

Briefing paper

Humanitarian policy recommendations: South Sudan

April 2023



tearfund

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Tearfund is a Christian relief and development agency working with partners and local churches to tackle poverty and injustice in more than 50 countries.

 **Crowds line the streets of Juba in February 2023 to welcome Pope Francis, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and Moderator of the Church of Scotland Right Rev Dr Iain Greenshields.**

Cover photo: Rosemary Wilfred/Tearfund

1. Recommendations to the leaders of South Sudan

- Ensure there are no further delays in implementing the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS).
- Maintain the renewed commitment to the Sant'egidio Rome Peace talks. Engagement with non-signatories to the R-ARCSS needs to be expanded to include those who are not included in the Sant'egidio process.
- Make adequate preparations to hold elections before the newly agreed deadline of December 2024, including ensuring there is an end to ongoing violence and finalising the constitution.
- Establish an independent Hybrid Court for South Sudan as stipulated by and in collaboration with the African Union (AU).
- Enable the participation of women and young people in peacebuilding, governance and socio-economic reforms.
- End child and forced marriages as pledged through the Strategic National Action Plan (2017–2030) to End Child Marriage.
- Ensure the safety and security of humanitarian workers.
- Ensure that the status of the Abyei border region is settled with the Government of Sudan.

2. Recommendations to the UK Government and other international actors

- The Troika, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), AU and other international stakeholders who have historically supported the peace process should resume support for peace monitoring mechanisms.
- Reinstate humanitarian funding which has been severely reduced in recent years (such as the 59 per cent cut in funding from the UK in 2021).
- Multilateral banks such as the World Bank should make access to climate finance easier (especially for the most vulnerable/conflict-affected countries such as South Sudan, for whom access is often the hardest).
- Support the role of local churches and faith-based organisations in peacebuilding and humanitarian and resilience work.
- Increase investment in enabling safe climate mobility, climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and resilience building.
- Support locally led humanitarian action in line with the Grand Bargain and Charter4Change commitments.

Humanitarian needs overview



9.4 million

need humanitarian assistance in 2023



7.7 million

are food insecure



2.2 million

are displaced internally



Ranked 185

out of 189 countries on the HDI index*

3. Context

South Sudan became independent from Sudan in 2011, but two years later civil war erupted in the world's newest nation. Today, in addition to violent conflict, South Sudan is also reeling from climate shocks and a widespread economic crisis.¹ It is estimated that 9.4 million people will need humanitarian assistance in 2023² and 7.7 million people **(75 per cent of the population) are currently severely food insecure**.³ Additionally, due to extensive flooding and ongoing conflict, 2.2 million people are internally displaced.⁴ As of 2020, the country was ranked 185 out of 189 countries and territories on the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2020),⁵ indicating the severity of the humanitarian situation.

As the central electricity grid is expensive and the reach is limited, only 7.2 per cent of the population have access to electricity,⁶ making South Sudan the least electrified country in Africa. Without access to electricity, it is significantly more challenging to reduce poverty, broaden education and improve public health.

Peace deal

Following the violent conflict which erupted in December 2013, a peace deal was signed in 2015 for a unity government. The agreement collapsed in 2016 following another deadly clash within the presidential palace commonly known as J1. The peace deal was 'revitalised' by warring parties in 2018 and the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS)⁷ was created: this was set to be implemented by February 2023.

However, in August 2022, the parties signed a roadmap deal, extending the transitional period for 24 months and extending the deadline for implementation until February 2025. The agreement stipulates that general elections will be held by December 2024. Yet, there is scepticism as to whether these will take place: so far, limited measures have been put in place to enable them.

Violent incidents are being carried out with impunity in many locations and while some of the unified forces for law enforcement have trained and graduated, they have not been deployed due to limited logistics and funds. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) observed in December 2022 that 'the finalisation of deployment plans and a move towards the second phase to enable these unified forces to contribute to intercommunal harmony remains urgently needed'.⁸

¹ OCHA (2022) 'Humanitarian Needs Overview: South Sudan'

<https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-needs-overview-2023-november-2022>

² OCHA (2022) 'Humanitarian Coordinator in South Sudan raises alarm on projected increase of people's humanitarian needs', OCHA press release, 25 November

<https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/humanitarian-coordinator-south-sudan-raises-alarm-projected-increase-peoples-humanitarian-needs>

³ WFP (2022) 'South Sudan country brief'

https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000144173/download/?_ga=2.13046839.1232750739.1668525925-998075428.1666102548

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The Human Development Index (HDI) measures the average achievements in a country in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living. The HDI was created to emphasise that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone.

