (49%, physical and/or sexual) followed by South Sudan (41%, physical and/or sexual). With the support of UNFPA, the current study conducted by the Sudd Institute shows that the prevalence of IPV among married women aged 15-49 is rising (standing at 49.6%, physical and/or sexual). According to the study, substantial proportions of women (aged 15-64) in South Sudan experience GBV either in form of physical (34.0%) or sexual (13.5%) violence in their lifetime.

Dr. Augustino Ting Mayai, while presenting the survey results, revealed that Ruweng Administrative Area (43.1%), Warrap (39.7%), Eastern Equatoria (39.1%), Jonglei (39.1%) and Central Equatoria

(38.6%) report the highest rates of physical violence in the country. Similarly, the study documented a high prevalence of child marriage (34.6%, nationally) with Lakes and Jonglei states accounting for the high rates of child marriage in the country - 60.7% and 40.9%, respectively.

Dr. Michael Tawanda, from the embassy of Norway, noted that GBV and Gender Equality are not just about human rights, but equally important indicators of economic growth. He also stressed that the government of the Republic of South Sudan should act on combating GBV and improving Gender Equality. He underscored that South Sudan is one of the signatories of the Maputo protocol which mainly focuses on ending all forms of gender inequality.

UNFPA Representative, Dr. Ademola Olajide, noted that GBV hinders the capacities of individuals to positively contribute to the development of any country.



***“It is important to have evidence of the well-being of every South Sudanese. We learned today that GBV still continues to impede our capacities, a society where everybody to participate optimally must be free from GBV” Dr. Ademola said.***

The national Minister of Gender, Child, and Social Welfare, Hon. Ayaa Benjamin Warrile, thanked UNFPA and the Sudd Institute for conducting the survey.

***“The evidence generated by this study will provide a critical guide to policymaking and program management by the Ministry and all development actors,” Minister Aya said.***

Celina Peter, the Director for child welfare at the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare thanked UNFPA as a long-time partner of the Ministry in combating GBV in the country and engaging men to promote gender equality for the well-being of women.

***“GBV is a big challenge in South Sudan, I thank everyone present here who has contributed in one way or another as a change agent to make a difference in the lives of survivors, participants from all the states, and the two administrative areas,” she said.***



*Photo: Group discussions held to get views from participants during the launch of the validation report*



*Photo: (L-R) Dr. Micheal Tawanda, Norwegien Embassy, Hon. Ayaa Benjamin, Minister for Gender Child and Social Wellfare, Dr. Ademola Olajide, UNFPA Representative and Amb. Hon. John Gai ,Advisor to the President During the launch of the validation report*



## Restoring hope after a life of despair, a story of a 44-year-old displaced mother in Malakal



Malakal-Upper Nile State- Mary Jebeen, aged 44 -years old is a single mother of 3 children, born and raised in Malakal, Upper Nile State. Mary has seen all the turbulent times South Sudan has had to go through including the 2013 war that drove her and others to the Malakal Protection of Civilian Cites (POC), unfortunately a place she calls home to date.

Mary became a mother at 16, having been impregnated by an elderly man, who ended up abandoning her, something that put her at loggerheads with her father who did not approve of her behavior and denied her education.

***"I have gone through difficult times since my teenage, as a Shilluk girl, our tradition does not allow girls to attend school. We are expected to help our mothers with the house chores in preparation for marriage," Mary recalls.***

With the myriad of challenges including raising a child single-handedly coupled with hard economic times, she had no other option but to accept an arranged marriage to a second suitor for whom she ended up bearing two more children.

With the conflict in 2013, unfortunately, her second husband was killed, and life became very difficult, meeting daily necessities such as food was an uphill task, the preceding years also became, even more, tougher as there was no ray of hope, with biting hunger and despair all overwritten on her face. During an outreach program by Hope Restoration South Sudan in the camp, Mary's potential as a leader was spotted, and she then became, the POC IGA group leader.

"In the POC we depended on relief support. Poverty and hunger were our major challenges as women, even with the opportunities of starting a small business in the POC, I could not start one because I lacked capital and had no one to support me. In 2021, I joined a Women IGA group through livelihood



and economic empowerment directly providing cash assistance for livelihood support and start-up capital for small businesses. We developed a business plan, got cash assistance and we are running a group business. Mary says, beaming with a smile.

Provision of livelihood and economic support through cash assistance for start-up business kits as a mechanism for the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence, that HRSS with support from UNFPA is embarking on, Mary is just one of the many beneficiaries of such kit, she cannot thank enough for the opportunity.

Mary has lessons to share through her experience, having conceived at an early age, she says, parents' ought to step up their game to raise children responsibly. Through the Village Savings Group, she is economically empowered with a loan scheme, various trainings on women's rights have been equally beneficial to her as she became aware of her rights, and she has an advocate for the rights of other women and girls.

Hope Restoration in partnership with UNFPA implements GBV prevention and emergency response in Leer, Malakal, and Bentiu targeting vulnerable Women and Girls with livelihood and economic support on a start-up business kit.





## Juba launches Safe house for gender-based violence survivors



Photo: (L-R):The USAID acting head of mission in South Sudan Dr. Jeffrey Ashley, Hon. Ayaa Benjamin Minister for Gender Child and Social Welfare and Dr. Ademola Olajide UNFPA Representative signing the Safe house banner

South Sudan, like any other country facing violence and Conflict continues to grapple with Gender Based Violence which continues to destroy the societal fabric as survivors face horrendous abuses in the hands of perpetrators.

South Sudan population has been affected by circles of violence leading to increased suffering of the civilian population particularly women and girls.

***“These conflicts were exacerbated by pre-existing communal tensions, climate shocks, food insecurity, disruption of livelihoods, and the devaluation of the local currency – factors which are still contributing to cattle-related violence and wider tensions between communities.*”**

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund in partnership with the Ministry of Gender, Child Social Welfare, the Ministry of Health, together with other partners like, Nile Hope, International Rescue Committee (IRC), Strategic Initiative for the Horn of Africa (SIHA) joined efforts to change the devastating trend by setting up one

stop centers and safe houses to bring hope back to the survivors.

***“This safe house we are launching here today is a blessing because GBV survivors will be protected from physical harm by their perpetrators and as they seek protection in here, they will be safe from judgement in the societies” Minister Warrille stressed.*”**

The safe house and the One Stop Centers are set up to offer holistic and integrated package of health and legal services to victims of GBV. The Minister of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, Hon. Aya Benjamin Warrille, hailed UNFPA for the continued and committed support towards its quest to ZERO GBV Judge Francis Amun, the Juba based juvenile court judge, lauded all parties for taking the bold decision to establish the Safe House, stressing that issues of GBV can never be over emphasized as they are of human rights in nature.

