



*Danish Refugee Council (DRC) mine action teams conducting clearance with large loop metal detectors within agricultural land and settlements in Magwi.*

## BACKGROUND

The Protection Cluster has recorded an increase in incidents of rights violations associated with the current food crisis that is intensifying in South Sudan. In addition, food distribution as well as agencies engaged in these efforts are at significant risk of having their operations disrupted and their staff put in danger by sub-national and intercommunal violence, bureaucratic impediments, and physical constraints due to unprecedented flooding, combined with poor road conditions. The food security crisis in South Sudan is worsening amidst ongoing intercommunal and sub-national conflict across much of the country. In the lean season projection period from April to July 2023, an estimated 7.76 million people (62.7% of the population) will likely face food crisis or worse acute food insecurity, with 43,000 people likely to be in Catastrophic (IPC Phase 5) acute food insecurity in Akobo, Canal/Pigi and Fangak counties of Jonglei State; and Leer and Mayendit counties of Unity State. During this period, an estimated 2.90 million people are likely to face Emergency (IPC Phase 4) acute food insecurity.

There are over 2.2 million displaced persons throughout South Sudan with conflict and natural disasters being the leading drivers of displacement. The continued conflict and attacks on civilians have exacerbated the food crisis due to drought and/ or flooding in some locations and this has significantly impacted the resilience of herding and farming communities. Losses of livestock due to the impacts of widespread flooding further drives intercommunal hostilities. This is especially the case in areas that are heavily socio-economically dependent on cattle herding sparking high-fatality cattle raids and new waves of violence-induced displacement. This violence affects both remote areas and main supply routes and includes human rights violations such as maiming, killing, injury, rape, abduction, looting and destruction of housing and property.

Conflict induced internal displacement severely affects communities' access to basic needs, services and food, particularly. In the Greater Pibor Administrative Area, intercommunal violence has destroyed critical infrastructure, including boreholes (often the only source of water), schools, markets, and shelters. These developments have negatively impacted livelihoods and jobs and resulted in persisting high levels of household

vulnerability<sup>1</sup>. In addition to the violence and destruction of infrastructure, high rates of attacks against humanitarian infrastructure and personnel further inhibit the provision of assistance to communities in need. South Sudan has one of the highest levels of violence against aid workers worldwide. The deteriorating security situation has further exacerbated this. In 2022, 9 aid workers were killed, and nearly 419 incidents related to humanitarian access constraints were reported in 2022, of which 227 (55%) involved violence against humanitarian personnel and assets.

Across South Sudan, 16 million sqm of land (equivalent to over 2,240 football pitches) are contaminated with explosive hazards; in 2023, 538,000 people need mine action efforts. UNMAS monthly reports indicate that in Canal/Pigi, Bor South, Akobo, Malakal, Kapoeta, Maban, Fashoda, and Abyei, high food insecurity, explosive hazard contamination, and recent conflicts are coinciding, warranting special attention. Coupled with the flooding, this has also posed challenges to mine action actors to comprehensively map the full extent of contamination.

At the same time, in Central and Eastern Equatoria, explosive hazard contamination has inhibited access to key agricultural land, critical infrastructure, and service delivery, including along return routes. While IPC levels in these states are only at 3 (crisis) at this point, contamination has impeded the region from realizing the full potential as one of breadbasket regions for South Sudan – further contributing to food insecurity across the country. Furthermore, due to access limitations in South Sudan, such as inadequate infrastructure and contaminated roads (with 3,073,703 square meters remaining), it is crucial to integrate mine action, food security, and infrastructure efforts.

## KEY PROTECTION RISKS

When considering the impact that food insecurity provokes on households and individuals, it is evident that a food crisis is also a protection crisis. The Protection Cluster is concerned that neglecting protection, including mine action funding, in the midst of this food crisis will exacerbate the vulnerability of the affected communities and expose them to further risks and rights violations – as is already illustrated by the growing rates of violence. Key protection risks include:

- **Conflict, violence, systematic breaches of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law are the main drivers of protection risks. Protection risks aggravate food insecurity, which in turn increases protection risks and/or exacerbates existing ones**, resulting in a direct correlation and a pernicious cycle between food scarcity and conflict. Conflict and violence are significantly contributing to catastrophic food insecurity and compounding protection risks due to reduced access to livelihoods. Against a backdrop of dire humanitarian needs and a precarious security environment, the protection of women, men, and children in particular South Sudan has worsened.
- **Cattle raiding, land grabbing and intercommunal conflict** that results in looting and destruction of housing, land and property have direct implications on livelihoods and food security of communities.<sup>2</sup>
- **Women and girls are increasingly at-risk of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, while searching for food or an income to support themselves and their families.** Intra-domestic tensions are also increasing, heightening the risk of intimate partner violence. **Adolescent girls are facing increased risks of child marriage.** Rising rates of family separation, intimate partner violence, sexual abuse and exploitation, early/forced marriage and violent attacks occur across crisis contexts and have disproportionate impacts on

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<sup>1</sup> Protection Analysis Update, April 2022

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2074518/N2236422.pdf>, see also, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2074139/PAU-South-Sudan-Jan-March-2022.pdf> UN Security Council Report of the Secretary General, *Situation in South Sudan*, 9 June, S/2022/468, para. 19.

women and girls. Their exposure to these risks increases when communities face growing humanitarian needs, be it driven by conflict, violence, climate shocks or food insecurity.<sup>3</sup>

- **Risks of forced recruitment and the use of child soldiers<sup>4</sup>** increase as the humanitarian situation deteriorates and the conflict dynamics escalate. Recruitment of armed groups during periods of food insecurity and livelihood uncertainty increase as household and community resilience and coping mechanism are worn down.
- **Attacks against humanitarian operations** against aid workers<sup>5</sup> further inhibits the provision of assistance to communities in need.
- **Gender discrimination or exclusion:** Risk of GBV within the community, including deprivation of access to resources as well as food, contributing to cyclical poverty, underpinning decision making and empowerment as humanitarian needs and hunger increase.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

### Humanitarian country team and Donors

- **Funding for protection analysis and programming in food crises must be increased** to help operationalize the Centrality of Protection in a concrete, tangible way, helping better establish the relationship between food insecurity and the broader protection environment.
- **Stand-alone protection activities that address and respond to violence, exploitation and abuse must be prioritized in allocation strategies submitted to CERF** by the RC/HC and other pooled-fund mechanisms.
- Efforts to promote mine action programming should be prioritized, including increased funding, and integrated programming using mine action as “enabler” other humanitarian and development efforts in light of the nexus.

### Humanitarian Actors

- **Food assistance should be prioritized in areas where critical protection incidents such as grave violations, sexual violence, deliberate destruction of livestock and property are reported** – to avoid further increasing protection risks for already vulnerable populations.
- **Increase programming with local GBV actors, including women-led organizations and communities directly affected by food security crises**, to better understand the specific needs of women and girls and address issues such as rape and sexual violence.
- Humanitarian actors should **support a more comprehensive and sustained approach to access**, ensuring not just one-off food assistance but sustained presence of protection actors and services to ensure the most vulnerable are being reached and supported.

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<sup>3</sup> One hundred and thirty-two grave violations against 117 children (56 boys, 61 girls) were verified, including 13 children who suffered multiple violations. A total of 24 children (23 boys, 1 girl) were recruited and used, 34 children (30 boys, 4 girls) were killed (27) and maimed (7), 53 girls were raped, and 6 children (3 boys, 3 girls) were abducted. The violations were attributed to the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (22 boys, 53 girls), SPLM/A-IO (13 boys), SPLM/A-IO Kitwang faction (3 boys, 5 girls), forces loyal to General James Nando (6 boys, 1 girl), SSOA (2 boys), NAS (2 boys, 1 girl) and the South Sudan National Police Service (1 boy). Eight violations remained unattributed as they resulted from crossfire between the South Sudan People's Defence Forces and SPLM/A-IO (1 girl) and explosive remnants of war (7 boys). UN Security Council Report of the Secretary General, *Situation in South Sudan*, 9 June, S/2022/468, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2074518/N2236422.pdf> para. 67.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Violence against humanitarian personnel and operational interference increased. In 2021, there were more forced relocations of aid workers and almost three times as many humanitarians detained as in 2020, with five aid workers also killed. UN Monitoring Group Report, **Letter dated 28 April 2022 from the Panel of Experts on South Sudan addressed to the President of the Security Council, 28 April 2022**, S/2022/359, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/307/92/PDF/N2230792.pdf?OpenElement>, para. 73.