

# Children bear the health burden of the conflict in South Sudan

In its appeal for humanitarian assistance for South Sudan, UNICEF is requesting US\$181 million to meet the humanitarian needs of children in the country in 2017 [1]. It painted a bleak picture of how the children of South Sudan bear the brunt of the conflict.

Of the over 3 million people displaced by the conflict since 2013, children make up almost 70% of the refugees. With a devastating economic situation, it is estimated that 40% of the population of the world's newest country are on the verge of hunger, with almost 360,000 children facing severe acute malnutrition.

In most conflict settings across Africa and the world, children almost always pay the ultimate price. In South Sudan, the situation is compounded by the underlying poor health systems even before the conflict. Outbreaks of cholera and measles, in addition to malaria and respiratory infections, cause more problems to children. Even before the conflict, lower respiratory infection was the leading cause of death, causing an estimated 12% of all deaths in 2012 [2].

There are certain aspects of the health system that will need to be strengthened as the South Sudan Ministry of Health focuses on preventing needless deaths of children. From prioritizing immunization services throughout the country which can prevent deaths from preventable diseases [3], to providing nutrition and supplementary service programmes.

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The three articles on the child health situation in South Sudan featured in this issue highlight some of the pressing problems in the health facilities, made worse by the conflict. Severe acute malnutrition (SAM) is on the rise, compounded by the poor economic situation and high rates of infection especially diarrhoea.

Conflicts bring other problems to children: boys get recruited as child soldiers, and girls get exploited sexually, forced into early marriages and child labour. With over 50% of children out of school, their plight is not going to end soon [1]. The humanitarian situation continues to be an obstacle in improving child health services.

By prioritizing child health needs and care, and ensuring competent healthcare workers in the hospitals and primary health care centres, the Ministry of Health can lessen the devastating effects of the conflict on children.

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1. UNICEF, Humanitarian Action for South Sudan, 2017 [https://www.unicef.org/appeals/south\\_sudan.html](https://www.unicef.org/appeals/south_sudan.html)
2. WHO, South Sudan statistical profile, 2015 <http://www.who.int/gho/countries/ssd.pdf?ua=1&ua=1&ua=1>
3. Mindra, Godwin, All children should enjoy the benefits of immunization, Editorial *South Sudan Medical Journal*, 2016, Vol 9. No 4.