“Much as the safe house is a temporary dock station for the survivor to seek safety and protection, it is very important, the safe house will give them hope as it will be secure” he said. Judge Francis



regrettably noted that, there are alarming GBV cases in the country, saying that over 205 of them are before the court while 80 are pending.

South Sudan is a patriarchal society where majority of sexual and gender-based violence are not being reported due to fear of stigma.

UNFPA Representative, Dr. Ademola Olajide, assured the government and donors of the organizations' commitment to ZERO Sexual Gender Based Violence.

***“As we launch the GBV safe house, we will collectively step-up action join efforts to ensure that every part of the community such as homes, workplaces become safe for women and girls and everyone and such shelters are not needed” said Dr. Ademola***

Recently the UN Mission in South Sudan, in a report said the country had registered a sharp increase in violence indicating that from October to December 2022, the number of civilians harmed increased by 87 percent, compared to the same period in 2021. This rise was accompanied by a disturbing increase in abductions and conflict-related sexual violence — which have gone up when compared to the previous year.



*Photo: Judge Francis Amum giving remarks during the launch.*

The USAID acting head of mission in South Sudan, Dr. Jeffrey Ashley lauded the efforts to establish the safe house saying that, it will provide hope and life-saving services to survivors of GBV for women and girls all over Juba.

The executive Director, Nile Hope, Mr. Paul Biel Otoang committed to being vocal to speak against Gender-Based Violence and ensuring women and girls are kept safe from GBV.

With funding from USAID, the Juba-based Safe House will go a long way to changing lives of GBV Survivors, Nile Hope is running other centers in different locations including Northern Barh El Ghazal in Wau, in addition to 13 one-stop centers in the ten states and three administrative areas of South Sudan.



*Photo: Brigadier James Dak, Special Protection Unit making remarks during the launch*



## Building a Healthier Future through training of National Tutors in a war-torn Country



*Photo:- Godfrey Kenyi,(left) national tutor trainee in class at college of physicians and surgeons with his classmates*

In the heart of Juba, South Sudan, a group of trainees based at the College of Physicians and Surgeons is making strides by undertaking the health personnel education training programme, building their competencies to be tutors at Health Sciences Institutes across the country. These passionate individuals are working tirelessly to increase their knowledge and skills to contribute to improving pre-service education for mid-level health cadres including nurses, midwives, laboratory technicians, and clinical officers which will forge a brighter future for the people of South Sudan.

Nalumu Scovia, a young midwife who was trained at the Maridi Health Sciences Institute, and later served as United Nations Volunteer with UNFPA, has made it her mission to contribute to the development of the healthcare system in this war-torn country. Nalumu, who hails from a rural village in South Sudan, overcame countless challenges to pursue her midwifery career. She has a great desire to give back to her community and help train the next generation of healthcare professionals.

Nalumu is one of the many trainee tutors at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in South Sudan, committed to improving the quality of pre-service education for health personnel. She understands that strengthening the healthcare system starts with building a strong foundation through well-trained and qualified health care workers including nurses and midwives.

***“I believe that by training a strong core of national tutors who will be able to equip future healthcare professionals with the right knowledge and skills can make a difference. Despite challenges, we are making a lasting impact on the health and well-being of our people,” says Nalumu, as she prepares for another day of classes at the college.***

The College of Physicians and Surgeons, under the guidance of the national Ministry of Health, in partnership with UNFPA, and with support from Canada, launched a comprehensive train-



ing programme for national tutors like Nalumu. The programme aims to enhance their teaching skills, curriculum development, and mentorship abilities, ultimately benefiting health sciences training institutes across South Sudan. The first set of 33 national tutors who were trained through this initiative graduated in December 2021.

Elizabeth Achol, a Coordinator of the Tutors Training Programme at the College, in expressing her appreciation for the technical and financial support from UNFPA and Canada stated that

***“This programme was very critical to improving the quality of training of mid-level health cadres and will ensure a brighter future of health for all people of South Sudan”.***

Godfrey Kenyi, a fellow national tutor trainee, is also deeply committed to improving healthcare in South Sudan. He recognizes the importance of addressing the unique health needs of women and girls in the country, particularly in the areas of maternal and child health.

***“The training we receive as national tutors not only improves our teaching abilities but also broadens our understanding of the health challenges our country faces. With this knowledge, we can better prepare our students to address***

***these issues and provide quality healthcare to those who need it the most,” Kenyi explains.***

The impact of the national tutors’ training programme has already become evident in health sciences training institutes across South Sudan. They report significant improvements in the quality of education, increased enrolment, and higher retention rates among students. The success of the programme can be largely attributed to the commitment and enthusiasm of national tutor trainees like Nalumu and Kenyi, who are passionate about teaching and contributing to changing lives for better health in South Sudan.

As South Sudan continues to rebuild its healthcare system, the dedication of these national tutors offers hope for a brighter and healthier future. Through their unwavering commitment to health personnel education, they are lighting the way for a new generation of healthcare professionals who will transform the health and well-being of their communities, one patient and one community at a time.



Photo:- Nalumu Scovia, attending lectures at College of Physicians and Surgeons-Juba



## Domesticating Obstetric fistula repair: towards fistula-free South Sudan



Photo:- Beneficiaries of UNFPA Supported Obstetric Fistula repair campaign after successful discharge

Dr Koma Akim, a general surgeon by profession was one of the outstanding trainee on Obstetric Fistula in 2022 at Juba Teaching Hospital. For Dr Koma his interest in Fistula repairs started in 2019 when he first came into direct contact with patients suffering from obstetric fistula in South Sudan.

***“I was touched by the patients’ stories of despair, ostracization, and social stigmatization. I felt the need to help them the best way I could, and that is when I started learning how to perform obstetric fistula repairs” said Dr Koma Akim***

It was obvious that even with his superior surgical skills, specialised training in obstetric fistula repairs was necessary. The in-country capacity-building initiative for the fistula surgical team in South Sudan was very timely.

Dr Koma commends UNFPA for starting to build local talents to spearhead obstetric fistula prevention, diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation, and social reintegration.