⁶ World Bank (2020) 'South Sudan data' <https://data.worldbank.org/country/south-sudan?view=chart>. Accessed 16 February 2023.

⁷ IGAD (2018) 'Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS)', 12 September <https://www.peaceagreements.org/viewmasterdocument/2112>

⁸ UNMISS (2022) 'UNMISS supports graduation of forces in Malakal, Upper Nile', 22 November <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/unmiss-supports-graduation-of-forces-malakal-upper-nile>

There is continued conflict and instability in South Sudan on a national and subnational level. There are many localised conflicts that are often framed as communal disputes, but some analysts argue that the national elites play a significant role in stirring up tensions and are thought to be profiting from the ongoing conflict.⁹

To address this ongoing violence, one of the key recommendations relating to accountability mechanisms made in 2014 by the African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan (AUCISS) was to set up an AU-backed Hybrid Court for South Sudan (HCSS). While this was included in the 2015 peace agreement, the court is yet to be established, seven years on.

The AUCISS had recommended that the HCSS should be ‘an Africa-led, Africa-owned, Africa-resourced legal mechanism under the aegis of the African Union supported by the international community, particularly the United Nations, to bring those with the greatest responsibility at the highest level to account. Such a mechanism should include South Sudanese judges and lawyers’.¹⁰ Communities fear that valuable legal evidence that could be brought to such an independent court has already been lost and/or destroyed and delays have led to violence taking place with impunity.

One of the forms of violence that has led to large-scale death and displacement in South Sudan is **cattle raiding**.¹¹ Over half of the population in South Sudan is made up of pastoralist communities,¹² so cattle have very high value and are often people’s sole source of income. They play a key role in the economic and cultural fabric of society and are used in place of currency to barter, settle disputes, be offered as bride price and ‘in the absence of an established banking sector... [serve] as a reliable way to keep assets’.¹³



📷 Payar cattle camp, Twic East. The battle over resources and intercommunal conflict have led to violent cattle raids. Photo: Tom Price/Tearfund

⁹ Kleinfeld, P and O Francis (2023) ‘No quick fix: The challenge of local peacebuilding in South Sudan’, *The New Humanitarian*, 19 January <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2023/01/19/South-Sudan-peacebuilding-dialogue#:~:text=No%20quick%20fix%3A%20The%20challenge.&text=Residents%20of%20Mabior%20Yar%2C%20in.and%20conflict%20in%20recent%20years>

¹⁰ AUCISS (2014) ‘Final report of the AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan’, 15 October <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/auciss.final.report.pdf>

¹¹ Wild, H, J M Jok and R Patel (2018) ‘The militarization of cattle raiding in South Sudan: how a traditional practice became a tool for political violence’, *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* vol 3 (2) <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-018-0030-y>

¹² Mkutu, K (2018) ‘Pastoralism and Conflict in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel’, *Population and Development Review* vol 44 (4) <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/padr.12211>

¹³ Idris, I, 2018, ‘Livestock and conflict in South Sudan’, K4D Helpdesk Report 484. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies

Access to resources for cattle, such as water and grazing land, are becoming scarce with increasingly erratic rain patterns that have led to drought in some areas and flooding in others. In remote areas, government law enforcement groups are often not present and most pastoralists have taken it upon themselves to protect their herds and communities. The battle over resources and intercommunal conflict have led to violent cattle raids. The government-led forceful disarmament campaigns have been met with many challenges and resistance. Due to the nomadic nature of these groups and the fear of violence, they live clustered, away from villages, where it is hard for them to access humanitarian relief, health or education services, or clean water.

The continuing conflict has a particularly severe impact on **women and girls**. South Sudan has some of the highest child marriage rates in the world, although the legal age for marriage is 18. A girl in South Sudan is more likely to die in childbirth than finish secondary school.¹⁴ The government has pledged through its Strategic National Action Plan (2017–2030) to End Child Marriage in South Sudan to achieve this by 2030 but civil society actors consider that progress has been slow.



