

Frontline *Action*



WCF combats hunger crisis in South Sudan as Violent conflicts push food insecurity to highest levels

*Helping Children in a
World of Need*

South Sudan continues to suffer one of the most serious humanitarian crises in the world as civil war ravages the country. Nearly two-thirds of the population, up to 7 million people, are facing famine conditions and need sustained humanitarian assistance, according to three United Nations agencies.

World Children's Fund is aiding the emergency with an on-going feeding and nutrition programme that identifies and treats acute malnutrition in children under the age of five and women who are pregnant or breast feeding.

WCF supported programmes target about 340,000 people. WCF supports the operational costs of the stabilization centres and outpatient treatment sites.



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Currently, more than ten thousand children, under the age of five, are being screened each quarter for signs of acute malnutrition. Those with severe acute malnutrition who do not have other medical issues are enrolled in a feeding programme at one of the out-patient sites. Children and infants who no longer have an appetite and are suffering from both acute malnutrition as well as other medical complications begin receiving immediate, life-saving measures at one of the stabilization centres. Each quarter, more than five thousand pregnant or lactating women are also being screened.

Nyajima and Pouk are two of the acutely malnourished children who have been screened and identified recently by the programme. They are both being successfully treated through the WCF supported initiative.

Nyajima, 13-months old, weighed only 5.5 kg when admitted to the programme, less than the average body weight of a baby at birth in the EU. According to Nyajima's mother, they had been surviving by eating mostly wild fruits. Both mother and child were admitted to a stabilization centre, where they began receiving quality nutrition and medical



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management. Both were transferred to the outpatient therapeutic feeding programme for six weeks, and now are registered for the general food security and livelihoods programme.

Puok, an 18-month old, weighed 6.3 kg when he was screened and admitted to the programme. He and his mother had also been surviving on wild fruits and occasionally cow's milk. Puok and his mother followed a similar recovery path and mother and baby are now also stabilized and receiving food and nutrition supplements through the food security and livelihoods programme.

“This is a growing tragedy that simply cannot be ignored,” said Doug Kendrick, WCF Programme Director. “We are so proud of everyone, our supporters around the world and committed aid workers in South Sudan who continue to provide these life-saving nutritional services for starving children,” he said.

The project's aim is to treat malnutrition. However, Dr. Martina Fuchs, WCF's liaison in South Sudan, reports that children and adults arrive at the units with many other health related problems. “No other healthcare services exist in most of our areas of operation,” she said. In addition to treating malnutrition, staff also provide care for people suffering from malaria, respiratory tract infections, diarrheal diseases, intestinal worm infestations, skin infections and even gunshot wounds.

South Sudan is the world's youngest country, having received independence in 2011. Civil war erupted shortly thereafter. A 2015 peace agreement failed, as has a December, 2017 cease-fire agreement. Inflation, currency devaluation, disruption of farming and livelihoods and total economic collapse also exacerbate the crisis.

Since the conflict began in 2013, two million people have been internally displaced and another two million have fled South Sudan seeking safety in bordering countries. The civilians who are remain, like those served by the WCF programme, are caught in a web of warring rebel factions, ethnic killings and a young government struggling to survive. The United Nations describes South Sudan as one of the most dangerous countries for aid workers.

Fuchs said it is also a constant challenge to procure and coordinate the effective delivery of the nutrition supplies and essentials to the clinic locations. A satellite phone, paid for by donor support, is often the only means of communication. The United Nations Humanitarian Aid Service (UNHAS) is the only source available to transport goods into the area. Conflict and violence often delay and complicate the delivery of aid.

“Despite the challenges and the dire circumstances faced by so many, WCF is committed to these families and children struggling to survive. We will continue to support these critical programmes and prevent as many people as possible from dying from hunger,” said Kendrick. ■



Web site: worldchildrensfund.org.uk