***“It is my hope and prayer that the trained team will continue to work and contribute to ensuring that South Sudan is “fistula free” in our lifetime. At a personal level I have advanced my career by attending the intermediate training for fistula repairs in Eldoret, Kenya. This was a build up to the basic skills and networking I got during my first training” Dr Koma adds.***

He has since gone ahead to perform over 7 fistula repairs unsupervised and attended the International Society of Obstetric Fistula Surgeons (ISOFS) conference in 2022 with support from UNFPA. According to Dr Koma, the conference was an eye-opener and he appreciated the work and dedication of other experienced international fistula surgeons.

Building local capacity goes a long way to ensure continuity of care which is practically impossible with visiting consultant surgeons. Dr Koma says that even among those who undergo successful



repairs, the condition is likely to recur in subsequent births because their spouses do not give them sufficient time to recover. Dr Koma recounts about a miracle impossible in one of the fistula campaigns.

***“I remember this woman who had had five failed obstetric fistula repairs and was declared incurable! Yet she still came for screening and wanted another chance to undergo a fistula repair. Luckily, the repair was successful and returned to thank the medical team after 10 months. In her words she said you never gave up on me”. he narrates.***

While he still cherished the dream of establishing a private obstetric fistula repair centre in future, Dr Koma is grateful to UNFPA for the fundamental role it has played in training healthcare workers especially midwives, nurses, associate clinicians and specialist doctors in EmONC to help reduce the maternal mortality rates, in addition to providing sexual and reproductive health and GBV services for the wellbeing of women and girls, for everyone to thrive in South Sudan.

The situation of Obstetric Fistula in South Sudan The estimated prevalence of Obstetric Fistula (OF) among women of reproductive age is 3% in South Sudan as indicated in the National Obstetric Fistula Strategy. This is directly linked to high maternal mortality, particularly in those areas where prolonged obstructed labour and poor transport contributes to a high proportion of maternal deaths.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) estimates that at least 60,000 women are living with OF in South Sudan, of whom fewer than 1,000 have had surgical repair and treatment. Adolescent girls are particularly susceptible to obstructed labour because their pelvises are not fully developed. Unfortunately, South Sudan has a very high teenage-pregnancy rate, estimated at 300/1,000 and an adolescent birth rate of 158/1000. It is anticipated that the prevalence may be higher given the poor socioeconomic profile and healthcare system, a situation which has been worsened by the prolonged humanitarian crisis,

climate change and impacts of epidemics including COVID-19.

The solution that Dr Koma was part of Driven by the desire to increase access to obstetric fistula prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration services, the MoH with support from UNFPA developed the National Obstetric Fistula Strategy (NOFS) 2019–2023 underpinned by the global, regional and national agenda towards ending preventable maternal deaths and obstetric fistula eradication.

Over the years MoH with the support from UNFPA and other partners conducted several obstetric fistula campaigns by foreign surgeons which successfully repaired over 300 women across the country at a cost of about 1000 USD per patient. In some instances, the entire fistula surgical teams were expatriates and therefore not sustainable. Such an observation created the desire to train nationals and equip health facility to be able to provide routine fistula repair services at health facilities sustainably.

In 2021, a surgical team was trained including 2 surgeons and 3 obstetricians supported by medical doctors, nurses, midwives, theatre attendants and anaesthetists and second batch successfully trained in 2022 at Juba Teaching Hospital with 3 gynaecologists as the main trainees. As part of the training 80 women underwent fistula repairs.



*Photo:- Training of National Obstetric Fistula surgeons at Juba Teaching Hospital.*