📷 A Tearfund worker on a UN flight in South Sudan. Humanitarians rely on helicopters to reach field locations as access via roads is limited due to insecurity, flooding and poor road infrastructure. Photo: Polly Hughes/Tearfund

Furthermore, South Sudan has **one of the highest rates of violent incidents against humanitarian workers**,¹⁵ and looting of humanitarian relief materials. Since 2013, 141 humanitarians, predominantly of South Sudanese nationality, have lost their lives while providing humanitarian assistance. This includes nine humanitarian workers who were killed in 2022 and three already in January 2023 alone.¹⁶

¹⁴ UK Parliament (2022) 'Extreme poverty: A girl in South Sudan is more likely to die in childbirth than finish secondary school', 13 December

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/98/international-development-committee/news/175074/extreme-poverty-a-girl-in-south-sudan-is-more-likely-to-die-in-childbirth-than-finish-secondary-school/>

¹⁵ AWSD (2022) 'Highest incident contexts (1997–2021)' <https://aidworkersecurity.org/incidents/report/contexts>

¹⁶ OCHA (2023) 'Humanitarian Coordinator a.i. in South Sudan condemns the killing of three aid workers', OCHA press release, 11 January <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/humanitarian-coordinator-ai-south-sudan-condemns-killing-three-aid-workers#:~:text=Nine%20humanitarian%20workers%20have%20been,providing%20humanitarian%20assistance%20to%20people.>

Humanitarian access

Humanitarian access in the country is challenging. This is not only because of poor road infrastructure and conflict along the roads – the difficulties are compounded by flooding which makes large parts of the country inaccessible. Humanitarians rely on UN and private aircraft to reach field locations. This is not only expensive but has limited investment from humanitarian donors and as flights are often cancelled at short notice, it causes severe delays in humanitarian aid. In recent years, humanitarian organisations have had to invest in boats to reach communities impacted by floods.

The costs and time involved in using these transport methods have been a further barrier to effective and timely humanitarian assistance.

Localisation

The journey towards strengthening **locally led humanitarian response**, also known as **localisation**, has met with many challenges in South Sudan.

Humanitarian actors made commitments to localisation through the Grand Bargain¹⁷ and Charter4Change¹⁸ but progress has been limited. In South Sudan, a report published in 2023 found that between 2017 and 2022 local and national actors (LNAs) received just 0.4 per cent of all direct localised food sector funding.¹⁹ This is despite evidence that LNAs contribute significantly to the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian assistance.²⁰

In 2021, Tearfund and our partners published a study based on ethnographic research conducted in South Sudan in which researchers were embedded in a humanitarian project that aimed to bridge divides between local faith actors and the international humanitarian system.²¹ Tearfund and the consortium built a model called ‘Bridge Builders’ – a two-way capacity-sharing model aimed at bringing together local faith actors and international humanitarian actors to increase understanding, trust, coordination and collaboration.²² It was piloted in South Sudan in 2018–2019.

The programme revealed a pressing need for donors and humanitarian policymakers to urge international actors to make time and space for self-reflection on ways in which their own biases are limiting localisation. The training for international humanitarian actors on ways to work with local faith actors was intended to be a significant part of the model, but it was difficult to achieve widespread engagement and there was some misunderstanding of what the training included.²³

¹⁷ Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream (2018) <https://gblocalisation.ifrc.org/>

¹⁸ Charter4Change (2015) <https://charter4change.org>

¹⁹ CAFOD Development Initiatives (2023) ‘Food insecurity in South Sudan: Financing to local actors briefing’ https://assets.ctfassets.net/vv3axnuecuwi/4NQemEHMC8Mz7CasKRBUc/338a9b25b003a222b7f9d5f200f0b946/Food_Sector_Financing_to_Local_Actors_in_South_Sudan.pdf

²⁰ Christian Aid, CAFOD, Oxfam and Tearfund (2016) ‘Missed out: the role of local actors in the humanitarian response in the South Sudan conflict’ <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/missed-out-the-role-of-local-actors-in-the-humanitarian-response-in-the-south-s-606290/>

²¹ Wilkinson, O, K H Logo, E Tomalin, A Kurien et al (2022) ‘Faith in localisation? The experiences of local faith actors engaging with the international humanitarian system in South Sudan’, *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* vol 7 (4) <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-021-00113-8>

²² The model was developed by the Bridging the Gap Consortium (Tearfund UK, Tearfund Belgium, Tearfund in South Sudan, RedR UK, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Islamic Relief in South Sudan, the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI) and the University of Leeds) and was piloted in 2018–2019 in South Sudan.