## Let us protect women and girls against sexual violence

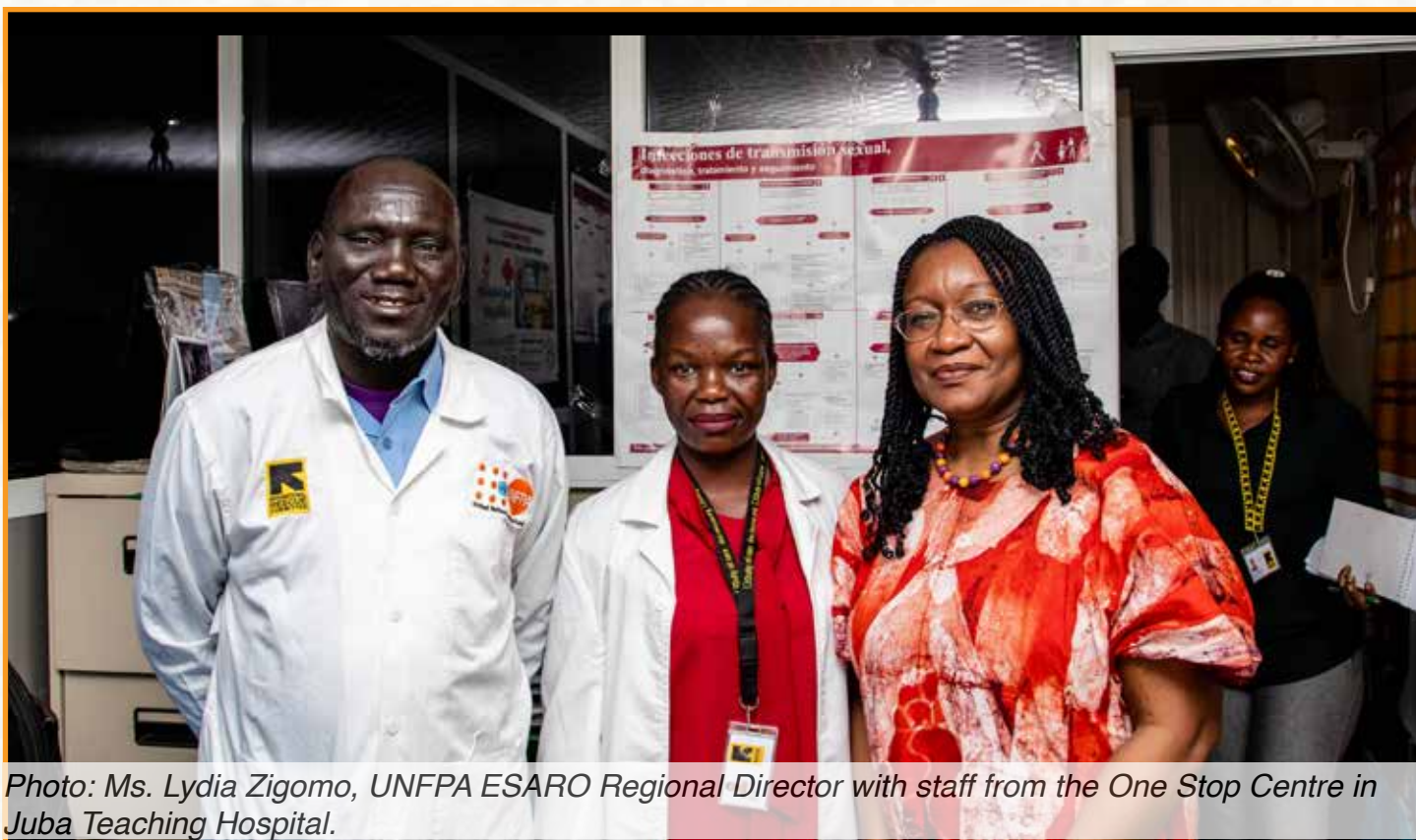


Photo: Ms. Lydia Zigomo, UNFPA ESARO Regional Director with staff from the One Stop Centre in Juba Teaching Hospital.

The cases of sexual and gender-based violence including rape and child marriage are alarming although not unique to South Sudan.

The government of South Sudan was hailed for establishing Gender-Based Violence Court which is providing plethora of services from psychosocial support and legal services.

***“There are counsellors to do with psychosocial support, there is also legal services, the judicial system is involved all the way in juvenile and gender -based violence court, those are really good practices,” Lydia Zigomo, UNFPA Regional Director for East and Southern Africa said after visiting the One Stop Center at Juba Teaching hospital.***

She also noted that one stop center handling reports of gender-based violence is offering holistic and integrated package of health services including judicial services to victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

***“When women and girls present themselves or are presented having suffered the effects of sexual and gender-based violence, the center provides holistic services, the diagnosis, testing and treatment are all available in one place which saves the victim to move to many places looking for help” Zigomo said.***

Antony Lupai, the Director General for Juba Teaching Hospital thanked UNFPA for continuous support extended to the one-stop center.

***“We are happy that drugs are made available, the government is doing its task to provide little, there is still a need for more support so that we do not have our indicators sliding down as they were in some years back” Lupai said.***

Majority of sexual and gender-based violence are not being reported due to fear of stigma which is rooted to culture. There is need for people to report but they become more conservative in the South Sudan society where women do not report



anything to do with rape and gender-based violence.

Despite the setbacks, Paul Jenaru Solomon, the Legal Officer at the one-stop center located at Juba Teaching Hospital, said there has been progress particularly in the sectors of health and gender. The support of partners especially UNFPA has been key to raise awareness of prevention, reporting, and response to cases of SGBV.

Looking at the statistics at the center, the number of people who have accessed legal services is more than 400, and more than 45 cases have been convicted, and the perpetrators have faced the law. He however, recently the number of rape cases reporting to the one-stop center have increased.

***“I advise the citizens of South Sudan that we need to take care of our sisters and our daughters, it is always a friend who commits the crime, we need to take care of our kids” Jenaru said***

Ms. Zigomo noted that Gender-Based Violence is still devastating in South Sudan which she has heard from various conversations in most meetings. Young nations like South Sudan emerging out of conflict a few years ago have countries with best practices to learn from.

At the same site visit, the RD visited UNFPA warehouse located at Juba Teaching hospital where she was walked through inspecting the commodities and explanations on how the management of commodities reach the beneficiaries to save lives at the last mile.



Photo: Ms. Lydia Zigomo, UNFPA ESARO Regional Director with staff from the UNFPA Commodities warehouse in Juba Teaching Hospital.



## Taking family planning to the last mile communities

Enzo County is located one of the remote Counties in South Sudan in Western Equatorial State. The area grapples with challenges of access to medical facilities and services let alone the access to Family Planning (FP) services which often is hampered by heavily entrenched social cultural norms.

To overcome the barriers to access, the Ministry of Health with support Hope Reviving Platform (HRP) and Amref Health Africa and funding from UNFPA instituted community-based health interventions to help improve access to FP services.

The interventions orientation of stakeholders in the communities of implementation and this included the State Security, Community and Religious Leaders as well as other gate-keepers within the community. Bi-weekly community dialogues were conducted to ensure communities were given chance to air their views and to sustain sensitization on the importance of the FP programme.

During implementation of the interventions, door to door awareness was conducted and community-based distribution of FP commodities was initiated.

With Ezo Central, Andari, Naandi, Yangiri, Bagidi and Bariguna Payams covered, a total of fifteen thousand six hundred and twenty eight (15,628) people were reached with FP messages while one thousand one hundred thirteen (1,113) clients received FP services in the three months of interventions.

***“There is need for multi-stakeholder engagement especially the involvement of men if women are to be empowered with FP. Engaging women alone cannot end the misconceptions about sexual reproductive health and FP. The men are key decision makers at the household level, their involvement in the conversation is very important,” said Aluma Moses the Hope Reviving Platform Programme Manager on his experiences supporting the community-based interventions.***



*Photo: Men engaging in the uptake of family planning services*

Laku, who attended one of the community dialogues aired his thoughts on the sensitization and awareness received. “The common misconception among men in the community is that if women use contraceptives, they become barren. This is a very strong myth in the community,” he said.

***“I was glad to hear from someone who has used the contraceptives and how they have been able to have children even after using Family Planning drugs. My wife is here, and we are already talking about this, and I will support her to use FP” Laku added.***

UNFPA in South Sudan has empowered local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) such HRP to engage in community-based interventions around providing information and services especially in hard-to-reach areas.



## From isolation during menstruation to reusable pads in cattle camps



Suzan is a young girl aged 14 who lives in Gbogoro cattle Camp in Terekeka. She had her first periods at the age of 11 and was aware of what was going on with her because her elder sister was always kept in one place every month during her menstruation period.

***“I was afraid to tell my mother thinking it is a crime to menstruate. My mother called on my auntie and took me to another place where they dug a hole, and I was told to sit on for the next days until the blood stopped. I was afraid to die because of the flow but again isolation was a normal practice as I had heard of other girls do the same here in our community” said Suzan***

The use of sanitary pads is believed to cause infertility, vaginal diseases and a risk to their cattle in case the cows swallow the pads.

Unlike other normal body processes, menstruation is linked with cultural meanings that affect the perceptions of young girls as well as the ways which the adults in communities around then respond to their needs.

Adolescent girls are often uninformed and unprepared for menarche. Information is primarily obtained from mothers and other female family members in the communities who are not necessarily well equipped to fill the gaps in girls’ knowledge. To worsen the situation, girls are given information only the time in preparation of marriage which is also early and forced.

Multiple factors including religious and cultural barriers, social stigma, lack of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) and myths/misconceptions on family planning have contribute to the present state of sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) which remains a contentious landscape in South Sudan.

To achieve results of from isolation to accepting the use of reusable pads made from clothes, Shabab Le Shabab Health Alliance with a support from UNFPA spent fourteen days (14) and nights holding sessions with men separately and women and girls on issues of concern to each group. The tireless days in cattle camps among other things were intended to address, among others to break the silence of menstrual health, violence caused by cattle raiding that left women and girls suffering, and Gender Based Violence issues.



As commonly said, it takes a village to raise a child...

***“Our father and cattle camp Chief accepted us to come and attend these sessions which I found very useful together with my mother and other girls. I learnt how to make pads out of clothes which will help me during my menstruation. I will not be isolated again”  
Akuol, Suzan’s sister shares her experience.***

While engaging with various groups in the cattle camps the Teenage Girls and young women sessions covered training on basic skills on making re-usual pads using local materials, sensitisation on menstrual health hygiene and management, and preventions of other STIs among young girls. The sessions were conducted in an interactive manner and encouraged open discussions on menstrual hygiene myths and how to overcome barriers especially misconception due to culture. The girls in the cattle camp liked the approach as it helps to break the silence, fears and stigma around menstruations and STIs.



Photo: Participants engaging during the menstrual hygiene awareness session in terekeka cattle camp



## The plight of internal displaced women in Juba camp



*Photo: Ms. Lydia Zigomo UNFPA ESARO Regional Director, listening to impact stories from the internally displaced camp 3 supported by UNFPA and managed by IMC*

Collective effort is urgently needed to address the plight of internal displaced Women and girls in Juba, Ms. Lydia Zigomo urges.

Conflicts have always had a devastating effect on women, girls, young people, and children across the world, and the situation in South Sudan is no different from the rest. Natural shocks and conflict place women under precarious conditions with many falling victim to conflict-related violence including sexual and Gender-Based Violence in addition to loss of health services and other basic needs.

Several internally displaced women in the Juba protection of civilian site have decried the tough living conditions that they have to endure, saying that they go for months without food, limited rights to access reproductive health services, risky environment for their daughters, fear of insecurities, and poor shelters with harsh climate conditions.

During her visit to the Juba IDP camp, UNFPA East and Southern Africa Regional Director, Ms. Lydia Zigomo called for the urgent and collective need to address the plight of the

displaced women and girls stressing that the needs are so huge in South Sudan and require adequate resources to respond to the need to have a right to live decently and free from violence.

***“What I have witnessed here in the camp is the immensity of the needs for every necessity. That is something that we need to keep highlighting to not just the government of South Sudan but also to the international community” Zigomo said.***

Ms. Zigomo in a one-on-one session sat down with internal displaced women to patiently listen to them as they poured out their cries on issues affecting them. She noted that there is a need to invest more in peace for sustainability, continuous support for reproductive health services and supplies for the women particularly those of reproductive age to have choices for family planning, and activities that gear towards societal change of norms citing that early marriage and unintended pregnancies are still the elephant in the building stressing that children should be borne by choice, not by chance.

“I would like to see our daughters go to school and complete their education than having babies as teenagers which will lead to progressive societies” Ms. Zigomo said.



Rebecca Nyakot, a mother of five who got displaced from Unity State following outbreak of conflict in 2013 said they often spend more than four months without food and clean water. The war has made most of them widows where they take the burden to be breadwinners, yet they don't have resources for their families.

***“Our safety and health condition are worrying as we take on risky long journeys in the bush outside the camp to collect firewood which expose us and our daughters to rape. We do not know how long we are going to stay here”. Nyakot cried as she narrated the story***

Mary Nyagai, another displaced person said they are overburdened with taking care of their children, adding that they need food, education, and health services. She narrated that their girls were compelled to drop out of school as a result of rape, early and forced marriage.

“Here in the camp, it is only women responsible for the children, women go and fetch firewood to sell so that they survive, but that is increasingly difficult



*Photo: Ms. Lydia Zigomo UNFPA ESARO Regional Director, handing over dignity kits to mothers in the maternity ward*

work because of the attacks. There is no one to stand with us” Nyagai said.

Ms Zigomo said that during her few days in South Sudan, most of her conversations with various groups of women and the government focused on the need to eradicate gender-based violence and promote peace as a foundation for sustainable programming.

She pledged to advocate for women and bring their voices to those who could aid them.

“I am a mother and have a daughter just like you. It is our responsibility as women to ensure that those girls and our children have a different, better reality and experience than ours,” she said

At the IDP Camp, UNFPA is supporting the health facility through International Medical Corps (IMC) to provide reproductive health services to women and girls in the camp, to ensure save birth and provide family planning in addition to other regular services. The clinic serves a population of 24,500 Internal Displaced Persons.



*Photo: Ms. Lydia Zigomo UNFPA ESARO Regional Director, handing over dignity kits to mothers in the IDP 3 camp*



## Stronger together with donors for sexual and reproductive health



*Photo: Joint donor visit to Internally displaced camp 3 medical facilities in Juba by SIDA and Canada Representatives*

With the dedicated support of key donors with the effortless and continued commitment work of UNFPA South Sudan, the future looks brighter for the women, girls, and young people of this resilient nation.

In its ongoing quest to strengthen its strategic partnerships, UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund in South Sudan recently held a joint programme meeting with its key donors: Canada, Sweden, and Norway. The event served as an opportunity for the organization and its partners to review their 2022 achievements, particularly in the realm of sexual and reproductive health and rights for the women and girls of South Sudan.

As a country that has faced numerous challenges due to prolonged conflict and natural shocks related to climate, South Sudan's population has long needed aid and assistance. Thankfully, the joint efforts of UNFPA and its donors have made a remarkable impact in 2022, providing vital support to women and girls in both development and humanitarian settings.

During the meeting, UNFPA took the time to highlight some of the significant achievements from the past year. These include increased access to sexual and reproductive health information and services, as well as enhanced community engagement to tackle cultural barriers that have historically impeded women's reproductive health and rights. UNFPA was also able to support the National Bureau of Statistics to conduct a population estimation survey and work with implementing partners to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in South Sudan.