²³ Tearfund (2020) ‘Bridge Builders: Strengthening the role of local faith actors in humanitarian response in South Sudan’ <https://learn.tearfund.org/en/resources/research-report/bridge-builders-strengthening-the-role-of-local-faith-actors-in-humanitarian-response-in-south-sudan>

One of the staff we interviewed from an international secular humanitarian organisation said:

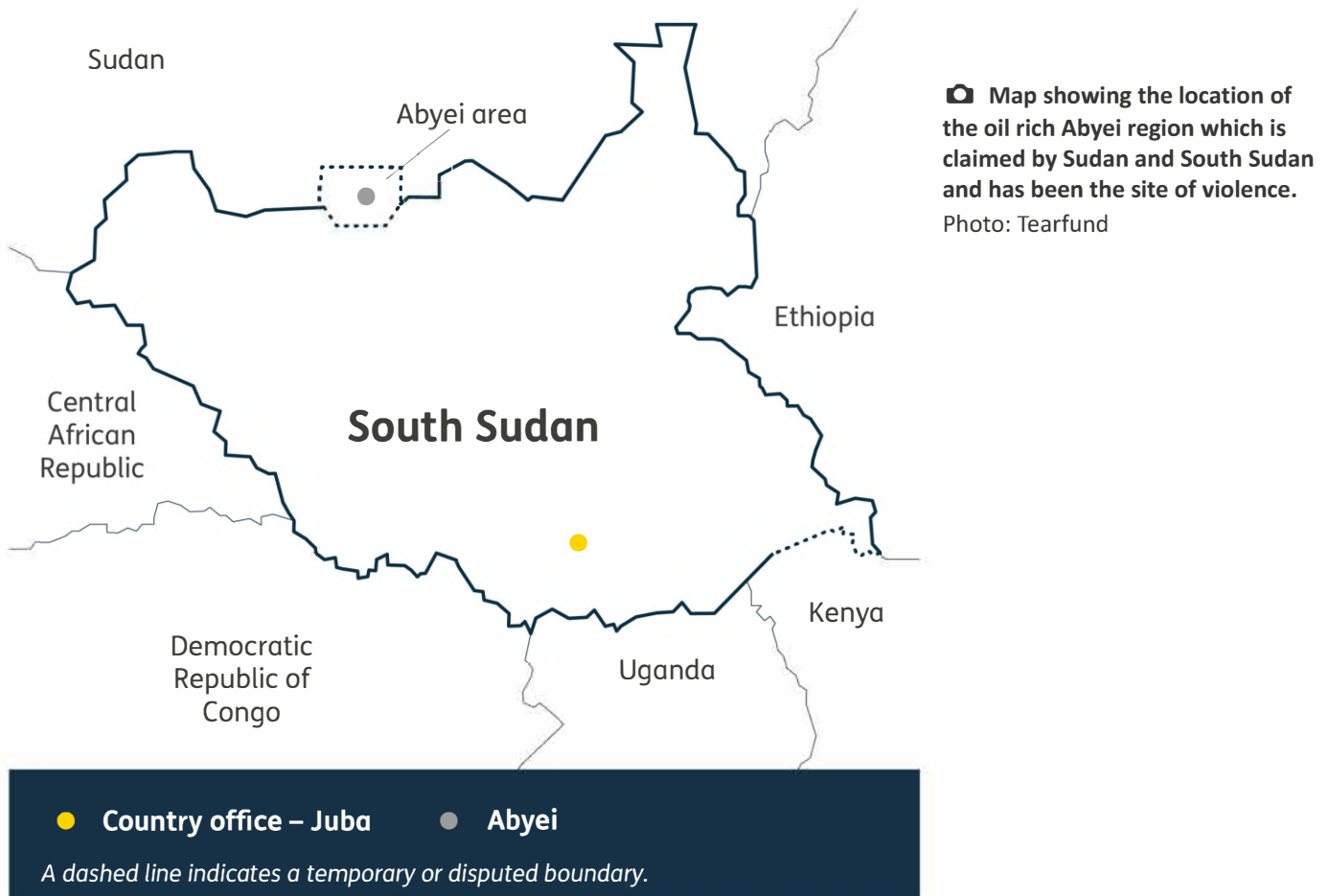
'If you look at all these (UN humanitarian) clusters... Yes, recently we have seen the national actors being coordinators, being chairs of these clusters, but if you ask yourself in terms of the authority to [make] decisions, the national ones are sometimes... bypassed. People ought to listen.'

Abyei

South Sudan has one of the highest **oil reserves** in Africa and crude petroleum is its top export. In 2020, it exported crude petroleum to the value of US\$701 million. The top importer of this was China (\$357 million).²⁴ Most of the oil fields are located on the border of Sudan and South Sudan.