***"We are grateful to our donors for the continuous financial and technical support in ensuring the services we provide are to improve the well-being of women, girls, the young people to access reproductive health services. The journey is still long to get to the Zeros, but our march continues to ensure a healthy population of this country. Our commitment of support to the government of South Sudan has been set in the new country program which we ready to take forward with our donors" Sarah Masale, UNFPA Deputy Representative who chaired the meeting.***



Additionally, the meeting served as an opportunity for UNFPA to share its plans for the upcoming roll-out of its fourth country programme of assistance to the Government of South Sudan, set to begin in 2023. This will further the organization's commitment to supporting the nation in achieving better health outcomes for its population, particularly for vulnerable women and girls.

***“Canada is pleased with the work being done by UNFPA especially on capacity building and the training of health professionals through the health sciences institutes to ensure improvement in health service delivery” said Jesse Ann, from the Embassy of Canada***

The representatives of Canada, Sweden, and Norway expressed their continued commitment to support the efforts of UNFPA in South Sudan. The donors expressed appreciation for the quarterly meetings and commended UNFPA on the achievements in 2022 to ensure that women, girls, and young people in the country are empowered to realize their sexual and reproductive health and rights. The donors also requested more discussion on some of the challenges faced in implementing the programme in future meetings.

***“UNFPA is doing excellent work in the field, but it will be important to also look at some of the output specific challenges affecting women and girls’ access to sexual and reproductive health services and how UNFPA was able to mitigate these challenges” stated Markus Larsson from the Embassy of Sweden.***

Christianne Nyakato from the Embassy of Norway, in highlighting that gender equality and women’s empowerment were critical areas for Norway. ***“We are pleased to hear about the progress and achievements in the area of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls since this is essential to the health and social development of families, communities and the country as a whole.”***

As the fourth country programme unfolds, it will be inspiring to see the continued progress that this powerful partnership can achieve, transforming the lives of countless individuals and helping to build a healthier, more equitable society in South Sudan. It is also expected that with the operationalization of the new country programme, more focus will be





## At 15 and a bride - a couple roots to end child marriage in the community

Nzara-Western Equatoria State- Child marriage denies girls the freedom to make their own decisions, and their health and well-being, as well as to have choices and opportunities for their futures. This is no different for Mary\* (name changed), now 19 years old. She was married off at the age of 15 to a 43-year-old man. Mary and her husband hail from Nzara County Western Equatoria State.

Child and forced marriage aren't isolated to one culture, religion, or group of people. It cuts across regions, cultures, religions, and backgrounds in South Sudan. The root causes – which allow it to continue are - gender inequality, poverty, cultural norms, and lack of education, all of which we have the power to change.

With no education, Mary was reduced to doing domestic chores, as her husband, Kumbo is only a hunter. The burden of putting food on the table weighed heavily which made her often burst into tears with no ray of hope. "Sometimes when I saw my schoolmates going to school, I felt ashamed. At times they laugh at me, making me completely lose hope in life as I felt like a misfit in the society," said Mary.

Forced into marriage by her father, she said she was naïve, and the cultural norms lured her father to accept a marriage proposal for her to get married to an old man who was not her choice.

Mary is just one of the many girls who are making the numbers of child brides. With intervention from Women and Children Health Organization (WCHO), Mary is one of the beneficiaries of Gender-based violence prevention and post-violence care (COVID-19) Project supported by the Global Fund.

WCHO led awareness on Gender-based violence prevention and post-violence care (COVID-19) Project, these were geared towards changing the existing negative social norms within the community, Mary and her 40-year-old husband both at-



tended the community dialogue.

***"Marrying off girls before the age of 18 is not good as it deprives them basic rights such as education. I have realized that it was wrong to marry my wife when she was just 15. I have benefited from the community dialogues. Every parent should support, and no girl must get married young" Said Kumbo Andrea***

Andrea and Mary are now rooting for every girl-child to not get married before completing their education or before reaching the age of 18 years old. Mary and Kumbo said that the work of WCHO is life changing.

***"From now onwards, this practice is not allowed in the community. We will not allow parents to marry off their children at an early age because it will negatively affect their lives in the future," said Mary and Kumbo.***

They thanked UNFPA and WCHO for reaching out to the community to raise awareness to the entire community of Nzara.



## Ensuring Human Rights and Social Inclusion at the heart of UNFPA work

Achieving equality and dignity of all also underpins the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), which guides UNFPA's work. Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) is one of the six Guiding Principles of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. Therefore, HRBA and gender transformative approaches are identified as one of the six key accelerators in the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

Keeping in view the importance of understanding the human rights-based approach and the skills for domestic application of these instruments, UNFPA team as well as all the Implementing Partners underwent two-day trainings on Human Rights based Approach for Development and Peace. The training was attended by the Government counterparts, civil society partners and UNFPA personnel.

The participatory training covered myriad topics such as understanding the human rights principles (universality, indivisibility, equality and non-discrimination, participation, accountability), understanding the roles of both duty-bearers and rights-holders, framework of international human rights standards and its operational application in development programming.

The participants analyzed the intersectional inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that often result in groups of people being left behind.

***“I have learnt through this training how human rights are applicable in all socio-cultural context. I now understand that they are not just some foreign concepts but are embedded in our day-to-day life” said one of the training participants.***



*Photo: Dr. Stella Bosire, taking participants through the HRBA training*

At the end of the training, the participants also committed that they would discuss what they learnt in the training with their respective external partners and will monitor how they apply HRBA in their own life and programming.

***“It is important for staff and implementing partners to be equipped with knowledge about the various international treaties and how to domesticate them while applying the human rights instruments in their activities” – Stella Bosire, a consultant.***

UNFPA South Sudan is committed to continue supporting the Government in its reporting and monitoring obligations, and supporting the civil society to submit their reports, and support the South Sudan Human Rights Commission to monitor sexual and reproductive health and fulfil the commitment to leave no one behind.



## Farming out of GBV, the life-changing experience of displaced women in Mangala



Photo: Harvesting okra at Bilinyang farm

Mangala-Central Equatorial State - South Sudanese women face GBV following long cycles of civil wars in addition to communal violence as well as natural disasters. The country was hard hit by massive floods in the recent past causing massive displacements and this came with the challenges of food shortage as farmlands were submerged.

The unfortunate situation is no different from Internal Displaced Persons (IDP) especially women at Mangala camp. They were robbed of a decent livelihood and putting food on the table has been an uphill task. This prompted Divine Feminine Foundation as a small National NGO to start up a farming project to propel these women out poverty but above all, provide food.

The Mangalla Payam land operated by DFF with support /funding from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) aimed at empowering 50 women, who were survivors of Gender-Based Violence in Billnyang village, Mangalla Payam east of Juba. The project is supported by Global Fund to build a cadre of national women-led organizations to innovate finding lasting solutions to the social-eco-

nomic challenges in South Sudan.

***“Reaping what one sows is a satisfying feeling, the gains from farming solved problems that would have exacerbated our plight as IDP women of Mangala. We are grateful to DFF and UNFPA for coming to our aid, but we request the project be scaled so that a greater number of vulnerable women would be helped, the food supply in the market could be increased, and food security could be guaranteed. With more help and generous funding, the impact could be ten-fold. We are glad to show the world what we can do as women in farming! We appreciate the support and the trust put in us to deliver” said Mary Abiong of DFF.***

With the funds, a myriad of activities were carried out. This involved psycho-social support as well as training in modern farming and agriculture, such as new scientific methods of planting and weeding and pest control.”

“DFF can confidently show that 12 women were employed on the DFF farm and earned more than



the previous seasons. The jobs created and the earnings, albeit meager, are a step in reducing food security. It is worth noting that jobs were created for women from all walks of life, whether non-literate or with some level of education. the project had a double impact of employing a group of women who were disadvantaged on multiple fronts. These were the most disadvantaged groups. Abused, illiterate and neglected in mainstream society” said the DFF project manager Mary.

She added that the project scored significant achievements as livelihoods within the IDP community improved, and women were economically empowered making them less vulnerable to GBV. I can categorically say “The markets around Mapaw and the Juba Bor Road recorded increased variety and supply of vegetables. Watermelons from DFF farms, Okra, beans, cabbages, and Kale were some of the vegetables that DFF farms produced through the project. the IDP women could see their power in what they produced on the farm and sold in the market. These vegetables were able to sell more quickly than the vegetables from neighboring countries because they were fresh off the farm and did not have customs duties added to their prices,” said Mary.

The project supported by Global Fund through UNFPA, is an example of how finding innovative solutions for social and economic empowerment can strengthen women’s agency and solidarity to not only change their lives, but also contribute t



*Photo: Green pepper garden at Bilinyang farm*



*Photo: MDFF women harvesting tomatoes at Bilinyang farm*



## Responding to the cries of First Time Young Mothers in Kapoeta



Gender based violence (GBV) and violence against children—both boys and girls, remains widespread in Kapoeta and beyond.

This year, Kapoeta One Stop Centre (OSC) recorded the highest number of GBV survivors ever since its inception in 2019. At the end of last year, the centre recorded a total of 421 survivors of whom 3 of them were boys aged 8, 9 and 10 years. The records indicated that physical assault is rampant in the community at 206 cases followed by child marriages at 62, rape at 59, sexual assault at 45, emotional abuse at 29 and the least was denial of resources at 21 cases.

There were 2079 of first-time young mothers (YTYM) that benefited from the services of Adolescents Sexual Reproductive Health, a UNFPA project. The data shows that the number of the beneficiaries started to increase in July this year. This is due to the efforts exerted through meetings with multisectoral stakeholders and regular outreaches for community sensitization.

***“This five-days counselling support session has impacted me; it has relieved me from despair, anxiety, depression, trauma and stigma and restored hope in me building resilience too. Am now confident that I can make my living by making micro business, such as tea, establishing vegetable garden instead of adopting dependence syndrome as a coping mechanism. These sessions have made me to know that life is good. I cannot commit suicide”. A first-time young mother who survived violence.***

The key stakeholders involved in the coordination and the success of services to GBV survivors include the county police services, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Gender, Child and social welfare, communities and the traditional leaders that work together with service providers that include health, legal, justice, psychosocial counselors and efforts to long-term prevention of recurrence to GBV survivors.

With the support from the UNFPA adolescent sexual reproductive health program, 20 service



providers were trained on GBV management including referral pathways to OSC in Kapoeta Civil hospital for timely intervention.

Opening of the safe house in Kapoeta

ADRA Project Officer receives Safe House Keys from the Hon Minister and Deputy Mayor of Kapoeta Municipality

On December 9th 2022, UNMISS in collaboration with the State Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare (SMGCSW) and the State Ministry of health (SMoH), opened and launched the Safe house in Kapoeta South County to host victims of gender based violence particularly young girls that ran away from their families due to forced marriages

This year, six girls ran away from their families and stayed at the police station for over three (days, months.....?) before some of them were sent to school at St. Bakhita Girls primary school in Kapoeta East.

The centre was officially handed over to ADRA by the MGCSW and the Deputy Mayor as the lead GBV partner for the county GBV subcluster.

***“This centre should be a collective responsibility of the government and the implementing partners to ensure that young girls are safe, receive the care, counselling, and the rights to leave with dignity and respect for humanity”. Minister of Gender, Child and Social Welfare said.***



Photo: a mother talking to a young mother in Wau teaching hospital



## Bridging the digital divide to advance gender equality



Photo: South Sudanese women in uniform, together their counterparts from UNMISS march on the streets of Bentiu to mark #IWD2023

Malakal-Upper Nile State - Annually, International Women's Day is marked by different actors to drum support to advance the women's cause. UNFPA together with UN Agencies in partnership with the Unity State Ministry of Gender, Child, and Social welfare, Bentiu Town Municipality, Rubkona County Authorities, 4th Infantry Division of South Sudan People Defense Forces (SSPDF), South Sudan Police Services, Prisons, and humanitarian partners from National and International Non-governmental Organizations joined forces to commemorate the International Women's Day on the 8th of March 2023 at the Independence Stadium in Bentiu town.

The State Women Union Chairperson, Hon. Nyadien Lual used the occasion to rally the state leadership to put an end to the prevailing harmful practices in the state that bar the girl-child from receiving an education and enforce the laws to stop child marriage. She thanked UNFPA and other humanitarian partners for the humanitarian support they are rendering to the community.

She also lauded UNFPA for its work in Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights which has significantly helped in the reduction of the number of unsafe abortions in the state.

***“Contraceptive uptake has increased among our women and adolescents, and it has helped them avoid unintended pregnancies”, said Nadien.***

Hon. Nyadien encouraged young girls to embrace education to better their future chances to participate in all aspects of life.

UNFPA played a pivotal role in coordinating with partners and bringing them together. The occasion saw a match of women in uniform SSPDF, SSPS, SSWLS, and UNMISS in the company of the Bentiu mayor, Hon. Nyachieng Biey Tuet move from the Dr. Garang Playground long to Bentiu Independence Stadium to an audience of more than 3,000 people who keenly listened to messages of peace and empowerment.