The **Abyei border region**, which is rich in oil reserves, is claimed by both countries and has been a site of intercommunal violence since South Sudan's secession in 2011. Humanitarian access is often restricted in this area. The African Union (AU) issued a communiqué in September 2022 stating that it plans to send a delegation to visit the Abyei region and help mediate peace between the warring parties.²⁵

Sudan and South Sudan must not delay in making a decision on Abyei's status, recognising that delays are exacerbating humanitarian need and communal tensions.



²⁴ OEC (2021) 'South Sudan country profile' <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/ssd>. Accessed 16 February 2023.

²⁵ African Union (2022) 'Communiqué of the 1108th Meeting of the Peace and Security Council held on 29 September 2022, on the Considering the Political and Security Situation in the Abyei Region', updated 13 October <http://www.peaceau.org/en/article/communique-of-the-1108th-meeting-of-the-peace-and-security-council-held-on-29-september-2022-on-the-considering-the-political-and-security-situation-in-the-abyei-region>

4. Peace process

‘Peace is our priority number one, two and three. Without peace, we cannot address other challenges in the country such as malnutrition or lack of education.’

A church leader

Juba

While steps have been taken to implement the R-ARCSS, it has been delayed multiple times. Where much of the peace agreement remains unimplemented, clashes between opposition and splinter groups are continuing to displace tens of thousands of people.²⁶ Several regional and global bodies have supported South Sudan on its peace journey, including the IGAD, the AU, the Troika (comprising the US, the UK and Norway), and other multilateral and bilateral groups.

The Rome peace talks

The Christian Community of Sant’Egidio has also supported peace talks between opposing groups in the country, including facilitating the Rome peace talks between South Sudan’s transitional government leaders and several ‘holdout’ groups that are yet to sign the 2018 agreement. The talks were suspended recently, with some groups unwilling to participate further. However, on 3 February 2023 during the ecumenical visit (see section 9), President Salva Kiir announced that these talks would be resumed.²⁷

Cuts in support to peace monitoring mechanisms

International funding to the bodies that oversee the implementation of the R-ARCSS, namely the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC) and the Ceasefire & Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring & Verification Mechanism (CTSAMVM), has been reduced over the past year. The US has withdrawn support citing ‘lack of sustained progress’²⁸ and the UK has reduced its contributions.

Government leaders had agreed that elections should be held before December 2024. However, we are concerned that adequate preparations have not been made, including ensuring there is an end to ongoing violence, finalising the constitution and making robust security arrangements.

²⁶ Kleinfeld, P and O Francis (2022) ‘Interlocking crises: Why humanitarian needs keep increasing in South Sudan’, *The New Humanitarian*, 18 October

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2022/10/18/South-Sudan-humanitarian-needs-conflict-flooding-famine>

²⁷ Lamb, C (2023) ‘Pope’s South Sudan visit inspires president to resume peace talks’, *The Tablet*, 3 February <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/16562/pope-s-south-sudan-visit-inspires-president-to-resume-peace-talks>

²⁸ Sudan Tribune (2022) ‘U.S. ends support to South Sudan peace implementation mechanisms’, 15 July <https://sudantribune.com/article261556/>

5. Food insecurity

The food crisis in South Sudan is mainly driven by conflict and extreme weather incidents. These have been made more frequent and more severe by the climate crisis, particularly the destructive flooding. As with other countries in East Africa which are facing the worst food security in decades, the food crisis in South Sudan has been exacerbated by the pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine and climate shocks. **Out of a population of 10.75 million, 7.7 million people are currently food insecure in South Sudan.** In 2017, famine was declared in South Sudan and an estimated 5 million people were impacted. The current levels of hunger and malnourishment are at their highest ever, surpassing even what was seen during the upsurge in the conflict in 2013 and 2016.²⁹ South Sudan is one of the countries that is the most affected by the climate crisis.



📷 Farmer Santino Anei shows an improved variety of okra that was provided by Tearfund through a seeds and tools distribution project. The okra will be ready for harvest within 45 days – much sooner than other varieties traditionally farmed and available in the area. Support for climate-smart agriculture is urgently needed in South Sudan. Photo: Will Swanson/Tearfund

Furthermore, humanitarian funding continues to be cut (see section 7), and consequently, millions more will find themselves unable to provide food for their families.³⁰

²⁹ Unicef (2022) 'Hunger and malnutrition being driven by climate crisis and conflict in South Sudan', Unicef press release, 3 November <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/hunger-and-malnutrition-being-driven-climate-crisis-and-conflict-south-sudan#:~:text=The%20lates%20Integrated%20Food%20Security,million%20children%20will%20be%20malnourished>

³⁰ Ibid.

6. Climate shocks



📷 Canoes remain essential for getting around. Tearfund is using them to support remote communities that have been cut off by the flood waters. Photo: John Majok/Tearfund

Climate change has had a catastrophic impact on the communities in South Sudan and they face multiple climate shocks which amplify other challenges and crises.

Extreme weather events – such as unprecedented levels of rain during the wet season and hotter temperatures and drought during the dry season – have contributed to worsening food insecurity. While during the rainy season there is flooding, in the dry season (which is getting longer) some parts of the country are prone to drought. The combined impacts of droughts and flooding have devastated subsistence farming, and such extremes are predicted to make investment in climate change adaptation more critical than ever.

South Sudan is particularly vulnerable to flooding, which used to occur between July and September on an annual basis. During this time many parts of the country – including Jonglei, Unity State, Upper Nile, Warrap, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, and parts of Western Equatoria and Eastern Equatoria – are left under water.³¹ However, since 2019, flooding has increased, and is affecting the country on an unprecedented scale.³² **Many homes and offices remain submerged in water at the time of writing, with flood waters failing to recede for over three years, dramatically impacting livelihoods.**

³¹ World Bank Group (2021) 'Climate Change Knowledge Portal: South Sudan' <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/south-sudan/vulnerability>. Accessed 16 February 2023.

³² Kleinfeld, P and O Francis (2022) 'Interlocking crises: Why humanitarian needs keep increasing in South Sudan', *The New Humanitarian*, 18 October <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2022/10/18/South-Sudan-humanitarian-needs-conflict-flooding-famine>



📷 45-year old Maketh-Duot Deng shows off his catch of the day as his friend looks on at Panyagor dyke, August 2021. Photo: Tearfund

Flooding in Jonglei

Maketh-Duot Deng was in Garlei *boma*³³ in Panyagor in Twic East county in Jonglei state, where there were flash floods in August 2020. He used to rely on farming and rear livestock, but the floods destroyed his home, livestock and farm – displacing his family.

As the floods failed to recede, chances for cultivation became narrower each day since the area was totally submerged in water. With his family at the brink of starvation and exposed to water-borne diseases, Maketh had lost all hope.

He was able to receive fishing gear and training on fishing through a UN FAO-funded Tearfund Emergency Livelihood Response Project. This is a temporary relief, and he longs for the day the waters recede enough to enable him to return home and rebuild his life.

As well as urgent humanitarian support, there is a huge need for resilience and capacity building. A report by the Sudd institute recommends that the Government creates immediate, medium- and long-term policy interventions to build the country's climate resilience capacity to withstand flood disasters.³⁴

In Juba, the capital city, climate mobility (people intentionally moving or being forcefully displaced as a result of the climate crisis) is projected to account for all urban growth by 2050.³⁵ It is vital that government leaders and civil society anticipate and plan for safe climate mobility by fostering social cohesion.

³³ A *boma* is the lowest-level administrative division, below *payams*, in South Sudan.

³⁴ Tiitmamer, N (2020) 'South Sudan's devastating floods: why there is a need for urgent resilience measures', *The Sudd Institute* <https://www.suddinstitute.org/publications/show/5fbcef5b321bd>

³⁵ Global Centre for Climate Mobility (2023) *African shifts: the Africa climate mobility report* <https://africa.climate-mobility.org/report>

7. Humanitarian funding shortfall

There have been significant cuts to humanitarian funding, resulting in a significant shortfall. This means that one-third of the people facing hunger in South Sudan received no food assistance last year.³⁶ The UN World Food Programme (WFP) planned to provide food assistance to 6.2 million people in 2022 but, due to funding shortages, it was forced to suspend food assistance to 1.7 million people.³⁷

Against the backdrop of the 0.7 per cent to 0.5 per cent reduction in official development assistance (ODA), the UK has significantly cut back on its humanitarian funding support to South Sudan in recent years. It cut its aid budget for South Sudan by **59 per cent in 2021**.³⁸

Furthermore, in 2022, the UK withdrew funding from the Health Pooled Fund (HPF) which supported hospitals and healthcare centres across the country. As of 1 April 2022, the HPF budget was cut by 24 per cent for the fiscal year, again due to the UK's drastic cuts in ODA. This resulted in the immediate suspension of funding to approximately 220 of the 797 public health facilities it was supporting in eight out of ten states in the country.³⁹ The cuts were not staggered, and the South Sudanese Government and civil society were not given advanced warning of the cuts to give them enough time to step in and provide extra services. By June 2022, two-thirds of South Sudan's 2,300 health facilities were already non-functional and only 44 per cent of the population were within 5km of a functional health facility.⁴⁰

‘Humanitarian needs are far exceeding the funding we have received this year. If this continues, we will face bigger and more costly problems in the future, including increased mortality, malnutrition, stunting, and disease.’