The UNPOL commander who at the same time represented the Head of Field Office UNMISS, Sector Unity applauded the participation of Unity State women in different activities both in uniform and non-uniform in the state government. She said the UNMISS will continue to work with Humanitarian partners from UN agencies and the government to promote gender equality in the state and fight against GBV. This year's theme for International Women's Day aims at empowering women with digital skills to attain equality.



## The power of female sports in norms shifting: UNFPA collaboration with the Bright Starlets, the National Women's Football team



Photo: Dr. Ademola Olajide UNFPA Representative with the Bright Starlets team.

Women's participation in sports has a long history. It is a history marked by division and discrimination but also one filled with major accomplishments by female athletes and important advances for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Increased involvement of women and girls can promote positive development in sports by providing alternative norms, values, attitudes, knowledge, capabilities, and experiences. The contributions of women, particularly in leadership positions, can bring diversity and alternative approaches and expand the talent base in areas such as management, coaching, and sports journalism.

Women in sports leadership can shape attitudes toward women's capabilities as leaders and decision-makers, especially in traditionally male domains. Women's involvement in sports can make a significant contribution to public life and community development.

***“The participation of women and girls in sports challenges gender stereotypes and discrimination and can therefore be a vehicle to promote gender equality. Football cuts across tribes and borders which accelerate peace and unity, and the empowerment of women and girls for the benefit of communities” said Grace Soga, a female athlete.***

Particularly in traditionally masculine fields, women in sport leadership can influence opinions around leadership, decision-making ability, can significantly improve society and their communities. UNFPA South Sudan is partnering with Starlets for Change Organization to harness the power of Sports to improve menstrual hygiene management, promote gender equality, prevent Gender Based Violence (GBV), and end child marriage.

***“Exploring the intersection of football and reproductive health in South Sudan reveals not just the current knowledge, attitudes, and practices of adolescents and young people, but also the potential to empower and educate***



*through sports.” – Dr, Stella Bosire, SRH consultant*

UNFPA conducted a focus group discussion with sportswomen, adolescent boys, and girls from various schools in Juba to understand their sexual and reproductive health needs. The engagement offered a platform for young girls to share their experiences on menstrual health management, access to reproductive health services, and understanding of gender-based violence, including the dangers of forced and child marriage. The discussions will inform the development of a handbook/training manual which will be used in a yearlong cascade training by youth-led networks and adolescent reproductive health.

To improve menstrual health management during sports time at the stadium, UNFPA is further supporting the installation of a self-care facility for female footballers and support the team with training equipment for their talents to grow and become change makers in their communities



*Photo: Dr. Stella Bosire SRH Consultant with the Bright Starlets team.*



*Photo: The Bright Starlets Womens National Team*



## Showcasing the strength and resilience of women from South Sudan during CSW67



This year's Commission of Status of Women (CSW67) was held under the theme "Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls."

With support from United Nations Population Fund in South Sudan, the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare with leadership of the Vice president, H.E. Rebecca Nyandeng De Mabior, Vice President for Gender and Youth Cluster, organized the first ever side event at CSW. The side event was themed "Exploring innovation and education in promotion of gender equality and women's leadership for positive change and peacebuilding."

The side event was an opportunity to show the world the strength and resilience of women of South Sudan who have been at the foundation of the country's independence and development.

As a 12-year-old nation, CSW67 was a fountain of wisdom on this journey for gender equality. Reflecting on this year's Priority theme, the side event focused on Exploring innovation and edu-

cation in promotion of gender equality and women's leadership for positive change and peace building. There is need to recognize the positive linkages between innovation, education, gender equality and peace.

The steady fast leadership and restless efforts of H.E Rebecca Nyandeng De Mabior as a living example to the women, girls, men and boys in South Sudan was commended.

***"You have shown over the years that women and girls can achieve their dreams through perseverance and claiming equal space at the negotiation table"- Hon. Aya Benjamin Warille, Minister of Gender, Child and Social Welfare.***

On appreciating the support of UNFPA in South Sudan, the Minister said,

"Dr. Demola usually reminds us that a bird cannot fly with one wing. I would therefore like to use this opportunity to extend my gratitude to UNFPA South Sudan for your consistent support to the Government and people of South Sudan. Through your support, we are in high gear on the road to



promoting women's rights, documenting the reality of the women's lives of South Sudanese and gradually shaping standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women in this nation."

Technology is rapidly shaping how people engage with the world. And yet, when the girls are pursuing education, they are encouraged to pursue non-technology related areas. The technology-led areas are largely dominated by men and boys. And this comes from deep-rooted stereotypes about the roles and capabilities of women and girls. The government leadership need to urgently bridge this digital access divide between women and men, girls and boys so that we harness the strength of the whole population.

***"To the women in South Sudan, the world hears us, and recognize your contributions for the country's development. And above all, this is an opportunity to celebrate our gains. On a day like this, I would encourage you to reflect on the journey thus far. Yes, there is a long way to go but we have to acknowledge we have covered probably the hardest part of the journey. You are the true champions of the nation" H.E Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior, VP for Gender and Youth Cluster.***



Photo: H.E Mama Rebecca De Mabior Vice President South Sudan delivering remarks during the CSW side event



Photo: Dr Julitta Onabanjo, Director of Technical Division. , making remarks during the commission of status of women side event in New York

While there has been progress in some of the targets of the International Conference for Population Development (ICPD) Plan of Action, countries including South Sudan still have a long way to go to achieve the SDGs, particularly those directly related to the health, empowerment and well-being of women and girls. Conflicts and climate induced shocks, coupled with deeply rooted negative cultural norms and practices, continue to increase women and girls' vulnerabilities, and curtail their agency and bodily autonomy. GBV is a real concern and so is the rampant femicide associated with family feuds arising from forced early marriages.

Technology is good when used for the betterment of the society however poses some newer challenges like online intimidation and harassment of women and girls. People have to harness the strength of technology to advance women and girls rights, and also safeguard them from potential risks of targeting and intimidation.

***"On behalf of UNFPA, I re-affirm commitment and pledge to continue the journey until every woman and youth in globally and in this case South Sudan has equal rights, opportunities and access to information, knowledge, services to enable them to participate in the peacebuilding and development as equal citizens" Dr Julitta Onabanjo, Director of Technical Division.***









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