Adeyinka Badejo

Acting Country Director, World Food Programme South Sudan

³⁶ Care (2022) ‘Humanitarian funding cuts affect millions in South Sudan as the country marks 11 years of independence’, Care press release, 11 July

<https://www.care.org/news-and-stories/press-releases/humanitarian-funding-cuts-affect-millions-in-south-sudan-as-the-country-marks-11-years-of-independence/>

³⁷ UN News (2022) ‘South Sudan: UN humanitarian workers forced to cut aid to 1.7 million people’, 14 June

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/06/1120322#:~:text=South%20Sudan%3A%20UN%20humanitarians%20forced%20to%20cut%20aid%20to%201.7%20million%20people,-14%20June%202022&text=Food%20assistance%20to%201.7%20million,in%20%27famine%2Dprevention%20mode%E2%80%9D>

³⁸ Christian Aid (2021) ‘South Sudan anniversary: Conflict, Covid and the climate crisis, plus UK aid cuts to peace work, threaten world's youngest country’, Christian Aid press release, 7 July

<https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-anniversary-conflict-covid-and-climate-crisis-plus-uk-aid-cuts-peace>

³⁹ MSF (2022) ‘British aid cuts threaten hundreds of healthcare facilities in South Sudan’, MSF press release, 1 June

<https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/british-aid-cuts-threaten-hundreds-healthcare-facilities-south-sudan>

⁴⁰ Ibid

8. The role of young people

Some 73 per cent of South Sudan's population are under 25 years of age.⁴¹ These young people have limited access to education and employment and face a host of challenges including conflict-related sexual violence, early and forced marriage, and forced recruitment into armed groups. Although young people are greatly affected by the conflict, their participation in national-level dialogue is limited, and they are largely excluded from these conversations. This has led to many youth feeling disillusioned and unwilling to participate in politics. It is critical that young people are included in the dialogue in South Sudan.

Step up: A podcast for young peacebuilders

Tearfund South Sudan launched a podcast called '[Step up: Inspiring young minds](#)' in 2022, featuring interviews with young South Sudanese peacebuilders. It is a platform for them to voice the challenges they are facing and share their ideas about solutions for the way forward. Championing initiatives such as this, which enable young people to have their voices heard, is key to the nation's journey towards peace. The podcast is available on all major podcast hosting apps.



📷 Priscilla Ayuen, a young poet and peacebuilder, speaks to Rosemary Wilfred, Tearfund South Sudan Advocacy and Media Manager. Photo: Asha Kurien/Tearfund

Research conducted in 2020 found that 2.2 million children in South Sudan were not in education and 86 per cent of children in primary education were failing to complete it.⁴² This has a significant impact on the employability of young people, and has left many vulnerable to substance abuse or recruitment into armed groups.

Young girls are particularly affected: 31 per cent of girls aged 15–19 have begun childbearing.⁴³ The cultural practice of a groom giving the bride's family a bride price and the unaffordability of this due to insufficient income has led to some groups kidnapping young girls, or stealing cattle (which has also contributed to violence) to pay for the bride price.

⁴¹ IIEP-UNESCO and Unicef (2022) 'Ministry of Education, engagement and leadership in early stages of humanitarian interventions: South Sudan case study'

<https://www.iiep.unesco.org/en/publication/ministry-education-engagement-and-leadership-early-stages-humanitarian-interventions>

⁴² Anderson, F (2020) 'State of the youth report launched: shocking figures but "the youth know what needs to be done"', *UNMISS*, 31 January

<https://unmiss.unmissions.org/state-youth-report-launched-shocking-figures-%E2%80%9C-youth-know-what-needs-be-done%E2%80%9D>

⁴³ Ibid.

Scan this QR code to listen to the Step up podcast



📍 South Sudanese youth at the launch of the Tearfund 'Step up' podcast, November 2022.
Photo: Rosemary Wilfred/Tearfund

‘Investing in young people in South Sudan is investing in 70 per cent of the population, which is investing in nation building. We have to change the whole idea of the youth being the leaders of tomorrow. I feel the youth are the leaders of today and tomorrow.’

Grace Aguil Garang
Executive Director, Youth and Society-Africa, South Sudan

9. The role of the church

Local churches and ecumenical parachurch networks in South Sudan play a significant role in peacebuilding and humanitarian work in the country. It is estimated that Christians make up 60.5 per cent of the population, followers of indigenous (animist) religions 32.9 per cent, and Muslims 6.2 per cent.⁴⁴ In Tearfund's experience of working in South Sudan, we have seen that people's trust in formal structures such as law enforcement groups and the judicial system is low and they place a higher trust in churches and faith leaders.



📷 Farmers pause to pray in Aweil, South Sudan. Photo: Will Swanson/Tearfund

Churches in South Sudan have a long history of building peace at national and local levels. In Tearfund's experience, on a local level in many towns and villages, churches of different denominations come together in an ecumenical spirit to promote peace and to work both for development of livelihoods and for spiritual growth. And on a national level, the **South Sudan Council of Churches** – an ecumenical body established in 2013 which includes all the main Christian denominations in South Sudan – seeks to play an important role in advocacy, peacebuilding and mediation at the local and national level. It has regional offices and inter-church committees (ICCs), and hundreds of local churches in its membership through which it works.⁴⁵

In 2015, it developed the **Action Plan for Peace (APP)**, a locally led and faith-based approach to address conflict. It has four pillars – namely advocacy, neutral forums, healing and reconciliation – through which it was designed to complement the R-ARCSS. The APP aims to build a 'peaceful, prosperous and reconciled South Sudan, built on inclusive citizen engagement at all levels'.

⁴⁴ The 2010 Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project report, quoted in the US Department of State's 'South Sudan 2020 International Religious Freedom Report':

<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/240282-SOUTH-SUDAN-2020-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>

⁴⁵ South Sudan Council of Churches (2021) 'About us' <https://sscchurches.org/about-us/>

Churches are also playing a vital role in supporting communities to address decades of trauma and mental health needs that have arisen from the violence they have experienced. It is therefore imperative that the voice of the church is heard in any peace negotiations. They have an unrivalled understanding of the local community, and the church is a trusted and respected body in South Sudan.

Ecumenical visit

The Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland undertook an **ecumenical pilgrimage of peace** to South Sudan in February 2023. This joint visit by leaders of the Catholic, Anglican and Reformed Christian traditions is thought to be the first of its kind.

In 2019, Pope Francis hosted a retreat in the Vatican at which he famously knelt down and kissed the feet of South Sudanese President Kiir and those of the First Vice President Riek Machar.⁴⁶ These South Sudanese leaders are from different ethnic groups – the Dinka and Nuer respectively. Militias loyal to each group have in the past fought each other and tensions still exist today.

A positive outcome of the ecumenical visit in 2023 is that President Kiir announced that the Rome peace talks, which had stalled in 2022, would be resumed.⁴⁷ The groups have since met in March 2023 in Rome to continue the negotiations.⁴⁸



📷 Pope Francis, Archbishop of Canterbury the Most Rev Justin Welby and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland Right Rev Dr Iain Greenshields meet with the leaders of South Sudan.

Photo: South Sudan presidential press unit

⁴⁶ South Sudan has five vice presidents. The office of the First Vice President is held by Riek Machar.

⁴⁷ Lamb, C (2023) 'Pope's South Sudan visit inspires president to resume peace talks', *The Tablet*, 3 February <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/16562/pope-s-south-sudan-visit-inspires-president-to-resume-peace-talks>

⁴⁸ Deng, D G (2023) 'South Sudan's Holdout Rebel Groups Resume Talks in Rome', *Voice of America: Africa*, 22 March <https://www.voaafrica.com/a/south-sudan-s-holdout-rebel-groups-resume-talks/7016828.html>

10. Tearfund's work in South Sudan

Tearfund has been working in South Sudan since the 1970s. Besides our office in Juba, we have an operational presence and offices in the following counties: Twic East, Uror, Pochalla, Aweil East, Aweil South, Aweil Centre, Morobo, Kajo Keji, Yei and Lainya. Additional locations covered by our partners include Mundri East and West.

In partnership with local NGOs, our current work in South Sudan focuses on:

- food security and livelihoods
- peacebuilding
- nutrition and health
- water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)
- gender and protection
- local partner capacity strengthening



📷 Floods in Tearfund office, Twic East, in 2020. Twic East is in Jonglei state, one of the states worst affected by floods. Since 2019, South Sudan has experienced flooding to an unprecedented level. The waters in several parts of the country are yet to recede. Photo: Tearfund

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